

Answer each of the following questions with an essay. Be sure to include specific examples that support your thesis and conclusions.

1. What role did kinship ties play in West African life? Describe the role one's family played in society, politics, and economics.
2. What role did slave labor play in Spain's conquest of the Americas? Discuss how Indians and Africans were enslaved in the New World and why colonists abandoned indigenous slavery for African slavery.
3. What did captives experience while waiting for a slave ship to arrive on the West African coast?
4. What were the physical, cultural, and psychological traumas that West Africans were forced to endure during the Middle Passage?
5. What were the differences between slavery in Africa and slavery in the New World?

Answer Key

1. *Answer would ideally include:*

The role of kinship in society: Most people along the western coast of Africa lived in villages or kingdoms united by common ancestors. Africans' social identity was based on a collective identity rather than an individualistic one. Family lineage, which could be matrilineal or patrilineal, determined one's place in African society.

Politics: Political power was based in local communities. Kinship ties bound individuals to their village or kingdom, and large numbers gave ruling families their influence. Thriving empires formed in western and central Africa, such as Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, and were held together through kinship networks.

Economics: Property was passed from mother to daughter or from father to son, but individuals did not own land. Village land was communal and administered by local officials. Wealth in West Africa was based not on landownership but on family size, which helped make ruling families powerful, as did institutions such as slavery that gave rulers power over people.

2. *Answer would ideally include:*

Indian slave labor in the New World: When the voyages led by Christopher Columbus arrived on the island of Hispaniola in 1492, the colonists from Spain immediately began extracting forced labor from the indigenous people in the Caribbean. During the first decades of the fifteenth century, the encomienda system permitted Spaniards to collect tribute from native peoples under their control; those who resisted were slaughtered. Slave labor, warfare, and disease decimated native peoples of the Americas such as the Taino Indians, whose population dropped from 500,000 in 1500 to just a few hundred by 1542.

African slave labor in the New World: The first Africans arrived in America with the voyages of Christopher Columbus in 1492 — some as crewmen and some as slaves. Known as *bozales* in New Spain, African-born slaves were forced to do the hardest, dirtiest, and most dangerous work, such as working on sugarcane plantations, mining for gold and silver, and diving for pearls. Demand for slave labor increased over time and gave rise to an international slave trading system that over the course of three centuries brought at least 12.5 million African slaves to the New World.

Change from Indian to African slave labor: Slave traders began shifting from Indian slave labor to African slave labor in the late fifteenth century. The indigenous population was decimated, and European colonists were looking for other ways to fill their desire for cheap labor in their growing colonies in America. An attractive quality of African slaves was that it was difficult for them to escape because they were unfamiliar with the New World and had almost no way of returning home. Africans had also built up natural immunities to Old World diseases, while Indians had no such immunities, which caused their population to rapidly decline. The slave trade left some regions of Africa

depopulated while providing Europeans with the raw materials, labor, and capital to fuel the economic development of Europe and propel it into the industrial age.

3. *Answer would ideally include:*

Captives' physical experiences on the Slave Coast: Slave ports became known as the "door of no return" because there was little hope of escape once a captive was taken to Africa's western coast to be sold into the transatlantic slave trade. Captives were taken to underground dungeons in castles such as the Cape Coast Castle. Merchants lived in the upper portions of the castle in elegantly designed fortifications, while slaves were housed in cramped, wet, and filthy conditions below. The "slave hole" was designed to prevent the slaves from escaping but also from mounting an insurrection against the castle's inhabitants. Captives were also housed in barracoons, which were often outdoor holding pens exposed to the elements. Slaves received little food or water, and as many as 10 percent perished in the deplorable conditions.

Captives' mental experiences on the Slave Coast: Slaves experienced psychological trauma in addition to physical abuse. Some slaves believed they were going to be slaughtered on board the slave ship due to the inhumane treatment they had already received. Others believed the slave traders were cannibals, which was a reflection of traditional African beliefs about dangerous foreigners who ate human flesh. Many Africans linked the trade with the practice of sorcery and witchcraft because of the suffering associated with the slave trade. Captives were routinely separated from their family before embarking on the Middle Passage, which was also spiritually and psychologically damaging.

4. *Answer would ideally include:*

Physical traumas of the Middle Passage: The physical trauma of enslavement began after the Africans were captured and sold into the internal slave trade in Africa. The march to the coast in coffles, or chained groups, caused one in ten to perish before they ever saw a slave ship. Men were placed in the deepest parts of the ships in order to prevent rebellion. They were often chained to one another and rarely were allowed to leave the filthy and dangerous confines on a journey that could take months. Women were victims of sexual abuse in addition to enduring the horrors of being separated from their homes and families and forced into backbreaking labor on sugarcane plantations and in silver and gold mines or into other forms of dangerous and demeaning labor.

Cultural impact: Africans sold into the transatlantic slave trade were not just physically separated from their homes and families but also were disconnected from familiar cultural and social norms. Family and kinship affiliations were the most important aspects of life and culture in Africa, and once they were separated from their homes, Africans were forced to form new families and new kinship ties.

Psychological toll: Even before entering a slave ship, the horrors of the slave trade were penetrating the minds of those about to witness them firsthand. Some captives believed the slave traders were cannibals due to African lore that warned of dangerous foreigners who were cannibals. Families were often torn apart in slave ports, which became known

as "the door of no return," causing them endless sadness and torment before they entered the gruesome confines of the slave ship. While on board, women were subject to rape by the ship's crew. Men, who were shackled belowdecks, had to listen to this sexual violence while being powerless to stop it. Slaves experienced the spiritual agony of seeing others buried at sea without being able to perform mortuary rites and properly grieve the deaths.

5. *Answer would ideally include:*

Slavery in Africa: Slavery in Africa was usually a by-product of war. War captives were sold by their enemies into a slave trading network that spanned the continent. One could become a slave in other ways in Africa, such as by being convicted of a serious crime or by serving time for indebtedness. Concubinage was a form of sexual slavery that resulted in freedom for those women who bore a freeman's son. Slavery was often temporary in Africa; slaves could gain freedom either through assimilation into a kinship network through marriage or by working off their debt through labor. Slaves sometimes gained their freedom through manumission, which was a legal process through which slave owners could grant a slave freedom. Slavery in Africa was not inherited, and the children of slaves were usually free. Slaves had some degree of autonomy and were permitted to have families, educate themselves, and earn money.

Slavery in the New World: The number of slaves who labored in the New World far exceeded the number of slaves in Africa. Slaves in the New World had to endure the Middle Passage and the pain of being separated from their families. Once in the New World, slaves were forced to work on large sugarcane plantations, in gold and silver mines, and in many other menial, disgusting, and dangerous jobs until their death. Slaves rarely escaped their enslavement in the New World due to the unfamiliar terrain and because the color of their skin marked them as slaves.