

Many Slaves Came to America as Christians



RoadMap

- Introduction
- Why is this Important?
- Slavery in Africa
- The Spread of Christianity in Africa
- Evidence Many Slaves were Christians
- Conclusion
- Summary

Introduction

- We will examine how Christianity has had a strong presence in Africa for the last two thousand years and how many Africans taken from Africa during the Atlantic slave trade, were already Christians before arriving in the Americas
- We will examine the timeline of the Atlantic slave trade with the spread of Christianity in Africa to demonstrate that many African slaves were from areas that were Christian or exposed to Christianity

RoadMap

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- Why is this Important?

Why is this Important?

- Letter to my wife from her father
 - “the reason you’re a Christian is that Christians kidnapped your ancestors from Africa and brought them over to America as slaves, then indoctrinated them with the religion of the conquerors. *They forced your ancestors to accept Christianity because it served the interests of those in power*” (emphasis mine)
- Many blacks believe that Christianity is a foreign religion to Africans and that Africans were forced to convert to this foreign religion once they reached the Americas. This is a stumbling block to many blacks who do not see Christianity being compatible with blacks

RoadMap

- Introduction
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- Slavery in Africa

Slavery in Africa



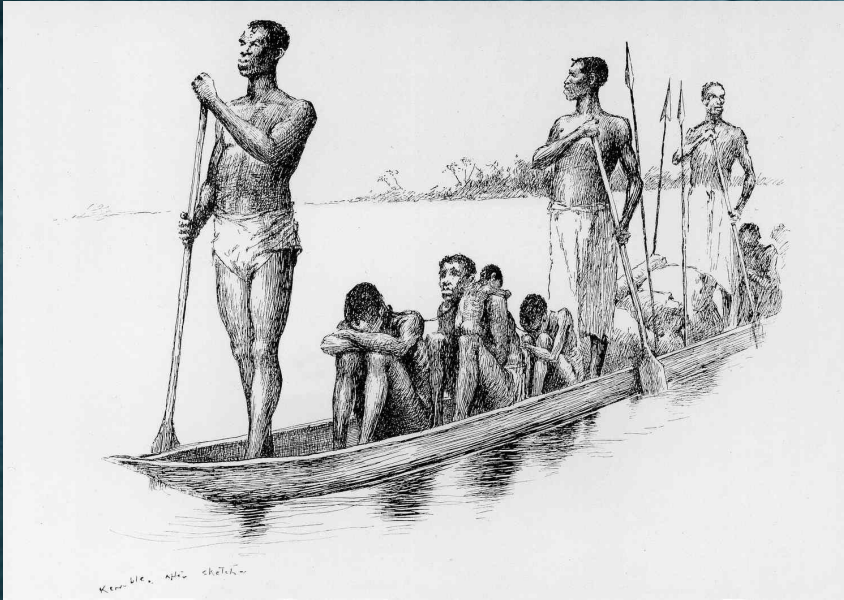
- Slavery existed in Africa, like the rest of the world, long before the arrival of Europeans

Slavery in Africa



- It was very rare for Europeans to take slaves
 - “In the early stages of the trade, European slave traders made expeditions into Africa in order to capture people. However, diseases such as malaria made the mortality rate for Europeans venturing into the interior prohibitively high. Instead, traders began to establish outposts on the African coast where they purchased enslaved people from local African leaders” (History, 44)

Slavery in Africa



- Europeans worked with local leaders to obtain slaves
 - “But most slaves carried from Africa between 1440 and 1870 were procured as a result of the Africans’ interest in selling their neighbors ... ‘Man-stealing’ accounted for the majority of slaves taken to the New World, and it was usually the responsibility of Africans” (Thomas, 792)

Slavery in Africa



- Kingdom of the Kongo
 - The Kingdom of Kongo was in Central Africa located in present day northern Angola, western portion of Democratic Republic of Congo & the Republic of Congo

Slavery in Africa

King Afonso



- Kingdom of the Kongo
 - Under King Afonso (1470 – 1509) “this monarch also saw that he, too, could make money from the slave trade, provided that he controlled it himself...Afonso had a few slaves available, those being obtained in wars with the neighboring Tio state of Makoko...so the Congolese began to raid their neighbors, the Mbundu” (Thomas, 109)

Slavery in Africa

King Alvare



(1568 – 1587)

- Kingdom of the Kongo
 - King Alvare of the Congo provided slaves to the Portuguese (Thomas, 255)
 - “King Alvare now used slaves as soldiers and servants, messengers and mistresses, builders and bearers, as well as workers on the land” (Thomas, 130)

Slavery in Africa



- Kingdom of Dahomey (Republic of Benin)
 - Many “slaves were purchased from the African slave coast, principally from Dahomey. Up to 50% of all enslaved people transported from Africa to the Americas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were purchased by British traders and transported on British ships to British colonial possessions” (History, 34)

Slavery in Africa



- Kingdom of Dahomey
 - The Kingdom of Dahomey “was a fervently militaristic state with a feared professional army that included some of the only all-female military units in history. The society of this nation was based on conquest and the use of captives as slaves and human sacrifices. When the international slave trade expanded, Dahomey became one of the most significant slave trading centers in the world” (History, 1)

Slavery in Africa



- King Agaja 1708-1740
 - Dahomeyan King Agaja “sold the captives whom he obtained in war on a considerable scale, and began again, with alacrity, the business of raiding the territories to the north” (Thomas, 358)
 - “A proportion of captives taken during military action in the preceding year would be kept specifically to be used as sacrifices during the Annual Customs. On average, around 500 captives would be publicly decapitated during the festivities, though in some years, several thousand captives might be killed” (History, 41)

Slavery in Africa



- King Tegbesu 1740 -1774
 - “Tegbesu, who sold over nine thousand slaves a year, chiefly to the French and Portuguese, was estimated as having an annual income in 1750 of about £250,000- a figure which far exceeded that of the richest merchants of Liverpool or Nantes. (The richest English landowner might expect, in the eighteenth century an income of £40,000 to 50,000)” (Thomas, 354)
 - “the kings of Dahomey more than once appealed to their European trading partners for arms to enable them to carry out the raids on their northern neighbors which alone could provide the slaves needed to fill the European boats” (Thomas, 373)

Slavery in Africa



- Madingos (Gambia)
 - “the region of West Africa from which Kunte Kinte supposedly came was one of the great slave-trading regions of the continent—before, during, and after the white man arrived. It was the Africans who enslaved their fellow Africans, selling some of these slaves to Europeans or to Arabs and keeping others for themselves. Even at the peak of the Atlantic slave trade, Africans retained more slaves for themselves than they sent to the Western Hemisphere” (Klein, 10)

Slavery in Africa

- Madingos
 - They were middlemen
 - “In 1730, Mandingos, then the middlemen in the slave traffic in the region, brought down to the coast ‘slaves to the amount of two thousand, which, they say, are prisoners taken in war: they buy them from the different princes who take them” (Thomas, 371)



Slavery in Africa

- Mandingos
 - They marched captured slaves from central Africa to the coast
 - According to an eyewitness account, “The unhappy captives, many of whom are people of distinction, such as princes, priests, and persons high in office, are conducted by the Mandingos in drives of twenty, thirty, and forty, chained together...These Mandingoes perform the whole journey...I saw there the unfortunate captives, chained two and two together, by the foot. The mangled bodies of several of them, whole wounds were still bleeding, exhibited a most shocking spectacle” (Thomas, 383).

Slavery in Africa



- Angola
 - They waged war to take slaves
 - “The invincible Queen Nzinga (in retreat, her kingdom was known as Matamba) also became a Dutch ally, and undertook several small wars locally in order to provide the Dutch with more slaves than she could otherwise supply” (Thomas, 184)

Slavery in Africa



- Angola
 - They facilitated slavery
 - In 1681 Queen Nzinga agreed to protect African agents who purchased slaves in the African interior on behalf of the Portuguese crown or private traders for the Atlantic slave traders in search of slaves (Thomas, 220)

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- The Spread of Christianity in Africa

The Spread of Christianity in Africa

- “Christianity went immediately to Africa as soon as it was proclaimed in Pentecost. Recall where the Ethiopian eunuch was headed. It spread quickly, like a prairie fire, into the known nations of the world in the 40s, 50s and 60s. In those early decades Africa was a prime target for Christian witness, since a large number of Diaspora Jews had been long settled there” (Oden, 47)
- “The first Gospel narrative was written by Mark, who personally brought the first apostolic voice to the African continent, according to African tradition” (Oden, 97)
- After the Aksumite kingdom became one of the first Nubian kingdoms in the world to adopt Christianity as an official religion in the 4th century, the African kingdoms of Nobatia, Makouria and Alodia followed two centuries later (Isichei, 30)

The Spread of Christianity in Africa

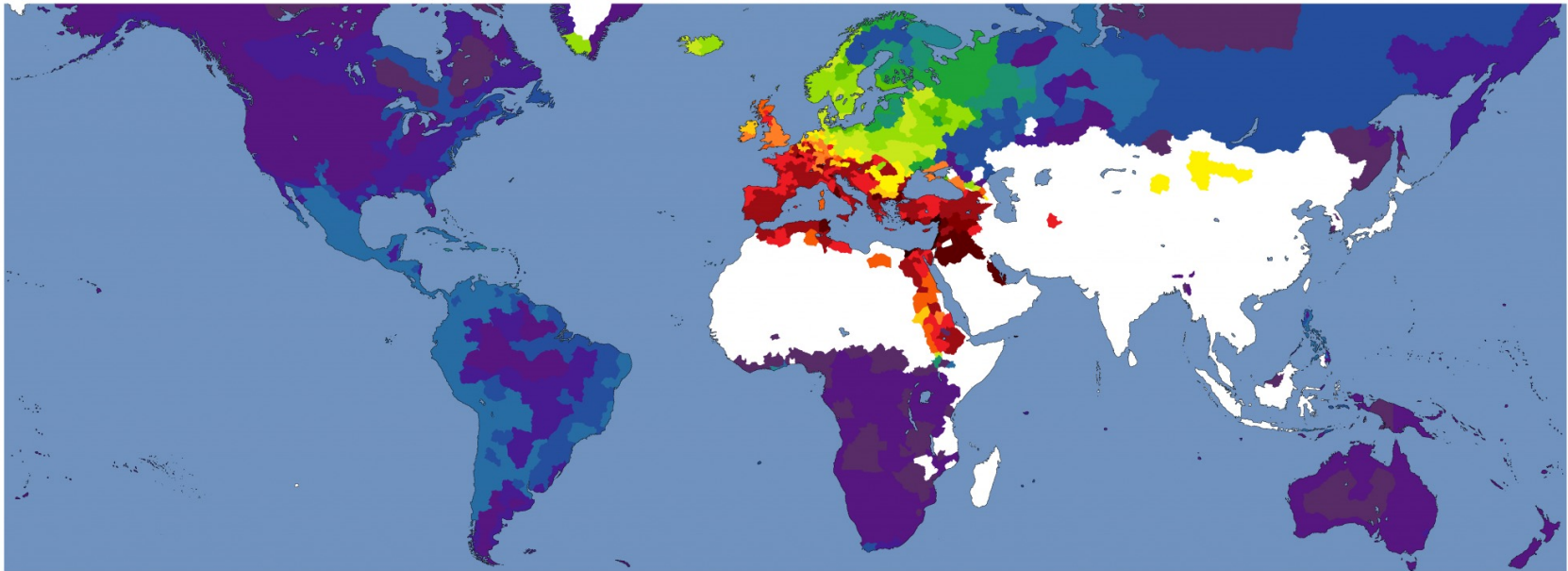
- Christianity was present all up and down the Nile in the 5th, 6th and 7th centuries, and continued there without interruption following the Arab conquest. This included the countries of present-day Uganda and Kenya in addition to the earlier Christian nation of Ethiopia and the Sudan (Oden, 84)
- Although Christianity was dominate in Africa during the early centuries, its influence waned through a gradual process of the Arab influence via trade
- Christianity eventually declined in Africa with the influence of Islam but a new wave of missionary activity began in the 15th and 16th century

The Spread of Christianity in Africa

- Christianity never died out in Africa from its early inception. It has always existed in pockets such as Benin, Cape Verdes, Senegambia and Zambezi. In fact when the famous missionary Livingstone traveled to Zambezi, he encountered Catholicism that had never died out (Isichei, 47)

The Spread of Christianity in Africa

◦ SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY ◦



By the end of:

First Century	800,000	Sixth Century	40,400,000	Eleventh Century	51,960,000	Sixteenth Century	100,440,000
Second Century	4,660,000	Seventh Century	40,570,000	Twelfth Century	65,710,000	Seventeenth Century	130,110,000
Third Century	14,010,000	Eighth Century	40,870,000	Thirteenth Century	83,910,000	Eighteenth Century	204,980,000
Fourth Century	25,320,000	Ninth Century	40,830,000	Fourteenth Century	56,730,000	Nineteenth Century	558,132,000
Fifth Century	37,800,000	Tenth Century	44,670,000	Fifteenth Century	75,890,000	Twentieth Century	1,985,870,000

The Spread of Christianity in Africa

King Afonso



1456–1542

- Kingdom of the Kongo
 - King Mvemba a Nzinga, the fifth king in the Kongo dynasty accepted Christianity during the arrival of the first Portuguese vessel off the Zaire river in 1483. He was baptized as Afonso” (Isichei, 64)

The Spread of Christianity in Africa

- Kingdom of the Kongo
 - Afonso understood Christian theology
 - “According to the Portuguese vicar and resident of the Kongo Rui de Aguiar, Afonso assiduously learned the history and the teachings of the church. ‘I certify to your Highness,’ the cleric wrote in 1516 to the king of Portugal, ‘that [Afonso] teaches us and knows more than we do about the Prophets, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and all the lives of the Saints and everything about the Holy Mother Church ... he does not do anything but study and often he falls asleep on top of his books’” (Fromont, 37-38)
 - Afonso evangelized other African nations
 - “As overlord, the papacy would receive part of the kingdom’s precious ore; it would also be associated with the crusading efforts of the Kongo monarchs, who had already succeeded in converting several of their neighboring rulers” (Fromont, 156-157)

The Spread of Christianity in Africa

- Kingdom of the Kongo
 - Christianity thrived in the Kongo during the Atlantic slave period
 - “We have four centuries of Christian history in Kongo in which Christian objects, rituals, and paraphernalia play a very important role, not only in the religious life of the country, but also in its political life” (Cummings)
 - “Foreign visitors in the sixteenth and seventeenth century always regarded Kongo as a Christian state” (Isichei, 64)
 - “By 1710, the Kingdom of Kongo had effectively collapsed...It was not until the early 20th century that the Portuguese, who had long sought to control the region, finally succeeded in absorbing it into their Angola colony” (Mitchell)

The Spread of Christianity in Africa

- Angola
 - Angola became Christian in 1491 with a Catholic mission. Angola is still Christian today with 80% of the population practicing Christianity
 - The church was actively involved in the slave trade
 - “Some priests traded in slaves. The Church in Angola derived much of its income by instructing and baptizing the enslaved... Exported slaves were branded as proofs of ownership and of baptism” (Isichei, 71)
 - *“In Central Africa-whence, after all, most slaves were exported, through the Congo and Angola”* (Thomas, 375)

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Evidence Many Slaves were Christians

Philip V



1683 – 1746

- Early Christians complained about fellow Christians being enslaved
 - “In August 1736, Antonio de Salas, the Spanish governor in Cartagena de Indias, wrote to his king, Philip V, to complain that the South Sea Company was importing ‘black Christians’ into the Spanish empire, specially from the region of the Congo. The king understood the point: it was not lawful, he replied, ‘to ensnare anyone born free, or is it lawful that a Christian should enslave another’” (Thomas, 464)

Evidence Many Slaves were Christians



- Early Christians complained about fellow Christians being enslaved
 - “Most Capuchins who took a strong stance on the subject of the slave trade did not denounce the trade itself but rather the practice of sending enslaved Catholics, or even recently baptized men and women, to Protestant countries” (Fromont, 222)

Evidence Many Slaves were Christians

- Many African slaves to America came from the Christian regions of the Kongo and Angola
 - “Many people who were already Christian in the Kongo, or at least aware of Christianity and familiar with its rituals, ended up enslaved in the Atlantic trade and took up roots in different parts of the Americas” (Cummings)
 - “Of those Africans who arrived in the United States, nearly half came from two regions: Senegambia, the area comprising the Senegal and Gambia Rivers and the land between them, or today’s Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Mali; *and west-central Africa, including what is now Angola, Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Gabon*” (Pruitt)

Evidence Many Slaves were Christians

- Many African slaves to America came from the Christian regions of the Kongo and Angola
 - According to pbs.org., “And how many of these 10.7 million Africans were shipped directly to North America? *Only about 388,000*” (Gates)’
 - So roughly 97,000 of the 388,000 slaves that came to North America, came from Christian nations in Africa

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Conclusion

- Christianity had spread to areas in Africa known for engaging in the Atlantic slave trade
- Many of those slaves were exported as slaves to the Americas
- Hence, many slaves were already Christian upon arriving in the Americas

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Summary

- Slavery was practiced in Africa by Africans
- A significant number of African nations engaged in the slave trade were Christian
- Approximately one fourth of Africans exported to the Americas were already Christian or at least from Christian nations

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