

A Nasty Triangle

Adapted from A History of US, p. 144

Pretend a triangle is starting at Boston, Massachusetts—where many did. This is the first leg of the trip. The ship is loaded with rum and iron. The ship heads to Africa, where the rum and iron will be traded for African people.

The Africans have been captured by enemy tribesmen and sold to African slave traders. The slave traders bargain with the New England boat captain, who buys as many people as he can squeeze on his ship. Some of the captives are children, kidnapped from their parents.

On the second leg of the journey, the fully loaded ship sails to the West Indies where there is a huge demand for slaves to work in the sugar cane fields. This is very grueling work under the hot sun. The Africans are exchanged for sugar and molasses. On the third and final leg of the journey, the ship returns to Boston. The sugar and molasses are turned into rum, and the trade triangle repeats.

Stretch another triangle across the Atlantic. This one can start in England, goes to Africa, crosses the Atlantic Ocean to Charleston, South Carolina and returns to England. From England, the ship sets sail with products such as cloth and guns which will be used to purchase slaves in Africa. The Africans are then taken to South Carolina where there is a need for laborers to work on the plantations. The African slaves are traded for tobacco, rice, and indigo. Then the ship returns to its home port in England with the agricultural products. The Atlantic Ocean was once filled with ships sailing triangular routes like these.

M. Spingarn