

# The Slave Trade in the Western Hemisphere

Because the Indians died, Indian slavery then led to the massive slave trade the other way across the Atlantic, from Africa. This trade also began on Haiti, initiated by Columbus's son in 1505. Predictably, Haiti then became the site of the first large-scale slave revolt, when blacks and American Indians banded together in 1519. The uprising lasted more than a decade and was finally brought to an end by the Spanish in the 1530s.<sup>73</sup>

Figure 1. From James W. Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*.

- The earliest European slave traders were Portuguese (15<sup>th</sup> century), but the practice was soon adopted by all major European empires.
- Spanish explorers and conquerors sought laborers to work lands in the Caribbean and Americas. As imported diseases ravaged Indigenous populations, the Spanish found themselves surrounded by vast tracts of land but with few laborers to work it.
  - The Spanish attempted to harness the labour of those who survived the diseases, but Indigenous Peoples frequently revolted or escaped to the hinterland.

How can such behaviours be avoided? Why?

## AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE, 1450–1808



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- At every stage of the process, the slave trade was a brutal and inhumane process. The original capture of slaves in Africa was always a violent affair.
- As European demand for slaves grew, some African leaders organized raiding parties to seize individuals from neighbouring societies. Others launched wars for the purpose of capturing victims for the slave trade.
- Following capture, enslaved individuals underwent a forced march to the coast where they lived in holding pens until a ship arrived to transport them to the western hemisphere. They embarked on the dreadful **middle passage**, the transatlantic journey, aboard filthy and crowded slave ships.
- Most ships provided slaves with enough room (below decks) to sit upright, but not stand. Some forced people to lie in chains on shelves with barley half a metre of space between them.

- Conditions were so bad that many slaves attempted to starve themselves to death or mount revolts. Crew members used tools to pry open the mouths of those who refused to eat and pitched sick individuals into the ocean rather than have them infect others or waste limited supplies of food.
- The journey to the Caribbean from Africa took four to six weeks. At the beginning of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the survival rate for the middle passage was often 50%. This would be “improved” to 75% overall (from 1450-1800s).