

For more information on the

International Day for the
Commemoration of the 200th Anniversary of the
Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, see
www.un.org/events/slaveryabolition/

Other Sources

UNESCO Slave Route Project
www.unesco.org/culture/slaveroute

"Struggles Against Slavery" (UNESCO, 2004)

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001337/133738e.pdf>

Breaking the Silence Education Project (UNESCO)

www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence

Anti-Slavery International

www.antislavery.org

The Slave Route, UNESCO: For accessing the map please see:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/dialogue/slave/images/Apdf.Pdf>

The Schomburg Center

www.schomburgcenter.org

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**Acknowledging the Tragedy,
Honouring the Victims**

On 28 November 2006, the UN General Assembly designated 25 March 2007 as the "International Day for the Commemoration of the 200th Anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade."

Recognizing the everlasting effect of slavery in the modern world, Member States acknowledged that slavery was at the heart of "profound social and economic inequality, hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice, which continue to affect people of African descent today."

The purpose of this Day is to honour the memory of those who died as a result of slavery, including through exposure to the horrors of the Middle Passage and in the fight for freedom from enslavement. It also aims to decrease the "knowledge gap" that exists today with regard to the consequences created by the slave trade and slavery.

**INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE
COMMEMORATION OF THE
200th ANNIVERSARY OF THE
ABOLITION OF THE
TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE**


Imagine being torn from your weeping family as a result of ethnic warfare...forced to walk hundreds of miles until you reach the sea on the West African side of the Atlantic Ocean. You are stripped of your name, your identity, of every right a human being deserves. The European ship that you are forced to board is headed across the Atlantic to Caribbean and South American plantations, a voyage through the awful "Middle Passage". A multitude of black people of every description chained together, with scarcely room to turn, travelling for months, seasick, surrounded by the filth of vomit-filled tubs, into which children often fell, some suffocating. The screams of the tortured and the groans of the dying render the whole scene of horror almost inconceivable. Death and disease are all around and only one in six will survive this journey and the brutal, backbreaking labour that follows...

**The trans-Atlantic slave trade
persisted for four centuries.**

Slavery and the slave trade are among the worst violations of human rights in the history of humanity. The trans-Atlantic slave trade was unique within the entire history of slavery due to its duration (four hundred years), its scale (approximately 17 million people excluding those who died during transport) and the legitimization accorded to it, including under laws of the time.



25 March 2007



The trans-Atlantic slave trade constituted the biggest deportation in history. Lasting from the 16th century to the 19th century, it involved several regions and continents: Africa, North and South America, Europe and the Caribbean, and resulted in the sale and exploitation of millions of Africans by Europeans.

The “Triangular Trade”

Ships carrying trading goods such as guns, alcohol and horses left European ports headed for West Africa, where they would exchange these items for enslaved Africans. The slaves had either been captured in African ethnic wars or were victims of a thriving local business in the capture and sale of slaves.

Ships heavily overloaded with enslaved Africans would then set out across the “Middle Passage” to European colonies and American territories, in the Caribbean and North and South America. To transport the maximum number of slaves the ship’s steerage facilities were often removed. It is estimated that one in six slaves died on this journey due to the cramped, unsanitary conditions. On ships where disease or rebellion occurred, this toll could rise to more than one in two.

After the surviving slaves were sold, the ships returned to Europe carrying goods produced with slave labour such as sugar, tobacco, cotton, rum and coffee. The slave trade was central to the development of European colonial economies in the Americas for nearly 400 years.

Justifying A System Of Slavery

The trans-Atlantic slave trade was a comprehensive and large scale economic system. The main trading countries – Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, England and France – were able to make a significant profit on each leg of the triangular journey and many European cities flourished courtesy of the profits from agricultural industries built and sustained literally on the “backs” of African slaves.

The practice of slavery was often justified on philanthropic or religious grounds. It was a system of hard labour and harsh discipline including flogging and branding for minor crimes. It was even codified under law, in the notorious “Code Noir” of 1685. This French law set out the rights and duties of masters and slaves in the colonies of the Americas and stated that “We declare slaves as movable property”. The Code Noir was often portrayed as a “benefit” to slaves to protect them from abuses by their masters and included the provision of religious holidays, enforced Catholic worship, tolerance of intermarriages between slaves and others and advocated the preservation of families.

Legacy

The legacy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade is the subject of much debate. It resulted in the destruction of a significant portion of the language, culture and religion of millions of enslaved Africans. The removal of such large numbers of people from Africa disrupted the African economy and is believed by some scholars to have permanently disadvantaged Africa compared to other parts of the world. It can also be argued that slavery redefined Africans to the world, leaving a legacy of racism and stereotyping of Africans as inferior.

Abolition Of The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

By the late 18th century, moral and political opposition to the slave trade was growing in Great Britain and the United States, as well as in other parts of Europe. Groups such as the Quakers in North America and the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade in Britain were instrumental in raising public awareness of the slave trade through public petitions, boycott campaigns and the dissemination of materials describing and sometimes illustrating the living conditions of slaves on board trade ships or working on plantations.

Slaves also rose up against their subjugation, throughout the Caribbean and most notably in Haiti in the Revolution of 1791 to 1804. These revolts marked a significant turning point for the slave trade as the colonial powers began to recognize the political and military risks of such uprisings. This factor, combined with the growing voices of the abolitionist movement and the changing economic conditions that had reduced the economic significance of some European colonies, signaled the beginning of the end of the trans-Atlantic trade.

Two hundred years ago in early March of 1807, the United States President, Thomas Jefferson, signed legislation abolishing the slave trade. Later that same month, the British Parliament, led by the efforts of abolitionists William Wilberforce, the Reverend James Ramsay and John Wesley, banned the slave trade throughout the British Empire. The tide had turned.

In subsequent years, other European countries followed suit with laws prohibiting slavery; however it was not until 80 years later that the trans-Atlantic slave trade was finally extinguished, with Cuba and Brazil abolishing it in 1886 and 1888 respectively.