Slavery in Belize

Beginnings of slavery in the Caribbean

-Tobacco, indigo, and cotton dominated. In the first part of the 1600s planters turned to sugar. Farmers sold their most fertile land to sugar planters. In Belize, the logwood and Mahogany rose.

-Labor issues: Taino and Caribs were decimated; The Maya retreated inland; Poor settlers and bondservants migrated to other islands and colonize uninhabited islands.

- Start of the trade: 1501 first Africans were brought to America; The Spanish sold an asiento (license) to the Portuguese to import captives.

-Promoting the trade: The Dutch West India Company gained control of the trade through raiding Portuguese ports

-Dutch arguments: African captives were cheaper, Africans were loyal to their masters, African captives had children, Captives served as assurance for loans/debts, Dutch guaranteed a steady supply, Africans came with agricultural backgrounds.

European Rivalries

-Italians planted sugar in Cyprus and took African captives. Portugal and Spain established plantations in the Canary Islands and Cape Verde. Brought the idea to the Americas.

-Business of slave: In the 17th century, the demand for labor rose due to the sugar industry. High amount of cash to pay for ships, warehouses, and slave barracks. Traders set up companies and spread costs over investors.

-National rivalries: The British favored the Company of Royal adventurers (later reorganized to form the Royal Africa Company). The French established the French West India Company


-Private traders: The Royal Africa Company gave way to private traders. Private traders bought directly African traders= cheaper. The British granted licenses and paid them to maintain ports.

Trans-Atlantic slave trade

-Packing the cargo: Captains acquired captives: 1. cruising along the coasts to deal with African traders; 2. sailed directly to a trading station to buy from a European factor; Captives were placed under the deck in tiers of open-ended box-like trays; Men were placed in the trays with shackles around their ankles; Women were placed below deck in the fore section; Provisions included: rice, yams, oil, water, fresh fruits.

-The middle-passage: On the high seas: 1. Doctor made morning rounds to check captives; 2. captives were allowed to have group activities on deck; 3. heavy seas= long hours below deck; Lasted 6-10 weeks; Main markets: Barbados, Martinique, Jamaica and Hispanola.
- Sales and Auctions: Enslaved were prepared for sale; removing gray hairs and placing palm oil. Scramble sale: Africans placed on groups with a set prices, when a signal was given planters rushed to assess the best/cheapest group; Auction sale; Branded and given clothes.

**Slave occupations in the Caribbean**

- Occupations on plantation: Fields Gangs: working on the sugar fields planting, weeding, and harvesting; Driver: commanded gangs; Artisans: involved in the production of sugar (boiler); Cattlemen, midwives, watchmen; Pickney gang: children from 4-10 worked in picking sticks, carrying food and feeding poultry.

- Jobbing slaves: Masters sold slave services-- Jobbed as field workers, Jobbed as tradesmen, Jobbed as domestics

- Alternative works: Work in coffee, cocoa, cotton or indigo plantations; Traded to work in timber works in British Honduras; Europeans owning pens; Domestic workers: Some worked in towns as personal servants of European families; Some worked in the household of the planter

**Slavery in the timber works**

- Extracting timber: Units/gangs were created to extract timber products; Units shifted regularly once the products were exhausted; Slaves worked in small, isolated, temporary camps in uninhabited areas.

- Extracting timber: The extraction of logwood was small scale; Only one white man and a Negro was needed for the extraction; When the shift occurred to Mahogany a lot more effort was needed.

- Once trees were found, they were cut and trimmed and trucked through temporary paths in the bush to the nearest riverside, at the place called “Barquadier”, from there the gangs (work men) cut the timber, bringing the trees to the river to be formed into rafts. From the Barquadiers the rafts would float down river (in the rainy season) to a boom before the trip to the river’s mouth where the logs were squared ready for shipment to Europe.

**Slavery at Camps**

- Huntsmen: Their duties were to go into the wilderness to hunt for the trees they needed; The tree was marked and the zone with the most amount of trees was then reported to the master for the master to claim the unoccupied territory. The huntsmen were highly skilled and could located the trees very easily.

- Axemen: highly skilled, able-bodied slaves; they cleared all around the tree and built a “barbeque”. A barbeque was a platform that elevated the axe man for him to easily chop down the tree. They would chop the tree and remove all the branches leaving the log ready for transportation to the riverside.

- Cattlemen: Responsible for taking care of the cattle and for transporting the logs to the river side. Dragged the logs and created them into rafts for it to flow down-stream to a boom.

- Food Production: Women prepared food; Women also planted and harvested short term products.

**Slave Laws**

- Deficiency Laws: Match the number of enslaved with the number of free; A planter must hire a European worker per ten enslaved workers; Ignored the law= easier to train a slave; Fine of £10.
- Trials: A “jumper” (special constable) enforced the laws; Serious cases: tried by a justice of the peace and three free holders (European property owners)

- At trials Africans could not: Speak in their defense; Give evidence against a free man.

- Planters forms of control: Planters mixed gangs with Africans with different backgrounds and languages and adults were rotated (to prevent family leaders and avoid children); Incentives for “good” slaves: extra provision, permission to walkabout, clothing, plots of land, higgling; Serious disturbances: Called the local militia, it is a big revolt, they joined the regiments.

- Benefitting slaves: Stated the minimum clothing, food and housing; Forbade planters to kill or place cruel punishments.