

Unit 14

Land and Labor Relationships

Section 1

Unit Materials

Questions To Consider

Question 1.

What are some ways that different cultures and times have used land and labor?

Question 2.

How did conquest affect systems of land and labor?

Question 3.

How and why did labor systems change on a global scale after 1500?

Question 4.

How did massive forced labor migrations between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries contribute to globalization?

The Big Picture

How is this topic related to Increasing Integration?

For thousands of years, land and labor systems were critical to the development of complex societies and helped integrate peoples into larger social networks. After the conquest of the Americas, the need for labor resulted in the transatlantic slave trade, which integrated all of humanity in a single web for the first time.

How is this topic related to Proliferating Difference?

Land and labor systems — whether in the form of wage labor, serfdom, corvee labor, or slavery — were usually based on social inequalities; thus, their structures both contributed to and maintained perceptions of difference between peoples.

Unit Purpose

- Land and labor are directly related: The amount of available land and labor determines the use, value, and productive capacities of each.
- Land and labor systems have varied widely across both time and space.
- Most systems of labor were based on social inequalities, and many were based on coercion.

- In the period after 1500, the conquest of the Americas led to the globalization of labor migration in the form of the transatlantic slave trade — a system that had profound effects on all peoples involved.

Unit Content Overview

In the pre-industrial world, the relationship between land and people formed the basis of the economy, and so determined access to wealth, power, comfort, and security. How different societies constructed this relationship was shaped both by the physical environments people inhabited and by differing political, social, and cultural traditions. As a result, societies around the world developed a wide variety of systems with which to deal with problems of land and labor, including serfdom, corvée labor, wage labor, and slavery. Many complex societies depended heavily on unpaid labor in one form or another to build roads, for agricultural enterprises, or to produce goods. Frequently, power was determined by how much labor the leaders of societies could mobilize and control.

This unit explores some of the diverse systems of land and labor that existed before 1500, and contrasts them with the increasingly globalized system of forced labor that resulted from the European conquest of the Americas. Indeed, even though slavery did not endure in most parts of Europe, capitalist impulses there encouraged and even thrived on such forms of exploitation elsewhere. Abundant land and limited labor in the post-1500 Americas led Europeans to look outward to other continents, and embellish existing forms of forced labor for their own capitalist purposes. Transatlantic slavery and forced labor on a massive scale thus came to characterize the period between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. For some, this traffic in humans brought wealth and power; for others, it brought misery. For everyone, it served to reinforce perceptions of difference between peoples, and bolstered social inequalities. Perhaps most importantly, it linked regions of the world previously isolated from one another. The result was a new transatlantic world that both altered and unified human history.

Unit References

Patrick Manning, ed., *Slave Trades, 1500–1800: Globalization of Forced Labor* (Brookfield, Vt.: Variorum, 1996).

Michael Cranton, "Property and Propriety: Land Tenure and Slave Property in the Creation of a British West Indian Plantocracy, 1612–1740," in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. John Brewer and Susan Staves (London: Routledge, 1996).

Janet Ewald, "Crossers of the Sea: Slaves, Freedmen, and Other Migrants in the Northwest Indian Ocean, c. 1750–1914," *American Historical Review*, vol. 105, no. 1 (February 2000), 69–91.

Anthony Reid, ed., *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency Southeast Asia* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983).

Global Historical Context

- Time Period: 1500–1800
- The period 1500 to 1800 marked an unprecedented era of global interdependence. Encounters between Europeans and the people of the Americas connected all of the world's regions for the first time. Ecological and demographic catastrophe was the result in the Americas, while new foodstuffs and the discovery of precious metals fueled population and economic growth in Afro-Eurasia. Also in this period imperial states expanded in West Asia, China, and India, while Europe produced the intellectual

movement known as the Enlightenment. Europeans at this time also sought economic opportunities in the Americas. As part of these efforts, they began to forcibly move African slaves across the Atlantic to work in agricultural enterprises in the Americas. Slavery was hardly unique in human societies of this period, and was widely practiced in areas as diverse as China, India, the Americas, and Southeast Asia. The Atlantic system of slavery was unique, however, for its scale, scope, and brutality.

AP Themes

- Examines interactions in economy and politics by focusing on trade, systems of international exchange, and the effects of war and conquest in tsarist Russia, Southeast Asia, and the Americas.
- Explores technology, demography, and the environment. Labor systems around the world resulted in enormous population and environmental changes, especially in the American exchange.
- Discusses systems of social structure by exploring how labor systems helped shape, and were shaped by, wider social structures.

Related Units

- Unit 9. Connections Across Land: How were land-based trade routes conduits of both commerce and culture? The Eurasian Silk Roads, the trans-Saharan Gold Roads, and the Mesoamerican Turquoise Roads trace the transmission of commodities, religions, and diseases, as well as the movements of people. This unit is related to Unit 14 because the transfer of labor across long distances was a basic function of ancient trading networks.
- Unit 10. Connections Across Water: How were water routes used as conduits of expansion and trade? The traders of the Indian Ocean, the early Mississippians, and the Norsemen carried death and disease, skills and technologies, and philosophies and religion down rivers and across oceans. This unit is related to Unit 14 because it documents an earlier period in which connections across water helped connect distant peoples.
- Unit 15. Early Global Commodities: What is globalization and when did it begin? Before the sixteenth century, the world's four main monetary substances were silver, gold, copper, and shells. It was China's demand for silver and Spain's newly discovered mines in the Americas that finally created an all-encompassing network of global trade. This unit is related to Unit 14 because labor migrations became globalized — in the form of the transatlantic slave trade — in order to meet the production needs of new commodities geared toward global trade networks.
- Unit 24. Globalization and Economics: How have the forces of globalization shaped the modern world? This unit travels from the Soviet Union to Sri Lanka and Chile to study the role of technology and the impact of economic and political changes wrought by globalization. This unit is related to Unit 14 because it deals with a later period of globalization, which depended on early modern systems of labor migration and commodity exchange for its creation.

Section 2

Video-Related Materials

Video Segment 1: Slavery and Serfdom: From the Ancient World to Tsarist Russia

This segment examines compulsory labor systems in Europe from the Roman Empire until the 1600s. In the Roman Empire, slaves were used extensively to build roads and work the estates of wealthy landowners. Most Roman slaves were prisoners of war, although some were sold as children or adults in order to pay off debts. Centuries later, compulsory labor still characterized many parts of Western and Eastern Europe in the form of serfdom. Serfdom — a system in which laborers are permanently bound to the land — developed in many parts of Europe where the demand for labor was at a premium. This phenomenon was clearly evident in Tsarist Russia. By 1500, Russian tsars had dramatically expanded the size of the state. As a result, Russian landowners came to control huge estates — all of which needed a large labor force. At first, peasants chose the estates where they wished to work. However, in the sixteenth century landowners anxious to secure a permanent labor force prevailed upon the tsar to limit freedom of movement among the peasantry. By the end of the seventeenth century, Russian serfdom resembled slavery: Serfs could be bought, sold, and even willed to descendants. In the same period, the expanding Russian empire came into conflict with invading Tartars in the south and Cossacks in the west. These invaders captured Russians and shipped them across the Black Sea to be sold as slaves, thus linking Eastern Europe with far distant port cities in Asia and the Middle East.

Video Segment 2: Islamic Southeast Asia

This video segment explores slavery as it developed in Southeast Asia between 1000 and 1700 CE. Unlike in tsarist Russia, farm laborers in Southeast Asia were free. Instead, slavery was common only in mercantile city-states, where the possession of slaves was an important symbol of noble power and prestige. In these city-states, slaves were not agricultural workers but were domestic servants, entertainers, and commodity producers. Kings and nobles often fought for control of slave labor in city-states. Through the system of corvee labor, kings sought to conscript slaves for work on state projects, while nobles sought to retain their slaves' labor for their own uses. As in Russian serfdom, the important difference between master and slave was based not on ethnicity but on whether one performed manual labor. Southeast Asian slavery differed from Atlantic slavery in that slaves could become junior members of their owner's family, and could even be assimilated into kinship networks through marriage or conversion to Islam. Moreover, owners were supposed to provide adequately for their slaves. Once Constantinople fell to Muslim rule in 1453, the trade routes that brought slaves to the Islamic world — including Southeast Asia — expanded. At the same time, however, this Muslim conquest prompted the Spanish and the Portuguese to try to find ways around Muslim-controlled sea-lanes, sailing around the Horn of Africa and west across the Atlantic.

Video Segment 3: The Americas and the Globalization of Labor: Slavery and Resistance

This case study explores the various forms of forced labor Europeans used in the Americas after 1500. Initially, Europeans sought to force indigenous peoples to labor in mines and on agricultural estates. This, in addition to diseases brought by Europeans, resulted in dramatic loss of life. For example, nearly a half million native people died on the island of Hispaniola alone between 1492 and 1550. In Latin America, the Spanish adopted the Inkan system of forced labor — the *mit'a* — in order to increase their own wealth, especially in the silver mines of Potosi. Indeed, the harshness of European labor systems in the Americas led many indigenous groups to either resist or to flee. In the Caribbean, the lack of a surviving labor force led Europeans to experiment

with imported labor in order to develop the agricultural potential of the land. Quickly, African slaves became the preferred labor source in the region. Indeed, the trade in African slaves became so profitable that 12 million Africans were forced to migrate across the Atlantic between 1500 and 1800. The transatlantic slave trade, as it became known, thus globalized the labor system of the Americas, and linked Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia in one single network. Its effects on Africans and African societies were huge: Some Africans gained guns and power by collaborating with slave traders, while others were subjected to appalling conditions both in the journey across the Atlantic and in the Americas. Resistance was widespread, but could not stem the tide of such a profitable global labor system.

Perspectives on the Past: Slavery’s Multiple Legacies

Why did slavery decline in Europe, only to rise under European control in other areas of the world? Historian Patrick Manning argues that systems of forced labor in Europe gave way by the early modern period to systems of wage labor; ironically, Europeans oversaw a dramatic increase in compulsory labor in the Americas. Historian Peter Winn, however, argues that there is little irony in this seeming contradiction. For him, the capitalist desire to maximize profit in Europe was entirely compatible with using forced labor to achieve high export prices on agricultural commodities produced outside Europe.

Video Details

Who Is Interviewed

- Patrick Manning
- Peter Winn
- E. Kofi Agorsah

Primary Source Materials Featured in the Video

- Affonso, King of the Kongo
- Tsarist government decree
- Bartolome de Las Casas, Spanish priest chronicler

Program Contents

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