

Topic 4.8 — Continuity and Change from 1450 to 1750

Standards Table

Thematic Focus	Learning Objective	Key Concept
<p>Social Interactions and Organization (SIO) – The process by which societies group their members and the norms that govern the interactions between these groups and between individuals influence political, economic, and cultural institutions and organization.</p>	<p>Unit 4: Learning Objective N – Explain how economic developments from 1450 to 1750 affected social structures over time.</p>	<p>KC-4.1 – The interconnection of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, made possible by transoceanic voyaging, transformed trade and had a significant social impact on the world.</p> <p>KC-4.1.II – Knowledge, scientific learning, and technology from the Classical, Islamic, and Asian worlds spread, facilitating European technological developments and innovation.</p> <p>KC-4.1.II.A – The developments included the production of new tools, innovations in ship designs, and an improved understanding of regional wind and currents patterns— all of which made transoceanic travel and trade possible.</p> <p>KC-4.2 – Although the world’s productive systems continued to be heavily centered on agriculture, major changes occurred in agricultural labor, the systems and locations of manufacturing, gender and social structures, and environmental processes.</p> <p>KC-4.2.II – The demand for labor intensified as a result of the growing global demand for raw materials and finished products. Traditional peasant agriculture increased and changed in nature, plantations expanded, and the Atlantic slave trade developed and</p>

		<p>intensified.</p> <p>KC-4.3 – Empires achieved increased scope and influence around the world, shaping and being shaped by the diverse populations they incorporated.</p> <p>KC-4.3.III.ii – Economic disputes led to rivalries and conflict between states.</p>
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Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Develop a historical argument about economic change and social impact.
- Identify continuities and changes in global social structures.
- Use evidence from Unit 4 to support a claim.
- Connect economic developments to political and social consequences.

Lesson Overview

Between 1450 and 1750, the world became more interconnected than ever before. New maritime technologies allowed Europeans to establish trade networks linking Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. These economic developments reshaped societies. Some traditional structures continued, especially agricultural production and elite dominance. However, new labor systems, racial hierarchies, and social elites emerged.

This lesson focuses on argumentation. Students will draw upon evidence from across Unit 4 to explain how economic developments affected social structures. The emphasis is not just on describing change, but on explaining its extent and significance.

Essential Vocabulary

- **Continuity** – Something that remains the same over time.
- **Change** – A transformation or development that alters conditions.
- **Plantation economy** – Large-scale agricultural production using coerced labor.
- **Commercial capitalism** – Economic system based on trade and profit.
- **Social mobility** – The ability to move between social classes.

Background Reading

Transoceanic voyages connected the Eastern and Western Hemispheres. European advances in shipbuilding, navigation, and cartography made long-distance trade possible. These innovations drew on knowledge from the Islamic world, China, and

earlier Mediterranean traditions. The result was a global trading system centered on silver, sugar, tobacco, and textiles.

Although agriculture remained the foundation of most economies, labor systems changed. Plantations in the Americas expanded dramatically, relying on enslaved African labor. Traditional peasant agriculture also intensified to meet global demand. In some regions, new merchant elites gained influence, while in others, monarchs centralized power.

Economic developments affected social structures differently across regions. In the Americas, racial caste systems developed. In Asia, traditional elites often retained authority but adapted to new trade opportunities. Understanding both continuity and change is essential for constructing a strong historical argument.

Primary Sources

Source 1

Thomas Mun, *England's Treasure by Forraign Trade* (1664)

Internet Medieval Sourcebook

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/mun-trade.asp>

The ordinary means therefore to increase our wealth and treasure is by foreign trade, wherein we must ever observe this rule; to sell more to strangers yearly than we consume of theirs in value. If we consume more than we export, the difference must be paid in treasure, which diminishes the kingdom's stock.

Therefore, it is necessary that the State carefully regulate commerce, encourage domestic manufactures, and make full use of colonies for the supply of raw materials and the sale of finished goods. By this method, employment is increased, revenues are strengthened, and the power of the nation is secured.

Treasure is the sinews of war and the foundation of strength. A prosperous trade ensures the means by which the State may defend itself and maintain its authority among rival nations.

Guided Analysis Questions

1. Identify ONE economic development described in the excerpt.
2. Explain how this development could affect social structures within England.
3. Explain how this document supports the idea that economic change strengthened state power.
4. Analyze how mercantilism might reinforce existing social hierarchies.

Source 2

Oludah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative* (1789)

Internet Medieval Sourcebook

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/equiano.asp>

The closeness of the place and the heat of the climate added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself. The shrieks

of the women and the groans of the dying rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable.

Families were separated without mercy; children were torn from parents, and husbands from wives. Many despaired and wished for death rather than continued misery. Yet even amidst suffering, some preserved their songs and customs, remembering their homeland though carried far from it.

The system which treated human beings as merchandise enriched merchants and planters, but it destroyed the lives and societies of countless Africans. Its consequences extended far beyond the voyage, shaping the conditions of life in the Americas and Africa alike.

Guided Analysis Questions

1. Identify ONE economic system referenced in the excerpt.
2. Explain how this system altered social hierarchies in the Americas.
3. Explain ONE continuity in African cultural traditions despite economic change.
4. Evaluate the extent to which economic development reshaped social relations.

Economic Developments and Social Effects

Economic Change	Social Effect
Atlantic slave trade	Racial hierarchies and forced migration
Mercantilism	Strengthened monarchies and merchant elites
Plantation expansion	Growth of coerced labor systems
Silver trade	Increased global interconnection

Continuity and Change Overview

Continuities	Changes
Agriculture remained central	Rise of plantation economies
Elite dominance persisted	New racial caste systems
Regional trade networks survived	Global trade integration

Change / Continuity / Comparison

Changes:

- Expansion of global trade networks.
- Intensification of slavery and plantation systems.
- Formation of racial hierarchies in the Americas.

Continuities:

- Agriculture as economic foundation.
- Elite control over political power.
- Regional trade networks in Asia.

Comparison:

In Europe, merchant elites gained influence; in the Americas, racial classification determined status; in Asia, existing elites often retained power while adapting to trade.

Key Takeaways

- Economic developments reshaped social structures unevenly.
- Global trade increased interconnection but reinforced inequalities.
- New elites emerged, yet elite dominance continued.
- Slavery fundamentally altered demographic and social systems.
- Both continuity and change defined the period 1450–1750.

Reflection / Practice Activity (Argumentation Focus)

Prompt:

Evaluate the extent to which economic developments from 1450 to 1750 transformed social structures.

Write 2–3 paragraphs that:

- Present a defensible thesis.
- Use evidence from both primary sources.
- Include at least two additional pieces of evidence from Unit 4.
- Explain both continuity and change.

Primary Source Citations

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