The Illinois Amistad Commission
and The DuSable Museum of African American History
Present:

Maafa- “Great Tragedy”: Was It a Trade?

LEST WE FORGET

SHOGO

BANGI

ASCHANTI

BAYOT

ABAYONG

Cotton
Sugar
Molasses

¥ £ € $

Coffee
Rice
Tobacco
"Each day the traders are kidnapping our people—children of this country, sons of our nobles and vassals, even people of our own family. This corruption and depravity are so widespread that our land is entirely depopulated. . . . It is our wish that this Kingdom not be a place for the trade or transport of slaves."

– King Affonso of the Congo, in a letter to King João III of Portugal, 1526 (Davidson, 1964)

“You tell me that you want no slave-trading in your domains, because this trade is depopulating your country. The Portuguese there, on the contrary, tell me how vast the Congo is, and how it is so thickly populated that it seems as if no slave has ever left.”

– King João III’s response to King Affonso’s letter, 1529 (Fish and Fish, 2001)

WHAT IS THE MAAFA?

Maafa (pronounced muh–ah–fah) is a Swahili word that means “terrible occurrence” or “great tragedy.” It is used to describe the period in history called the Euro-African slave era (approx. 1500–1800) and its effects on African people. This period is also known as the African Holocaust because of its methodical and systemic destruction of the people and their culture.

AFRICANS, EUROPEANS AND TRADING

Prior to the Maafa, Africa was rich with natural resources such as gold, ivory, and diamonds. Africa had kings and queens, such as King Affonso of the Congo and Mansa Musa of Mali. Mansa Musa, the fourteenth-century emperor, was worth $400 billion. He is known as having been the richest person ever. His nation was responsible for more than half of the world's salt and gold supply.
European countries (mainly Portugal, Spain, England, France, and Holland) began to explore, searching for trade routes along the west coast of Africa. Once Europeans saw the vast African empires such as Mali and Songhai also called Songhay, they began to trade goods with Africans there, but they also began taking the resources for themselves, often violently.

Ancient Songhai Government

These same countries also colonized the Americas and the Caribbean islands, which were originally inhabited by Native Americans. Native Americans were enslaved and initially forced to work as domestic servants in the North for wealthy families. They eventually were forced onto plantations that made huge profits from their labor, but they died from diseases brought to the New World such as tuberculosis and smallpox. The Native Americans who survived fled. This presented a problem: who would do the work without costing a lot of money? If there was no one working, then Europeans were losing money. To solve this problem, these European countries looked to Africa. Europeans began trading high-demand resources such as sugar, rum, and gunpowder to Africans in exchange for enslaved persons who would work as domestics and in the fields on the plantations.

Originally, enslaved Africans were prisoners of war (Grosset and Dunlap, 1964). This was allowed by some African societies. It initially provided a win–win situation for both parties: Africans received resources that were in high demand and were able to get rid of groups of people they didn’t want in their villages and kingdoms. For the Europeans, it was an inexpensive way to get workers for their plantations, which maximized their profits. An added benefit was that Africans were already acclimated to the tropical climate and could tolerate the heat of the South. In addition, they were skilled in other areas besides agriculture, such as medicine and metalworking. This would further increase the plantation owners’ profits. Lastly, since they were uprooted and taken to a foreign land thousands of miles away, the chances that they would escape were thought to be small. To keep up with the demand, Europeans began taking Africans instead of “trading.” Africans were taken by force without warning, to be placed on ships and sent to either Europe or the Americas.

“Most of the Negroes shipped off from the coast of Africa are kidnapped.”
– Dr. Alexander Falconbridge, a surgeon aboard a number of slave ships (1788)

This so-called “trade” boosted the economy of the European countries, but it decimated Africa. More than just prisoners of war were taken: women and young children were kidnapped, never to be seen again. It is a common misconception that Africans were compliant, but there are many accounts of Africans who fought back. The Ashanti and Iban fought Europeans for their freedom and were somewhat successful. But with gun technology giving them a clear advantage, Europeans continued to take Africans at will. King Affonso of the Congo continued to write letters to the king of Portugal. He even wrote to the Pope, asking him to intervene, but those letters were intercepted. Later it was found out that some of his relatives never made it to Portugal to study religion and instead were enslaved in Brazil (Fish and Fish, 2001). No one was exempt from slavery, not even royalty.

It is important to note that slavery also occurred in Africa, but it was similar to being an indentured servant. Their period of slavery ended after a few years of working for their captors, and it was not intergenerational (Slavery, 2004). Slavery in the New World was very different.

THE VOYAGE

Once Africans were kidnapped, they were forced to a holding area until they were ready to board a ship to the Americas. They were then chained and packed tightly in the bottom of the ships. They were not allowed to move and had to sit in their own waste for about six to eight weeks. Many people
died during this part of the trade just from sickness. A variety of diseases plagued the slave ships, including smallpox, measles, scurvy, dysentery, and fever. Very little medicine was used. Sick Africans were usually isolated with no food for a few days until they felt better (Inikori and Engerman, 1992).

In 1819, slaves on the French slave ship Le Roduer, along with the crew, contacted a contagious eye disease called ophthalmia. The outbreak was so severe that all of the slaves and crew members except one person went blind. Most people on the ship recovered. The thirty-nine Africans who remained blind were thrown overboard (Rawley and Berhendt, 1981). It was not uncommon for enslaved Africans to have jumped overboard and committed suicide rather than endure a life of degradation and capture. Women were beaten and raped by sailors. Although many of the captured Africans tried to rebel against their circumstance, their efforts were often suppressed with many of the freedom fighters being tortured and/or killed.

Captain Luke Collingwood, who commanded the Zong, committed one of the most infamous incidents of the slave trade. He packed his ship with 442 Africans to sail from the Gold Coast to Jamaica on September 6, 1781. By November 29, he had lost seven whites and over sixty Africans and had a large number who were very ill. Another "complication" was that he only had about 200 gallons of fresh water to drink. Since that wasn't enough water for the voyage, he picked the most sick Africans (a total of 132 people, out of which 26 committed suicide) and threw them into the ocean to their death (Rawley and Berhendt, 1981).

The psychological effects of the transoceanic slavery passage were often considered as dangerous as the physical damage was. Reports, journals and diary logs report that many captives were prone to depression and simply lost their will to live.

However, even during these challenging times there were examples of great heroism and bravery against injustice.

One of the more notable instances of Africans successfully rebelling against their captures occurred aboard the Spanish schooner, La Amistad in 1839. Fifty-three Africans who had been kidnapped from Sierra Leone, West Africa were placed aboard the slaver ship, Tecora, bound for Cuba. Shortly after arriving in Cuba, the kidnapped Africans were loaded aboard the La Amistad, destined for another part of the island. While aboard the schooner, the Africans, led by Joseph Cinqué successfully fought and took control of the transport and killed most of the crew. Cinque allowed a Spanish navigator to live for the sole purpose of having him navigate them back to Sierra Leone. Understandably, the Spanish navigator feared for his life and surreptitiously steered the vessel northward, where they eventually docked near the coast of New York. All of the Africans aboard the Amistad were arrested and held in jail upon the discovery of the vessel. The Africans were imprisoned until it could be determined if they were the property of the owners of the schooner or had been recently kidnapped and imported across the Atlantic which was illegal as a result of the 1807 statute (426) banning the importation of Africans for the purposes of enslavement. After a lengthy trial that ended in 1840, Cinque and the other kidnapped Africans were allowed to return to their communities in Sierra Leone.

Once Africans landed in the Americas, they were sold by human traffickers in auctions to work on plantations as domestic servants, porters, craftsmen, and field workers. They were separated from their families and forced to change their name, adopt a new religion, and speak another language. Their entire being and culture were systematically erased.
Effects from the Euro-African Slave Era

There are many lingering effects from the Euro-African slave era. European empires became extremely wealthy from slave labor. Many of the companies that supported slavery then are still functioning today, among them Lehman Brothers, Aetna Insurance, New York Life Insurance, AIG, CFX, and plenty more (ABS Staff, 2013).

Is there a way to calculate how much money Europe and the Americas made from slavery? That question is hotly debated today. Should descendants of slaves be compensated for their ancestors’ work?

“The total value of slaves, or ‘property’ as they were then known, could exceed $12 million in today’s dollars on some of the largest plantations. With land, machinery, crops and buildings added in, the wealth of southern agricultural enterprises was truly astronomical. Yet when slavery ended, the people that generated the wealth received NOTHING!” (Jones, 2013)

What isn’t up for debate is that families in Africa were destroyed. Whole families, entire villages of people, were taken, never to be seen again. Africa’s population was completely decimated. It is estimated that 12.5 million people were lost (either by death or by kidnapping). That is a staggering loss of people from a single continent.

Chart: Number of Africans Taken from Africa to Europe and the Americas, 1500–1866
(Voyages: Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spain/Uruguay</th>
<th>Portugal/Brazil</th>
<th>Great Britain</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Denmark/Baltic</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1501–1600</td>
<td>119,962</td>
<td>154,191</td>
<td>1,922</td>
<td>1,365</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>277,506</td>
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<tr>
<td>1601–1700</td>
<td>146,270</td>
<td>1,011,192</td>
<td>428,262</td>
<td>219,931</td>
<td>4,151</td>
<td>38,435</td>
<td>27,391</td>
<td>1,875,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1701–1800</td>
<td>10,654</td>
<td>2,213,003</td>
<td>2,545,297</td>
<td>330,014</td>
<td>189,304</td>
<td>1,139,013</td>
<td>67,334</td>
<td>6,494,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1801–1866</td>
<td>784,639</td>
<td>2,469,879</td>
<td>283,959</td>
<td>3,026</td>
<td>111,871</td>
<td>203,890</td>
<td>16,316</td>
<td>3,873,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>1,061,524</td>
<td>5,848,265</td>
<td>3,259,440</td>
<td>554,336</td>
<td>305,326</td>
<td>1,381,404</td>
<td>111,041</td>
<td>12,521,336</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trade with other countries eventually decreased when Europeans began raiding African communities for the sole purpose of enslaving people with no intent on trading anything in return. In addition, the difference in appearance and culture made it easier for Europeans to justify their “superiority.” These effects and attitudes are still felt today, hundreds of years later.

WAS THE TRADE REALLY FAIR?

With the systematic loss of people, culture, and resources, Africa became underdeveloped, which is the Maafa, the “Great Tragedy.” Development on the continent has stagnated while Europe and the Americas’ development has grown exponentially. What does Africa truly have to show from the so-called transatlantic slave trade? The word “trade” is defined as giving up something to receive something of equal value. When you think of the entire concept of slavery, the most important question to answer is this: “Was the so-called transatlantic slave trade really a trade?”
Lesson Schedule:

- **Lesson #1:** What is the Euro-African slave era, and why did it happen?
- **Lesson #2:** What happened during the transoceanic slavery passage?
- **Lesson #3:** Given the lasting effects/implications of the so-called transatlantic slave trade, was the “trade” really fair?

**Additional Activities/Interdisciplinary Connections:**

- **Science:** Research the health issues/diseases that Africans contracted while traveling through the so-called “transatlantic slave trade.”
- **Math:** Research the prices to purchase a slave during the Maafa. Convert the sales prices to the inflated prices today.
- **Drama:** Find a narrative of a first-generation enslaved person who traveled over from Africa. Write a choreopoem or a skit about the experience of that slave during the Middle Passage.
- **Visual Arts:** Create a self-portrait and arrange it on a boat drawn out on butcher paper to symbolize the transoceanic slavery passage.
- **Reading:** Complete the novel *The Glory Fields* by Walter Dean Myers. You may also complete *Slavery on Trial* by Jeannine Marie DeLombard.

**Sources**


Falconbridge, Alexander. (1788). *An Account of Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa.*


The slave trade of the sixteenth century was an economic boon to Portugal but was devastating to Africa. The Congo was a key location in the Portuguese slave trade. Initially, King Affonso, the Congolese leader, cooperated with the Portuguese slave traders, letting them take lower-class citizens and prisoners of war. But as Europe’s demand for slaves grew, Affonso became increasingly alarmed as he saw the trade destroying his society. In the following letter to the king of Portugal, King Affonso pleads for his country.

Think through History: Hypothesizing Why do you think that King Affonso let the Portuguese enslave his subjects at first? In the letter below, why does the king now request regulations?

“Moreover, Sir, in our Kingdoms there is another great inconvenience which is of little service to God, and this is that many of our people, keenly desirous as they are of the wares and things of your Kingdoms, which are brought here by your people, and in order to satisfy their voracious appetite, seize many of our people, freed and exempt men, and very often it happens that they kidnap even noblemen and the sons of noblemen, and our relatives, and take them to be sold to the white men who are in our Kingdoms; and for this purpose they have concealed them; and others are brought during the night so that they might not be recognized.

“And as soon as they are taken by the white men they are immediately ironed and branded with fire, and when they are carried to be embarked, if they are caught by our guards’ men the whites allege that they have bought them but they cannot say from whom, so that it is our duty to do justice and to restore to the freemen their freedom, but it cannot be done if your subjects feel offended, as they claim to be.

“And to avoid such a great evil we passed a law so that any white man living in our Kingdoms and wanting to purchase goods in any way should first inform three of our noblemen and officials of our court whom we rely upon in this matter, and these are Dom Pedro Manipanza and Dom Manuel Manissaba, our chief usher, and Goncalo Pires, our chief freighter, who should investigate if the mentioned goods are captives or free men, and if cleared by them there will be no further doubt nor embargo for them to be taken and embarked. But if the white men do not comply with it they will lose the aforementioned goods. And if we do them this favor and concession it is for the part Your Highness has in it, since we know that it is in your service too that these goods are taken from our Kingdom, otherwise we should not consent to this.”

Source: Excerpt from Historia de Congo by Visconde de Paiva-Manso, translated in The African Past by Basil Davidson (Groset & Dunlap, 1964)
CAUSE and EFFECT: Euro-African Slave Era

DIRECTIONS: We’ve discussed the transatlantic slave trade in class. Please fill in the causes and effects in the diagram below.

Causes of the Euro-African Slave Trade
What are the reasons?
Why did the Euro-African slave trade

Effects of the Euro-African Slave Trade
What happened as a result of the slave trade?
DIRECTIONS: We’ve discussed the transatlantic slave trade in class. Please fill in the causes and effects in the diagram below.

**Causes of the Euro-African Slave Trade**
- What are the reasons?
- Why did the Euro-African slave trade occur?

Europeans wanted to establish trade routes with Africa.

**Effects of the Euro-African Slave Trade**
- What happened as a result of the slave trade?

Africans were traded as goods, which is what initially began the transatlantic slave trade.

Europeans needed people to work on their plantations and in their homes.

Africans lost family members, who were kidnapped and never seen again. Because of the people that were lost, Africa’s culture and economy has been changed forever.

Europeans wanted to maximize their profits, so having enslaved Africans work for nothing allowed them to make a lot of money.

Africa did not receive equal compensation, and the continent was bled dry of its resources and its people.
Euro-American Slave Era Questions
(To be used during the fishbowl discussion)

FISHBOWL DISCUSSION DIRECTIONS: Have students write a question on a Post-It note and place it into a “fishbowl.” This can be a regular bowl. Have a student pick a question randomly and have the students discuss what they think. As a teacher, you are there merely to facilitate the discussion.

The questions below can serve to get your class discussion started or to spur discussion in case the students run out of things to talk about.

1. What role did slavery have in the establishment of the United States?
2. How did imperialism affect enslaved Africans?
3. Who is responsible for the Euro-American slave “trade”?
4. Should descendants of enslaved Africans be compensated for their free labor?
5. Was the “trade” fair? Who set the terms of the “trade”? Who benefited?
6. What lessons can be learned from the Maafa?
7. How has the Maafa changed the world?
8. Many enslaved Africans (and their descendants) had to change their surnames to their captors’ name. Do you think that people should find or re-create their ancestral name? Why or why not?
The People vs. Slavery, et al.

Adapted from The People vs. Columbus, et al. by Bill Bigelow, Zinn Education Project

The Peculiar Institution: Slavery is one of the darkest periods in American history. Debate has raged for years about who bears responsibility for it, which is difficult because there were so many people involved. Who is responsible for the kidnapping, torture, and forced servitude of over 12 million people from Africa? Students will attempt to answer this question by completing this activity.

Note: This should be done after students complete unit 2; that way, they have the full understanding of the transatlantic slave trade and its participants (willing and unwilling).

Materials Needed:
- construction paper (to make sign of the defendants’ names)
- markers

Time Needed to Complete Project:
Student should have at least two 50-minute periods to complete the role-play activity, though time may vary depending on the students’ defense strategy.

Procedure:
1. Before beginning the project, please explain the format of a trial (who is a plaintiff and who is a defendant). Please have the defendants’ names written on the board: Slave Owners, Africans, European Powers (Portugal, England, Spain, France, and Denmark), Slave Traders, Ship Captains, and Crew.

2. Tell your students that all of the defendants are charged with the kidnapping, enslavement, torture, and murder of 12.5 million Africans. They will portray the defendants in groups, and teacher will be the prosecutor. The students must do the following:
   a. Defend themselves against the charges.
   b. Explain who they believe is guilty and why.
   c. If the students choose to plead guilty, they can’t say they are solely responsible; they must place partial blame on at least another defendant.

   Note: Some students will be confused and upset because Africans are listed as a defendant. Explain to them that you will explain the charges and they will receive a written copy of the charges against them.

3. Explain the order of the activity:
   a. Students will be divided into six groups and will have to select a defendant that they want to portray. You need to give them their indictment sheet so they can read what they’re being charged with and the evidence. There is one group that will not portray a defendant; that will be the jury, and they have to be neutral. (They may also need to take notes to help them make a decision; they are not to look at the indictment sheets).
   b. The students who will be representing a defendant have to prepare a defense against the charges. Students should take notes and outline their defense since they will be presenting their information orally. As the students are working, go from group to group, answering any questions that they may have and making sure they understand what is
going on. They may also look at other group’s charges to help them prepare their defense.

c. You (prosecutor) will begin arguing the guilt of a particular group. You may select the order of the prosecution: I find it easier to write the defendants’ names on sheets of paper and draw them out of a hat/bowl to keep it random.

d. Those in the group accused will defend themselves against the charges. They will also tell who they think is guilty and why.

e. This process is repeated until all the groups that were accused have defended themselves. The jury will then step out of the classroom and deliberate. They must decide who was guilty and who was innocent. If they believe that more than one defendant is guilty, they can assign a percentage (for example, one party is 50 percent guilty, another is 30 percent, etc.). The jury must be able to explain why they assigned blame to the guilty defendants.

f. Lastly, the class will discuss the jury’s verdict. The students will have some opinions! Here are the some questions to help your discussion along:
   - Was anyone entirely not guilty?
   - Do you agree with Africans being charged along with the other defendants?
   - Are the ships’ crews responsible . . . or were they just doing their jobs?
   - How to you rectify what happened in slavery? Is there some type of way to pay the enslaved Africans back for what they’ve lost?
   - Can you imagine a peaceful meeting between the kidnapped Africans and the people who kidnapped them?
   - If the defendants are guilty, what should their punishment be?
Defendant:
European Powers
(Portugal, Spain, England, France, Denmark)

The Indictment:
You are charged with the kidnapping, torture, and forced servitude of over 12.5 million people from Africa.

Your original goal in exploring Africa was to discover new trade routes. After discovering the vast resources that West Africa had to offer (gold, ivory, etc.), however, you began plotting to take over the region for yourself. African kings did enter into trade agreements with you, but you began kidnapping slaves outside of that agreement. You knew that kidnapping Africans was wrong. King Affonso of the Congo wrote King João III of Portugal, asking him to stop taking Africans, but you refused to do so.

Portugal isn't the only country that kidnapped Africans into slavery. England, France, Spain, and Denmark also kidnapped Africans, and they are equally guilty. As countries, you have profited from slavery: “The fruits of the slave trade funded the growth of global empires. The greatest source of wealth for imperial France was the ‘white gold’ of sugar produced by Africans in Haiti. More riches flowed to Britain from the slave economy of Jamaica than all of the original American thirteen colonies combined” (Jones, 2013). You still benefit from slave labor even today, hundreds of years later.

What gave you the right to kidnap 12.5 million people from their homes and force them to work for free? These people have never been repaid for their work, nor reunited with their families. If it weren’t for you, slavery wouldn’t have existed in Europe and the Americas. Because of your greed, you are guilty.
Defendant:  
Slave Traders

The Indictment:
You are charged with the kidnapping, torture, and forced servitude of over 12.5 million people from Africa.

Although enslavement took place throughout human history, your introduction of chattel "slavery" makes all of you guilty of one of the worst forms of slavery in the history of the world. You arranged the sale of Africans to the European powers. If it weren’t for you, there would have been no one to sell people into a situation they would never be able to get out of. Just because someone hires you to do something doesn’t mean you have to do it. You could have done the right thing and said no.

Adult slaves were taken by extreme force. You tricked children into getting on ships by offering them candy; after you arranged to have them placed on the ships, they never saw their families again. If you had committed this crime in any of the European countries, you would be charged and sent to jail. Why should this be different because it happened in Africa?

Of course you’re going to blame other people, like the European royalty, but you could’ve done the right thing and refused to participate. You are just as guilty as everyone else.
Defendant:  
Ship Captains and Crew

The Indictment:  
You are charged with the kidnapping, torture, and forced servitude of over 12.5 million people from Africa.

You held kidnapped Africans in some of the most inhumane conditions ever known. By keeping them shackled together and packed tightly in ships for weeks, maybe even months, you made the Middle Passage hell. There was constant sickness such as measles, dysentery, and smallpox because the ships were so unsanitary. There are reports of women being raped and people being tossed overboard and tortured. The conditions were so bad that some Africans chose to commit suicide by jumping overboard. They preferred death over the hell that they were living in.

You didn't have to do this! You could have picked other shipping jobs, such as shipping food or textiles. You did a lot of the dirty work, so you are just as guilty as the other parties. Without you, there would have been no way to transport the kidnapped Africans to the Americas and Europe. In other words, there wouldn't have been a transatlantic slave trade.
Defendant:
Kidnappers/Overseers

The Indictment:
You are charged with the kidnapping, torture, and forced servitude of over 12.5 million people from Africa.

You have benefited greatly from the transatlantic slave trade. If it hadn’t been for you, there would have been no need for slaves. How can you justify kidnapping people to work on your land without compensating them? You purchased people as if they were animals and worked them for years. When slaves were defiant, you severely beat and tortured them to make an example out of them. Africans who tried to escape might even have been killed. Male slave owners raped African women and impregnated them. Kidnapped Africans were separated from their families. This was a vicious cycle that was repeated for generations. Overseers are guilty also because they helped the slave owners run the plantations. They often were the ones who doled out the punishments.

You cared only about making a profit by any means necessary.

Of course, you didn’t have to do this. You didn’t have to purchase kidnapped Africans. If you needed people to work for you, you could have done the humane thing and hired them, paying them for their services. Take a moment and think about this: would you work for free? Most slave owners would say no. Since you purchased these slaves, you are just as guilty as the other parties involved.
Defendant:
Africans

The Indictment:
You are charged with the kidnapping, torture, and forced servitude of over 12.5 million people from Africa.

It’s ironic that you would be charged with the kidnapping, torture, and forced servitude of over 12.5 million Africans. Most people just assume that Europeans just came over to Africa and kidnapped people. What most folks don’t know is that Africans traded slaves to Europeans for goods. That means that you brought the fate of those millions of Africans upon yourselves.

It’s believable that you probably didn’t know the Europeans’ true intentions. But when you found out that they were kidnapping your people without your knowledge, you should have put a stop to it immediately! King Affonso of the Congo wrote letters to King João attempting to appeal to him, but those requests were ignored. When you saw that Europeans were ignoring your requests, you should have united with other African kingdoms and killed them. Imagine how different things could’ve been if you’d fought back as a united force. It would’ve sent a powerful message.

Instead, this rich continent was robbed of its people, resources, and culture. This is a result of you trading with the Europeans. You are guilty . . . and your people have suffered greatly.
European contempt for African culture and traditions was a major feature of colonization. This engraving of about 1700 depicts plundering of the indigenous population in the region around Fort St. George, Elimina, Gold Coast (now Ghana).
SLAVE TRADE FROM AFRICA TO THE AMERICAS
1650–1860

Between 1650 and 1860, approximately 15 million enslaved people were transported from western Africa to the Americas. Most were shipped to the West Indies, Central America, and South America.

Key:
- Rice
- Tobacco
- Coffee
- Sugar
- Cotton

Migration routes:
- Atlantic Ocean
- Rio de Janeiro
- Brazil
- Salvador
- Recife
- Lima
- Panama
- Cartagena
- Paramaribo
- New Orleans
- Charleston
- New York
- Richmond
- To Europe

Major Slave Trade Routes:
- 4.5 Million
- 5 Million
- 3 Million
- 2 Million

Slave Trade Regions:
- Senegal
- Sierra Leone
- West Africa

Central America:
- Mexico City
- New Orleans
- Charleston
- New York
- Richmond
# Lesson Plan

## Maafa—“Great Tragedy”: Was It a Trade?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level(s)</th>
<th>6–8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit and Time Frame</td>
<td>Five 60-minute periods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Common Core State Standards
- CCSS. ELA-Literacy. CCRA. R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- CCSS. ELA-Literacy. CCRA. R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- CCSS. ELA-Literacy. CCRA. W.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- CCSS. Math Practice. MP.1: Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.

### Lesson Goals
After completing this lesson, students should be able to:
1. Demonstrate knowledge of the complex social, economic, political, and environmental factors that create and perpetuate precariousness.
2. Analyze the ways that processes of inequality and differences in access and power are shaped by complex interactions of local and international dynamics.
3. Recognize how meanings of justice and reconciliation are mediated by identity, historical experience, and future imaginaries.
4. Name and discuss factors that allowed the trading of African people into slavery.
5. Define the Euro-African slave “trade.”
6. Be able to evaluate whether the Euro-African slave era was trade-based given the evidence presented.

### Materials/Resources

#### Classroom Materials:
- computer
- smart board/projector
- handouts (attached to lesson plan)
- videos (*Discovery Education: Globe Trekker: Transatlantic Slave Trade*)

#### Websites, Books, and Other Media:
- *The Glory Fields* by Walter Dean Myers
- *The Destruction of Black Civilization* by Chancellor Williams
- *Traces of the Trade* (documentary)
| Key Terms and Concepts | trade: 1. The act or process of buying, selling, or exchanging commodities, at either wholesale or retail, within a country or between countries. 2. A purchase or sale; business deal or transaction. 3. An exchange of items, usually without the payment of money.  

Maafa: great tragedy/disaster; the history and ongoing effects of atrocities against African people. It encompasses the transatlantic slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression today.  

Middle Passage: the Africa-to-Americas part of the transoceanic slave traffic.  

Enslaved: 1. Identifies the condition of a person who is considered the legal property of and wholly subject to another; a bondservant. 2. A person entirely under the domination of some influence or person: (ex., a slave to a drug). 3. A drudge: a housekeeping slave.  

Transoceanic slave “trade”: connected the economies of three continents. The biggest deportation in history and a determining factor in the world economy of the eighteenth century.  

Imperialism: 1. A policy or practice by which a country increases its power by gaining control over other areas of the world. 2. The effect that a powerful country or group of countries has in changing or influencing the way people live in other, poorer countries.  

Interdisciplinary Connections | • Science: Research the possible health issues/diseases that Africans contracted while traveling through the transatlantic slave trade.  
• Math: Research the price of purchasing a slave during the Maafa and then convert the sales prices to today’s dollars.  
• Drama: Students must find a narrative of a first-generation African (who traveled over from Africa). Write a choreopoem or a skit about the experience of that African during the Middle Passage.  
• Visual Arts: Students will do a self-portrait and arrange it on a boat (drawn out on butcher paper) to symbolize the Middle Passage.  
• Reading: Complete the novel *The Glory Fields* by Walter Dean Myers. |
**Anticipatory Set (Opening)**

1. **Opening:** Speak with a student prior to the lesson to have him or her participate in the hook of the lesson. Have the class define what the word “trade” means. Once they have defined it, act out the concept of a trade with the student. Then take what the student is offering and do not give anything back, or give something that is clearly of lower value. Then ask the other students if the trade is fair and discuss what characterizes a “fair” trade. Then introduce the transoceanic slave “trade.”

2. **Introduction to New Material:** Teacher will lead a discussion on what resources Africa had and why they were so valuable. The concept of imperialism will also be discussed to help students understand why it was possible for Europeans to think that it was OK to carry out this human tragedy.

**KEY CONCEPT:** As a continent, Africa sustained a terrible loss of human capital as a result of the transoceanic slave “trade.”

3. **Discussion:** Have students write a question on a Post-It note and place it into a bowl to have a “fishbowl discussion.” Usually the students will come up with good questions to discuss. Also have a list of questions to discuss (attached to lesson plan) to carry on the discussion if the students do not have any questions.

4. **Critical Reflection:** Students will answer the following:
   - Why would the transoceanic slave “trade” be defined as *Maafa*?
   - Why would having slaves be profitable for slave owners?
   - Define the following terms: (1) enslave, (2) Maafa, (3) Middle Passage, and (4) trade.
   - Should Africa be compensated for the huge loss of human capital and resources? If so, how?
   - Would Africans have any legal grounds to hold a particular group of people responsible? Why or why not?

5. **Closing:** Have the students do an exit slip or the 3-2-1 activity. (After the lesson, have each student record three things he or she learned from the lesson. Next, have the students record two things that they found interesting and that they would like to learn more about. Then have students record one question they still have about the material.)

**Assessment**

Observation, reflection activities, class discussion and participation, interdisciplinary connections, and essay

**Essay Question:** The human trafficking of Africans during the Maafa was one of the most controversial and traumatic human
experiences in world history. Millions of Africans were captured from their homes, never to return and live the rest of their lives in captivity. The Maafa is sometimes called the Transoceanic Slave Trade but some scholars argue that the slave 'trade' was not really a trade at all. Based on what you've learned write an essay to defend this argument and explain how it was unlike a trade. Be sure to use examples from your handouts and notes to construct a well-written five-paragraph essay detailing your answer.

| Extensions (Homework, Projects) | Observation, reflection activities, class discussion and participation, interdisciplinary connections, and classroom trial (Who Is Really Responsible for Slavery?) |