

How Many Slaves Came to America? Fact vs. Fiction

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Amazing Fact About the Negro No. 1: How many Africans were taken to the United States during the entire history of the slave trade?

Perhaps you, like me, were raised essentially to think of the slave experience primarily in terms of our black ancestors here in the United States. In other words, slavery was primarily about *us*, right, from Crispus Attucks and Phillis Wheatley, Benjamin Banneker and Richard Allen, all the way to Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass. Think of this as an instance of what we might think of as *African-American exceptionalism*. (In other words, if it's in "the black Experience," it's got to be about black Americans.) Well, think again.

The most comprehensive analysis of shipping records over the course of the slave trade is the [Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database](#), edited by professors David Eltis and David Richardson. (While the editors are careful to say that all of their figures are estimates, I believe that they are the best estimates that we have, the proverbial "gold standard" in the field of the study of the slave trade.) Between 1525 and 1866, in the entire history of the slave trade to the New World, according to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, 12.5 *million* Africans were shipped to the New World. 10.7 million survived the dreaded Middle Passage, disembarking in North America, the Caribbean and South America.

And how many of these 10.7 million Africans were shipped directly to North America? *Only about 388,000*. That's right: a tiny percentage.

In fact, the overwhelming percentage of the African slaves were shipped directly to the Caribbean and South America; Brazil received *4.86 million Africans alone!* Some scholars estimate that another 60,000 to 70,000 Africans ended up in the United States after touching down in the Caribbean first, so that would bring the total to approximately *450,000* Africans who arrived in the United States over the course of the slave trade.

Incredibly, most of the 42 million members of the African-American community descend from this tiny group of less than half a million Africans. And I, for one, find this amazing.

By the way, how did historian [Joel A. Rogers](#)—writer of the 1934 book [100 Amazing Facts About the Negro With Complete Proof](#), and to whom this series is an homage—do on this question? Well, incredibly, in his "Amazing Fact #30," Rogers says, "About 12,000,000 Negroes were brought to the New World!" Not even W.E.B. Du Bois got this close to the most accurate count of the number of Africans shipped across the Atlantic in the slave trade.