

CHAPTER 14 AFRICANS IN THE DIASPORA AND WORLD ISSUES

Objectives

After studying this chapter, students should be able to:

- explain the meaning of Africans in the diaspora;
- discuss Africa's contract with the outside world;
- explain how the slave trade catapulted Africans to the new world;
- state the impact of Africans in the diaspora on world issues;
- discuss the phenomenon of brain drain.



Map of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade routes

African's in the diaspora is an attempt to rediscover historically, how black peoples dispersed to other parts of the globe such as Europe, America and the Middle East as slaves. It also gives us a vivid analysis of the survival of the black man's culture in countries like Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, etc.

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade which started in the 15th century and ended in the 19th century, remained the darkest episode in the history of the black world. The shipment of millions of black people to the American continent, following the discovery of the New World in 1492 by Christopher

Columbus, gave rise to a period of socio-cultural domination and oppression which reached its crescendo with colonial and neo-colonial exploitative phenomenon.

14.1 Conceptual Meaning of Africans in the Diaspora

Africans in the diaspora involves a movement of Africans and their descendants to places throughout the world predominantly to America, then later to Europe, Middle East and other places around the globe. The term applies particularly to the descendants of black Africans who were enslaved and shipped to the United State of America during Atlantic slave trade era with the largest population in Brazil.

The African Union (AU) defined the African in the diaspora as consisting of people of African origin living outside the continent irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union.

Africans in the diaspora include African-Americans – people in the United States who are of African descent, Afro-Caribbeans-people in West Indies who identify themselves as Africans, Afro-Latin Americans – blacks in South and Central America, Afro-Arabs – these include Middle Eastern people whose ancestors were bought during the Arab slave trade period and the Siddis, who inhabit the Indian sub-continent of Pakistan and India but also who are of African descent.

14.2 Africa's Contact with the Outside World Before the 19th Century

Africa's contact with the outside world before the 19th century resulted in the dispersal of the Negroid race to other parts of the globe which came about in three major forms namely:

- i. **Contact through the Trans-Saharan Trade and the Era of Middle Eastern/Arab Slave Trade:** The era of the Trans-Saharan trade that existed between Western Sudanese empires and the Muslim World, North of the Sahara at about the 9th and 15th centuries paved the way for the enslavement of Africans by the Arabs. Although, the Western Sudanese region exported gold to North Africa via Morocco, but the major article of trade then was slaves. The Mediterranean slave-receiving territories demanded slaves for the following reasons:
 - a. Aristocratic families in the Mediterranean urban cities demanded for and kept domestic slaves as a luxury product.
 - b. Mediterranean states that suffered low population data demanded African slaves for defensive purposes.
 - c. Mediterranean territories demanded slaves for labour in agriculture and mining. These slaves provided cheap labour in places like Southern Iraq, Egypt and Cyprus.
- ii. **Contact through Migratory Activities to Europe**

Right from the era of Spanish conquistador, Africans participated either as voluntary expeditions or as involuntary colonists. Many Africans as far back as the 16th century migrated to many other countries of the world such as the United Kingdom and France.

iii. Contact through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade took off immediately after the Portuguese and Spanish sailors discovered the New World which included both South and North America and the West Indies. This wonderful feat attracted the attention of capitalist nations like Spain, Britain, Holland and France, who hurriedly established plantations like tea, plantain, sugarcane, cotton, ginger and coffee. The capitalist nations mentioned above also, were desirous to mine the abundant mineral deposits that were available in large quantities in the New World.

The quest for plantation labourers made capitalist nations in Europe to hire the services of the aborigines of the land – the Red Indians who were relatively unfit to work in plantations.

Faced with the crisis and challenges of sourcing for alternative labour, Bishop Bartholomeo De La Casas, persuaded European plantation owners to substitute the Native Red Indians with Africans who according to him ‘were destined to work under the hottest of the sun’. This fatal advice led to the introduction of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the eventual shipment of millions of energetic Africans into North and South America, West Indies and Europe. These trans shipment of Africans to the New World to provide cheap labour for European plantations ultimately gave rise to the social phenomenon called Africans in the Diaspora.

14.3 The Atlantic Slave Trade and Shipment of Africans to the New World

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade involved European slave traders who were the buyers of the human commodity and coastal middlemen traders who bought slaves from hinterland regions of Africa and sold to the European slave dealers. These African slaves were obtained in the most inhuman manner through wilfull burning of bushes and farmlands, raidings and kidnapping.

African slave victims journey to the coastland areas was always an arduous task as these slaves were chained, carried as merchandize by their agents to the coast for sale to the European slave merchants. Most times, the tortuous journey to the coasts were always led by special guards who play the role of heartless task masters.

Slave victims, experience a lot of inhuman treatments at the coasts where they were kept in unhygienic and small-spaced dark houses called ‘baracoons’. As captured slaves were expected to spend many days in the ‘baracoons’ waiting for slave ships that transport them to the New World, many of them died as a result of hunger, starvation and suffocation due to poor ventilation.

When the slave ships finally arrive at the coasts, the slaves were packed like sardine in Cargo shops to save transport costs. The deplorable conditions, slaves were subjected to while on board cargo ships to the new world led to high mortality rates. Dead slaves were thrown mercilessly into the ocean while those who endured all the hardship and finally reached the new world were inspected and later auctioned at the slave market. Before auctioning sessions, prospective buyers of the slaves inspected the slaves by watching their stomachs, observing their teeth, peering into their eyes and punching the muscles of the slaves in order to know the working capacity of each slave.

When they were finally sold to plantation owners in the West side, they undergo series of initiation rites called ‘seasoning’ or ‘broken in’ – a kind of initiation into the horrors of the system. During this period, the slaves were brutalized and were also given new names by their new masters. This loss of original names had great psychological effects on the slaves.

The Beginning of Slavery in the United States of America

The first batch of slaves arrived in Virginia in 1619 and subsequently, were carried to South America, the Caribbean Island, Central America and Mexico. Slaves were used in numerous tasks in the New World. Many were skilled craftsmen who were used in agriculture and plantations where gang labour and disciplined group endeavour were practiced. The expansion of tobacco plantation led to mass importation of black slaves in 1690. As the number of black slaves increased, the Virginians became suspicious of possible slave revolt and in 1795, laws were codified to regulate slavery.

In the 1630’s, planters in Maryland started to import African slave labour. In 1669, the constitution of Carolina conferred on every free man of that colony the absolute power and authority to recruit Negro slaves, and in 1759, Georgia opted to use African slave labour as the most practicable means of developing agriculture in their colony.

14.4 The Impact of Africans in the Diaspora on World Issues

Although Africans in the Diaspora faced a lot of discrimination, but they still were able to distinguish themselves in the fields of politics, military, professional research, arts, sports and music. These achievements are outlined below:

- i. **Political Impact:** Africans in the diaspora like Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois and Blaise Diagne were all Pan-Africanists who worked very hard to ignite Negroes renaissance whereby blackness became a sign of goodness and beauty. Marcus Garvey through the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), taught American-Blacks to have self-respect and to create their own flourishing economic institutions that would be independent of white control. Garveyism influenced the foundation of Pan-Africanism, which later changed into Organization of African Unity (OAU) now re-christened African Union (AU).

Equally, Martin Luther King Jr’s civil rights movement has spurred many blacks to attain great heights in all spheres of human endeavour. For instance, both Jesse Jackson and

Andrew Young are prominent American statesmen. Collin Powell proved his mettle as an American general as well as a secretary of state. Another Black woman of repute is Condoleezza Rice who served in dual capacity as George W. Bush Juniors chief security adviser as well as secretary of state.

Presently, America is being ruled by a black president in the person of Barack Obama who won landslide victory in November 2008 election and won a second term in November 2012.

- ii. **Science and Technology:** In the field of science and technology, Africans in the Diaspora have demonstrated undisputable excellence and creativity. A black man called Granville Woods, invented steam-boiler furnace, an incubator, automatic air breaks, etc. Granville Woods also invented railway telegraph, which helped to stop accidents between moving trains. In the area of electrical and mechanical engineering, Elijah McCoy invented the first self-lubricating industrial machine in America. Daniel Hale Williams (1858 – 1931) was acclaimed as the first American doctor to operate on the human heart. A black engineer, Benjamin Baneker designed the street of Washington.
- iii. **Education:** Booker T. Washington in 1881 founded the Tuskegee Institute, which he used to promote industrial education which helped blacks to acquire skills in crafts and liberal arts. Dr W.E.B Du Bois opposed Booker T. Washington's industrial education programmes and advocated for a strong liberal arts education that could help black Americans achieve economic and social equality with the whites.
- iv. **Music and Entertainment Industry:** Africans in the Diaspora have distinguished themselves in the field of music and entertainment industry. Marian Anders has proved herself a musician of very high repute such that one of her admirers Arturo Toscanini said that "a voice like hers was heard only in a century", other Negro-American musicians include Lionel Richie, Michael Jackson, Marvin Gaye, etc.
- v. **Sports:** In the area of sports, African's in the Diaspora have performed creditably well. For instance, Joe Louis won the heavy weight crown and defended it 25 times from 1934 to 1949. Jesse Owens, the Black American track star won the 100 and 200 meter events and the broad jump and also the 400 meter relay team at the Olympic Games. Black Americans also have enviable records of world heavy weight boxing champions namely, Mohammed Ali, Joe Fraser, Leon Spinks and Michael Tysons etc.

The phenomenon of brain drain occurs when highly skilled citizens whose services are needed for over all national development of their home country migrate to other countries in search of employment opportunities. Economic hardships, high standard of living, poor salary structure and general insecurity presently force Nigerian professionals like Computer Scientists, Medical Doctors, Lawyers, Engineers, Nurses (trained), Lecturers to migrate to countries in Europe, Asia and the American continent in search of greener pastures and better economic opportunities. This trend started in Nigeria in the late Nineteen Nineties till this present time.

The phenomenon of brain drain during the slave trade period implies that intelligent, highly skilled and vigorous blacks were forcefully transported from Africa to America, the Mediterranean and other parts of Europe. European slave merchants had strong desire to enslave Africans who were intelligent, healthy and physically strong in appearance. They were less desirous to enslave Africans who were unintelligent and physically challenged. Equally, the aged and children were also spared. The implication of the transshipment of virile youths to the new world was that the slave trade, robbed the African continent of first-rate minds whose efforts would have plodded Africa into the scientific and technological age. Besides, indigenous economic activities like blacksmithing, wood carving, basket making stagnated due to the fact that skilled craftsmen were enslaved to the New World.

Summary

- Africans in the diaspora applies to the descendants of black Africans who found themselves in different parts of the world through migratory activities of the European.
- Africa's contact with the outside world before the 19th century which resulted in the diaspora came about through the Trans-Saharan, Middle Eastern/Arab slave trade, migratory activities to Europe and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.
- The Trans-Atlantic slave trade or European trade involved a system of trade where Africans were bought by European slave dealers and sold to plantation owners in the America's and West Indies via the Atlantic Ocean.
- Blacks in the diaspora has produced eminent personalities who have made giant strides in the spheres of global politics, science, technology, education, music and sports such as Barack Obama, Granville Woods, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, Mohammed Ali and others.
- The Trans-Atlantic slave trade through its method of procuring virile, intelligent and energetic Africans as slaves have engendered the phenomenon of brain drain in the African continent between the 15th and 19th centuries impacting negatively on scientific and technological inventions in Africa.

Objective Questions

1. _____ is a correct description of Africans in the diaspora.

- A. Movement of Africans to European countries
 - B. Movement of black people to European countries
 - C. Movement of Africans and their descendants to Europe, the Middle East and other places around the globe
 - D. Movement of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean
2. Africans in the diaspora includes all the following groups of people except _____.
- A. African-American
 - B. Afro-Latin American
 - C. Afro-Libyan
 - D. Afro Arabs
3. European slave dealers bought the following agricultural products from West Indies except _____.
- A. yam
 - B. sugar cane
 - C. rice
 - D. cotton
4. Blacks or Africans living in South and Central Americans are referred to as _____.
- A. Afro-Arabs
 - B. Afro-Americans
 - C. Afro Latin Americans
 - D. Afro Middle Easterners
5. _____ persuaded European plantation owners in the West Indies to substitute the native Indians with Africans who have the ability to survive harsh tropical weather.
- A. Amerigo Vespucci
 - B. Henry the Navigator
 - C. Antam Gonzalves
 - D. Barthlomeo De La Casas
6. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade is a trading relationship that involves the following continents except _____.
- A. Europe
 - B. Australia
 - C. Africa
 - D. North and South America
7. The unhygienic small-spaced dark houses where slaves were packed like sardines before their departure to the West Indies is called _____.
- A. dark room

- B. slave house
 - C. baracoon
 - D. cave house
8. The following states in southern America used African slaves in their plantations except _____.
- A. Virginia
 - B. Carolina
 - C. Texas
 - D. Georgia
9. _____ founded Turskegee institute to promote industrial education amongst American blacks
- A. Marcus Garvey
 - B. Booker T. Washington
 - C. W.E.B Du Bois
 - D. Blaise Diagres
10. _____ is the first Afro-American doctor to carry out successful surgical operation of the heart of a human being.
- A. Benjamin Baneker
 - B. Granville Wood
 - C. Daniel Hale Williams
 - D. Elijah McCoy

Essay Questions

1. Define the term Africans in the diaspora.
2. State different sources of contact between the African continent and the outside world before the 19th century.
3. Discuss how the Trans-Atlantic slave trade gave rise to the social phenomenon now known in human history as African's in the diaspora.
4. Discuss three effects of Africans in the diaspora on the overall development of Asia, Europe and the American continents.
5. Do you think that the Trans-Atlantic slave trade should be associated with the phenomenon of brain drain in Africa between the 15th and 19th centuries?