

# Imperialism and the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Economic Engines and Human Cost

## Materials Needed

- Whiteboard, large paper, or digital display screen.
- Markers, pens, or digital annotation tools.
- Access to a map (physical or digital) of the Atlantic Ocean, highlighting Europe, West Africa, and the Americas (the "Atlantic World").
- Printout or digital access to a short primary source excerpt regarding the Middle Passage (e.g., a passage from Olaudah Equiano or a description of a slave ship).
- Timer.

## Learning Objectives (Success Criteria)

By the end of this 45-minute lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Define the concept of "chattel slavery" and explain how it fundamentally differed from prior forms of servitude.
2. Identify and map the three legs of the "Triangle Trade" and describe the crucial role of key cash crops (sugar, tobacco, cotton) in fueling the system.
3. Analyze, using primary source evidence, the political, economic, and human cost of the Transatlantic Slave Trade (TST) on African societies and emerging European empires.

## Lesson Structure

### I. Introduction (5 Minutes)

#### Hook: The Domino Effect of Sugar

**Educator Prompt:** Imagine one single consumer product becoming so valuable that the global economy reorganizes itself entirely around its production. For 300 years, that product was sugar. How could a simple sweet substance drive the forced migration of over 12 million people and permanently redraw the economic and political boundaries of three continents?

We are not just studying history; we are studying economics, power structures, and systemic dehumanization. Today, we focus on the slave trade as a critical engine of European imperialism.

#### Review Objectives

We will define the economic systems that drove this era, analyze the human reality of the trade, and assess its lasting global impact. *Success Criterion Check:* If you can explain why the TST was different from previous forms of slavery, you will be successful today.

### II. Body: Content and Practice (35 Minutes)

#### A. I Do: Setting the Economic Stage (10 Minutes)

**Instructional Strategy: Direct Instruction and Concept Mapping (Visual/Auditory)**

1. **Defining Chattel Slavery:** Unlike ancient forms of slavery where a person might sell themselves into servitude temporarily or work to buy their freedom, chattel slavery stripped the enslaved person entirely of their legal status, treating them as movable property ("chattel"). This status was hereditary, making the system self-perpetuating and racially determined.
2. **The Imperial Demand:** European empires (Britain, France, Spain, Portugal) required massive amounts of labor for cash crops grown in the New World (e.g., Caribbean, Brazil, Southern North America). Indigenous populations had been decimated by disease and warfare, creating a labor vacuum filled by forced migration from Africa.
3. **Mapping the Triangle Trade:** (Use the physical or digital map).
  - o **Leg 1 (Europe to Africa):** Finished goods (guns, textiles, rum, metal goods) traded for enslaved people.
  - o **Leg 2 (Africa to the Americas - The Middle Passage):** Enslaved Africans transported across the Atlantic.
  - o **Leg 3 (Americas to Europe):** Raw materials (sugar, tobacco, cotton, coffee) produced by slave labor were shipped to European markets for huge profits.

**Formative Assessment Check:** What was the most profitable leg of the triangle, and why?

## **B. We Do: Analyzing the Human Cost (15 Minutes)**

**Instructional Strategy: Primary Source Analysis (Visual/Reading/Discussion)**

### **Activity: The Weight of Evidence**

**Instructions:** Distribute or display the selected primary source excerpt concerning the Middle Passage. Learners will read the excerpt and then engage in a guided analysis.

1. **Read and Highlight:** Learners read the text and highlight words or phrases that demonstrate:
  - o The physical suffering and mortality rate.
  - o The system of dehumanization (treating people as cargo).
2. **Think-Pair-Share (or Guided Discussion):**
  - o **Prompt 1:** How does the perspective of the writer (e.g., an enslaved person vs. a captain's log) change our understanding of the economic necessity vs. the human reality?
  - o **Prompt 2:** What specific detail in this passage illustrates the difference between traditional servitude and chattel slavery? (Focus on the intent to destroy identity).

**Success Criterion Check:** Were you able to link the economic motives discussed in the "I Do" section to the descriptions of human suffering found in the source?

## **C. You Do: The Global Impact (10 Minutes)**

**Instructional Strategy: Critical Thinking Application (Independent Writing/Processing)**

### **Activity: The Permanent Scar**

**Instructions:** Learners respond to the following prompt. (Homeschool context: written response. Classroom/Training: written or small group debate prep.)

**Prompt:** The Transatlantic Slave Trade removed millions of young, productive workers from Africa, destabilizing societies and fueling European industrialization. Based on this fact, argue for or against the following statement, providing at least three distinct points of evidence:

"The Transatlantic Slave Trade did not just transfer wealth; it fundamentally created the

economic underdevelopment of many West African nations while simultaneously providing the foundational capital for Western industrial success."

**Success Criteria for the Response:** The response must clearly distinguish between the effects on Africa (loss of human capital, political instability) and the effects on Europe/Americas (capital accumulation, infrastructure development).

### III. Conclusion (5 Minutes)

#### Closure and Recap

#### Review Questions:

1. What single commodity was the biggest driver of the TST? (Sugar)
2. Summarize in one sentence the primary difference between chattel slavery and previous forms of slavery.
3. What is one lasting consequence of the TST that impacts the modern world (e.g., racial inequality, global wealth disparities)?

#### Exit Ticket (Summative Assessment)

On a piece of paper (or in a digital note), complete the following sentence:

"The Transatlantic Slave Trade was a primary engine of imperialism because \_\_\_\_\_, ultimately accomplishing \_\_\_\_\_."

## Differentiation and Flexibility

#### Scaffolding (For Struggling Learners or Shorter Sessions)

- **Content Simplification:** Focus only on the TST's economic drivers (the Triangle Trade map) and skip the distinction between chattel vs. traditional slavery initially.
- **Source Analysis Support:** Pre-select 2-3 key sentences in the primary source excerpt for analysis, rather than requiring the learner to locate evidence independently.

#### Extension (For Advanced Learners or Longer Sessions)

- **Research Task:** Research the role of African involvement in the coastal slave trade (e.g., the Kingdom of Dahomey or the Asante Confederacy). How did internal African politics and warfare adapt to and profit from, or resist, European demand?
- **Comparative Analysis:** Compare the economic arguments made by proponents of the slave trade (18th century planters/merchants) versus the moral arguments made by abolitionists (19th century).