

# Teaching about the African Diasporas

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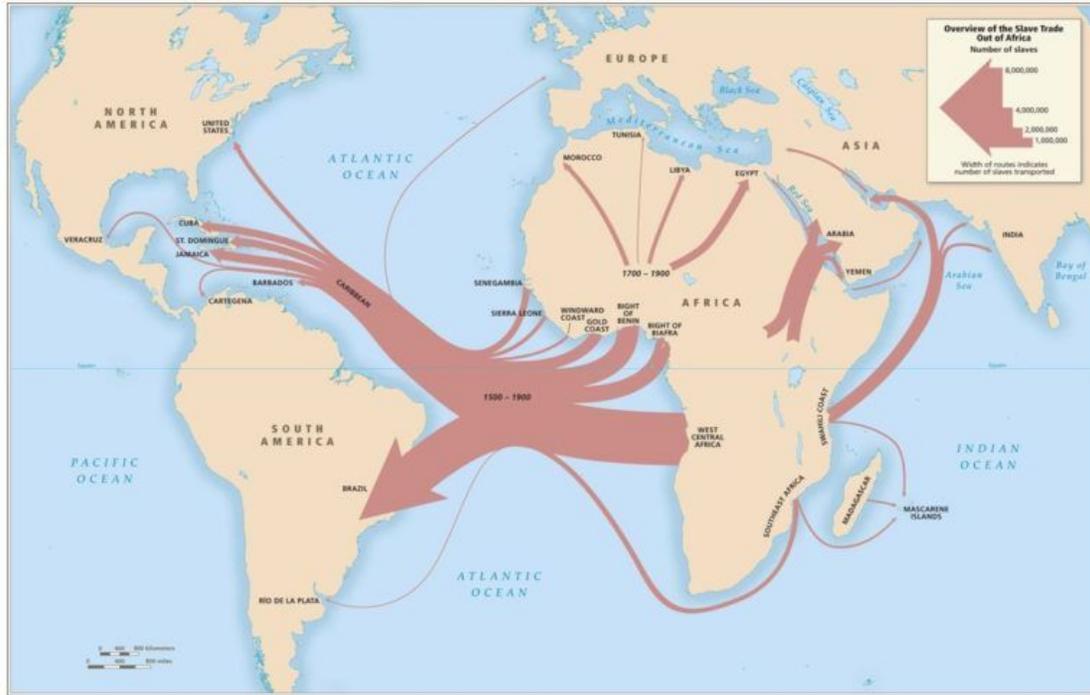


Image credit: John Mouldoux- <https://news.uci.edu/2016/07/05/tracking-the-slave-trade/>

by **Jon Rehm** on January 04, 2021

We often think of the Atlantic slave trade only in terms of the Atlantic slave trade and within that the African Slaves brought to North America. In reality the African Diasporas are not just a single movement of people. Africans have interacted with and moved around the planet for millennia with the largest mass movement being the Atlantic slave trade. Within the Atlantic Slave trade an estimated 11 million Africans were brought to the Americas with about 5% being transported to the United States while the remaining 95% went to Central America, South America and the Caribbean. Additionally another 10 -20 million Africans, mostly males, enslaved by Arabs and transported from the East coast of Africa. When enslaved, these individuals took with them the languages, customs, culinary skills, music and belief systems of a variety of African kingdoms. As such the African Diasporas are a difficult concept to teach and for students to grasp. We need not teach the entirety of the diasporas at once, but we must remember that it is important not to teach the diasporas as a monolithic cultural entity. Below are some suggestions of ways to teach aspects of the diasporas at different grade levels.

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## Countering the Inferiority Paradigm

How we phrase descriptions of African and African Americans and their culture is important. On a societal level the way we address topics related to Africans and African Americans comes from a perspective of inferiority using descriptions that imply less than. When teaching, we spend so much time on enslavement, civil rights and race we “largely ignoring the specific, cultural, social and historical legacies of specific African cultures who were foundational to our present day cultural and ethnic memory.”(1) The perception of modern Africa held by most Americans do not represent the reality of the civilization on the continent. “Many countries are growing fast. The likes of Ethiopia, Rwanda, Senegal, Ghana and Ivory Coast have logged impressive records. Last year, six of the top 10 performing economies in the world, albeit from a low base, were African. This feat is likely to be repeated again this year. There have been big health gains. Child mortality rates in all but the most dysfunctional countries have plummeted. Life expectancy is 65 and rising. Chinese investment, as well as funds from countries such as Turkey and Brazil, has improved infrastructure. Coups are rare. Scattered internal conflicts and terrorist threats aside, Africa is not the violent continent of repute. And although many elections are flawed, some 45 of today’s leaders were voted into office.” (2) Even the way we describe African as if it were a single country and not a continent 3 times the size of the U.S. is a problem. African is made up of 54 countries, 1.2 billion people and has over 1,250 different languages. We would never describe North American as holistically as we do African.

The compacting of all African nations and culture into one holistic Africa feeds into a narrative of inferiority. To counter the paradigm we as teachers need to recognize the inferiority paradigm in our culture and curriculum and “we also need to build our skills and stamina for the racial discomfort engendered by a new paradigm.” (3) This is why an understanding of the African Diaspora and its contributions to the world’s culture and economy are so important. They counter an inferiority paradigm that many students have internalized. Please utilize the the following links to help with your teaching.

(1) [Falola and Childs, p.1.](#)

(2) [Financial Times Editorial Board](#) (2019)

(3) [DiAngelo \(2018\)](#)



## Background

[Wikipedia](#)

[Teaching Beyond Slavery](#)

[Perspectives on History: Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora](#)

## Resources

Teaching Tolerance

[Black in Latin America](#)- PBS video series 7 part each approx. 1 hr.

[Black in Latin American Resources](#)- resources and materials to accompany each episode of the series

[Museum of African Diaspora](#)- includes classroom content and educator resource guides

Lessons

[Afro cuban photo essay](#)- This is Afro Cuban Life from NBC News

National Geographic Kids- [Haiti](#)

[Haitian Cultural Curriculum Guide](#)- Broward Schools

[Lessons on Brazil](#)- University of Pittsburgh Center for Latin American Studies

## Book Suggestions

[The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe. Dr. Joseph Inikori and Dr. Stanley Engerman \(eds\).](#)

[Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800. By John Kelly Thornton.](#)





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