

Africa in the Early Colonial Period

We cannot reckon how great the damage is, since the mentioned merchants are taking every day our natives, sons of the land and the sons of our noblemen and vassals and our relatives, because the thieves and men of bad conscience grab them wishing to have the things and wares of this Kingdom.

—King Afonso, in a letter to the King of Portugal (1526)

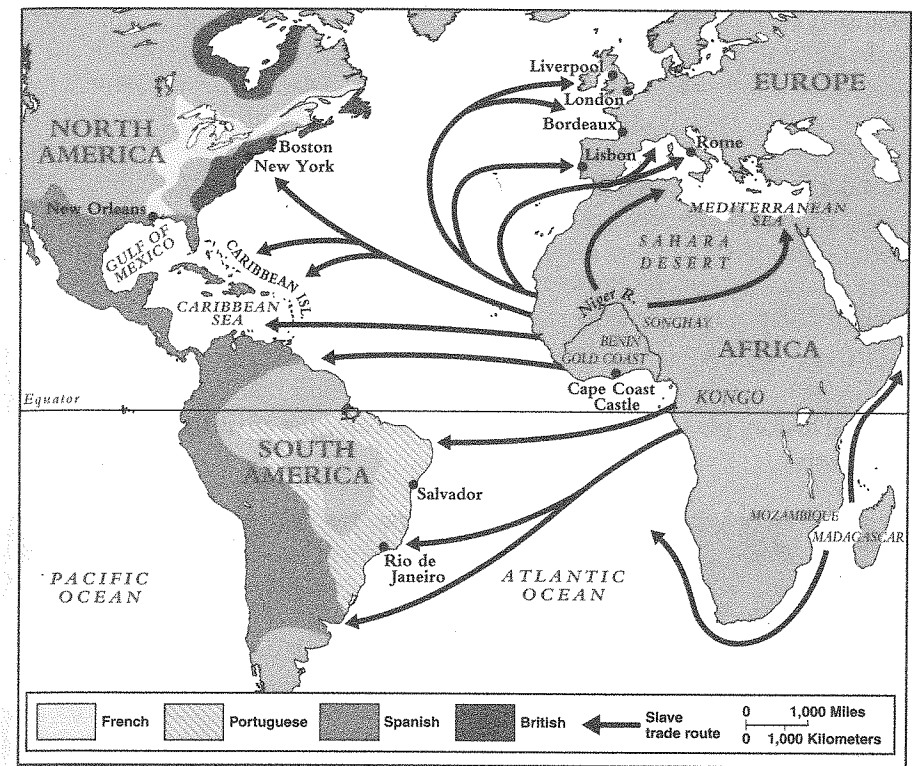
In the quote above, King Afonso of the Kongo Kingdom was writing about the terrible devastation that the Trans-Atlantic slave trade wrought on his kingdom. The Atlantic slave trade was a pivotal development in the history of the African continent during the Early Modern Era. It contributed to the decline of many West African societies, but it also had ripple effects across the entire African continent; the changes it brought would make African societies of the year 1450 almost unrecognizable by 1750.

African Civilizations at the Beginning of the Era

As discussed in Chapter 9, the era from 600 to 1450 brought considerable change to Africa. South of the Sahara, the introduction of bananas from Southeast Asia spurred great population growth. In North Africa and in the trading cities along the east coast, Islam spread rapidly as a result of the phenomenal growth of the Abbasid Empire, centered in Baghdad, and the activities of Muslim merchants. Interactions among various cultures inside and outside of Africa brought extensive trade and new technology to the continent. (Test Prep: Create a timeline of the main changes in Africa during the years 600 to 1450. See pages 161–172.)

Songhay Empire The Songhay people were the main ethnic group in and around the city of Gao on the Niger River. Gao was conquered and the Songhay were absorbed into the Mali Empire. As the Mali Empire began to decline in the early 1400s, Songhay gained its independence. In 1464, *Sunni Ali* became ruler of Songhay and began to aggressively expand into territory on both sides of the Niger River. He took over Timbuktu with its famed center of Islamic scholarship. Although a Muslim himself, he instituted repressive

THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE



policies against some of the scholars there, particularly those associated with peoples he had overthrown in his empire-building campaign. By the 1480s, he had built an empire that surpassed that of the Mali Empire before him. The cause of Sunni Ali's death in 1492 is uncertain. According to some, he drowned while crossing the Niger River; others contend that he was killed by his sister's son in a bid for power. The Songhay Empire would last for 100 years, until its defeat by Moroccan forces wielding firearms, uncommon weapons for armies in Sub-Saharan Africa at that time.

Europeans Arrive Certain regions of East and West Africa were the targets of European conquest during the late fifteenth century. Portuguese ruler Prince Henry the Navigator was keenly interested in navigational technology. He financed expeditions along Africa's Atlantic Coast and around the Cape of Good Hope, exploring African coastal communities and kingdoms before other European powers.

With the cooperation of local rulers, first Portuguese and then other European traders set up trading posts along Africa's coasts. Some local rulers traded slaves to the Europeans in exchange for gunpowder and cannons, giving those coastal governments a military advantage when battling neighboring villages. Thus, many African city-states grew wealthy by agreeing to sell

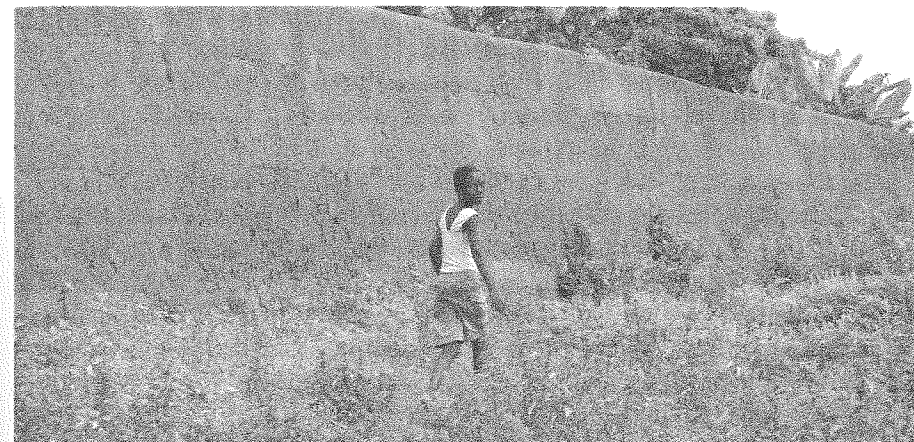
enslaved Africans to European slavers. *Dahomey*, in particular, grew stronger because it raided other villages for slaves and sold them to European merchants.

In central West Africa, Portuguese explorers, traders, and missionaries made inroads into the Kongo and Benin kingdoms. Artwork from these societies bears signs of European as well as African cultural influences. As early as the sixteenth century, Benin artisans incorporated images of the European “intruder” into their carvings and sculptures.

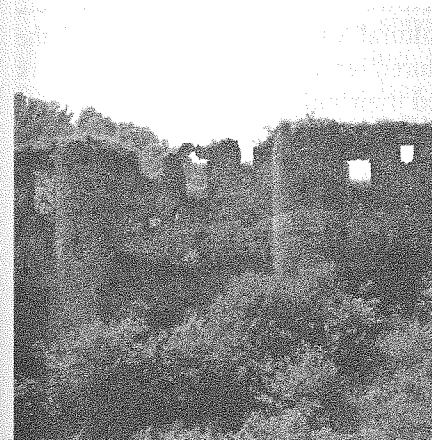
In 1498, Portuguese explorer *Vasco da Gama* invaded the Swahili city-states of East Africa, most of which were thriving commercial centers in the Indian Ocean trade. The Portuguese took over trade in Kilwa, Mombasa, and other city-states, throwing the region into a devastating decline.

Literature As in many other regions of the world, Africa produced influential literary works in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. The oral history passed along by griots later became the basis for written poetry and novels.

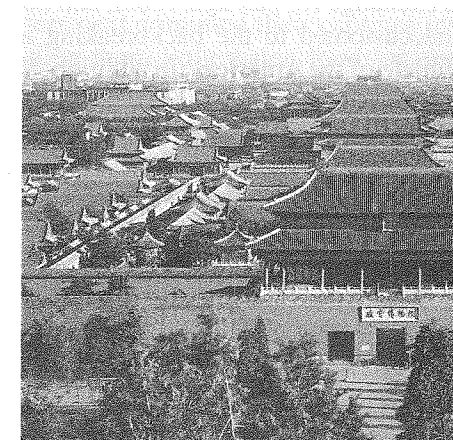
Developments in Literature			
Works	Country	Dates	Significance
Collected works of William Shakespeare	England	1564–1616	Set the precedent for European styles in prose, poetry, and drama
<i>Don Quixote</i> by Cervantes	Spain	1547–1616	Was the first great novel in European literature
<i>Epic of Sundiata</i>	Mali Empire in West Africa	1210–1260	Spread the story orally of the founder of the Mali Empire for generations before being written down
<i>Journey to the West</i>	China	1592	Used Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian symbolism in the format of a novel
Kabuki Theatre	Japan	17th century	Dramatized love stories, conflicts, and other aspects of Japanese culture in a highly stylized and flashy form



Source: Wikimedia Commons, Adam Jones, Ph.D.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, Eupator



Source:

Before the use of gunpowder weapons, walls provided defense. Remnants of these defensive walls still stand throughout the world, including in the West Africa (in Benin, above), Central Asia (in Kyrgyzstan, below left), and in East Asia (China, below right).

Africans and the Atlantic Slave Trade

Slavery had existed in Africa long before Europeans sought slave labor for their investments in the Americas. For example, in many societies, the entire community shared the land. In order to establish positions of wealth and power, individuals not only showcased the property they owned, but also showcased their slaves. Europeans were also not the first foreigners to seek out African labor. As discussed earlier, Arab merchants during the Post-Classical Era (600–1450) often bought slaves during their travels to the Swahili Coast of East Africa. However, it was the Atlantic slave trade that wreaked the most havoc on African societies. (Test Prep: Compose a graphic organizer that compares the forms of slavery during Sub-Saharan Africa’s Early Colonial Period with slavery from 600 to 1450. See pages 161–172.)

Why Africans? Several factors converged to make Africa a target for slave raids by Europeans after 1450. As discussed in the previous chapter, slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean began toward the end of the sixteenth century, when European *conquistadores* sought fortunes in gold, silver, and sugar. Land was plentiful, but labor to make the land profitable was scarce.

Europeans initially forced indigenous people to do the hard labor of mining and farming, but European diseases wiped out large portions of these coerced laborers. The indigenous slaves who survived found it easy to escape bondage because they were more familiar with the territory, had social networks that could protect them, and could easily camouflage themselves within the native population. Repeated efforts to enslave Native Americans failed, although other efforts to coerce labor did have some success.

Labor for Plantations In North America, plantation owners recruited European indentured servants who would come to work for a specified period in exchange for passage, room, and board. However, most of these people were unaccustomed to the backbreaking agricultural working conditions and the climate of the Americas. In addition, indentured servants were required to work only for about seven years. If they survived their indenture, they became free laborers. Thus, landowners did not think of indigenous captives and European indentured servants as ideal workers.

During this era, Europeans sought sources of inexpensive labor in the Americas. Western European countries such as Portugal, Spain, and England were developing their naval technology, but Portugal was ahead of the others. In West Africa during the latter part of the 1400s, Portuguese trading fleets arrived in the Kingdom of the Kongo seeking slaves. Initially they took the enslaved Africans back to Europe to work as domestic servants.

Triangular Trade The Europeans' desire for slaves in the Americas coupled with Portugal's "discovery" of West Africa meant that Africa became the source for new labor. African slaves soon became part of a complex global trading system that was called the *Atlantic trading system* or the *triangular trade* based on a trade cycle with three "legs." One version of triangular trade involved the transport of European manufactured goods such as firearms to West Africa, and from there enslaved Africans were shipped to the Americas. The final leg involved the transport of American tobacco and other cash crops to Europe.

Once other European nations noticed the success that the Portuguese enjoyed with sugar plantations in Brazil, the English, Dutch, and French worked to replicate that success in the Caribbean; by the 1700s, sugar production and rum (made from sugar) were financing fortunes in Britain, and to a lesser extent in France and the Netherlands.

Capture and Shipment of Slaves to the Americas Capturing Africans for slavery was invariably a violent affair. When African leaders along the coast realized that their kingdoms could economically benefit from the slave trade, they invaded neighboring societies in a quest for slaves to take back to the coast. At times, African rulers were also willing to hand over individuals

from the lower rungs of their own societies, such as prisoners of war, servants, or criminals. However, as King Afonso suggested to the King of Portugal in the quotation that opens this chapter, slave raids were not easily controllable. Though he had initially allowed slave trading in his kingdom, he had no intention of giving up his society's elite to slavery, nor did he want Kongo to be depopulated. King Afonso also saw that his authority was undermined because his subjects were able to trade slaves for European goods without his involvement. Before the Europeans came, he had been able to control all trade in his domain.

Captive Africans, swept away from their families, were taken to holding pens in West Africa known as *barracoons*, or "slave castles." The modern-day country of Ghana has preserved these "Points of No Return," where thousands upon thousands of Africans said goodbye to their homeland for the last time. Today, tourists can visit one such holding prison—the so-called House of Slaves on *Ile de Gorée* (Gorée Island), on the coast of Senegal.

From these holding pens, slave traders next crammed their captives into the dank cargo section of a ship, providing them little water, food, or even room for movement. The grueling journey across the Atlantic was known as the *Middle Passage*, because it was the middle part of the captives' journey. Many captured Africans staged rebellions en route, but most revolts were crushed. (The 1997 film *Amistad* provides an example of a successful Middle-Passage rebellion in 1839, in which Africans took control of the Spanish slave ship *Amistad*.) During the journey to the Americas, which usually took about six weeks, up to half of a ship's captives might die. Historians estimate that over the hundreds of years of the Atlantic slave trade from the early 1500s to the mid-nineteenth century, approximately 25 percent of all African captives perished before reaching the Americas.

African Presence in the Americas

African cultures were not completely lost once captives arrived in the Americas. In fact, during the *African Diaspora* (dispersion of Africans out of Africa), enslaved Africans managed to retain certain aspects of their cultures in their new environments.

Languages With a few exceptions, Africans were not able to transplant their languages to the Americas. The captives were spirited away from their communities, and they soon found themselves on ships among captives from all across West Africa (and, on some slave ships, from across East Africa as well). Since captives were taken from myriad African cultural groups, most did not share a common language. Understandably, they found it difficult, if not impossible, to communicate en route. Because of their linguistic isolation on the ships and in the Americas, most Africans lost their languages after a generation.

In spite of this forced isolation from their cultures, West Africans managed to combine European colonizers' languages (English, Spanish, French, or Portuguese, for example) with parts of their West African languages and grammatical patterns to create new languages known broadly as *creole*.

Because the Caribbean islands had a larger concentration of enslaved Africans than did North America, creole languages dominate there even today. In the United States, which had a smaller percentage of Africans in comparison to the total population, few examples of creole languages exist. One notable exception is the *Gullah* or *Geechee* language, of South Carolina and Georgia, in places where slaves once composed 75 percent of the population.

Religions African religions in the Americas provide powerful examples of religious syncretism, or the combining of different religious beliefs and practices. Africans melded aspects of Christianity that were introduced to them (or imposed upon them) with their West African religious traditions, such as drumming, dancing, and a belief in spirits that could “possess,” or take over and act through a person, often in evil ways. The traditions of *Santería* in Cuba, *Vodun* in Haiti, and *Candomblé* in Brazil were all combinations of Christian and traditional African religions. Enslaved Africans in the United States also laid the roots for the African-American church, a hybrid of Christianity and African spiritual traditions that remains one of the oldest and most stable institutions in African-American communities today.

Some of the enslaved Africans, maybe 10 percent, practiced Islam. While some of the men who sailed with Columbus may have been Muslims, these enslaved Africans became the first significant presence of Islam in the Americas.

Music Africans brought their music with them. Today’s music, including gospel, blues, jazz, rock-n-roll, hip-hop, samba, reggae, and country music, are all influenced by African music. The syncopated rhythms and percussion in contemporary music can be traced back to West African musical traditions. Perhaps many African descendants maintained their musical traditions because enslaved Africans in America used music as a means of survival, singing tunes from home to help them endure long workdays as well as to communicate with other slaves, such as when planning an escape. They blended European Christian music with their own religious songs, known today as Negro spirituals—essential elements of American folk music history. Slaves also invented the banjo, which is very similar to stringed instruments found in West Africa.

Food Africans brought rice and okra (a green vegetable) to the Americas, as well as their knowledge of how to prepare these foods. The dish known as *gumbo*, popular in the southern United States, has roots in African cooking. With influences on language, music, food, and much more, African culture has had a profound and lasting impact on life in the Americas.

Effects of the Slave Trade on Africa

The Atlantic slave trade affected Africa in social, economic, and political ways. Those most affected were the peoples and civilizations of West Africa in present-day Ghana and Benin, from which most Africans were kidnapped or sold. Gender distributions in those regions became severely imbalanced, because more than two-thirds of those taken were males. The resulting predominance of women prompted a rise in *polygyny* (the taking of more than one wife) and forced women to assume duties that had traditionally been men’s jobs.

Economically, African societies that conducted slave raids, such as the *Dahomey* and the *Oyo*, became richer from selling their captives to Europeans. This trade also had political effects, because when a society like Dahomey exchanged slaves for guns, its raiders easily took advantage of rival societies that had no firearms. Without firearms, it was hard for neighboring groups to resist slave raids, so raiding societies became even richer and more fortified with firearms. Intergroup warfare thus became more common and bloodier as a result of the slave trade.

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade permanently weakened several West African kingdoms (such as Kongo), largely because of the violence that it caused among their societies, but also because African slave-raiding kingdoms became economically dependent on goods from Europe. Such societies were slow to develop more complex economies in which they produced their own goods. Thus, the slave trade set the stage for European imperialism of the late nineteenth century. European colonizers would have an easier time further conquering the African continent in that era. (To learn about later European conquests in Africa, see pages 497–498.)

While the Atlantic trading system weakened Africa in many ways, it also ultimately spurred population growth through an improved diet. The Columbian Exchange introduced new crops to the continent, such as the American crops maize, peanuts, and manioc (also known as yucca or cassava), which became staples in the African diet.

The End of the Atlantic Slave Trade

Due to diverse factors, the slave trade ended in most places during the nineteenth century. In Europe, particularly Great Britain, political and social changes would drive the push for *abolition*. Enlightenment philosophers of the eighteenth century, such as Rousseau, wrote passionately about the right to freedom and the need for equality among all human beings. Enlightenment ideals formed the foundation for political revolutions in Europe and the Americas. Many intellectuals felt that slavery could not be reconciled with the Enlightenment values of democracy and equality, and thus the abolition movement was born. (See pages 394–413 for more information about the Enlightenment.)

People of European descent were not solely responsible for ending the slave trade in the Americas. Slave revolts were common, especially in those locations where enslaved Africans outnumbered free Europeans. In fact, slave revolts led by Toussaint L’Ouverture in the French colony of *Saint Domingue* in the late eighteenth century were so successful that they brought the end of slavery to the island in 1804, giving the newly independent nation of Haiti the distinction of being the first country in the Americas to end slavery. By 1888, slavery would be abolished throughout the Americas, usually through a gradual process of abolition. Haiti and the United States were the only two countries to end slavery through a full-scale war.

The Indian Ocean Slave Trade

Enslaved Africans were also sold from the eastern part of the continent. By land routes or by sea, slaves from Eastern Africa were sold to buyers in Northern Africa, the Middle East, and India. Many were transported to the islands off the southeast coast of Africa, such as Madagascar.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: WHAT WAS THE SLAVE TRADE'S IMPACT?

Historians continue to study the impact of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. In his book *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1944), historian Eric Williams, who was also the first prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, posited that without slavery in the Americas, the European Industrial Revolution and capitalism as we know it would never have existed. Williams was thus one of the first to draw connections between the wealth of Western European countries and their involvement in the Atlantic slave trade. Thirty years later, Eugene Genovese's seminal work, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (NY: Pantheon, 1974) described in great detail the social and cultural history of slavery, primarily in North America.

One public debate around African history in the Americas concerns the extent to which peoples of African descent actually retained remnants of African culture. The Black English controversy is a notable example of this debate. Linguists who study Creole and Black English have traced the grammatical patterns back to West Africa. For example, many West African languages do not conjugate the verb "to be," and linguists also observe this lack of conjugation among some people of African descent in the Americas. The validity of Black English as a dialect sparked a huge controversy in the media, touching on the question of whether Africa had a central place in the discussion about African-American history and culture.

Author Joseph Holloway addressed that issue in his book *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), showcasing research on the aspects of African culture that continue to exist in the Americas in music, religion, and other areas, with particular case studies of New Orleans and of Gullah culture in South Carolina. The book provides a unique perspective on the many connections among the cultures of the African Diaspora.

Most recently, in 2014, historian Edward E. Baptist published *Slavery: The Half That Has Never Been Told*. Baptist argued that the expansion of slavery and cotton production in the United States in the nineteenth century provided the foundation for the country's rise to its status as a global industrial power.

KEY TERMS BY THEME

ENVIRONMENT

Niger River

CULTURE

creole
Gullah
Geechee
Santeria
Vodun
Candomblé
gumbo
polygyny
Saint Domingue

STATE-BUILDING

Dahomey
Sunni Ali
Oyo

ECONOMICS

barracoons
Ile de Gorée
Vasco da Gama
triangular trade
Atlantic trade system

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

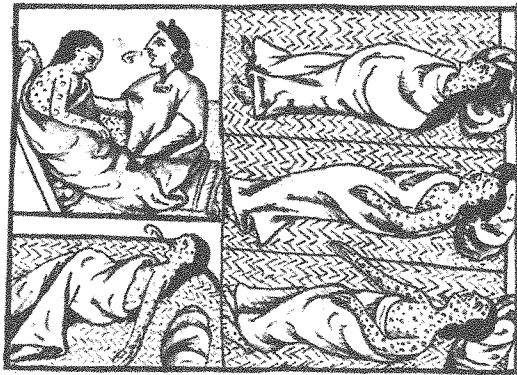
Middle Passage
African Diaspora
abolition

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. The Middle Passage involved which of the following new connections in the era from 1450 to 1750?
 - (A) It was the route of enslaved Africans from the interior of Africa to the African coast.
 - (B) It was the voyage of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas.
 - (C) It was the triangular voyage of slave merchants between Europe, Africa, and the Americas.
 - (D) It was the route of enslaved Africans leaving slave ships in the Americas and going to plantations.
2. Which statement is true about the slave trade in Africa?
 - (A) The Atlantic slave trade was the beginning of slavery in Africa.
 - (B) Portuguese traders were the first to capture slaves in Africa.
 - (C) Slavery existed in Africa long before the arrival of Europeans.
 - (D) Arab merchants of the Post-Classical Era were the first to trade for slaves in Africa.

3. What was one reason Africans became a prime target for slave traders?
- (A) Africans knew how to grow tobacco.
 - (B) Africans were willing to travel to the Americas.
 - (C) Africans had no prior experience with agricultural labor.
 - (D) Africans did not succumb to illnesses common among Europeans.

Question 4 refers to the following image.



Source: Wikimedia Commons / CJLL Wright

4. The impact of the events portrayed in the image above led to
- (A) large-scale reduction in the population of indigenous peoples in the Americas
 - (B) the violent capture of Africans to be sold as slaves in Africa
 - (C) the harsh treatment of enslaved Africans on the voyage across the Atlantic
 - (D) the enslavement of indigenous Americans by European *conquistadores*
5. What was a major effect in Africa of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade?
- (A) Most slave-raiding African groups became poorer because of the competition with other groups.
 - (B) Warfare among African groups decreased in frequency and severity.
 - (C) The influx of money caused economic growth.
 - (D) The ratio of males to females became unbalanced.

6. What was the main cause of Haiti becoming the first land in the Americas to abolish slavery?
- (A) political and social changes in Europe
 - (B) slave revolts there in the late eighteenth century
 - (C) slave revolts on ships during the Middle Passage
 - (D) the abolition movement in the United States
7. One similarity between the Swahili Coast and the West Coast of Africa is that local rulers on both coasts
- (A) gained power by trading slaves for firearms
 - (B) used gunpowder and cannons to battle invading Europeans
 - (C) abandoned trade with other African kingdoms to trade with Europeans
 - (D) refused to participate in the slave trade that Europeans encouraged

Question 8 refers to the table below.

Destination of Enslaved Africans by Colonial Region	
Destination	Percentage
Portuguese Colonies	39%
British West Indian Colonies	18%
Spanish Colonies	18%
French Colonies	14%
British Mainland Colonies	6%
Dutch West Indian Colonies	2%
Other	3%

Source: Stephen D. Behrendt, et al. *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*.

8. Which statement is supported by the table above?
- (A) Most enslaved Africans landed in regions that produced labor-intensive crops such as sugar.
 - (B) The labor needs of the Spanish Empire and British West Indian Colonies were the same.
 - (C) Slaves in the Dutch West Indies served primarily as domestic servants.
 - (D) About six percent of the population of British West Indian Colonies were enslaved Africans.

9. Which statement explains why Portugal became the first European nation to engage in widespread slave trading along the West Coast of Africa?
- (A) The Portuguese were pioneers in gunpowder and cannon technology.
 - (B) The Portuguese were more skilled in setting up trading posts.
 - (C) Only the Portuguese were willing to trade cannons for slaves.
 - (D) The Portuguese were pioneers in naval technology.
10. Santería in Cuba, Vodun in Haiti, and Candomblé in Brazil were all
- (A) African religions that were the roots of today's African-American church
 - (B) African religions that included the belief in spirits that could "possess" a person
 - (C) Syncretic religions that combined aspects of Christianity with African religious beliefs and practices
 - (D) Syncretic religions that combined aspects of African religious tradition, such as drumming and dancing

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE-OVER-TIME ESSAY QUESTIONS

Directions: You are to answer the following question. You should spend 5 minutes organizing or outlining your essay. Write an essay that:

- Has a relevant thesis and supports that thesis with appropriate historical evidence.
 - Addresses all parts of the question.
 - Uses world historical context to show continuities and changes over time.
 - Analyzes the process of continuity and change over time.
1. Analyze the continuities and changes on the African continent from 1450 to 1750 in one of the following areas:
- Political and military power
 - Economic power

Questions for Additional Practice

- 2 Analyze the continuities and changes in networks of communication and exchange in Sub-Saharan Africa from the Post-Classical Era (600–1450, see Chapter 9) through the Early Colonial Era (1450–1750).

3. Analyze the continuities and changes in political power and the building of states in Sub-Saharan Africa from the Post-Classical Era (600–1450, See Chapter 9) through the Early Colonial Era (1450–1750).

COMPARATIVE ESSAY QUESTIONS

Directions: You are to answer the following question. You should spend 5 minutes organizing or outlining your essay. Write an essay that:

- Has a relevant thesis and supports that thesis with appropriate historical evidence.
 - Addresses all parts of the question.
 - Makes direct, relevant comparisons.
 - Analyzes relevant reasons for similarities and differences.
1. Analyze the similarities and differences between slavery in Africa and in the Americas from 1450 to 1750.

Questions for Additional Practice

2. Analyze the similarities and differences in the culture of Africans living in Sub-Saharan Africa and enslaved Africans who had been sent to the Americas as part of the triangular trade.
3. Analyze the similarities and differences between slavery in Sub-Saharan Africa during the Post-Classical Era (600–1450) with slavery during the Early Colonial Era (1450–1750).

THINK AS A HISTORIAN: RECOGNIZE CORRELATION

To correlate is to show a relationship between two or more things, events, people, or eras. For example, a historian might correlate evidence of climate change with the collapse of a civilization. *Select the statements below that express correlations.*

1. In the West Africa Empire of Songhay, Islam was related to economic interests; espousing Islam made it easier to do business with Muslim traders.
2. Prince Henry the Navigator financed expeditions along Africa's Atlantic Coast and around the Cape of Good Hope.
3. Coastal governments that traded in slaves had the wealth to buy firearms and gain military advantage over governments that did not engage in the slave trade.
4. Europeans were not the first foreigners to seek African labor; Arab merchants during the post-classical period bought slaves during their African travels.

WRITE AS A HISTORIAN: APPLY THE SKILL OF HISTORICAL ARGUMENTATION

Part of creating a strong argument is acknowledging and responding to evidence that does not support your thesis. *Identify the statements below that could be used as evidence AGAINST the thesis that new technology and products damaged Africa.*

1. Guns promoted the slave trade, which created problems for Africa's economic development.
2. Improvements in naval technology made shipping enslaved Africans to the Americas less expensive.
3. Imported manufactured goods from Europe slowed Africa's economic development.
4. New food crops introduced into Africa from the Americas caused the population to grow.