

AFRICANA

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Religious meetings provided important ritual communal opportunities for African American slaves to worship in ways that connected them to African traditions, while also creating, over time, a new belief system adapted to their lives in the New World. Religion gave individual slaves a sense of their place in the world, a sense of their worth, and a life-sustaining faith in a better future.

Some masters organized mandatory Christian church services, in the hope that Christian slaves would be more docile. Some allowed slaves to hold their own services. Many others, however, did not allow their slaves to attend church at all, either because they felt threatened by any such communal gatherings or because they disliked the suggestion that slaves might have souls to be saved. But even on plantations where religious gatherings were forbidden, secret meetings were held at night in secluded outdoor sanctuaries – often bush arbors that slaves nicknamed “hush harbors.”

Many facts about slaves' religious practices went unrecorded, but it is known that slave religion combined elements of traditional African religions and American evangelical Protestant Christianity. African influences were present in many of the slaves' ceremonies. For example, in the ring shout, a common form of worship, believers formed a circle and moved counterclockwise, shouting and professing their faith, while others stood outside the circle and sang. The call-and-response worship pattern, in which the preacher's sermon was interspersed with responses from members of the audience, also had African roots and is still a common characteristic of African American preaching and music.

Slave theology was predominantly Christian, but slaves appropriated from the Christian Bible only what they found most useful. A common complaint about the sermons preached by white ministers in the slave quarters was that nearly all relied on only one verse: “Slaves, obey your masters.” But as slaves learned more about the Bible, they were able to decide what other messages it held for them. Consequently, they identified with the God who favored the poor and meek over the wealthy and strong, the God who praised the little David over the mighty Goliath, and, above all, the God who freed the Hebrew slaves from their Egyptian captors. In this way slaves were able to see themselves not as property but as people created in God's image, important in his eyes, and people who would have deliverance and justice in the days to come.

Religious meetings offered benefits that were not only spiritual. Regarded as a democratic space where all were welcome to speak if they felt the spirit, meetings provided what was essentially the only opportunity slaves had for public speaking. As a result they also provided a rare forum for leadership to emerge, and slave preachers were generally respected as the speakers and leaders

of the entire community. NAT TURNER and Gabriel Prosser, two famous slave rebellion leaders, both began as religious leaders.

One of the most common forms of religious expression was spirituals, songs with a rich double purpose. Slave masters often encouraged this music because they saw the spirituals as simple hymns and thought that singing kept slaves content as they worked. Spirituals also played a key role in teaching the Bible to slaves who were not literate, because the lyrics of common spirituals retell the biblical narrative from Creation to Revelation. But many of these lyrics also had secret meanings. It was common knowledge among the slaves who sang spirituals that “Steal Away” did not mean only to Jesus, and “I Am Bound for the Promised Land” did not refer only to Heaven. Spirituals offered a method of secretly communicating plans and directions for escape from the plantation.

For all these reasons, slave religion played a crucial part in slave life. It provided the basis for a cohesive community in which slaves were able to communicate more openly and express themselves more freely than in any other context. Through this community, with its shared rituals, beliefs, and songs, slaves could find the spiritual validation and hope for the future that many relied upon to sustain them through their trials. An enslaved woman named Polly summed up one view of the slaves' religious faith: “We poor creatures have need to believe in God, for if God Almighty will not be good to us some day, why were we born? When I heard of his delivering his people from bondage I know it means the poor African.”

Lisa Clayton Robinson

SEE ALSO

Slavery in the United States; Gabriel Prosser Conspiracy; Spirituals, African American; African Religions: An Interpretation.

Africa

Slavery in Africa

Too often, observers have treated Africa as a region in isolation. The history of slavery, in contrast, shows the significance of Africa's socioeconomic connections to other world regions. The very distinctiveness of African society and African slavery results in large part from local responses to global connections.

This essay focuses on three historical points. First, slavery existed and sometimes flourished in Africa before the TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE, but neither the African continent nor persons of African origin were as prominent in the world of slaveholding as they would later become. Second, the capture and sale of slaves across the Atlantic between 1450 and 1850 encouraged expansion and repeated transformation of slavery within Africa, to the point that systems of slavery became central to societies all across the

continent. Third, even after the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade (largely accomplished by 1850) and the European conquest of Africa (mostly by 1900), millions of persons remained in slavery in Africa as late as 1930.

The three sections of this essay address each of these points, giving particular attention to the last two. While the argument reviews the rise and decline of export slave trades – across the Atlantic, the Sahara, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean – it focuses on the nature and extent of slavery within sub-Saharan Africa.

BEFORE THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

In ancient Egypt and Nubia slavery existed but not as a dominant institution. The enslavement of the Hebrews in Babylonia and Egypt was a significant exception. In classical times the commercial North African state of CARTHAGE as well as the Greek states and Rome all relied on slave labor in galleys and in agriculture, and acquired some of their slaves through trade with sub-Saharan Africa.

The rise of Islam in the seventh century C.E. brought a set of rules that provided protection for those in slave status, but in so doing reinforced the institution of slavery. In Africa Islam took root first in North Africa, then later in West Africa and along the eastern coast. A large proportion of slaves in Islamic society served as domestics, but slaves also worked as farm laborers and porters. Elite corps of slaves entered the military and government.

Among pre-1500 sub-Saharan states, traces of slavery are only occasionally clear. Evidence of slavery in AKSUM and the Christian kingdoms of Nubia, for example, is scarce. For the ancient West African empires of Ghana and Mali, the written record makes only an occasional reference to slave status. For the Islamic empire of Songhai, on the other hand, there are clearer indications of significant numbers of persons held in slave status by the monarchy and by lords of the realm. To the east of Songhai the kingdom of Kanem-Bornu may also have had substantial numbers of slaves. In East Africa slaves were important to the labor of the Islamic Swahili states along the coast as well as to the greater Indian Ocean regional economy. In the states of Ife, Oyo, and Benin in West Africa, KONGO in Central Africa, and Munhumutapa in what is now ZIMBABWE, slave populations took form around powerful monarchs.

It is difficult to assess the extent of slavery outside of these major states prior to 1500 because of the lack of data. But the earliest written reports by visitors from Europe and North Africa and the later anthropological records suggest that various kinds of slavery existed in smaller as in larger polities.

It is also difficult to assess the nature of servility during this era, and to know whether it was equivalent to chattel slavery. By the beginning of the twentieth century, according to the descriptions of European writers,

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African societies had developed many different types of servitude. But some of this variation may have developed over time, in response to the imposition of chattel slavery in the plantations and mines of the Americas (see *SLAVERY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN*).

DURING THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE, 1450-1850

Portuguese and Spanish holdings of African slaves expanded with the maritime voyages of the fifteenth century, then grew moderately until, after 1650, the transatlantic trade exceeded the slave trade across the Sahara and Red Sea. Portuguese and then Dutch purchasers focused in Senegambia, Kongo, Angola, and SIERRA LEONE. Africans' willingness to participate in the export of slaves varied. The kingdom of Benin, for example,

were also considered easier to control than men. As prices diverged, the European and African markets for slaves grew in tandem. Their parallel expansion meant that, from the seventeenth century, the number of persons in slavery in Africa roughly equaled the number in the Americas.

Between 1700 and 1800, for the western coast of Africa from SENEGAL to Angola, the export of massive numbers of primarily male slaves led to both overall population decline and the dramatic increase in female slavery. Thus the transatlantic slave trade had not only demographic consequences for African societies but also economic and social ones.

At the turn of the eighteenth century the BIGHT OF BENIN was the principal region of slave supply. Wars among competing coastal states supplied as many as 15,000 slaves per

all along Africa's west coast began to deliver captives, the excess of males delivered across the Atlantic led to a changed population structure in the homeland. Women exceeded men by a substantial proportion in West and Central Africa, with an average of 100 adult females for every 70 adult males. In areas such as Angola and the Bight of Benin, the ratio reached two adult women for every man.

Most captive women were sold into slavery and kept by families. A huge system of female-dominated family slavery arose all along the African coast during the eighteenth century. It expanded as long as demand for slaves in the Americas expanded – that is, until the end of the eighteenth century. Women worked as servants or in the fields. They were without family except for their owners and their children, and the children



A soldier guards a group of slaves linked together by chains in 1896. *Hulton Getty/Liaison Agency*

eventually withdrew from the slave trade, but in Kongo and Senegambia those willing to profit from capture and export of slaves became dominant. These and then other African societies developed the means to capture, feed, finance, and transport captives for sale to European buyers.

As the trade expanded, Europeans developed a preference for males and were willing to pay more for them. Africans, in contrast, paid higher prices for female slaves, who were preferred because they could be used as domestic and agricultural laborers, as concubines, and as bearers of children. They

year for export. Many of these slaves spoke the Gbe language and practiced the religion of Vodun (a predecessor of Haitian Voodoo). But as 5 percent of the population were exported each year in chains, the population declined and captives became more expensive to collect and deliver. As a result prices of slaves in the Bight of Benin rose dramatically between 1690 and 1730. As population declined and prices rose in one area, other areas were drawn into the slave trade: the Bight of Biafra (southern NIGERIA), Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast (now GHANA), Angola, and the Republic of the Congo. As traders

were property of their owners. This century of numerical dominance but social inferiority for women had a lasting influence on the institution of marriage and on the sexual division of labor in societies along Africa's west coast.

Between 1800 and 1850 two distinct but related developments led to an increase in the number of persons held in slavery in Africa and to the overall transformation of African systems of slavery. The first development was the growing demand for slaves in the Muslim Mediterranean and the lands bordering the Indian Ocean, beginning in

LEFT: Slaves of the Pasha of Taoundenni, in Mali, stack blocks of salt in the 1950s. CORBIS/Hulton-Deutsch Collection

BELOW LEFT: Two African slave boys in a nineteenth-century photograph. CORBIS/Hulton-Deutsch Collection



the late eighteenth century. Perhaps this demand reflected the general growth in commercial activity; perhaps it reflected simply the spread of the system of slave labor from the Atlantic Basin. It remained primarily a demand for female slaves, who served largely as domestics. Societies of the northern savanna and the Horn of Africa, therefore, had populations with an excess of males, in contrast to the excess of females in societies along the Atlantic.

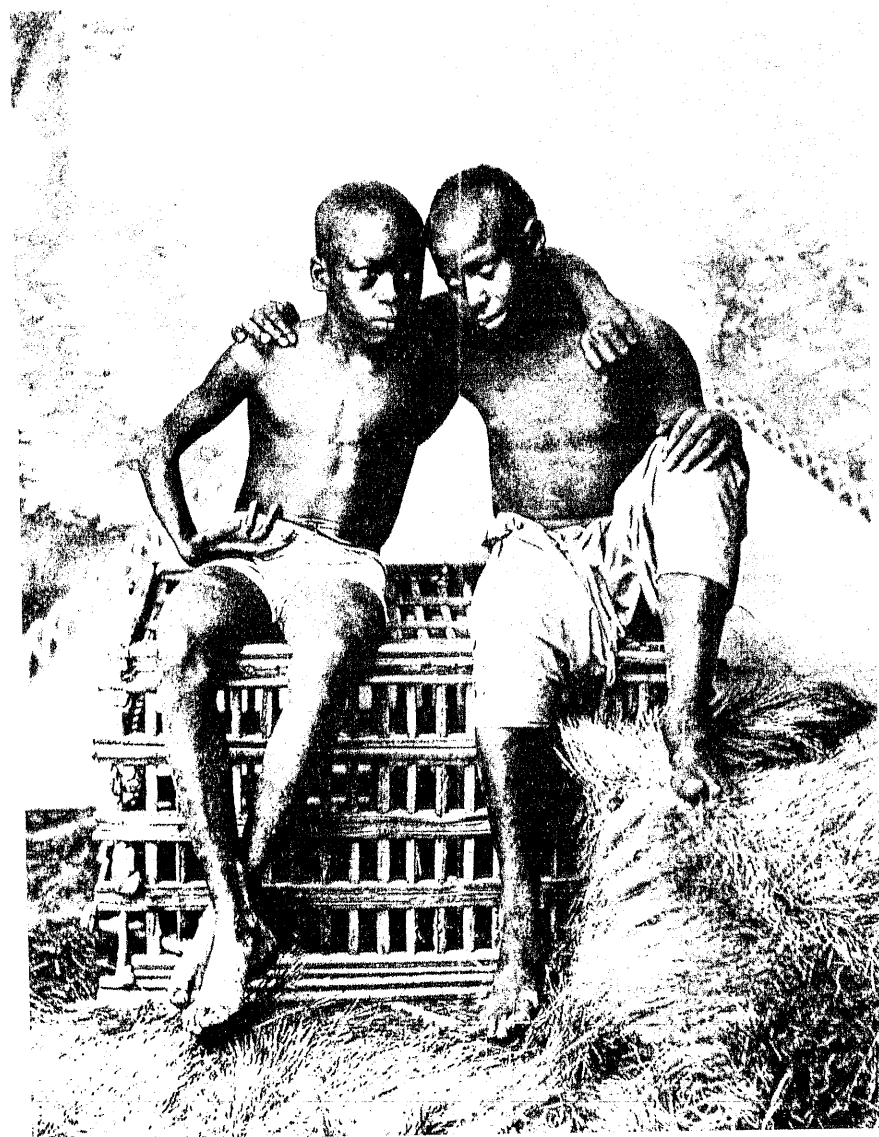
The second development occurred along the west coast of Africa, where the decline of slave exports after the gradual abolition of the transatlantic trade led to expansion and transformation of the African system of slavery. African sex ratios tended to equalize as the proportion of exiled males declined. Slaves were now both male and female, and they lived not in the households of their masters but in separate villages. For the continent as a whole the expansion of this new system of slavery coincided with ongoing population decline. The number of captives exported from West Africa declined, but exports remained high in the Republic of the Congo and Angola, and exports actually rose along the Sahara fringe as well as along the Horn and the east coast of Africa. As population declined and levels of enslavement rose, plantation slavery and slave villages became more common in many areas in Africa. In southern Africa slavery declined under British colonial rule in the west but expanded in the east, where slaves were captured for export to lands around the Indian Ocean.

AFRICAN SLAVERY AFTER THE ABOLITION OF THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

Slave trade across the Atlantic had virtually halted by 1850. But the various regions of the African continent continued to feel heavily the impact of enslavement and slavery for most of the next century. The result was that Africa in the late nineteenth century had more people in slavery than at any previous time. The final great emancipations of the Americas – the United States in 1865, Cuba in 1886, and Brazil in 1888 – left Africa, and especially the SOKOTO CALIPHATE in northern Nigeria, holding the world's principal enslaved populations.

Slave exports across the Indian Ocean, the Sahara, and the Red Sea reached their peak in about 1850, then declined at varying rates until the end of the century. During this time some enslaved Africans were carried across the Red Sea to build an expanded pilgrimage site at Mecca, in Saudi Arabia; others were carried on steamers through the SUEZ CANAL, bound for Istanbul and Izmir.

In coastal West Africa slavery expanded on plantations producing export commodities



such as palm oil. The result was social turmoil, as slaves revolted in several regions from Calabar to Dahomey during the 1850s. Although the revolts were suppressed, they also set new limits on the exploitation of slaves. In the Republic of the Congo and Angola exports finally halted around 1850, though enslavement for local purposes continued. In the northern savanna exports of slaves peaked in the mid-nineteenth century, but the number of captives exceeded what could be explained as a by-product of export trade. In regions of the upper Niger Valley there were repeated reports that the majority of the region's population was in slavery, and that the slaves were principally female: they produced grains and textiles for the domestic market and leather goods for export. Captive workers in the Sahara mined salt and produced dates and grains in oases. Slave labor forces in Senegal produced peanuts for export.

In the Horn of Africa the continued export of slaves to Arabia left large holdings of slaves within Africa. Exports of slaves and a population decline also continued in East Africa, where European purchasers, based in MADAGASCAR and the Mascarene Islands, maintained a high demand for slaves into the 1880s.

In short, the world markets for slave labor and for the goods produced by slaves remained strong in the middle and late nineteenth century, and these markets supported slavery and slave trading in Africa. The European powers poised to invade the continent pointed to the persistence of African slavery to justify colonization. Thus the BERLIN CONFERENCE of 1884-1885, convened as an antislavery meeting, in fact set the rules for the European conquest of Africa (see SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA).

Between 1890 and 1940 the European colonial powers strengthened their grip on African lands and African societies and preached a doctrine of antislavery. The result was not, however, immediate emancipation. Large-scale slave raiding came to an end because the European powers had monopolized the use of armed force. But slavery itself continued for millions of Africans until the eve of World War II.

The European conquest of Africa took place, in large measure, between 1880 and 1900. By 1900 African armies had been routed and European hegemony was established nearly everywhere except ETHIOPIA, LIBERIA, MOROCCO, and parts of the Sahara. Great numbers of slaves took their liberty with the change in power, and European authorities decreed, for the most part, that slave raiding was henceforth prohibited. Yet only infrequently were African slaves emancipated. The slaves of Madagascar were liberated after the 1897-1898 French conquest, but British conquests during those same years did not lead to the emancipation of slaves in either SUDAN or the Sokoto Caliphate.

With the establishment of COLONIAL RULE, slavery was reformed but not abolished. Slave

owners, no longer able to hope for new captives, put higher value on infant and child slaves; both the prices and the level of nourishment of children increased. Workloads for adult slaves decreased accordingly, as their survival now became more important. In Ethiopia, for instance, the abolition of the slave trade during World War I (when Ethiopia sought European approbation of its regime in order to avoid conquest) brought a rapid rise in prices of child slaves. The accounts of colonial ethnographers who visited African societies after 1900 describe systems that protected the rights of slaves; these rights had been expanded just as slave raiding had ended. The colonial-era African system of slavery without slave raiding corresponded in many ways to SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES.

Instead of emancipation, European rulers in Africa resorted to gradual and indirect means to end slavery. One was through the courts: slaves who claimed mistreatment could appeal for redress or emancipation in colonial courts. Slaves could purchase their own freedom. In British colonies the administration tended to declare that the state no longer recognized the institution of slavery. This approach, first implemented in British India in 1843, prevented slave owners from appealing to the state to retrieve escaped slaves; it also prevented slaves from challenging their condition, since the state argued that slavery no longer existed. Still another device was the legislation of the emancipation of infants born after a given date; in Sierra Leone, for example, the date was 1928. Further, as Paul Lovejoy and Jan Hogendorn have shown in *Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897-1936* (1993), the institution of concubinage continued beyond the era of slavery. Northern Nigerian landowners continued to pressure poor families to provide young women for their harems.

The distinction between slave and master in Africa was not, as in the Americas, typically based on a distinction in race. But indicators such as name, language, scarification, dress, and manners all distinguished the identity and social status of slaves from those of their masters. Thus, while the heritage of slavery was kept alive in the Americas through discrimination by race, the heritage of slavery remained alive in Africa through discrimination by class. African countries, though millions of their inhabitants are descendants of slaves, have no holiday to celebrate the emancipation of slaves. The lack of a clear act of emancipation helped to propagate relations of servility into the mid- and late twentieth century.

Patrick Manning

SEE ALSO

Benin, Early Kingdom of; Explorers in Africa Before 1500; Dahomey, Early Kingdom of; Ghana, Early Kingdom of; Kanuri; Egypt, Ancient Kingdom of; Nubian; Oyo, Early Kingdom of; Sahara Desert;

Songhai Empire; Swahili People; Indian Ocean Slave Trade; Abolition and Emancipation in Latin America and the Caribbean; Islam and Tradition: An Interpretation; Trans-Saharan and Red Sea Slave Trade; Mali Empire.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean

Slaves have existed on every populated continent since well before the opening of the Western Hemisphere to European colonization. In fact the modern word "slave" comes from the identification of slaves with Slavic peoples in the Muslim societies of the MIDDLE EAST. There were still Muslim, Jewish, and Christian slaves in Europe and the Middle East in 1492. Most of these slaves were tied to their masters' households and did not produce the basic food or manufactured products in these societies. This work was usually done by free urban and peasant labor. In a few societies, however, slaves did make up the primary labor force in agriculture and industry. This type of slavery, sometimes referred to as "industrial slavery," was developed in classical Greece and Rome, and it would become the type of slavery adopted in most of the American colonies.

WHY AFRICANS WERE IMPORTED INTO LATIN AMERICA

The Spanish and Portuguese conquest of the Americas created a new demand for African slave labor. America was abundant in land but not in labor. Despite the availability of at least 20 to 25 million American Indians in 1500, labor was still a high-cost item for the Spanish and the Portuguese. With more opportunities and wealth available through Spanish and Portuguese expansion in Europe, Asia, and Africa, the small populations of the Iberian Peninsula were reluctant to migrate to the New World. Wages necessary to entice European workers to America were too high to make colonization profitable. Moreover, the use of Muslim slaves from North Africa and the Middle East was coming to an end, and the Roman Catholic Church pushed hard to end European enslavement of any Christian peoples. Thus by 1500 most slaves held in Europe were Africans.

Queen Isabel rejected Columbus's proposal that Indians be enslaved. It was held that American Indians were free subjects and should be enslaved only if they waged war against the Spaniards. Even this "just war" reasoning for enslaving some of the frontier Indians was finally rejected by the Crown in the middle of the sixteenth century. Portuguese colonizers, on the other hand, enslaved Indians from the beginning of their settlement of BRAZIL well into the eighteenth century. But even though Indian slaves in Brazil or Indian peasants in Mexico and PERU were quickly mobilized for the labor