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## Europe and the Slave Trade



Some West Africans, like these men with guns, captured people. Then they traded people as slaves to Europeans for guns, cloth, rum, and other goods.

Slavery existed in West Africa for many centuries. These enslaved people were servants or workers. Some of them had been captured during wars or had been found guilty of crimes. People from West

Africa were also traded across the Sahara desert. Each year, several thousand Africans were traded to countries in the Middle East for salt and other goods.

Although these slaves were not free, many of the slaves in West Africa remained part of the larger family in a village. They may have had fewer rights than other villagers, but they could own land to farm. They could even become skilled workers and earn money. Their descendants could become free.

Traders from Europe changed this way of life in West Africa. After founding colonies in the Americas, many Europeans had sugar and tobacco plantations that needed workers. Using slaves was a cheap way to get the work done. Traders from Europe went to West Africa and offered cloth, rum, salt, and other goods in exchange for slaves. Many Africans became wealthy by trading slaves for goods like these.

In addition to these goods, the European traders also offered to trade guns for slaves. A village that had guns became more powerful than its neighbors. As one village grew in power, its neighboring villages were often forced to sell slaves to Europeans in exchange for weapons to protect themselves. Soon, groups all over West Africa were capturing and enslaving people to trade for guns.

*Why did Europeans/Colonists want to own slaves?*

***It was a cheap way of getting work down on their sugar and tobacco plantations.***

*What things did European traders trade in return for slaves? What traded item had the biggest impact on West Africa? Why?*

***European traders traded guns, cloth, rum, salt, and other goods. Guns had the biggest impact on Africa because they gave West African villages a way to protect themselves and caused villages to capture and enslave others to trade for guns.***

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## **Triangular Trade**

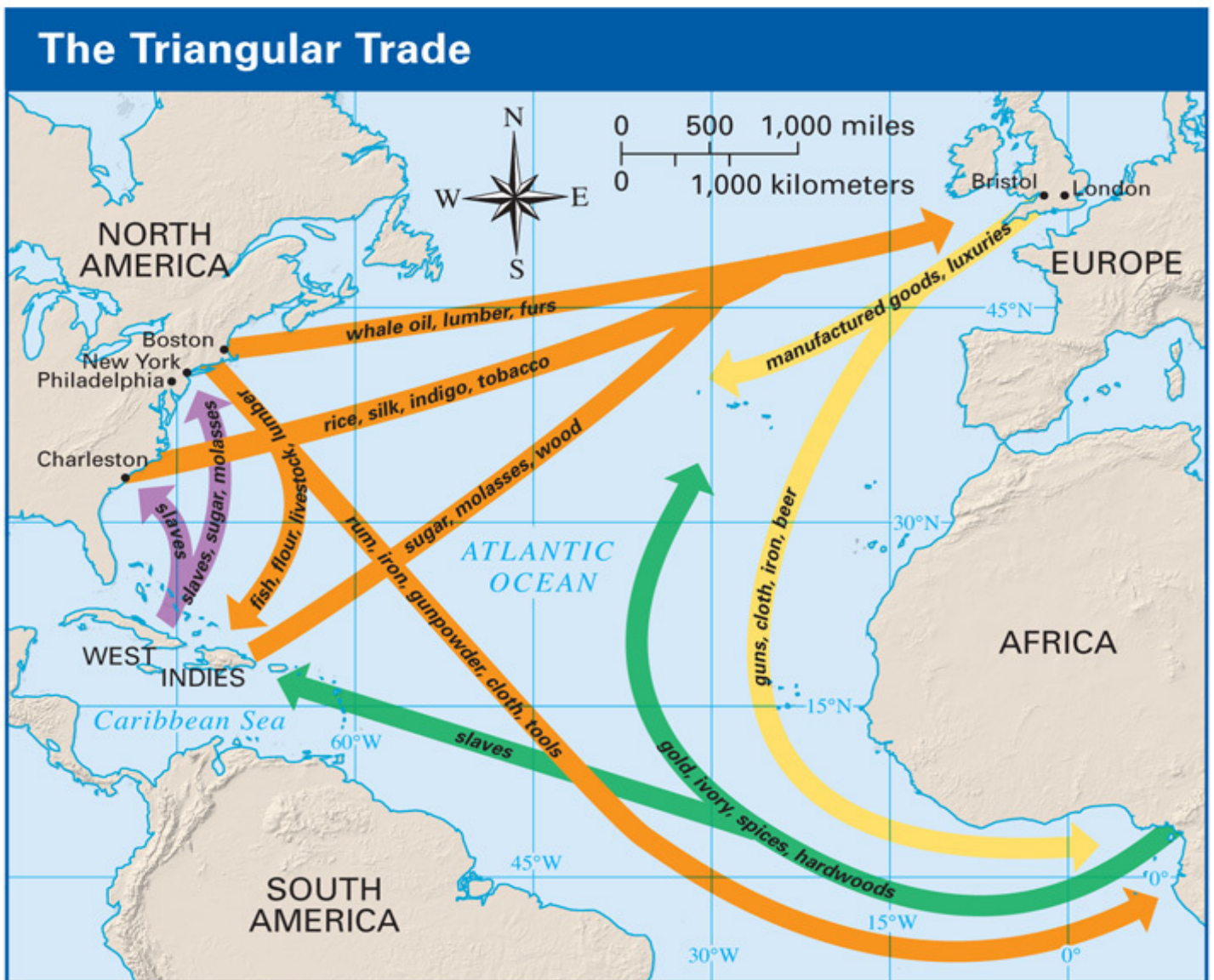
People who were captured as slaves faced a terrible journey. First, other West Africans put them in chains and marched them, sometimes hundreds of miles, to Africa's west coast. Many slaves died along the way or after reaching the coast. Europeans ships waited to load the survivors onto slave ships. Many of the enslaved Africans had never seen white people before. None of the slaves knew where they were going or what would happen to them on their voyage to the Americas.

This voyage was part of the **triangular trade**. There were three different parts of the triangular trade. In the first part of the triangular trade, Europeans traded cloth, guns, and other goods for slaves from Africa.

The slaves then were sent on a voyage across the Atlantic Ocean that was called the Middle Passage because it was the second of three parts of the slave trade. The **Middle Passage** usually took between 21 to 90 days. In bad weather, it could take even longer. Traders sold slaves in South America, the West Indies, and the British colonies in North America.

No one knows exactly how many West Africans made the Middle Passage, but the number has been estimated at 10 to 12 million. About 15 out of every 100 Africans died during the voyage because of the harsh conditions.

Once they had reached the Americas, most slaves were sent to the West Indies, where slaves grew sugarcane. It was turned into sugar and molasses. New Englanders bought these products and made them into rum. In the third part of the triangular trade, traders took American goods, such as tobacco and sugar, to Europe. Then they took goods made in Europe to Africa. There, they traded the goods for even more slaves. The triangular trade continued for about 300 years.



## Triangular Trade Relationships

Color the arrows coming from America orange. **America traded:**

**Lumber, tobacco, livestock, rum, gunpowder, cloth, raw materials**

Color the arrows coming from the West Indies purple. **The West Indies traded:**

**Slaves, sugar, molasses**

Color the arrows coming from Africa green. **Africa traded:**

**Gold, ivory, spices, slaves**

Color the arrows coming from Europe yellow. **Europe traded:**

**Guns, cloth, beer, manufactured goods**