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# The Transatlantic Slave Trade: History's Greatest Injustice

KS3 Ages 11-14 ⌚ 3 min read

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## What Was the Transatlantic Slave Trade?

The **transatlantic slave trade** was a horrific period in history, lasting roughly **400 years from the 1500s to the 1800s**. During this time, millions of **African people were forcibly captured** and transported across the **Atlantic Ocean** to the **Americas** (North and South America, and the Caribbean). They were bought and sold as **slaves**—people forced to work without pay or freedom.

European traders, particularly from countries like **Britain, France, Spain, and Portugal**, organized this cruel system. They saw an opportunity to make huge profits by selling enslaved people to work on plantations (massive farms) growing crops like sugar, tobacco, and cotton.

## How Did the Trade Work?

The slave trade followed a terrible pattern called the **triangular trade**. European ships sailed to **Africa**, where traders bought enslaved people from African merchants and local rulers. The ships then crossed the Atlantic packed with humans in horrifying conditions. Millions died during this journey, called the **Middle Passage**. Survivors were sold in the Americas to work on farms.

Think of it like a deadly trade route: ships left Europe carrying goods, went to Africa to pick up enslaved people, sailed to the Americas to sell them, then returned to Europe with goods like sugar and tobacco. But unlike normal trade, the "goods" were human beings.

Finally, the ships returned to Europe loaded with valuable products produced by enslaved labor, completing the triangle.

## Why Was It So Terrible?

The transatlantic slave trade was one of history's greatest injustices for many reasons. First, **over 12 million African people were forcibly taken** from their homes,

families, and communities. Around **2 million died** during the voyage across the ocean.

Enslaved people suffered unimaginable cruelty. They were chained together in dark, disease-filled ship holds. They received barely any food or water. They had no freedom, no rights, and no hope. Once in the Americas, they were forced to work in brutal conditions, often until they died.

Think of it like if someone took you away from your family forever, locked you on a boat with thousands of others, and forced you to work your whole life without ever being paid or free.

The trade destroyed African societies, tore apart families, and built wealth in Europe and the Americas entirely on human suffering. It created racism that persists today. In **1807, Britain banned the slave trade**, and **slavery itself was abolished** in British territories by **1833**, but other nations continued for longer.

## **Why Do We Remember?**

We study this dark chapter because it's crucial to understand how millions of innocent people were treated as property, and how this injustice shaped our modern world. Learning about it helps us build a fairer, kinder future.