CHAPTER 18

THE ATLANTIC SYSTEM AND AFRICA, 1550-1800

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Similar to Chapter 13 (Tropical Africa and Asia, 1200-1500), this chapter explores the role that an ocean basin played in connecting peoples of three continents, focusing on the social, economic, and religious patterns that emerged in the Atlantic World by 1800. This chapter’s content provides an excellent opportunity to practice the “Habit of Mind” of “comparing societies’ reactions to global processes.” Slavery may disturb and offend you, but it also provides an opportunity to delve into one of the darkest truths of history. How you interpret and react to it will tell you much about yourself as a human being as it does about history.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading Chapter 18 and completing this study chapter, you should be able to:

- Explain how the Atlantic system changed the lives of Africans, Europeans, and Amerindians.
- Discuss the ways in which the new institutions, technology, and political systems facilitated the rise of capitalism and mercantilism.
- Discuss how sugar plantations operated and the impact they had on society and the environment.
- Discuss the role Christianity and Islam played in African politics, economics, and society.
IDENTIFICATIONS

Define each term and explain why it is significant, including any important dates.

**Atlantic System**

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**chartered company**

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**Dutch West India Company**

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**plantocracy**

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**driver**

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**seasoning**

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**manumission**

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**maroon**

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**capitalism**

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MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

Read the entire question, including all the possible answers. Then choose the one answer that best fits the question.

1. What made possible the expansion of the sugar plantations in the West Indies?
   a. The introduction of a superior strain of sugar cane.
   b. A jump in the volume of the slave trade from Africa.
   c. Quinine, used to treat malaria, which was endemic among African immigrants.
   d. Massive immigration of Europeans to the West Indies as indentured servants.
   e. The failure of tobacco crops.
2. Why were African slaves the form of labor preferred by the operators of sugar plantations?
   a. Africans were better suited to field labor than Europeans.
   b. Africans were better able to withstand disease.
   c. Africans were enslaved primarily because of European prejudice against them.
   d. Africans already knew how to grow sugar cane.
   e. Africans were simply more cost effective.

3. Poor Europeans tended to emigrate to North America rather than to the West Indies because
   a. they did not want to be enslaved like the Africans.
   b. the price of land was too high in the West Indies, and they could not afford to buy any after they earned their freedom.
   c. the colonizers of the West Indies forbade whites to immigrate there.
   d. North America was wealthier.
   e. the mortality rate was higher in the Caribbean.

4. Why did Jamaica need to import most of its food in 1774?
   a. Everybody grew sugar instead of subsistence crops.
   b. A terrible famine had destroyed all the wheat.
   c. The population grew so much that it could no longer be supported with domestically grown crops.
   d. It was more lucrative to export the food grown there and to import cheaper food from elsewhere.
   e. The indigenous plants did not appeal to the Europeans or Africans living there.

5. The “great gang” did most of the field work and was compromised mainly of
   a. slave women.
   b. slave men.
   c. slave children.
   d. older slaves.
   e. indentured servants of both sexes.

6. Which of the following did not lead to the low fertility rate among African slaves in the Caribbean?
   a. Time for family was inadequate.
   b. Many more women than men were imported.
   c. Poor nutrition lowered fertility.
   d. Pregnant women found it difficult to carry their babies to term.
   e. Overwork lowered fertility.
7. Why did European planters try to curtail African cultural traditions?
   a. They viewed the Africans as barbarians and found their traditions distasteful.
   b. Their main goal was to convert Africans to Christianity.
   c. They felt that if Africans learned European languages, they would communicate better with their masters.
   d. They thought that slave revolts were led by slaves with the strongest African heritage.
   e. The different African ethnic groups hated each other, and repressing their different cultures was believed to reduce violence.

8. Restrictions on Dutch access to French and English colonies
   a. ensured that the Dutch could not sell enough African slaves.
   b. ensured that the French and English maintained their monopoly on sugar.
   c. provoked a series of wars, which the Dutch lost.
   d. provoked a series of wars, which the French and English lost.
   e. forced the Dutch to expand their American holdings.

9. Most slave deaths on the Middle Passage were due to
   a. drowning when slaves tried to swim to shore while manacled
   b. starvation.
   c. disease.
   d. punishment or execution.
   e. suicide.

10. In general, what trade goods were the Africans most interested in importing from Europe?
    a. Gold, porcelain, and ivory.
    b. Porcelain, silver, and guns.
    c. Textiles, hardware, and guns.
    d. Gold, silver, and guns.
    e. Beads, iron kettles, and brass pans.

11. How did African kings and merchants obtain slaves for sale?
    a. Most of them were prisoners of war.
    b. Most of them were children sold into slavery by their parents.
    c. Most of them were captured in slave raids.
    d. Most of them were hereditary slaves owned by kings.
    e. Most of them were indentured servants.
12. Female slaves were more in demand than male slaves in the Islamic world because
   a. men were too violent and tended to runaway.
   b. women were more popular as commodities for sale to American slavers.
   c. women were intended as wives in depopulated areas inland.
   d. women had many business skills that were valued in the Muslim marketplaces.
   e. women were intended as concubines and servants.

13. The European cultural impact on Africa during the Atlantic system is best described as
   a. vast.
   b. minimal.
   c. nonexistent
   d. equal to that of Islam.
   e. greater than that of Islam.

14. Which areas of Africa suffered the most losses in the slave trade?
   a. The coastal regions.
   b. The lands behind the Slave Coasts.
   c. Both coastal and inland regions.
   d. The Cape Colony.
   e. Actually, historians today think that the damage to Africa from the slave trade has been overstated.

15. How did European goods such as textiles and metals affect Africa?
   a. They undermined the work of local artisans.
   b. They were imitated by local artisans.
   c. They were rejected by Africans as inferior goods.
   d. They were intended only for consumption and did not help develop the economy.
   e. They were highly priced luxury goods.

16. Which of the following does not describe the trans-Saharan slave trade?
   a. Slaves were employed primarily as agricultural workers.
   b. A majority of slaves were female.
   c. Most slaves in the Islamic world were soldiers and servants.
   d. A high percentage of trans-Saharan slaves were children.
   e. The trans-Saharan slave trade involved far fewer slaves than the Atlantic slave trade.

**COMPARISON CHARTS**

Using information gathered from the text; fill in the blank areas of each chart with the relevant data pertaining to regions and categories listed. (Not all blank areas will necessarily be equally complete.)
DIVERSITY AND DOMINANCE

After reading “Diversity and Dominance: Slavery in West Africa and the Americas” in your text, answer the following additional questions.

1. Why do you think that the Muslim scholar Ahmad Baba made a distinction between prisoners taken in a state of unbelief and those who become Muslims of their own free will?

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2. What did you think of the treatment Job received at the hands of his master Mr. Tolstoy?

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3. What do you think of the great compassion of many of Job’s white acquaintances? How does this compare or contrast with the institution of slavery in which they all participated?

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MAP EXERCISES

On Outline Map 18.1, mark the main sources of African slaves for the New World and the main areas of importation of slaves in the New World in blue; then add the routes used by the slave trade in red.

On Outline Map 18.2, shade in or mark the following areas:

- Kingdom of Songhai, ca. 1500
- Sierra Leone
- Hausaland
- Bornu
- Timbuktu
FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. How did the Atlantic System work? What lasting impact did it have on the demographic makeup of Africa and the Americas?

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2. What was daily life like for a slave?

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3. How did capitalism contribute to the development of the Atlantic system and the slave trade?

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4. To what degree did Europeans control Africa during this time?

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5. How did slavery compare to other coercive labor systems in the Americas?

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6. How did the global trade network change from 1500 to 1800 C.E.?