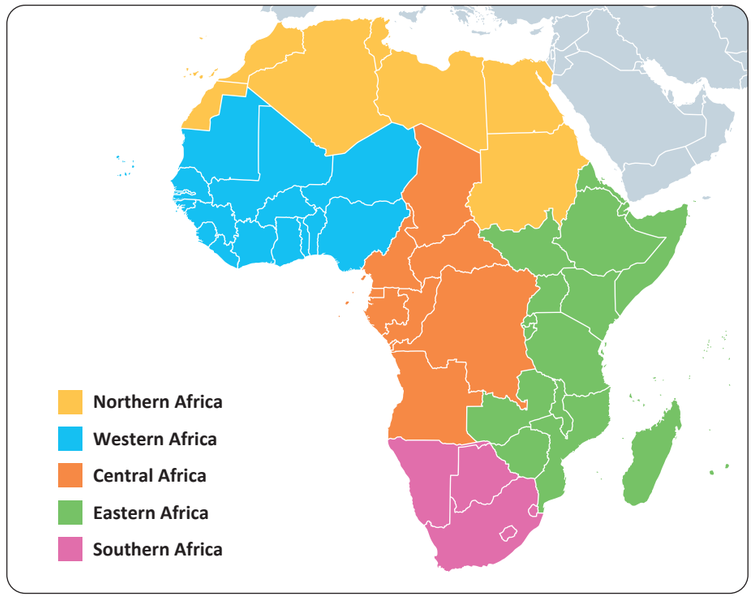
Maafa

Africa

Africa is the world's second largest continent, and is made up of 54 different countries. Today, more than one billion people live in Africa, including over 3000 different indigenous groups. As well as a diverse range of people, languages and cultures, the continent has a vast range of landscapes and habitats. Sprawling metropolises, rural villages and shanty towns can all be found here, along with grasslands, deserts, swamps and rainforests, which together support thousands of plant and animal species.



Ancient kingdoms

Humans have lived in Africa for millions of years. Great civilisations developed in every part of Africa, including the Kingdom of Aksum, the Kingdom of Benin and the Mali Empire. Each were great trading nations and gained wealth and power by trading natural resources, such as gold and salt, with other African kingdoms, Europe, the Middle East, India and China.

Illustration of Benin City, 1668

Beginning of the European slave trade

Portugal's involvement

From 1441 onwards, enslaved African people were transported to Portugal and were bought, sold and treated like cattle. This form of enslavement became known as chattel slavery. African tribes sold enslaved people from central Africa to Europe in exchange for luxury goods and guns.

Spain's involvement

In 1492, Christopher Columbus discovered Hispaniola, a Caribbean island, which he claimed for Spain. On a later voyage, he took sugar cane to the Caribbean to create sugar plantations. The indigenous people of Hispaniola suffered greatly when they were enslaved to work on the sugar plantations. A Spanish priest believed that African people would be more suited to work on the plantations, because of their darker skin. African people were then targeted for enslavement.

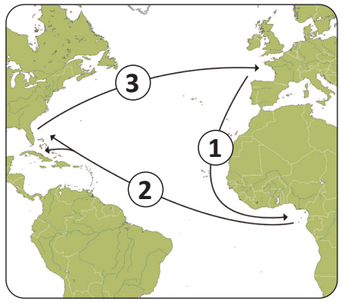
Britain's role in the Maafa

Britain first began transporting enslaved African people in 1562, when Elizabeth I gave John Hawkins, an English naval commander, the permission to do so. By 1650, Britain had seized several West Indies islands from Spain, and was transporting several thousand enslaved African people across the Atlantic Ocean each year. By the early 1800s, this number had increased to 120,000 each year. In total, Britain transported more enslaved African people than any other European country.

John Hawkins

Triangular slave trade

The triangular slave trade was a very profitable system of enslavement, developed to provide labour for plantations in the Americas. It involved three journeys:



1 The first journey
Goods, including metal and guns, were transported to the west coast of Africa.

2 The second journey
Enslaved African people were transported to the Caribbean and the Americas. This journey was also known as the middle passage.

3 The third journey
Goods produced on the plantations were transported back to Europe.

Life for enslaved African people

African people were forcibly taken from their villages and marched to coastal trading forts on the west coast of Africa. They were locked up in cells before being transported to the Americas. Conditions on board the ships were appalling, and many people died from sickness or disease. Once they arrived in the Americas, they were sold at auction and transported to work on plantations or as domestic servants. Enslaved workers who tried to escape or rebel were severely punished, but acts of resistance were common, as they despised the situation that they had been forced into.

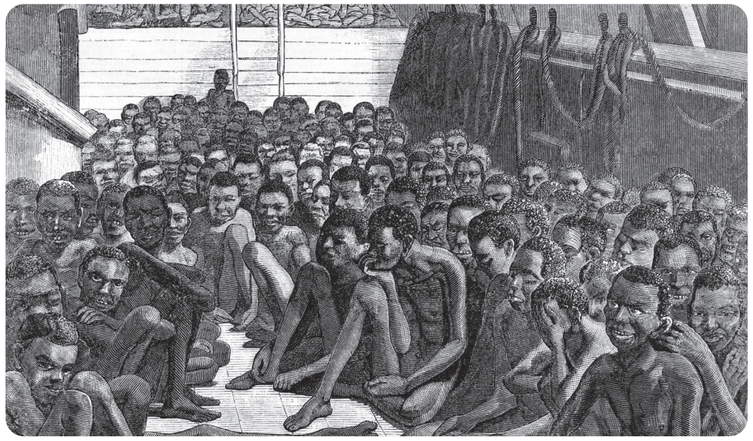


Illustration of the slave deck on the ship, *Wildfire*, 1860

Abolition of slavery

Many people, including plantation owners and traders, profited greatly from the slave trade and were keen for it to continue. British cities, banks and businesses also developed as a result of the money made from the slave trade. However, over time, people came to believe that slavery was wrong. A range of factors, such as enslaved people rebelling against plantation owners in the First Maroon War and the work of abolitionists, eventually led to the end of the slave trade in Britain in 1807. The Slavery Abolition Act was passed in 1833, which made slavery illegal. However, the lives of most emancipated slaves did not improve for many years.

African nations after slavery

After the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884–1885, was held between 14 European countries, Africa was divided into 50 European colonies. Many European people became extremely wealthy by exploiting Africa and its wealth of natural resources, and the division of Africa marked another struggle that African people faced for their freedom from European control.

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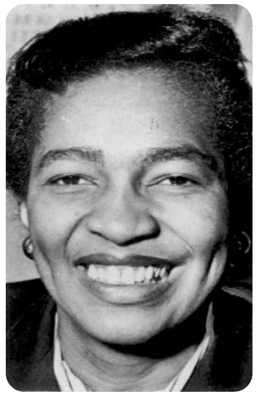
Black people in Britain in the 20th century

During the 20th century, Britain recruited thousands of soldiers and workers from the West Indies to help Britain fight in both World Wars and to rebuild the economy afterwards. However, mass arrivals of black people between the 1950s and 1970s caused a rise in racial tensions and prejudice, and black people were treated badly. The Race Relations Act was passed in 1965, to combat prejudices that black and ethnic minority communities faced. It has since been replaced with the Equality Act 2010. This act covers racial discrimination, but also other kinds of intolerance, such as discrimination against gender, disability, sexual orientation or religion.

Great black Britons



Claudia Jones

Many black Britons have achieved amazing things, instigating change and empowering others, while overcoming racial and social barriers in the process.

John Blanke was one of the earliest recorded black people in England after the Roman period, and was a trumpeter in the Tudor court in the 1500s.

Ignatius Sancho was an abolitionist and one of the first black writers to have a wide British readership in the 1700s.

Olaudah Equiano was an abolitionist who wrote a bestselling autobiography in the 1700s.

William Cuffay was a leading figure in the fight for the rights for the working class during the 1800s.

Mary Seacole was a nurse in the 1800s who set up the 'British Hotel' in the Crimea, where she cared for soldiers injured in the Crimean War.

Claudia Jones was a political activist in the 1900s, who is described as the 'mother of the Notting Hill Carnival'.

Olive Morris was a community leader and key organiser of the Black Women's movement in the mid 1900s.

Lenford Kwesi Garrison was an educationalist and activist, who set up the Black Cultural Archives to track the history of black British identity.

Maafa timeline

1441	Portugal starts transporting enslaved African people.
1492	Christopher Columbus discovers Hispaniola.
1562	Britain begins transporting enslaved African people across the Atlantic Ocean.
1728	The First Maroon War begins in Jamaica, where escaped enslaved workers fight British troops for the right to live independently.
c1800	Approximately 120,000 enslaved people are transported, by British ships, to the Caribbean and Americas every year.
1807	The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act is passed.
1831–1832	The largest rebellion of enslaved people takes place in the British Caribbean.
1833	The Slavery Abolition Act is passed.
1884–1885	Africa is divided into 50 European colonies.
1948–1973	Around 500,000 people are invited to Britain from the Caribbean to fill job positions after the Second World War. The first people arrived on a ship called HMT *Empire Windrush.* All of the people arriving in this way become known as the 'Windrush generation'.
1965	The Race Relations Act is passed.
2010	The Equality Act is passed.

Glossary

abolitionist	A person who fights to ban something, such as slavery.
auction	A public sale, where goods are sold to the person who bids the most money.
chattel slavery	A form of enslavement, where people are kept as another person's property and are treated very badly.
colonisation	The act of sending people to live in, govern and control another country and its indigenous people, forming a colony.
emancipation	To be set free from legal, social or political restrictions, such as slavery.
enslavement	To have one's freedom taken away and to be forced to work for no money.
indigenous	To naturally exist in a country or area, rather than arriving from somewhere else.
maafa	A Swahili word meaning 'great catastrophe'. The name Maafa is used to describe the African Holocaust and the history and effects of the transatlantic slave trade.
plantation	A large estate where crops, such as sugar cane or tobacco, are grown.
trading forts	A place designed for the storage, buying and selling of goods.
West Indies	A group of islands surrounded by the North Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. More commonly known as the Caribbean.

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