

## 27. European Slave Fever

Slavery had existed both amongst the tribes and amongst the Islamic conquerors of Africa for a very long time, as it had in Europe and virtually throughout the whole world. The Portuguese introduced slavery to Europe as a cheap source of labor, and Europe's first slave market was developed there. In 1445, 235 Moorish captives from the Arguin Islands off Mauritania were sold as a commercial venture. It was so successful that four more privately sponsored expeditions went slaving on the Arguins in that year alone.

By 1500 the European discovery of the New World of the Americas made slaves a valuable commodity and greatly increased the demand for them, causing the beginning of the infamous "Slave Fever". Portuguese slave fever began on Sao Tome, an island about 600 miles northwest of the mouth of the Congo River. Sao Tome was first utilized by the Portuguese as a penal colony. Sugar and coffee plantations were developed there, and the Sao Tomese began buying slaves to work them. The Portuguese put Sao Tome under the charge of a trading company headed by Fernao de Mello. He ignored the Portuguese and ruthlessly plundered Africa for slaves, fomenting wars to enslave the resulting prisoners of war, encouraging crime so as to enslave criminals, and deliberately corrupting and using the local chiefs for his monetary benefit.

Diogo, who ruled Kongo after the Catholic Affonso, did not oppose the slave trade and was interested only in profiting from it. In the 1550's, the Portuguese broke friendly ties with the Kongo in order to profit from the slave trade, using the deserved expulsion of the Jesuits as an excuse. They built Mboma as their own slaving port and another where Angola's capital Loanda stands today.

Beginning about 1690, the West African slave trade began to accelerate. Five and a half million slaves a year were traded up to the year 1800. It has been estimated that 25 to 50 million Africans from the west coast of Africa were sold into slavery. Only 15 million survived, 9.5 million of them being brought to the Americas. They were bought for as little as \$.40 in the beginning. Later for \$600, and up to \$1800 before the close of the American Civil War in the U.S.

Christian opposition to slavery existed from the beginning. In 1691 the Society for the Conversion and Religious Instruction and Education of Negro Slaves in the British West India Islands was formed (later called the Christian Faith Society).

An increase in the slave trade took place about 1770, this time in East Africa. About 1,250,000 slaves were traded along the coast by Muslim Arabs up to the abolition of slavery in 1897.

### ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

In 1772 slavery was ruled illegal in Britain (but not in the American colonies), but Atlantic slave traders continued to deliver an average of 75,000 a year from 1750 to 1800.

Up to 1915, however, northern bound Arab Islamic caravans still stopped to castrate slaves for the harems of the southern and eastern Mediterranean at Germa and other locations in the Sahara.

In 1833 slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire, and the former owners of 700,000 former slaves were compensated, but Arab Islamic slavery still continued. In 1855 20,000 slaves a year were being exported from East Africa by the Arab Muslims.