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Discuss the main factors that lead to *European-led African Slave Trade*, and explain the key reasons for its eventual abolition in the 19th century.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, labor-intensive cash crop plantations were established in the Americas, laying the groundwork for a substantial change in the dynamics of labor around the world. Africans were enslaved in order to satisfy the insatiable desire for a large workforce caused by the demand for profitable commodities like sugar, tobacco, and cotton. This essay explores the many causes that supported and ultimately resulted in the 19th-century trade in African slaves being abolished. Through a comprehensive exploration of economic motivations, geopolitical influences, shifting cultural attitudes, intellectual developments, and humanitarian efforts, this essay aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted forces that shaped this pivotal historical trajectory. By tracing the evolution of the slave trade from its inception to its eventual decline, we seek to unravel the intricate web of influences that facilitated its existence and contributed to its demise.

The European-led African Slave trade was driven by several factors. Firstly, the triangular trade system connected Europe, Africa, and the Americas. European ships would carry manufactured goods to Africa, where they would be exchanged for enslaved Africans. These enslaved individuals were then transported to the Americas and sold, with the profits used to purchase raw materials that would be sent back to Europe. This trade network became deeply entrenched and profitable for European nations.¹

Mercantilism was a strategy used by European powers to build up their economies through trade imbalances. They were able to harvest important resources from Africa and the Americas thanks to the slave trade, which helped the economies of European countries develop.²

European nations fought each other for control of the slave trade. In order to manage the flow of people in slavery and guarantee a consistent supply for their colonies, they tried to establish colonies and trading posts along the African coast.

¹ Peter Linebaugh, & Moses, Rediker, The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic. (Dallars: Beacon Press, 2000), p.6

² Stanley Mintz, Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History (Penguin: Books, 1985), p.86.

Tragically, some African rulers and tribes were involved in capturing and selling fellow Africans to European slave traders. Intertribal conflicts and alliances were sometimes exploited by European powers to facilitate the capture and trade of slaves.³

The development of racial ideologies that portrayed Africans as inferior and less than human facilitated the moral rationalization for enslavement and mistreatment. This dehumanization allowed European slave traders to justify their actions.

Europeans were driven to explore new lands and found colonies because of their insatiable need for valuable metals, especially gold and silver. Africans who were held as slaves were frequently made to labor in mines to harvest these precious commodities for the benefit of European economies.

Diseases like smallpox, which decimated Native American populations, had some degree of immunity among Europeans. Due to their lower risk of contracting these illnesses than native populations, enslaved Africans became a more desirable labor source.⁴

In order to secure the legal basis for the transatlantic slave trade, European powers passed laws and rules that supported the enslavement of Africans. These laws endorsed and legitimized the notion of racial superiority.

Some European colonizers justified the enslavement of Africans based on religious beliefs, interpreting certain biblical passages to support their actions. This further perpetuated the idea that enslaving Africans was divinely ordained.

Enslavement allowed European colonists to establish a rigid social hierarchy based on race, where white Europeans held superior status over enslaved Africans. This social structure served to maintain control and preserve the interests of the ruling class.

³ Harry Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870*. (Simon & Schuster, 1997), p.61.

⁴ Davis Donald Buchanan, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*. (Oxford University Press, 2014), p.15.

As European colonies expanded, they became increasingly reliant on slave labor to sustain their economies. This dependency made it challenging for some regions to consider alternatives to slavery, even as debates over its morality intensified.

The forced migration of Africans to the Americas resulted in a complex cultural exchange. Enslaved Africans brought with them diverse cultural practices, languages, and knowledge that influenced the development of various aspects of American culture.⁵

Despite the harsh conditions, enslaved Africans often resisted their captors through acts of rebellion, escape, and sabotage. These acts of resistance highlighted the resilience and determination of enslaved individuals and contributed to the eventual downfall of the slave trade.

The Enlightenment and other intellectual movements of the time encouraged critical thinking, challenging traditional beliefs and practices. This led to increased questioning of the morality and ethics of slavery, contributing to the eventual abolitionist sentiment.

Over time, humanitarian organizations and individuals began advocating for the abolition of the slave trade, emphasizing the need to treat all humans with dignity and respect. Their efforts helped galvanize public opinion against the continuation of the trade.

In the early stages of colonization, European settlers faced labor shortages in the New World. Enslaved Africans were seen as a solution to this problem, providing the necessary workforce to establish and maintain agricultural operations.

Some European countries' economies developed to rely substantially on the proceeds from the slave trade. Because so many vested interests depended on its existence, this dependence led to hostility to abolition.⁶

⁵ Joseph Philp Rodriguez, *The African Diaspora: A History Through Culture* (Columbia: University Press, 2007), p.92.

⁶ Jimmy Walvin, *The Slave Trade: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (Routledge: Printpack, 2011), p.45.

Slavery was made to seem normal in European societies and their colonies, which helped to keep it going. Some people find it challenging to imagine alternative labor systems because slavery became so engrained in society.

There was frequently a gender divide in the transatlantic slave trade, with more enslaved males than women being carried. Both African societies and the colonies in the New World were significantly impacted by this in terms of social and demographic factors.⁷

As the demand for labor grew, European powers increasingly turned to the forced labor of indigenous peoples in the Americas. However, diseases, maltreatment, and harsh conditions led to high mortality rates among these populations. Enslaved Africans were then sought as a more "replaceable" labor source.⁸

European advancements in shipbuilding, navigation, and transportation infrastructure enabled more efficient and larger-scale slave trading operations. These developments facilitated the growth of the trade.

Competition between European nations for supremacy and control over colonial territories often fueled the demand for enslaved labor. Colonial powers sought to outdo each other in terms of economic gains and territorial expansion.

The development of deeply entrenched racist ideologies further perpetuated the belief in the inherent superiority of white Europeans and the inferiority of Africans. This reinforced the social and economic structures that supported the slave trade.

Enslaved Africans were often subjected to brutal practices that included the separation of families. This not only devastated individuals emotionally but also contributed to the breakdown of social structures within African societies.

⁷ Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, p.86

⁸ Alvis Resendez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (Houghton: Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), p.43.

The trauma and psychological impact of the Middle Passage-the brutal journey from Africa to the Americas- were intentionally used as a means of control, further dehumanizing and subjugating enslaved Africans.

The eventual abolition of the European-led African Slave trade in the 19th century was driven by a combination of factors. The spread of Enlightenment ideas brought forth new philosophical and humanitarian concepts that emphasized individual rights, liberty, and equality. These ideals inspired individuals to challenge the moral and ethical implications of slavery.

Moral and religious movements played a crucial role in advocating for abolition. Religious groups and individuals who opposed the inhumane treatment of enslaved Africans, such as Quakers and evangelical Christians, were driven by their moral convictions to push for an end to the trade.⁹

The publication of abolitionist literature, pamphlets, and artworks depicting the brutality of the slave trade exposed the harsh realities and evoked public empathy. This increased awareness led to a growing support for abolitionist causes among the general population.

Slave uprisings and rebellions, exemplified by events like the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), demonstrated the potential for enslaved populations to resist and overthrow their oppressors. The success of such revolts inspired a greater sense of urgency for abolition, as the determination and resilience of the enslaved individuals highlighted the need for change.

Economic transformations, including industrialization and technological advancements in the 19th century, led to changing economic structures. As economies shifted from agrarian to industrial, the demand for enslaved labor decreased in some regions. This shift, coupled with the evolving moral and intellectual landscape, contributed to the growing momentum towards the abolition of the European-led African Slave trade.

⁹ Richard Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (Boston: Verso Books, 2011), pp.17-18.

A growing sense of empathy and humanitarian concern for the suffering of enslaved individuals gained traction. This sentiment was fueled by narratives of escaped or freed slaves who shared their personal stories.

Landmark legal cases, such as the British *Somerset v. Stewart* case (1772) and the American *Amistad* case (1839), raised legal and ethical questions about the legality of enslaving individuals and contributed to abolitionist arguments.

International networks of abolitionists and anti-slavery activists, along with efforts to raise awareness through petitions and diplomatic pressure, created a global movement that pushed for the abolition of the trade.

The rise of democratic ideals and the influence of Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke and Montesquieu encouraged political leaders to consider the principles of equality and liberty, leading to abolitionist sentiments.

The costs associated with the maintenance and enforcement of the slave trade, as well as the economic inefficiencies of the system, became apparent to some governments and individuals.

The growing anti-slavery sentiment among the general public, fueled by abolitionist propaganda and increased awareness, exerted pressure on governments and institutions to take action.

International agreements, such as the Anglo-French Treaty of 1833, put pressure on European powers to abandon the slave trade and uphold their commitments to abolition.

Changing attitudes toward labor and the emergence of wage labor as a more viable and humane alternative played a significant role in the decline of the slave trade during the 19th century. As the industrial revolution gained momentum and societies underwent transformative shifts in economic and social structures, the notion of wage labor began to gain prominence as a more efficient and morally acceptable means of production.¹⁰

¹⁰ Andrew Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (Houghton: Mifflin Harcourt, 2015), p.72.

The efficiency of free labor systems became more apparent as societies transitioned to wage labor and capitalism. The productivity and innovation associated with free workers highlighted the shortcomings of the slave labor system.

Escaped or freed individuals who had experienced the horrors of slavery firsthand played a pivotal role in advocating for abolition. Their firsthand accounts and activism resonated deeply and helped galvanize public opinion.

The abolition of the slave trade was closely aligned with the broader international human rights movement. The principles of human dignity, equality, and freedom gained prominence on a global scale.

As colonies and nations diversified their economies, alternatives to the slave trade, such as trading in raw materials and manufactured goods, became more lucrative and socially acceptable.

Enlightened leaders who championed the rights of all individuals began to take political positions of power. These leaders were instrumental in shaping legislation and policies that supported abolition.

The growing influence of media, including newspapers, magazines, and cartoons, helped spread anti-slavery messages and raised awareness about the horrors of the slave trade.

Changing cultural norms and a growing sense of empathy led to a collective shift in attitudes towards the treatment of fellow human beings. This shift made it increasingly difficult to justify the continuation of the slave trade.

The publication of influential works like Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" (1852) in the United States and Thomas Clarkson's "The History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade" (1808) in Britain exposed the cruelties of slavery and inspired public outrage.

International alliances and diplomatic efforts led to coordinated campaigns against the slave trade. For instance, the British Empire used its naval power to suppress the trade and establish treaties with other nations to enforce abolition.¹¹

¹¹ Thomas, *The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870*, p.61.

The convening of global anti-slavery conventions, such as the World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840, provided a platform for activists from various countries to collaborate and advocate for abolition.

Boycotts of goods produced through slave labor and economic sanctions against nations that continued the trade contributed to the decline of the industry.

The establishment of dedicated abolitionist organizations, such as the British Anti-Slavery Society (1823) and the American Anti-Slavery Society (1833), allowed like-minded individuals to pool their resources and efforts.

Younger generations, exposed to changing social norms and the ideals of the Enlightenment, were more likely to reject the institution of slavery and push for its abolition. This generational shift in mindset contributed to the growing momentum towards ending the transatlantic slave trade.

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¹² Wills, Dwight, *A Global History 1688* (Atlanta: WW Norton & Company, 2009), p.19.

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In conclusion, the European-led African Slave trade stands as a haunting testament to the darkest aspects of human history. The establishment of labor-intensive plantations, driven by economic interests and the insatiable demand for commodities, perpetuated a system of exploitation and suffering that spanned continents and generations. This trade was sustained by a complex interplay of factors, from technological advancements to deeply ingrained racial ideologies, and from political power dynamics to the insidious normalization of human bondage.

¹³ Davis, *The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, p.15.

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