

Why did the West Africans give up their own people as slaves?

Why did the West Africans give up their own people as slaves? Why did the Europeans enslave the Africans? Why didn't it happen the other way round? Read these statements:

- A West Africa did not have developed iron ore deposits, or the technology for making guns. They did not need to develop complicated technology because getting food and other essentials was so much easier in West Africa than it was in Europe.
- B There were few big kingdoms in West Africa. Many of the kings fought against each other. Africans kings were more likely to win their wars if they could arm their men with guns – African spears and arrows were no match for bullets. Europeans and Arabs stirred up wars between Africans kingdoms and tribes. Many slaves were captured prisoners of war, or victims of kidnapping by other tribes.
- C Most Europeans still believed in witches and magic. Less than half of Europeans could read and write properly. Europe had serious problems with thieving at the time.
- D Europeans believed that Africans were strong, and able to work in hot climates, but that Europeans could not. They needed workers for their colonies in the Americas because the American Indians were dying off due to disease and overwork.
- E Most African kings had the right to sell as slaves any of their own people that were proven criminals. Some kings made up false charges against their own people.
- F Many African kings and chiefs became hooked on European gin and brandy in much the same way that Europeans today get hooked on drugs like cocaine and heroin that come from other continents.
- G European cloth became more fashionable to wear than African cloth, not because it was better, but because it cost more. So African kings felt that they had to get it for themselves and their wives.
- H The Arabs had been buying up slaves in the region for centuries before the Europeans arrived. The Africans had grown up with the slave trade. They had not known life without slave trading so some of them accepted it.



An African king holds court

Activities

1 Using the information that you have already gathered about West African civilisation, and the statements from the previous page, decide whether each of these reasons for Europeans enslaving Africans are true or false:

	True	False
• Europeans were stronger, so they conquered the Africans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• African kings wanted/needed to trade with Europeans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Some African kings betrayed their own people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• The Africans wanted to get rid of their criminals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• African kings should take all the blame	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• The Africans were victims of fashion and greed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Africans did not have the weapons to protect themselves	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Africans were too divided to protect themselves	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Africans had less brains, and were more superstitious than the Europeans, and so they were easy to trick	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Europeans stirred up trouble to get what they wanted	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Europeans had better technology and resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Discuss or write answers for the following questions.

2 Which true reasons are the most important, and why?

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3 Who was most to blame for the slavery? The Europeans? Or the African kings? Why?

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The selling of slaves

The Middle Passage – The Slave’s Story

Ouladah Equiano was kidnapped by slavers from his home in Africa and taken to Barbados. Years later he was helped by those who want to end slavery to write his memoirs. Below is a summary of his experiences on a slave ship.

Your task is to read the account, and then to write an interview with Ouladah Equiano. Below the account are some possible questions to ask him, but try to think of your own questions. You may make up some of the details in his reply, but try to keep them believable.



“I thought I had come to the world of bad spirits who were going to kill me. When I saw a large copper boiling furnace I was sure of my fate, and I fainted. When I came round, I asked the black men who had brought me to the ship if I was going to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces and long hair. They told me I was not.”

“I was soon put under the decks. I had never smelt anything so bad in my life. The stench and the crying out of the people made me want to die. The white men offered me food. When I refused, they tied me down and flogged me. Many others were whipped – I had never seen such cruelty in my own people. The white men were even cruel to their own men: one white man was flogged so cruelly that he died from it. They tossed him over the side as they would have done an animal. This made me even more frightened.”

“Now that the holds were full of people, the stench became even worse, and almost suffocated us. The heat of the climate made us sweat a lot, and there was no room to even turn. This brought on a sickness amongst the slaves, and many died. The situation was made worse by the rubbing of our chains, and the toilet tubs, into which the children often fell. The shrieks of the women and the groans of the dying men made the horror unbelievable.”

“One day the white men caught a large number of fish. When they had eaten all they could, they threw the remaining fish back into the sea. We were really hungry, and begged for some fish, but they ignored us. Some of my countrymen, pressed by hunger, tried to steal some of the fish. They were caught and flogged severely. One day two slaves, preferring death to such misery, managed to jump overboard, get through the nets and drown in the sea.”

“At last we came in sight of the island of Barbados, at which the whites gave a great shout.”

Possible questions

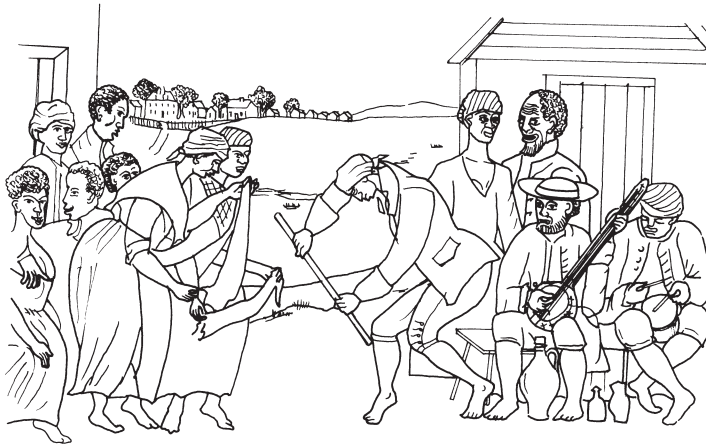
- What was your worst moment on the journey?
- Why didn't you kill yourself?
- How did you use the toilet tubs, if you were chained up?
- Why did the white people flog their own men?
- What did you have to eat?
- If the white men wanted to keep you healthy, why didn't they give you the fish?
- Did you try to rebel against your captors?
- What did the slaves get whipped for?
- What do you think about the white men after all these years?
- Do you think that you have remembered all the details accurately after so long?

Slave Life Group Role-play Sheet: Slave Group 1

Names: Matthew Brown Sukey Brown Ben Trower
 Martha Trower Faith Gordon Mary Smith

Your characters

The year is 1780. You are slaves who work on the Pacey's large cotton and sugar plantation. You pick the cotton, weed the fields, bale the cotton – you do whatever your master and your master's overseers tell you to do for the whole of your lives.



A 'marriage' ceremony, where the slaves 'jump the broomstick'

You were born a slave and you will die one. You are constantly short of food, tired and fearful of punishments. You are sitting down on a Sunday evening, the only day that you sometimes get off to do your washing and tend your vegetable patch. You talk about the laws that apply to slaves (see below). If you could get rid of just one law, which one would you all choose to most improve your life?

The laws

Slaves were not allowed to:

- legally marry – they can marry with their owner's permission, but an owner can break it up when he wants. Most slaves weren't married in church, but went through ceremonies like 'jumping the broomstick' to say that they were married.
- own property – all their possessions legally belong to their slave owner. Slaves cannot inherit property or leave it to anyone.
- give evidence in court against a white man.
- hit a white man, even in self-defence.
- read or write.
- have any rights over their children. Any children slaves have are the property of the slaves' owner, who can do what they want with them, including selling or beating them.
- reject any owner's sexual advances.
- refuse to work whatever hours and do whatever their owner tells them to do.

Your task

Present your discussion to the whole class. The laws above are just a starting point. You may use whatever details you may wish to research. To get a good argument going about the laws, you may want to make up details about your character that give you a different point of view. Your teacher may ask you to argue in your group, and then use the arguments to write a script for use when you present your discussion to the whole class.