

Chapter 4: Trading Places

The Decline of Islamic and African Empires (1350 – 1650 CE)

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Europe’s power was growing, and even surpassing the wealth of Eastern Asia, due to the global networks of trade they controlled around Africa and across the Atlantic. The mighty Muslim empires of Southwest and South Asia - India’s Mughals, Persia’s Safavids, and the Ottoman Turks - were clearly in decline. Over time their power was greatly reduced as their domination of the two most lucrative trade routes in the world for centuries - the Silk and Sea Roads – slowly waned.

Power also shifted in Africa from the interior empires that thrived off the Trans-Saharan trade routes – the Sand Road - to many coastal empires that benefited from the rapidly growing Atlantic trade routes. Furthermore, the interior of Africa was further decimated as the Europeans expanded the age-old practice of slavery.

Perhaps the most profound global shift in prosperity and power – the **Great Divergence** - commenced around the fifteenth century, in which the Western world surpassed the influence and wealth of the rest of the world. While the actual shift in fortune between the East and West did not significantly diverge until centuries later, this era set into motion a series of events that inevitably gave the Europeans a decided advantage over all other cultures.

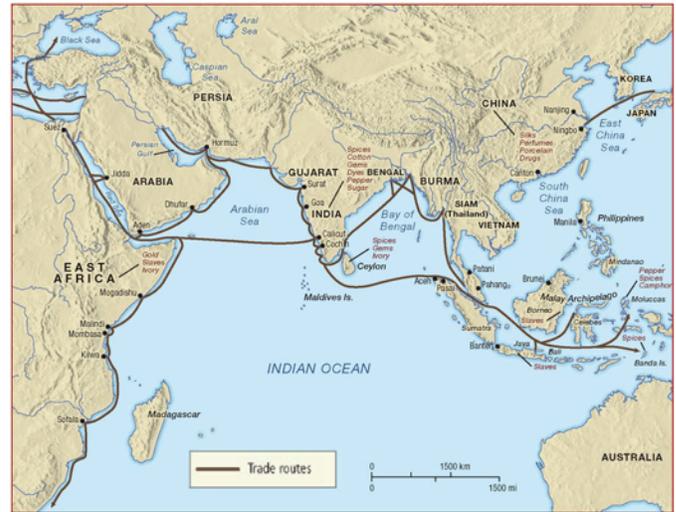
The title of this chapter, “Trading Places,” represents an intended duality. It refers to the actual locations in which commerce occurred, but it also refers to the changes in wealth and relative location that resulted from the flow of trade shifting from one set of places to new, more dominant ones. Once again, *those who do not, or cannot, adapt to changing conditions will become weaker, obsolete, or extinct.*



End of the Road

West Meets South

In the early seventeenth century, nearly all of southern Asia, from Anatolia (modern day Turkey) to Indonesia, was dominated by Islam. The three great Islamic empires- Mughal India, Safavid Persia, and the multinational empire of the Ottoman Turks-ruled huge and populous domains, while Muslim merchants exercised commanding influence on trade and culture along the Indian Ocean.



Major trade routes along the Indian Ocean in the early seventeenth century.

During the sixteenth century, and in the centuries immediately preceding it, the Indian Ocean basin served as the world’s main center of maritime trade. Riding the seasonal **monsoon** winds, Arab and Persian sailors carried on a lively commerce connecting India, Persia, Arabia, the city-states of East Africa, and Europe. Farther east, Chinese and Southeast Asian ships carried merchandise back and forth in and out of the Indian Ocean. Each region was highly specialized, supplying products that were locally raised, manufactured, or mined.

The Islamic empires were perfectly situated between Europe and East Asia to acquire technology and wealth. They made great fortunes through trade by means of taxes, and customs duties. They also developed their own technology as well as advancing scientific thought; for instance, mathematics today would be severely hindered without the Hindu-Arabic numeral system, which introduced the concept of “zero” as an actual number. Unbeknownst to them at the time, by the seventeenth century the great Islamic Southern Asian Empires had reached the

pinnacle of their power. They had long drawn strength and wealth from their control of the Silk and Sea Roads, but they declined as European countries seized control of the Atlantic as well as the Indian Ocean trade.

Ironically, one of Islam's greatest triumphs - the conquest of **Constantinople** in 1453 by the Ottoman Turks - set into motion a series of events that eventually undermined this domination and the fortunes of Islamic southern Asia. To avoid paying the huge fees and markups imposed by the Ottomans on goods coming through Constantinople from the East, Portuguese sailors began seeking an all-water route around Africa to southern Asia. In doing so they initiated the European voyages of discovery and challenged Muslim control of the Indian Ocean. While the Islamic Empires would continue to flourish for more than two additional centuries, their demise had already been set into motion.

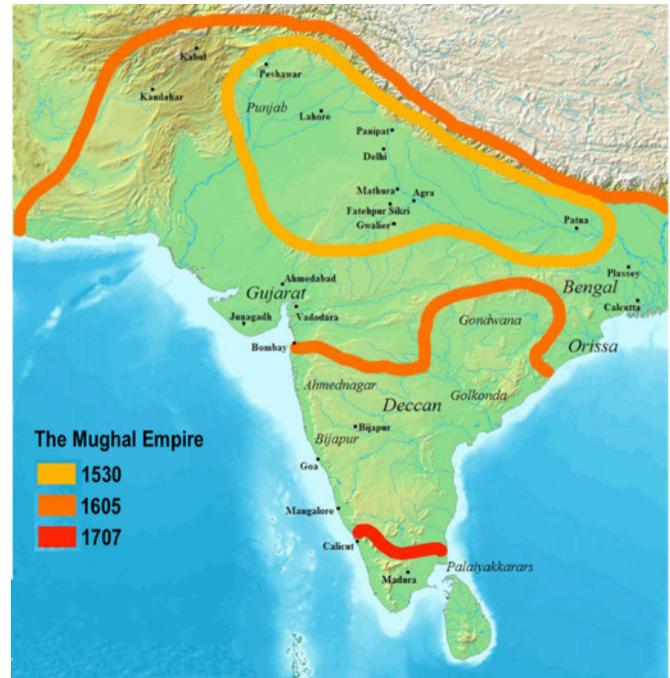
By the eighteenth century, Islamic preeminence in southern Asia had yielded to the Europeans, whose economic and technological strength helped reorient the global balance of wealth and power. When the Europeans moved into the Indian Ocean with monopolistic trading companies, they connected Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Indian Ocean commercial networks. As Europe's trade with the Americas became more profitable than its trade with the East, the busiest commercial routes shifted to the Atlantic. Mercantilism enabled countries such as England and Holland to seize the dominant commercial status previously enjoyed by the Islamic world. Global networks, controlled by the English and Dutch, linked Indian Ocean trade with the Atlantic trade. Commercial power thereupon became global rather than regional, and wealth flowed out of the Indian Ocean region through the trading companies and into Europe. Therefore the great Islamic empires of southern Asia lost their struggle for economic power as the Indian Ocean trading centers were increasingly dominated by Europeans.

For Europe, the transition to a global network of trade routes assured their ascendancy, as they controlled a majority of the most lucrative ports and markets. For Islamic southern Asia, the transition to a global economy, and the consequent shift in the global balance of power, had a highly negative impact. As the Muslims struggled to meet the European challenge, two very different responses had emerged: either Westernize and modernize along European lines, or reject Western ways and restore traditional Islamic practices. Regardless, neither approach proved effective in slowing the Islamic world's political and economic deterioration.

Mughal Expansion and European Incursion

The Islamic **Mughal Empire** was founded in 1526, and proceeded to expand over large parts of the Indian subcontinent and modern-day Afghanistan. The "classic period" of the Mughals began in 1556 with the ascension of **Akbar the Great**, who helped India develop a strong and stable economy. Presiding over a largely Hindu population, he abolished the long-standing tradition of taxing non-Muslims, and allowed them to attain high positions in both the government and military. During his reign,

the Mughals tripled the size of their empire, and won the loyalty of their native subjects. The foundations of a powerful multicultural empire were set, and the Mughals would likely have continued to enjoy unfettered dominance in the region had it not been for the intrusion of the Europeans.



The extent of the Mughal Empire over time.

The Indian subcontinent was the first southern Asian region to be affected by European expansion, beginning when Vasco da Gama entered Calicut harbor in 1498. The Portuguese opened up a lucrative trade network that brought valuable goods into Europe, and began to diminish the importance of the Silk Road. When **Philip II** of Spain, a devoted Catholic, inherited the Portuguese crown in the late sixteenth century, he promptly closed the Portuguese port of Lisbon to Protestant shipping. Protestant nations such as Holland and England, previously content to buy their spices from Portugal, now had reason to seek their own sea routes around Africa to India.

In 1600 and 1602, the English and Dutch governments each created a large commercial enterprise and gave it a national monopoly over trade with India. Before long these ventures, known respectively as the British East India Company and the Dutch United East India Company, were vigorously pursuing this trade. The Portuguese paid in gold, but the Dutch and English companies wanted to create a **positive balance of trade** by paying for spices in exchange for manufactured goods. Indian merchants neither wanted nor needed much of anything the Europeans had to offer at that time, so the British East India Company got creative.

Recognizing they could use **calico** cloth (made in Calicut) in the spice trade, the English built textile factories on the east coast of India, paying Indian weavers in gold to

make the calico. The cloth was then traded for spices. Because the labor was so cheap, the English were able to receive around three hundred times the spices than if they paid in gold alone. At the same time, by using inexpensive local labor, they reduced the cost of calico in the English home market and tied India more closely to England itself.



British-made calico from India

Additionally, the Catholic Portuguese and French intended not only to make money but also to save souls. The British and Dutch, however, focused more narrowly, focusing on specific regions for domination. Additionally, Protestant English and Dutch, were principally interested in doing business as opposed to spreading their faith. Dividing up the region among the Europeans themselves for financial gain would make individual parts of it easier to conquer.

Decline of the Mughals



The Taj Mahal was constructed in the mid-seventeenth century as a mausoleum for Mughal emperor Shah Jahan's wife; it is widely recognized as "the jewel of Muslim art in India."

Islam had conquered India but had never converted it. Along the subcontinent, Islam was the religion of the ruling elites, not the common people. Hinduism remained India's dominant faith, and the caste system defied repeated Islamic efforts at social leveling. Muslims had successfully installed their own political systems, but religiously and culturally India remained Hindu, a fact impossible to ignore when Mughal authority collapsed.

The British, seeking more trade, wealth, and power, continued to expand further into the Indian subcontinent. As time progressed, the Mughals lost power to the Brit-

ish, and their empire dissolved into many independent states, which were primarily controlled by **nawabs** (Nāwabs) – or local princes. Meanwhile, a new group of Europeans was making inroads in India, ready to take advantage of Mughal decline. In 1664 France founded the French East India Company, and the intense competition for trade in the region became fierce.

The Seven Years' War¹ broke out in 1756, pitting the giant European powers of Britain and France against each other. To support their trade in Calcutta, and to defend against possible French attack, the British East India Company reinforced a fort in the area. A nawab of the region laid siege to the fort, unhappy with the company's interference in the affairs of his province. The fort fell, and the captured British soldiers along with civilians were held overnight as prisoners in a cell. The conditions were so cramped that many died from suffocation, heat exhaustion and crushing. One account claimed that 123 prisoners died out of 146 prisoners held. This event would later be known as the **Black Hole of Calcutta**, and the British became even more involved in Indian affairs afterward to protect their people and to increase their wealth.

In India – as with many of their colonies – the British followed a policy of **indirect rule**, meaning they would send a smaller numbers of qualified men to influence and control the population. The British would subvert or bribe the nawabs, and use them to control their people. This policy was a necessity as there were not enough qualified British men to control the vast Indian population through **direct rule** – as, for example, the Spanish had done in South America.

During the next century, India became the "**jewel in the crown**" of the British monarchs - the cornerstone of England's worldwide empire and a principal element in its prosperity. Valuable raw materials and goods poured out of India into the global market, however, what made them Britain's most lucrative possession was their vast population. Britain used India as an immense market, selling their goods to the people of India, and reaping great profits in the process. The British dominated the political and economic affairs of India until the twentieth century. Once again, the Indian subcontinent was unified under foreign rule.

Muslims and Europeans in Southeast Asia

For centuries, the Indian Ocean trade routes reached into Southeast Asia. Unlike India, however, Southeast Asia proved to be a place where Islam continued to expand. Located at a crossroads of international trade, it was of interest to both Muslims and Europeans. The fragmented nature of the region presented obstacles to the development of political unity, with a large number of islands and archipelagos, as well as numerous moun-

¹ The Seven Years' War (1756-1763) is known as the French and Indian War in the United States (1754-1763) since it began two years earlier in the British American colonies, and because battles took place in India – in addition to Europe and the Americas.

tain ranges and rainforests within the Southeast Asian mainland. By the sixteenth century, Muslim missionaries and merchants had spread their faith deep into territories such as modern day Indonesia and Malaysia.



The spread of Islam in Southeast Asia from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries.

Initially, Islam spread to Indonesia through **hierarchical diffusion**, as many leaders and families adopted the new faith. Since India and other territories such as the Indonesian island of Java were predominantly Hindu, the Muslim religion did not affect nearly everyone from its hearth in Arabia. However, Islam did spread through **contagious diffusion** once it took root in several parts of Southeast Asia. Several rulers converted to Islam in the expectation that it would improve their position with regard to rival Hindu states. Conversion was also useful for trade, as connections with the Islamic trading networks across the Indian Ocean proved to be highly lucrative.

Nonetheless, the Europeans began to compete for trade and control of territory throughout Southeast Asia beginning in the sixteenth century. Led by Spain in the Philippines, and Portugal in modern-day Malaysia and Indonesia, profitable ports and colonies were founded. In the decades and centuries later, the Iberian states saw increased competition in the region by other European states such as the Netherlands, Britain, and France.

Decline of the Turks

The Islamic Empires differed with respect to their reactions toward Western influence. Some rejected Western influence and restored their traditional Islamic practices. This is not what occurred in Mughal India, which was increasingly weakened initially by Hindus within India, and much more intensely by the encroaching Europeans years later. As foreign influence increased, several nawabs succumbed to the British in order to maintain positions of power, fragmenting the Mughal Empire even further. Ultimately the Mughals were overtaken completely by the British, who prized the Indian subcontinent

more than any other colony. This was due somewhat to its rich resources, but much more because of its market, that is, the millions of people in India who could purchase British-made goods. The Mughals were forced to accept European influence, however, another Islamic empire – the **Ottoman Turks** – eventually westernized voluntarily.



The Ottoman Empire at the height of its relative power.

The Ottoman Empire was founded in 1299, and grew to become a transcontinental power. In 1453, the Turks overthrew the Byzantine Empire in their conquest of Constantinople. This was one of the key events compelling the Europeans to seek an alternate trade route around the long-standing Silk Road. As European traders increasingly bypassed the Muslim-dominated land routes, Ottoman income from trade and taxes declined. Unwilling to accept this loss of income, in the sixteenth century, the Turks competed vigorously against Portugal for Indian Ocean trade.

Suleiman the Magnificent was the Ottoman Empire's greatest leader, presiding over the apex of their military, political and economic power. He is often referred to as "Suleiman the Lawgiver" because he personally instituted legislative changes relating to society, education, taxation, and criminal law. His death in 1566 marked the beginning of a long decline in power for the Turks.



Suleiman the Magnificent

As long as the Turks expanded, they were able to plunder and reap great benefits from the conquered lands; they even expanded into southern Europe and were on the doorstep of some of the greatest powers in the world at that time. The Turks continued to expand over land for more than a century, often pillaging the conquered territories and enriching their multinational state. However, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, England and the Dutch of Holland had pushed both the Portuguese and the Turks aside with respect to Indian Ocean trade, reducing Ottoman power and wealth. Later

in that century, the Turks were defeated at Vienna by a multinational coalition of European states; this was the farthest the Ottoman territory would ever reach in Europe. From that point on, they experienced less wealth, more revolts, and eventually an increased loss of their land.



Political cartoon showing Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia carving up the Ottoman Empire after the Russo-Turkish War. The caption reads, "Let Us Have (A) Peace (Piece)."

so – as the Mughals had done – they granted many leaders sovereignty over their own lands – while remaining part of the greater Ottoman Empire.

Into the nineteenth century, extensive reforms based on western models changed the empire significantly. Contempt for western accomplishments gave way to grudging respect. European fashions in art, architecture, and clothing inspired Ottoman syntheses. Decentralization permitted healthy increases in local autonomy without compromising the Ottoman state as a whole. The empire once again appeared formidable and cohesive. The Turks may have been "sick", but they were far from dead.

Decline of the Safavids

The Ottoman Turks voluntarily westernized and fragmented their sovereignty over their territory as a strategy to maintain their power. The Mughals were forced to act similarly under the relentless encroachment of their lands and influence by the Europeans. However, an Islamic empire that pursued an opposite path was the **Safavid Empire** of Persia.



Shah Abbas I

Shah Abbas I ruled from 1587 to 1629, and he reconstituted a strong Persian state as a rival to the neighboring Ottoman Empire. From his capital at Isfahan, he presided over a golden age of commerce, refinement, and

reform. His reign marked the height of Persia's success. Abbas I, and the Safavid Empire as a whole, promoted the Shi'a form of Islam. Although he worked to transform Persia into a nation-state, he presided over a large multinational empire.

The death of Abbas I began the empire's decline. His successors worked to centralize their power, rather than empower regional leaders; this however, led to more corruption and inefficiency. Additionally, as more trade was diverted away from the Silk Road, the Safavids saw their wealth and power diverted as well. As greed, graft, and weakness took hold of the Persian government, various provinces of the empire rose in revolt, leading several of its neighboring rivals to take advantage of this civil unrest.



The Safavid Empire c. 1600 CE.

By the early eighteenth century, the Safavids lost Isfahan to the Afghans, and land to the Russians, and Turks. By the middle of the century, the Safavids were completely conquered. The **Qajar Dynasty** that took power in the late eighteenth century began to turn Persia into a **theocracy** – a government increasingly controlled by the Shi'a leaders, as opposed to secular leaders. This reaction was founded on the idea that the Persians had lost sight of their intended Islamic path, and were therefore losing ground to the Christians as a result. At the close of the century, Shi'ism was moving in a direction contrary to that of secular state control. Shi'ite religious reformers insisted that society and government be organized according to genuine Islamic principles, that the **Sharia law** replace civil and royal legal codes.

These events separated Persia from other modernizing Muslim cultures, such as the Turks and Mughals. In most such cultures, modernization began with western economic contact that escalated into colonial and imperial control. But in Persia, the people grew more devoutly Islamic, even in the face of increasing European influence, which proved to be largely economic and indirect.

Fundamentalism in Arabia

Persia was not the only region that followed a more **fundamentalist** approach, which was a stricter adherence to Islam, as opposed to westernization and secularism. In Arabia in the mid-eighteenth century, a young religious scholar named **Muhammad ibn Abd-al Wahhab** con-

cluded that all Islamic states, and especially the Ottoman Empire, had strayed from the path of strict observance of the teachings of the prophet Muhammad. In doing so they had incurred the wrath of Allah. Only by returning to this strict observance, al-Wahhab preached, could Islam triumph over the unbelievers.



The First Saudi State (1744–1818)

Wahhabism is a very fundamental branch of Sunni Islam in which the followers adhere to many strict interpretations of their holy book – the **Qur'an**. The teachings of al-Wahhab, troubling to many Muslims, made him an outcast in Arabia until 1744, when he forged an alliance with the house of Saud, which immediately established a small central Arabian state on Wahhabist principles. In time they gained territory and possession of two of the most holy sites in the Islamic faith – Mecca and Medina. As the birthplace of Muhammad and the site of Muhammad's first revelation of the Qur'an, **Mecca** is regarded as the holiest city in the religion of Islam. **Medina** was Muhammad's destination after his migration from Mecca, along with many of his followers. It is home to the three oldest mosques in Islam, and is the second-holiest city for Muslims.

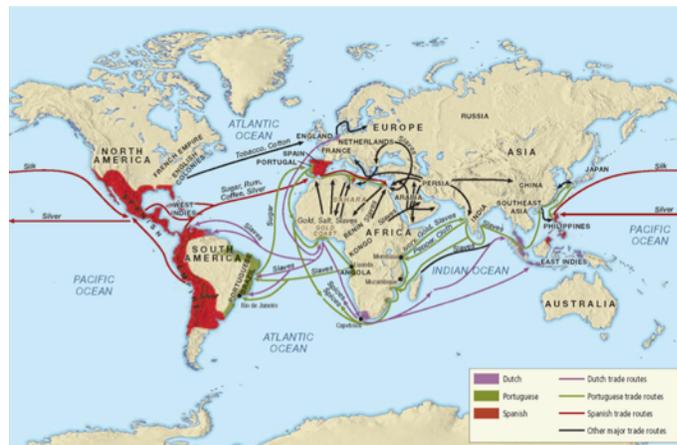
The Dire Decline of the Islamic Empires

The gradual weakening of the Islamic Empires occurred due to a combination of ethnic, military, economic, and commercial causes. The first key reason to consider is **ethnicity**, which refers to a group of people who identify with each other based on common ancestral, social, cultural or national experience. By spreading so far out from their ethnic hearths, the conquered lands they absorbed contained diverse cultures and religions. This situation made it virtually impossible to establish strong and unified nation-states. Over time the resentment of the subverted peoples and expenses due to the suppression of numerous rebellions took their toll.

Military decline was another reason. By the mid-seventeenth century, European military technology was advancing so rapidly, the Islamic Empires simply could not keep pace. Numerous wars exhausted their resources without adding to the productive capacities of the em-

pires. Their military decline paralleled with their economic difficulties. As long as they expanded, the Islamic Empires could supply themselves with fresh resources, plunder, and land. Over-expansion led to larger, more diverse, less efficient, and increasingly corrupt bureaucracies.

A final reason for the decline of the Islamic Empires dealt with commerce, which had been regionally focused along the Silk and Sea Roads. However, over time, trade – and wealth – was diverted by the European global trade routes along the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.



The Europeans established the first truly global empires and trade routes.

More times than not - land, money, and power are all connected. As the flow of trade and wealth changes - which invariably it always does - the **relative location** of places adjusts accordingly. The Islamic Empires had benefited from favorable trade routes for centuries. Their cities grew into some of the most important locations for commercial enterprises, scientific development, technological inventions, and political influence. However, once the Europeans had largely traversed these long-standing trade routes, the flow of wealth – and therefore, power - increasingly poured out of the Islamic powers.

There were essentially two reactions to foreign influence; go along with the Europeans and adopt their way of life, or defy the western influence and return to more traditional ways. The Mughals were increasingly westernized, although predominantly against their will. The Turks fought against the Europeans for centuries, but had begun to voluntarily assimilate themselves along European lines by the late eighteenth century. By contrast, the Shi'ites in Persia and Wahhabis in Arabia rejected western ways to restore traditional Islamic practices, seeking to preserve and purify their faith

Neither approach proved effective in slowing the Islamic world's political and economic deterioration. By the eighteenth century, the center of the global trade network had shifted from the interior of Eurasia and the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, where Europe was deriving vast power and wealth from its connections with Africa, Asia, and the Americas.

On Movement and Scale

To fully understand the effects of human mobility, it is necessary to investigate the theme of **movement** in conjunction with the qualifier of **scale**. Through most of human history, people's daily activities or journeys were strictly limited, as individuals could only travel by foot or by means of some domesticated animal – or team of animals. The cost of travel and trade over land was expensive in terms of time and energy spent. Commerce across routes such as the Silk and Sand Roads were slow, arduous, and costly. Caravans of camels, donkeys, and horses were used, requiring resources to feed and support the animals and merchants alike. People along the trade routes were susceptible to storms and thieves. All of these factors kept most trade regional in nature, and relatively expensive over vast expanses, contributing to a great deal of **distance decay**.

With the introduction of improved sea travel through ships such as Chinese junks and Portuguese caravels, the **friction of distance** was reduced dramatically. Single ships manned by scores of men could carry the equivalent of hundreds of camels guided by thousands of individuals, but at a fraction of the cost. Even though land travel had only improved modestly over millennia, the advancement of maritime travel enabled the Europeans to establish the first global empires in human history. As the new trade routes along the Atlantic Ocean connected previous trade route along the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean, previous routes grew less important and wealth was increasingly diverted to the more efficient paths.

The Europeans clearly benefitted the greatest though the global trade they engendered. Possessing the most highly advanced technology (e.g., guns) and best suited cultural attributes for that time period (e.g., mercantilism), Europeans established ports and colonies across Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Through their international connections, the movement of people, goods, and ideas accelerated to the fastest pace the world had seen to that point. However, the Islamic Empires fared far worse than their European rivals. The newer trade routes, focused primarily along the Atlantic, increasingly diverted valuable resources and money around the Silk Road, which had fed the Islamic Empires with wealth and technology for millennia. Their absolute locations had not changed over time, however, their relative locations had.

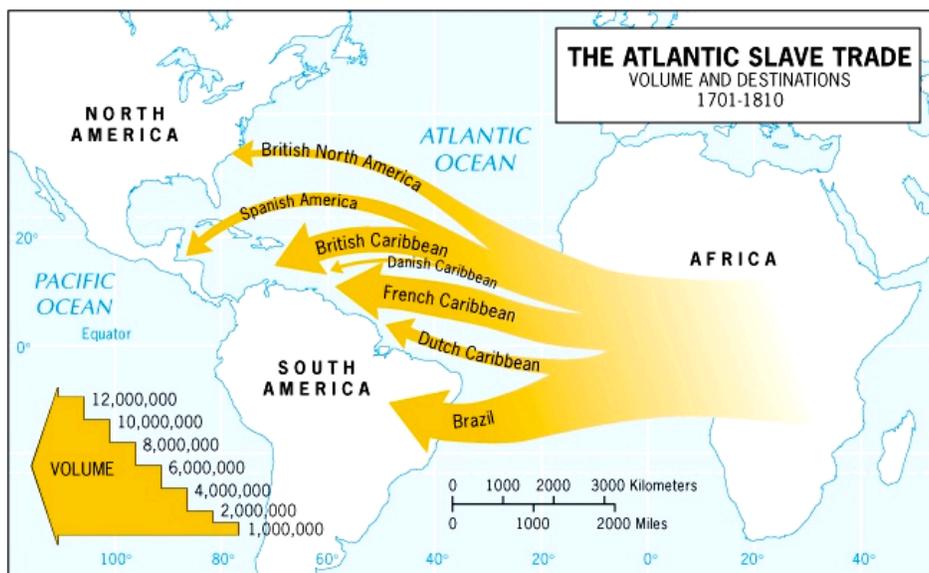
As the Europeans moved across the globe, they changed the cultural landscape as well as regional **demography**, which refers to the composition of a particular human population. When movement results in permanent relocation across significant distances, it is classified as **migration**. The Eu-

ropeans engaged in significant **international migration**, which is movement across country borders, and is also referred to as transnational migration. When a person leaves the home country, he or she is classified as an **emigrant**, whereas moving into a country makes a person an **immigrant**.

European colonies around the world presented millions of Europeans with new opportunities for employment, riches, freedom, or escape. These positive prospects created significant **pull factors** that lure people, or induce them to emigrate to a new area. Concurrently, people choose to move due to **push factors**, which are negative situations in one's place of origin, and can revolve around economic, environmental, or violent issues. Some migrants, such as the Europeans, had the luxury of choice, leading to **voluntary migration**; the role of pull and push factors were at work. Other migrations dealt with the fear and misfortune of compulsion, producing **forced migrations** that rendered the theoretical weighing of options irrelevant. The largest and most devastating forced migration in human history dealt with the unfortunate millions who were forcibly taken from their homelands in the **Atlantic slave trade**. These people had the calamitous misfortune of inhabiting West and Central Africa between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Home of the Slave

As the Europeans made their way across Africa's west coast, many kingdoms welcomed them, establishing commercial and cultural connections based on mutual interests. However, as plantations expanded – especially in the Americas – the interests of these relationships changed. The Europeans inadvertently killed off the vast majority of Americans through the introduction of old world diseases. In turn, they migrated and repopulated the hemisphere, while spreading their cultures and political systems. With respect to Africa, many Europeans purposefully engaged in the slave trade, and the goods produced by the hard labor of countless Africans, brought growing global wealth and power to Europe.

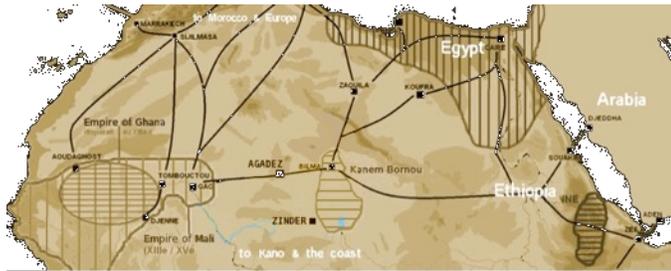


(after P.D. Curtin)

Africa's Great Diversity

Africa has historically been referred to as the “Dark Continent,” because so little was known about the majority of its people – that is, until the Europeans arrived with conquest on their minds. Today, Africa is divided among 54 states, with more than 3,000 ethnicities, and over 2,000 languages spoken in various regions. In the early fifteenth century, before the expansion of the Europeans, Africa's many cultures reflected its geographic diversity.

North Africa was fully Islamic, connected to West Africa via land and sea, and to West Africa via the trans-Saharan camel caravan trade routes – the Sand Road. Egypt, anchored by the Nile Valley, was its most prosperous realm. West Africa's cities were typically Muslim commercial and cultural centers, connected mostly through the Sand Road to North Africa. However, most of the people lived in farming villages and followed traditional religions, often worshipping local gods. Two types of religions dominated this fragmented region – animism and shamanism.

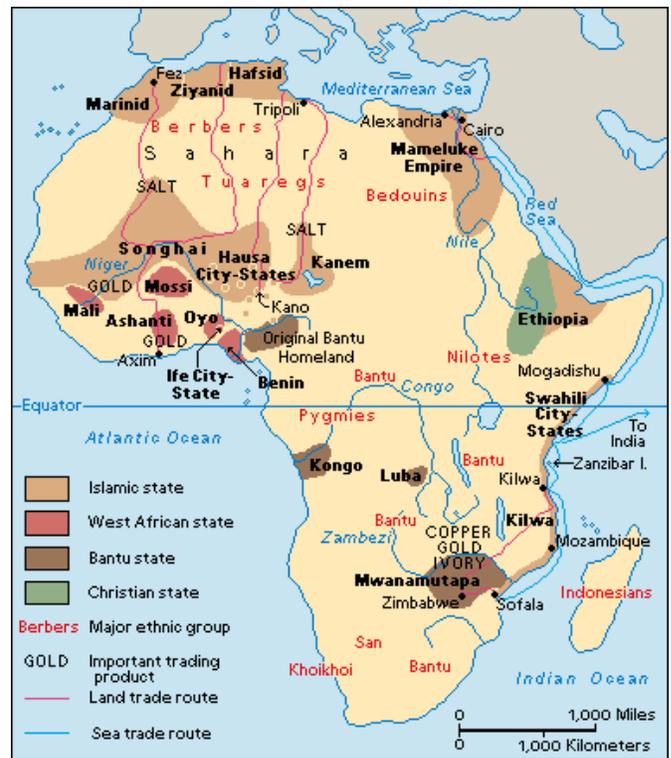


A few of the major trans-Saharan trade routes – known as the Sand Road – are depicted.

Recall that **animism** is the range of beliefs and practices in which souls or spirits exist not only in humans but also in animals, plants, rocks, natural phenomena such as thunder, geographic features such as mountains or rivers, or other parts of the natural environment – like the sun, moon, and stars. **Shamanism** is the range of beliefs and practices regarding communication with the spiritual world. The key practitioner in a community is a shaman; some terms have referred to these individuals as witch doctors, or even holy men.

East Africa's coastal city-states were strongly influenced by Islam and Indian Ocean Trade. In the East African interior, farmers and hunters often retained their traditional cultures, while the Ethiopians practiced an ancient form of Christianity.

Central and South Africa was not yet influenced by Islam or Christianity, and was populated mostly by traditional villages and stateless societies, composed primarily of independent villages and groups of settlements. They had evolved this way likely to reduce the concentration of large populations which would make the transmission of diseases like malaria much more common and deadly. Regardless, there were some strong multinational states encompassing scores of peoples that would eventually succumb to the coming onslaught of the Europeans.



Africa in the early fifteenth century.

Africa's Slave Trade

Slavery is an institution in which some people own others and use them for labor. Its origins predate written records, and today there are perhaps as few as 10 million slaves or as many as 30 million slaves worldwide, depending on how they are defined. The term slave probably has its origin with the “Slavic” people in southern Europe, who were enslaved repeatedly throughout history.

In Africa, as in most regions, slaves were typically prisoners of war, victims of raids, criminals, debtors, and even children. The Sand Road, opening by the second century CE, made slaves a key feature of trade, along with copper, gold, and salt. In some regions of Africa, the rich owners equated their wealth by how many slaves they owned – more than even livestock. In the Islamic north the most common form of slavery was **domestic servitude**, with predominantly female slaves serving in wealthy homes. In many instances, slaves could buy or earn their freedom, for example, if they adopted and practiced Islam for a significant amount of time.

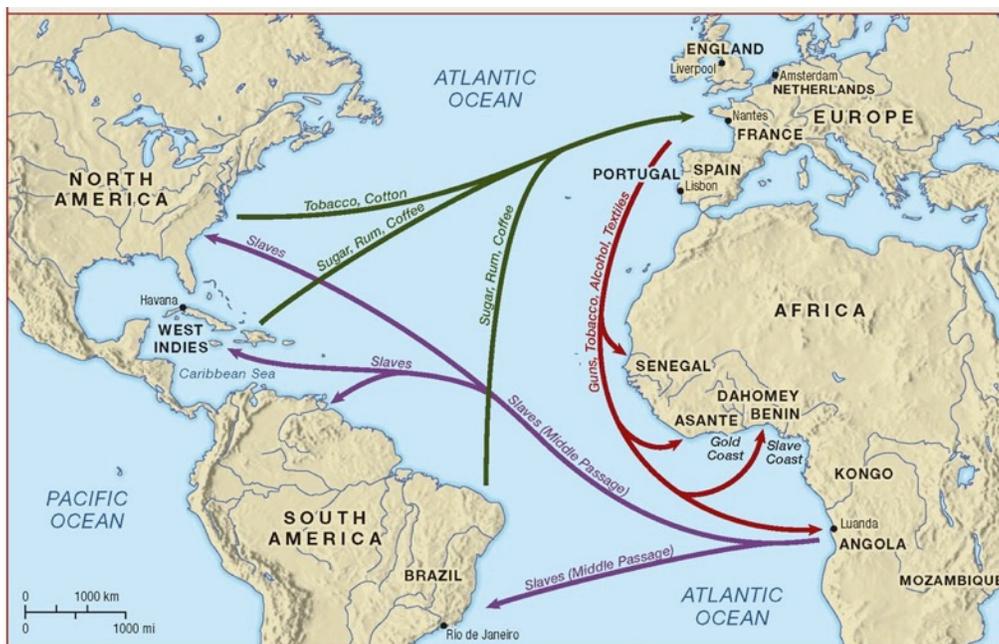
Motivated by mercantilism and the desire to spread Christianity, the Portuguese were the first to establish trading posts along West Africa. Between 1497 and 1498, the Portuguese sailor, Vasco da Gama, was the first European to discover an all-water route past the Islamic empires and into India. Starting in the early sixteenth century, Portugal used slaves for labor on sugar plantations in Africa and Brazil. This was largely due to the massive

loss Native Americans to widespread epidemics. Africans were more accustomed to the tropical climate and possessed greater immunity to old world diseases. Furthermore, many Europeans followed a racist ideology – associating dark skin with a low degree of humanity. By the latter seventeenth century, the English, Dutch, and French shipped slaves to the Americas as well.

From the late sixteenth century and into the nineteenth century, the **triangular trade** occurred - a massive network of commerce evolving between three predominantly different regions – Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Each region specialized in its own industries that were best suited for its resources and environments.

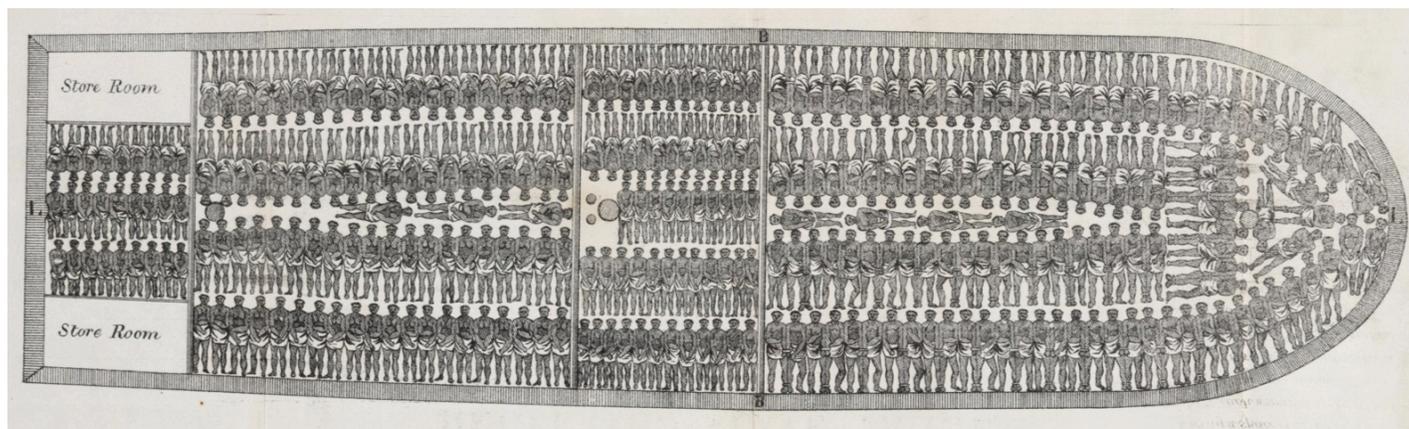
Between Europe and Africa, manufactured goods such as weapons and textiles were transported along the Atlantic. Between Africa and the Americas, living and breathing slaves were transported in the same hulls as inanimate objects and goods. This was known as the “**Middle Passage**,” it was a long journey for the unfortunate kidnapped souls, and throughout time, millions likely perished before making landfall. From the Americas, sugar, cotton, tobacco, coffee, and rum were some of many products that were highly sought after in Europe.

Indeed, the most ominous part of the triangular trade was the Middle Passage - the Atlantic Slave Trade. African slaves were almost exclusively captured by other Africans from rival villages, city-states, and kingdoms. The kidnapped Africans were sold into slavery - usually to the Europeans - for manufactured goods, tools, and weapons. The trade of slaves accelerated over time as more colonies and plantations were established in the Americas. In the sixteenth century, approximately 300,000 slaves were transported from Africa to the Americas. By the eighteenth, that number skyrocketed to around six million slaves transported in that century. All told more



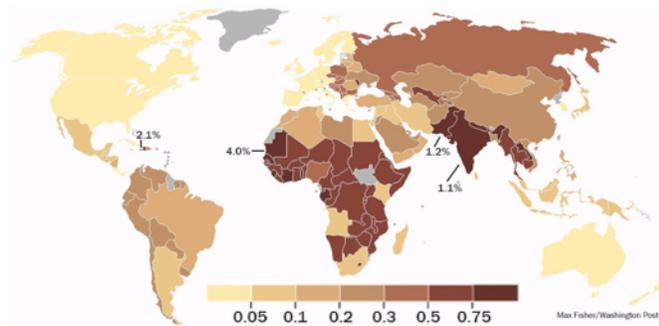
than 11 million slaves were estimated to have been forcibly relocated to the Americas. That number does not take into account the more than two million slaves estimated to have died en route due to the inhumane conditions of being packed into the holds of ships for weeks with very little food, water, or exercise of any kind. The forced migration of millions of slaves is called the **African diaspora** – in which millions of native Africans were spread around the globe.

The diagram below depicts the 'Brooks' slave ship in 1788, which transported enslaved Africans to the Caribbean. It is probably the most widely copied and powerful image used by those who campaigned to end the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Traders knew that many of the Africans would die on the voyage and would therefore pack as many people as possible on to their ships - in total there were as many as 609 enslaved men, women and children on board this ship. The conditions would have been appalling. Each person occupied a tiny space in the hold. In this case they had to lie in spaces just 10 inches high and were often chained or shackled together in pairs, making movement even more difficult. The cramped conditions meant that there were high incidences of diseases such as smallpox, measles, scurvy and dysentery. Because of the long distances involved food and water was rationed; it was always in short supply, or ran out completely.



Transformation of Africa

To think of slavery as solely an institution of the past is a momentous mistake. In the world today there are as many as 30 million slaves estimated to exist in conditions in which they are confined against their will. This number corresponds with a definition of slavery that includes those that are in bonded labor – often to pay back debts, those in forced labor, and finally the trafficked slaves – or what most people traditionally think of as the victims of slavery. While slavery is officially illegal in all countries today, obviously, the *practice* of slavery is still a reality for an unacceptably high number of men, women, and children across the globe.



This map shows the percentage of each country's population that is enslaved (as of 2014).

The Reality of Slavery

Slavery has existed in nearly every culture, nationality and religion, as well as from ancient times to the present. However, in the Atlantic slave trade, the victims were predominantly imprisoned soldiers, and were usually captured by rival African groups in Western Africa. They were shackled and chained together; many died of exhaustion, or even took their own lives. The slaves were then primarily bought by Europeans, and then packed into the holds of ships. It was not uncommon that more than 500 were crammed into in an area of less than 100 feet. The number of people packed into the ships was only limited by the space available, and the inhumanity of the slave ship captains and their crews. It was not uncommon that 10 to 20 percent of the slaves died en route to the Americas through the Middle Passage, often due to malnutrition, suffocation, or disease. The result of jamming more slaves into the hulls of ships meant that more would die on the journey across the Atlantic.

Once the slaves reached the Americas, they were most likely to be sold like animals at slave markets in South America and the Caribbean. Most slaves were men, and many died within five years of their arrival due to the difficult labor on the plantations as well as the harsh living conditions. Escape was purposefully made difficult by their owners, since they were considered as property.

Regardless of these deplorable circumstances, a slave culture did emerge, and communities formed. They typically adapted Christianity into their own beliefs, music, and dance. Runaways were easily identified due to their skin color, and were often punished severely if captured.

However, many runaways and their descendants managed not only to establish their own independent communities, but they adapted to their new homelands while creating their own cultures.



A slave market in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Slavery's Socioeconomic Consequences

Europeans acquired substantial economic benefits and indulged in many new pleasures and comforts. They enjoyed commodities such as sugar, coffee, tropical fruits, cotton and cheap clothing. Additionally, they acquired all this in many respects through the exploitation of slave labor. To rationalize the dehumanizing treatment of so many people, numerous Europeans viewed the darker skinned Africans as inferiors.

These attitudes and views fostered the notion of **race**, which is a social construct, categorizing groups of people who share similar and distinct physical characteristics – such as skin color. As with other hierarchical classifications, such as nobility or castes, race possessed little biological basis. It was, rather, a means of asserting superiority over other people. This viewpoint fostered the insidious notion of **racism**, consisting of ideologies and practices that seek to justify, or cause, the unequal distribution of privileges or rights among different racial groups. For instance, **eugenics** emerged as a social philosophy that advocated the selective breeding of humans based on perceived superior racial traits. In essence, it was nothing more than a pseudo-science, in which some people or races were believed to be genetically inferior to others. Beliefs such as these enabled many Europeans to continue and justify the Atlantic slave trade.

Reorientation of West Africa

Around a decade after the Ottoman Turks had conquered the city of Constantinople, the **Songhai Empire** (SAWN-GI) defeated their rivals in what is modern-day Mali, to become one of the most powerful states in African history. The Songhai were mainly Muslims who dominated West Africa and the western **Sahel**, a semi-arid zone of transition between the Saharan Desert to the north and tropical savanna to the south. They profited

greatly from their connections with the Sand Road and Niger River, and possessed the magnificent city of Timbuktu.



The Sahel region is a belt up to 600 miles wide that spans over 3,000 miles from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea.

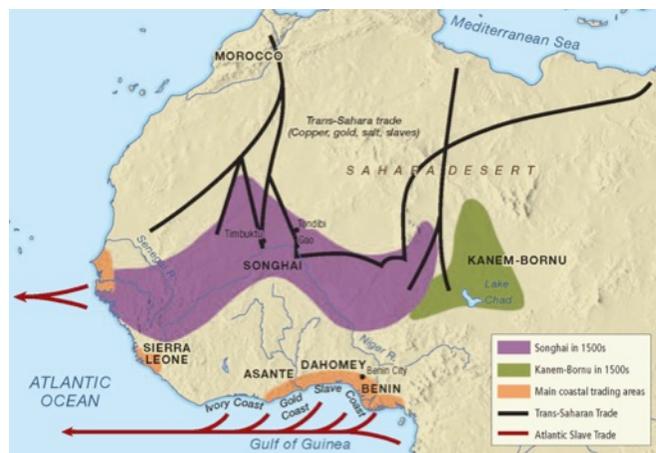
The Songhai began to decline as trade shifted from the Sahara to the Atlantic, primarily due to European expansion and intrusion. Money and commerce diverted from the old trade routes along the Sand Road to the Atlantic. The Songhai, as well as other traditional Western African powers, lost their influence in the region as wealth was increasingly redirected to states aligned across Africa's western coast. This effect was similar to what occurred to the Islamic Empires of the Middle East, as trade and wealth progressively shrank across the Silk Road.

As the Europeans expanded trade to a global level, Northern and Western Africa declined in both political and economic importance. However, the major blow to trans-Saharan trade was the **Battle of Tondibi** that occurred between 1591 and 1592, pitting the Songhai against the North African state of Morocco. The Moroccans had repelled a Portuguese invasion at the end of the 1570s, but they had to expend great sums of money to accomplish this, and their economy was on the verge of collapse by 1590.

In search of new resources, they turned their attention southward; an army of almost 6,000 men spent four months crossing the Sahara Desert and confronted a Songhai force of over 20,000 men outside their capital of Gao. Many Moroccans were armed with western weaponry such as arquebuses and they also utilized several cannons. The Songhai on the other hand, did not possess gunpowder weapons. The battle started very badly for the Songhai, when a stampede of around 1,000 cattle they sent against the Moroccans was repelled by the sound of gunfire, leading them to trample over their own men. The rest of the battle only grew worse for the Songhai, and the much better equipped Moroccan army soundly defeated them.

The Moroccans sacked and looted several cities in the area; nonetheless, it was impractical for the Moroccans to maintain their presence in the region. They had heard and read accounts of great treasures of gold, however these stories proved to be essentially nothing more than tales of fiction. The area eventually splintered into dozens of kingdoms. With this region in shambles, the Sand

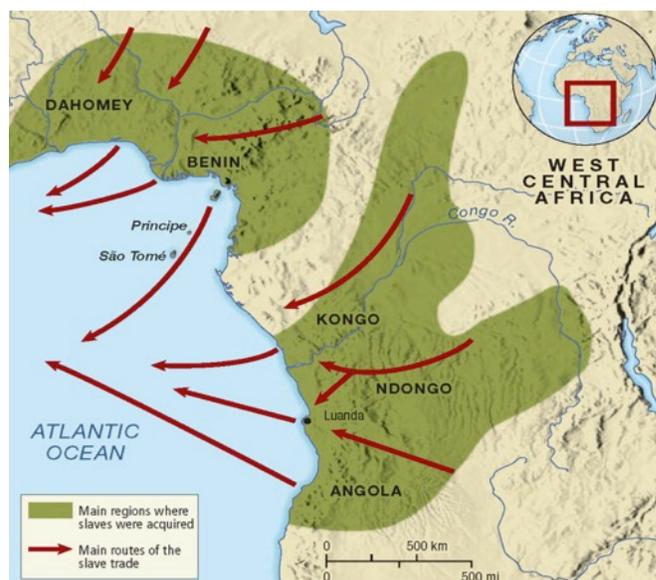
Road declined considerably, further decimating the economies along the interior of West Africa. The economic focus had clearly shifted to the coastal regions; the trans-Saharan trade routes that had existed for centuries gave way to the Atlantic trade of slaves, gold, and ivory for European firearms and goods.



West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.

Depopulation of Central Africa

Central Africa underwent a period of severe depopulation – mostly of the males – beginning in the sixteenth century. Leaders such as Afonso I of the **Kongo Kingdom** and Anna de Sousa Njinga of **Ndongo** – which is largely Angola today – initially welcomed the Portuguese to their shores. Witnessing their superior technology and learning of their intentions to trade, they sought to increase their own power and wealth, and even helped supply the Portuguese with slaves from rival empires. However, in time, the Portuguese began to take their own people as slaves, leading to an extended era of control and degradation.

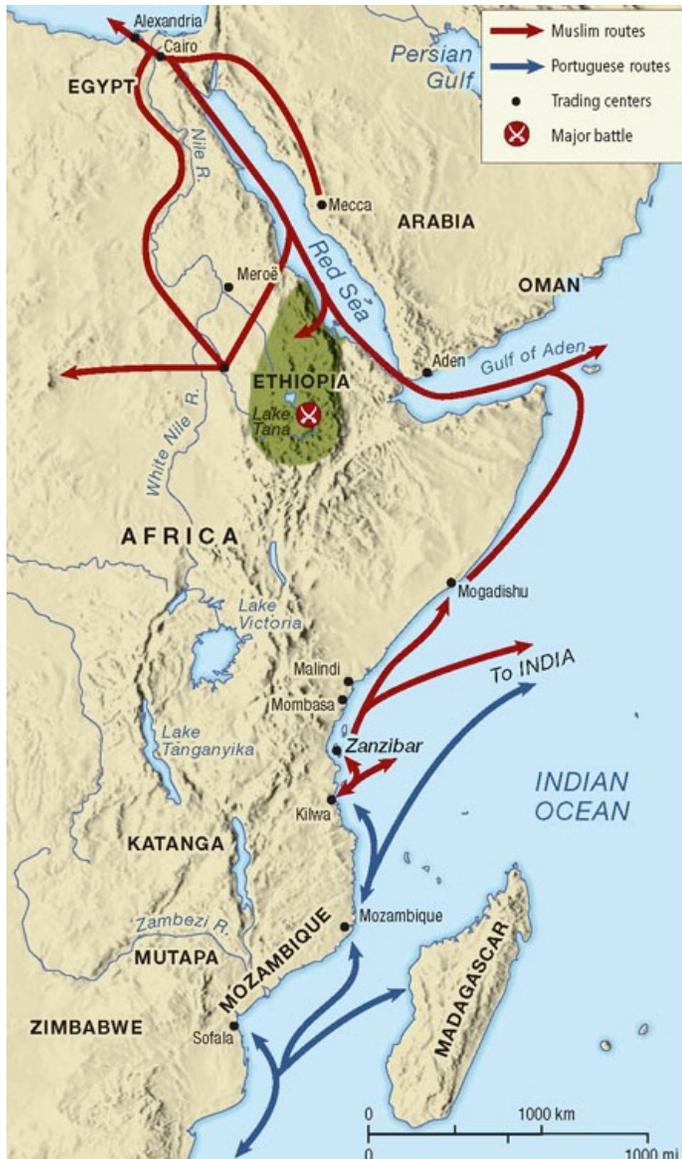


West-Central Africa and the Slave Trade from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries.

By the mid to late seventeenth century the Kongo, Ndongo, and many other regions were completely dominated not only by the Portuguese, but other European states as well. Angola was the primary source for slaves during this time period – accounting for around three million people in total. A primary reason for Angola’s plight boiled down to geographical location; their territory was situated directly across the Atlantic from Brazil.

The Contest for East and South Africa

In East Africa, strong Muslim-dominated city-states such as Mogadishu, Mombasa, and Zanzibar, thrived due to the Sea Road trade along the Indian Ocean. They were controlled by the Swahili people, an ethnic group whose language dominates East Africa today. The Portuguese made their way into this region starting in the sixteenth century, expanding there in search of gold and increased trade.



East Africa from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

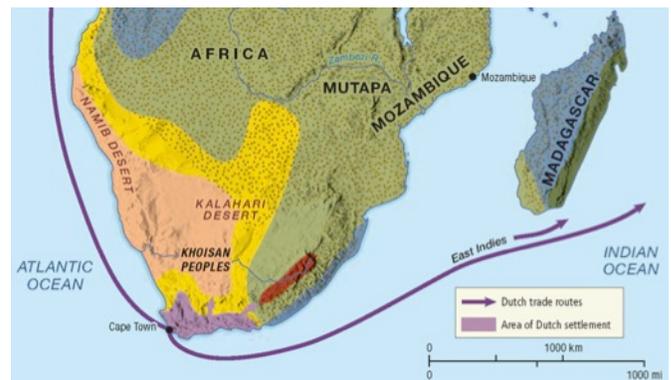
However, by the late seventeenth century, the Arabs and East Africans drove out the Portuguese using superior numbers. **Ethiopia** was a largely Christian nation in a sea of Islam. In the sixteenth century the Portuguese helped them expel Muslims from their country, however, while the Ethiopians were Christians, they were not Catholics. Over time the Portuguese had worked to convert the people of Ethiopia to their beliefs, but by the seventeenth century, the Ethiopians expelled the Jesuits, as well as most other outsiders. Despite the many changes on the region, Ethiopia retained their independence as well as their unique faith, resisting the intrusions of both Muslims and Christians alike.

In the mid-seventeenth century, the Dutch East India Company founded Cape Town, which would eventually become a vital port and city connecting the Netherlands to the East Indies. Dutch settlers made their way to South Africa by the hundreds, and over generations began to see themselves as Africans. The **Boers**, which is Dutch for farmers, pushed their way northward, but were slowed down by hostile natives, and by the fact that their crops did not thrive in the tropical regions of Africa. Furthermore, as the Boers pressed northward they were sickened by malaria, which was transmitted through mosquitoes that thrived in the tropical climate. However, ultimately the Dutch colony was taken over by the British in the early nineteenth century.



The founding of Cape Town in 1652.

During this time, commerce was increasingly focused along and across the Atlantic Ocean. Traditional trade patterns – such as the Silk, Sand, and Sea Roads - were disrupted or destroyed by the new global trade routes dominated by the Europeans.



South Africa and the Dutch Incursions from 1652 to 1806.

Demographic Dislocation

European global trade adversely affected the prosperity of Africa as well as the Islamic Empires. Traditional trade patterns, such as the Sand Road across the Sahara, and the Silk Road that trekked through the Islamic Empires, were disrupted or destroyed by the new global trade routes created and dominated by the Europeans.

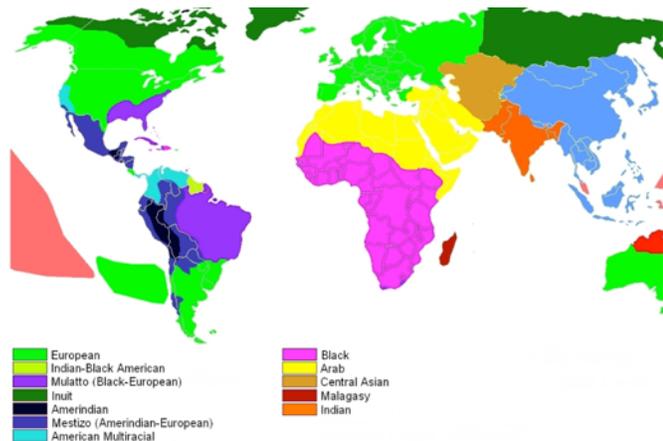


Cassava root

Over time, up to around 15 million Africans were lost due to the Atlantic Slave Trade, disease, and conquest. The losses were devastating, but were somewhat offset by American crops such as **cassava**, which originated in Brazil and grew well in many parts of Africa. Its edible starchy roots could be eaten, dried into tapioca, or processed into an alcoholic drink. Due to the increased nutritional value of this crop, many Africans lived healthier lives. Regardless, African families were robbed of valuable labor and the talents of countless individuals lost to slavery.

Polygamy, in which one man would be married to many wives, became commonplace since mostly men were lost through slavery. Several Western and Central African villages became predominantly female, and so polygamy expanded.

African and European Environmental Adaptation



Ethnic groups in the world by the end of the twentieth century.

Regarding the modern ethnic composition of the world, the Americas are mostly dominated by European ancestry. However, this is not the case for the other regions of the world that were controlled by Europeans, and this is primarily due to disease, climate, and geography. The old world **diseases** - such as smallpox, influenza, and plague - decimated the Native Americans, but had less effect on regions already exposed to these diseases. The continents of Africa and Asia were greatly af-

ected by the powers of Europe in terms of economics, politics, and society, but were far less modified in terms of demography.

Regarding **climate**, when the Dutch - and later the British - settlers expanded into South Africa, they had reached a rare region in the southern hemisphere that lied at a similar latitude to Europe. As such, the temperature and climate of these vastly separated regions were comparable, enabling the Europeans to establish successful farms and settlements. However, as they expanded northward, the Europeans crossed the geographical boundary of the **Tropic of Capricorn**. The climate and geography of this newly encountered territory within the tropics rendered European crops and settlement structures virtually useless.

Africa was composed of thousands of different tribes and villages, and this is even true up to today. Most of these groups are slightly distinct from each other, in terms of language, culture, and ethnicity. One of the main reasons for this is because the Africans had adapted to their particular environments over generations. Many civilizations had developed rudimentary, yet somewhat effective vaccinations against diseases like smallpox. However, their adjustment to malaria, which is transmitted by mosquitoes, required even further adaptation.

Africans tended to settle in high or dry locations, away from the wet, humid areas where mosquitoes breed; this is a major reason why millions of Africans need to gather water sometimes over great distances even in modern times. By residing in relatively small communities spread out over vast areas, Africans effectively limited the level of malaria transmission.



Only female mosquitos of the Anopheles genus transmit malaria.

Consequently, with fewer large empires and inferior weaponry, the Africans were overwhelmed by the European intrusion. However, as the Europeans moved into the tropics, their crops increasingly failed to grow as they had closer to the Cape. Crops like wheat and barley had been domesticated to thrive in more temperate conditions, as opposed to the hotter and wetter tropical climate. As opposed to the Africans who had adapted to their homelands for millennia, the Europeans built settlements by the rivers and lakes they used for water, in places infested by mosquitoes, and thousands died due to malaria and other tropical diseases.

Nonetheless, the Europeans would press on and eventually colonize virtually the entire continent of Africa. They organized towns and cities - structured much like their own states - with high concentrations of people in cities, as opposed to the more dispersed settlements of tropical Africans. This had the negative effect of enabling diseases to spread more easily, and this reality continues to plague Sub-Saharan Africa to this very day.

Social and Ethical Impacts of Slavery

The subjugation and control of Africans led to racism that became perpetual, and hereditary. Many Europeans followed a scientific belief that they were racially superior, and that – in turn – Africans were inferior; and even believed to be sub-human in many cases. Europe was materially enriched through the exploitation of other people, but many were morally diminished due to their connections with the slave trade.

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, the Europeans globalized trade and spread their culture into Africa, the Americas, across Asia and beyond. The shifting of trade to the Atlantic and around Africa diminished the importance of the Silk, Sea, and Sand Roads, weakening the Islamic and African empires respectively. The Great Divergence had begun, and Western Europe had become the primary carriers of oceanic commerce, the rulers of the most powerful empires, and the main centers of the global economy.

Geohistorical Concepts

End of the Road

The Great Divergence
 Monsoon
 Constantinople
 Mughal Empire
 Akbar the Great
 Philip II
 positive balance of trade
 calico
 nawabs
 Black Hole of Calcutta
 indirect rule
 direct rule
 "jewel in the crown"
 hierarchical diffusion,
 contagious diffusion
 Ottoman Turks
 Suleiman the Magnificent
 "The Sick Man of Europe"
 Safavid Empire
 Shah Abbas I
 Qajar Dynasty
 theocracy
 Sharia law
 Muhammad ibn Abd-al Wahhab
 Wahhabism
 Qur'an
 Mecca
 Medina
 ethnicity
 relative location
 movement
 scale

Home of the Slave

distance decay
 friction of distance
 demography
 migration
 international migration
 emigrant
 immigrant
 pull factors
 push factors
 voluntary migration
 forced migrations
 Atlantic slave trade
 "Dark Continent"
 animism
 shamanism
 slavery
 domestic servitude
 triangular trade
 "Middle Passage"
 African diaspora
 race
 racism
 eugenics
 Songhai Empire
 Sahel
 Battle of Tondibi
 Kongo Kingdom
 Ndongo
 Ethiopia
 Boers
 cassava
 polygamy
 disease
 climate
 Tropic of Capricorn