Historiography

- Africa tends to be presented as an aggregate victim society
- The concept of Africa as a victim have grown out of the abolition movement. Professional history writing about Africa began as a form of advocacy - proving that a history could be written - validating the African experience - supporting independence movements
- Kenneth Dike - Nigerian - Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta (1956) - looked at how the slave trade ultimately led to colonialism in the Niger Delta
- Walter Rodney - How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (1973) - Guyana - African underdevelopment was the direct result of the imposition of slavery on Africa. External influences created "pathological political forms". Argued that the ending of the slave trade, increased use of slaves in Africa, propelled political instability and ultimately led to a weakened Africa, ready to be conquered. Almost follows the abolitionist arguments from 150 years prior. Rodney was eventually murdered by the regime in 1980s
- Philip Curtin - the Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census (1969) - Can the impact of the slave trade be understood by the sheer numbers of people removed from the continent? 9.5 million 1500-1870? Curtin denounced by others who claimed 15-20 million were removed and the knock on influence led to double this (Joseph Inikori 1982). All depended on the choice of assumptions ie. how many died on slave ships
- David Eltis and Davis Richardson - Transatlantic Slave Trade Database - a resource which tries to collate and triangulate sources on the impact demographically - 12.5 million people removed - has used data to remove many of the assumptions about the impact of the slave trade numerically
- Still leaves the question: what was the impact? Do the numbers tell a differ story to the emotional one? Can suffering or morality be quantified?

Impact of the Slave Trade

- Most people living in Africa did not see themselves as Africans - should we therefore talk about them in these terms?
- Thornton’s work (1992) on kingdom of Kongo in C16th suggests that the kingdom had the upper hand - they were choosing how many slaves to supply etc. How is it that the king of Kongo has so much power to supply these slaves? Others have argued that whilst agency was there at the start, the kingdom became locked into this relationship
- Question of how far the slave trade was a product of external demand and how far it was part of a system which made servile people available. Dahomey for some represented a kingdom where slaves were available and which capitalised on the arrival of a trans Atlantic trade.
• Slavery was very much part of many of the societies eg. Slavery in Ethiopia in C18th not even connected to the Atlantic trade
• Other slave trades were existent - trans-Saharan (continued longer than the Atlantic trade), Red Sea, Indian Ocean (slaves taken to plantations islands) - all of these longer standing and potentially more influential. Why the obsession with the Atlantic trade?
• Sokoto Caliphate (Nigeria) is the second largest slave using state. Rodney argued that slavery was not in African culture and was given to Africa by the Europeans - this challenges that view as it was a much longer standing use of slaves. Increased use of slaves to feed world grain markets
• Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff - Slavery in Africa (1979) - tried to address what slavery actually is. Is slavery possible in places without formal states? Miers and Kopytoff argue yes. Usual argument is that slavery is "social death" however in stateless kingdoms, slaves were fitted into a system of kinship. As they become part of society they become part of that kinship group. As kinship claims developed they slowly worked out of a slave status. Claude Meillassoix 1986 has argued that slavery was not in fact to do with kinship but a fixed and legal status - slavery he argues is the antithesis of kinship.
• Slavery has become a way of investigating African societies.
• Another big question - how were slaves kept subordinate? In some instances with states, this was achieved through violence, but not the whole explanation. Many states did not have the coherence to do this.
• In some cases the status of slave was a high status - eg. Slave women concubines in Kenya (does not imply a voluntary decision) may have seen this as a high status role in comparison to a life of agricultural subsistence.
• Slavery is often predicated on promise of relief eg. Slaves in Zanzibar did not necessarily revolt as they were offered a long term relief from their status. The slave might well become part of the kinship group, be given property etc. For many slaves this "contradictory consciousness" led them to accept slavery as they saw no other way to improve their condition.
• Can also use slavery to think about the nature of colonial rule. Why did slavery persist under colonial rule? One of the excuses for Europe taking control of Africa was to remove slavery... One possible reason is that colonial states were too weak to stop the slave trade - did not have the resources to enact changes. They therefore relied on slavers to solidify their rule. Eg. Continuation of slavery in Sudan into the 1920s.
• May also be interpreted as a profound racism found in colonial societies. It was convenient and easy to tolerate. Racism could justify the continuation of the trade

End of the Slave Trade
• Who freed the slaves? By 1950s slavery had not vanished but was less prominent.
• In most cases colonial states were not willing to end the trade. Despite the provision of refuges for slaves, these were mostly used by slaves who had freed themselves, they were not necessarily a means of slaves escaping. Escapees often moved on for fear of being sent back.
• In many cases the opportunities of colonialism led slaves to see better opportunities than those being offered by slavery. Ran away to work or refused to accept authority. Does this tie is with concepts of chronism? A growing perception of an alternative future?  
• So why is Africa still considered to be the Third World? If not slavery, then what? What role does technology and the free market play?
• Problems researching Africa - great bulk is 18th - 20th century - lack of records in other eras. Archaeology, linguistics and oral history are other tools for investigating the more distant past.
• Teaching the slave trade - must be taught primarily as a great abuse. However should also try and think about the dynamics of power within it - question some of the preconceptions.