European Slave Trading in the Eighteenth Century

Jean-Michel Deveau

Silences and Guilt

The history of the African slave trade, despite its importance and role in world development, was not scientifically studied until 1930, and even since then few books and papers have been devoted to the subject.[1] Beginning in the nineteenth century, however, this history has been the focus of sensational publications that underline and broadly interpret a smattering of highly emotional events.[2] A conspiracy of silence cloaks the subject, as though shame still weighs upon the shoulders of Western society. In Africa, the same silence seems to favor consigning all memory of the collaborators to oblivion. In the last twenty years, the situation has begun to change. Several international conferences have brought together white and black historians.[3] The *Anneaux de la mémoire* (Chains of Memory) exposition in Nantes enjoyed considerable success, and in 1994 UNESCO launched a decade-long cultural program called *La Route de l'esclave* (The Path of Slavery).

The debate over the estimated number of deported Africans is among the most intense, since it lies at the foundation of the continent's current problem of underdevelopment. Rather fantastic numbers have been postulated for the Atlantic slave trade – 100 million, 200 million slaves – without any scientific basis. The first to attempt a serious calculation was Philip Curtin in 1969, who counted 9,566,100 deported slaves, though his calculation was challenged because it relied on materials that were not necessarily archival. It had, however, the distinction of having established a scientific benchmark removed from emotional issues. Subsequently, researchers have sought to define the importance of local trading. For the moment, the estimate ranges between 9.5 million and 15.5 million, and no one knows if it will be possible one day to reach agreement on the exact number.

These statistics can be understood only in the context of evidence that shows the active complicity of governments who supported unfettered economic evolution and subscribed to a racist ideology completely at odds with Enlightenment principles.

The French Trade

The French were the first to set up a detailed registry of their slave expeditions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[4] It was an indispensable first step on which to base efforts to respond to emerging problems.

With 3,343 expeditions in the eighteenth century, sixty-five identified between 1793 and 1805, and 717 illegal expeditions between 1814 and 1850, the French rank third among European slave traders. To these 4,125 voyages can be added those still unenumerated expeditions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is estimated that 11,698,000 Africans were transported from one coast of the Atlantic to the other, but it is possible that for each slave transported, five or six died in Africa before reaching the coast or afterwards during the trans-Atlantic passage. But how many? Seventy million victims or more? To which one must add the expeditions of the Indian Ocean. The French would then be responsible for the deportation of close to 1,180,000 trans-Atlantic slaves.[5]

In the sixteenth century, the initial voyages were undertaken at the risk and peril of adventurers who breached the Portuguese monopoly in Africa. The first adventurers set out from La Rochelle, Nantes, Honfleur, and probably Bordeaux. One cannot yet speak of a slave segment of the maritime economy, but voyages of exploration took place that opened the slave trade routes to their successors. The seventeenth century would be the era of monopolies that would expand private initiative through 1716. From 1651 to 1700, an estimated 152,000 blacks were introduced to the West Indies, 124,000 of these between 1676 and 1700. This

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219219704517905 Published online by Cambridge University Press

escalation shows that the plantation economy had taken on the role that was to be the foundation of the slave trade for a century. As the private companies were unable to export enough victims, the licensing permits of 16 January 1716 opened the slavery business to ship owners and outfitters in Rouen, Saint-Malo, Bordeaux, Nantes, and La Rochelle.[6] These five ports were first chosen for their ability to pull together the capital necessary for slave trade. Ship owners paid twenty pounds per slave brought to the islands,[7] in exchange for which the king gave them the right of entry for all imports destined for the trade and half the colonial duties collected on the sale of slaves. This encouraged colonial productivity for the government while accelerating the importation of manual labor and ensuring the enrichment of the mother country by shutting out all foreigners.[8] Hence the doctrine of mercantilism *(Pacte Colonial)* according to which colonials owed the mother country all or most of the profits produced by the colonies. These texts bring us to the heart of the concept of the state economy prevailing under the Ancien Regime and its basic political assumptions. Until the Revolution, slave trade was subject to policies aimed at dynamic growth during a period of general decline.

From 1716 to 1734, French slave traders responded somewhat timidly to the government's incentives; it was an exploratory phase of lingering hesitation following the rather mediocre results of the company monopolies. Then, except during the War of the Austrian Succession, the slave trade stabilized at a level of forty to sixty voyages a year, marking the beginning of the era of the great expansion of the sugar industry in the Antilles.

From 14,000 tons of sugar in 1715, production increased to 68,000 tons in 1740. The number of slaves employed in Martinique rose from 14,500 in 1713 to 65,000 in 1751, and in Saint-Domingue, during the same period, from 24,100 to 172,000. In 1763, following the interruption of the Seven Years' War, the colonials were short of slaves. Only Guadeloupe, occupied by the English, had received an adequate supply. When the trade reopened, the rhythm of slave trade returned to fifty or sixty voyages a year until 1779, though insufficient to make up for the labor wartime deficit that spurred the colonials to demand the opening of some ports to foreign slave traders. Passports were issued to foreign traders in 1763 and 1764.

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Soon the Chamber of Commerce protested to Choiseul (1761-1766). The minister, strongly inclined to favor the colonials, took part in a fierce debate in 1765 over the course of which the negotiators demonstrated that the slave trade no longer received preferential treatment with respect to its profits, and that colonials were exaggerating their needs in order to introduce foreign competition that would lower prices.[9] To encourage the negotiators, the order of 31 July 1767 exempted traders from the charge of ten pounds per slave brought to the Antilles. The measure kept the number of expeditions between fifty-five and sixty-nine but did not give new momentum to the trade.[10] Under Minister Sartine (1774-1780), Saint-Domingue continued to experience a labor shortage.

The extended hiatus of the war was followed by a vigorous revival: eighty-seven expeditions in 1783, a total never before reached. Ship owners speculated on the low price of slaves in Africa where they counted on overstocked markets, but they were mistaken: the Africans delivered only the number of slaves they could sell at a reasonable price and curtailed the supply until the surplus was reduced. The Africans relied on the probability that colonials, short of manual labor, would pay higher prices.

For its part the French government, aware of the labor shortage, wanted to encourage the slave trade. During the war, Castries (1780-1787) had thought at some point to issue passports to foreigners, but he quickly withdrew his idea in the face of the cries of outrage from the Chamber of Commerce. Once peace had been restored, and fearing that the ship owners would not be up to supplying the 25,000 Africans needed in the islands, he authorized foreign ships carrying no more than 180 slaves to trade in Martinique and Guadeloupe over a period of three years.

To stimulate private initiative, Castries later abolished the Guyana Company monopoly over trade with Senegal (on 11 January 1784) and, on 26 October 1784, granted a subsidy of forty pounds per shipping ton as well as sixty pounds per slave delivered to Martinique and Guadeloupe, and one hundred pounds for those sent to Tobago, Cayenne, and the southern part of Saint-Domingue. Of course the licenses of 1716 were abrogated, and with them the half-share of import duties disappeared. The result was more than a hundred shipments in 1785. With the dual impetus of government bonuses and the duty-free demand from the northern part of Saint- Domingue, the French trade reached its peak between 1783 and 1791 without any sign that the Revolution of 1789 disturbed the consciences of the traders. It took the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue, and the wars during which the English renewed their blockades, to disrupt the "triangle trade."

These factors, combined with the fear of seeing the Antilles taken over by the English, lent impetus to the proclamation of the abolition of slavery beginning in 1793, in the hope that slaves would side with the French. While the clash of ideas had been able to diminish the tendency to depend on slavery, in no case had this set in motion total abolition. Bonaparte, in fact, under pressure from the colonial lobby, re-established the trade on the very day he received their testimony. The Egyptian venture of 1798-1799 a shambles, France had to resume control of the Antilles in order to restore and insure its supplies of sugar.

The British Trade

The principal slave-trading nation in the world, England has yet to make a final assessment of the significance of its trade. The evolution of the country's role in the trade is only partially known.[11] Nonetheless, estimates of about 2,532,300 transported slaves are generally accepted. British trade thus represented 41 percent of the European total.

The English began by setting up commercial corporations: in 1588 that of the Senegal Adventurers; in 1618, the Company of Adventurers of London; in 1660, the Gambia Adventurers which became, in 1673, the Royal Africa Company (RAC). The RAC held a monopoly on the slave trade from 1673 until 1697, the year commerce was opened to all, subject to a tax of 1 percent paid on all merchandise bound for Africa. As the British colonies (St. Christopher, Barbados, and Jamaica in the Antilles, and the North American colonies) were not the only ones supplied by English ships, the total of these successive enterprises will be difficult to establish. In 1713, under the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht, the English received an *asiento*, but still seemed more inclined to privateering. During

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219219704517905 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the war in particular, the English supplied slaves to the French islands, depositing, they claimed, only the surplus of their cargoes. Within the Caribbean, they redistributed slaves from ports in Jamaica and Antigua. Between 1702 and 1777, Jamaica re-exported 137,114 out of 497,700 imported slaves and Antigua, between 1775 and 1783, did so for 1,972 out of 5,673 imported slaves.[12] A large part of these internal transfers would continue, although they would be rerouted toward the fledgling United States.

In the absence of an aggregate estimate of the English slave trade, the 469,893 slaves imported to Jamaica between 1703 and 1775 can be used as an indicator; about 50,000 slaves a year, dropping to about 20,000 a year in the period between 1730 and 1740. In the eighteenth century British trade benefited from the strong headstart it had acquired in the seventeenth century – 122 voyages compared with fifty-one from France. This headstart translated into a practical mastery of each stage, as shown by the example of Humphrey Morice (1676-1731).

For twenty years the most notable slave trader, Morice was a London merchant, son of a shopkeeper, who successively married two merchants' daughters. The father of the second wife was already active in the African trade. Morice's success was so spectacular and recognized that he was appointed a spokesperson and elected to serve in Parliament from 1713 to 1731. He began by investing in shares of slave cargoes before launching his own ships. By 1720, he owned eight vessels. In 1726 he sent out seven of the eighty-seven that departed from London, transporting 2,500 of the 26,440 slaves carried that year (9.4 percent). Only two others approached his scale of operations: Richard Harris, whose seven ships carried 2,180 slaves that year (8.2 percent), and Francis Chamberlain, whose five ships transported 2,100 (7.9 percent). The sixty-eight other slave cargoes were in the hands of small ship owners with one or two vessels each.

The English sought to spread the risks of trade as much as possible at a time when the French still ventured everything on a given voyage. The same pattern held true for Bristol; an official report shows that nineteen ship owners sent out between ten and thirty-eight ships between 1698 and 1729, while at the same time, forty-one other owners only sent out one each.[13]

Three ports assured the vitality of British trade. Between 1770 and 1775, Liverpool handled 273 slave ships, London 247, and Bristol 187. Other evidence indicates that between 1680 and 1769, London sent 535 vessels to Barbados, Jamaica, South Carolina, and Virginia, and 463 were sent to Bristol and Liverpool. In the seventeenth century, London, headquarters of the Royal Africa Company, had been the only slave port, which explains its lead of 164 sailings. Bristol and Liverpool began to outfit for the slave trade only in 1700 after the grant of the Royal Africa Company was withdrawn. While the number of ships from Bristol grew between 1720 and 1740 (this port was supplying the colonies of Virginia, South Carolina, and Maryland), there was a sharp decline in contrast to London's trade after 1720. The number of outfitters in Liverpool grew by 72 percent in the course of the decade 1760-1769. Other ports sporadically sent out trading ventures along this route, but they were of negligible importance: Whitehaven (nine voyages); Glasgow, Dublin, Belfast, Lyme (between two and four voyages); and six other ports attempting only one venture apiece. No more than 4.7 percent of the trade went directly to Jamaica, the principal island importing slaves, passing instead through secondary ports between 1686 and 1769. Liverpool handled 38.7 percent, Bristol 32.3 percent, and London 24.3 percent.

North American Trade

Until 1783, the North American colonies and later the United States were significantly involved in the slave trade. Officially outlawed by federal prohibition in 1808, the trade continued as before, but surreptitiously.

Until the end of the seventeenth century, American colonists exported cargoes of fur, lumber, and grain, which they exchanged for rum in the Antilles. They used the alcohol to purchase slaves in Africa. In the eighteenth century, their direction reversed: they loaded rum distilled in America and tobacco from Virginia and headed directly for Africa. On the return trip, they sold slaves to the Antilles, in exchange for molasses that was later distilled into rum back home.

It is quite difficult to estimate the number of blacks brought in since the great period of development in the South was in the nineteenth century. We know that the U.S. favored high birth rates among slaves, but the total number imported has not yet been determined. During the period of legal slave trading, at least twenty North American ships from Boston, Newport, Charleston, Salem, and Savannah participated in the trade. From 1750 to 1763, Rhode Island shared in eighteen voyages, and from 1763 to 1767, thirty voyages carried 117,000 slaves annually. The following period saw the number of slaving expeditions rise to sixty or seventy per year between 1771 and 1772. This doubling of the traffic was responsible for the deportation of 20,000 slaves each year from Africa.[14] The American Revolution halted this momentum, and the process of regaining the earlier levels after 1783 was quite slow.[15] In 1789, about forty small ships were in service, each with a capacity of 150 slaves. Altogether, from 1761 to 1810, the American trade must have taken 294,000 slaves from Africa.

After the concession of 28 February 1789 permitted them to unload in Cuba, American traders undertook a series of ventures along that route. In all likelihood, between 1790 and 1810, they sold about 41,730 Africans in Cuba. Other Spanish-American ports must have received slaves, but sources of information on this subject remain obscure. R. Anstey estimates that, all told, the Americans sold 180,843 slaves during this period. Assuming a 10 percent mortality rate during transport, this trade would have uprooted another 200,900 Africans.

The Portuguese Trade

As is the case with most slave trading countries, we have only fragmentary information about Portugal, although it ranks second with 29 percent of slave exports in the eighteenth century. Portuguese trade continued to be legal until 1836, long after it had been banned by other European countries in 1815. As was true elsewhere, it continued clandestinely even after 1850.[16] In a highly hypocritical move, the English agreed in 1815 to authorize slave trading with Brazil on the condition that it be confined to routes below the Equator.

Masters of Africa since the partition of 1493, the Portuguese colonized the islands of Cape Verde, São Tomé, and Principe, for which labor was bought directly from Africa. On the Gulf of Guinea, Fort St. George (Elmina), constructed in 1482, was designed to collect gold extracted from the north in the kingdoms of Taafo and De Wasa.

Traditionally, these gold mines were worked by slaves bought from the Kingdom of Benin and delivered by canoes from the lower end of the Gulf of Guinea. With their more efficient vessels, the Portuguese disrupted this traffic and rerouted it via São Tomé.[17] Some 30,000 slaves were exchanged for gold by the mid-sixteenth century,[18] fewer when the trans-Atlantic traffic became much more profitable. If São Tomé played a pivotal role, it was in the importation of hundreds of slaves to work on sugar plantations, although it was Brazil who took the bulk of the outflow. After 1553 individual planters were permitted to engage in the trade, and they became the most active traffickers. The Portuguese trade of 1,796,300 slaves was largely handled by them.

Three centers fed the slave trade of that century: the first and the least important was in the area of the southern rivers and the Bissagos Islands. This was vastly surpassed by the Gulf of Guinea to the east of Fort St. George and by Angola.

Bahia mostly imported supplies from the eastern Gulf of Guinea, especially after the Dutch took Fort St. George in 1637. Planters in Bahia found a market for their third-rate tobacco, which was greatly relished by Africans when it was soaked in molasses. For their part, by the terms of the treaty of 1661, the Dutch permitted only Portuguese ships loaded exclusively with tobacco, sugar, or rum in order to avoid competition with European manufactured goods. They collected freight charges of 10 percent of the value of each cargo plus a number of customs duties according to the whim of the West India Company employees. This regulation was, according to Bosman, circumvented with ease by the Portuguese, who were in any case accustomed to buying trade goods in Holland.

In another kind of smuggling, practiced after the discovery of Brazilian mineral resources in the eighteenth century, seamen often arrived at Elmina with gold from Brazil despite the prohibi-

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219219704517905 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tion of the Portuguese king who tried to reserve it for Crown use only. In this case the Dutch willingly accepted the gold, as did the French or English slave traders in the vicinity. A certain number of English slavers even managed to run the blockade around Bahia by flying the Portuguese flag. Once in Brazil, they exchanged slaves for gold.

From 1678 to 1715, 1,731 slave ships departed from Bahia for Guinea with cargoes of tobacco; from 1678 to 1685, between one and ten ships left each year; and thereafter, until 1792, fifteen to twenty continued to depart each year from Bahia. After 1792, more than twenty set out from Bahia each year, reaching a peak of forty-three in 1810. The sharp escalation was caused by the expansion of land planted in sugar cane in the Bahia region, which benefited from the collapse of Saint-Domingue after the slave revolts of the 1790s.

Colonized since its discovery by a strong contingent of settlers, Angola, that stretches between Benguela and the Congo, was only really controlled by the Portuguese at Benguela and Luanda. Ships at these ports had to report to Portuguese authorities for the purposes of inspection and customs. Farther north, Cabinda, Malimbe, and Loarze, still within the borders of Portuguese territory, were often visited by foreigners. According to J.C. Miller, 416,200 slaves were shipped from Luanda and Benguela between 1761 and 1790.[19] If one extends these figures through 1830, it would mean a total of 1,268,100 exported slaves. By broad comparison, Guinea, with 1,731 voyages between 1678 and 1815 and assuming 250 slaves per voyage,[20] must have shipped about 440,000 slaves to Bahia. To that figure one must add all those bought in the period when the trade was illegal, especially at Whydah (Benin), which became the key entrepot for contraband bound for ports north of the Equator.

Study of Luanda and Benguela in the second half of the eighteenth century shows that the graph of departing slaves varied directly with fluctuations in the trade between Angola and Brazil. Thus until 1760, Luanda remained the principal port, with 8,000 slaves transiting there, versus 2,000 at Benguela. Traffic in Benguela doubled suddenly in 1761 and continued to rise until 1770, when it attained a level of 60 percent of that of Luanda. For the two ports combined, traffic in the decade between 1760 and 1770 was 10 percent higher than that of the decades between 1740 and 1760.[21] This is precisely the era of the development of Maranhão. Plantations of cocoa, cotton, rice, and cinnamon filled the holds of slave ships that brought the slaves needed for production. Even if the mines began to give out in Mina Gerais toward 1760, their abandonment, made up for by a conversion to a plantation economy, probably increased the importation of slaves at the same time via Rio de Janeiro.

The African connection played a role as well. The Whydah region, bloodied by continuous conflict in the second half of the eighteenth century, lost its importance. Slave traders no longer felt secure and therefore rerouted ships to Zaire and Angola. The internal evolution of the Portuguese colony locally retarded the development of each port. Luanda suffered from foreign competition that began to flood into the ports north of Cabinda, Malimbe, and Loarze. African suppliers short of slaves had to go ever farther south in search of more. Hence they preferred to sell at Benguela, which was closer to the source of supply. The role played by Governor Souza Coutinho (1764-1772) was significant. By encouraging colonists to settle in the Ovimbundu (Mbundu) territory, he forced the dealers of that kingdom to scout ever farther toward the south and east, becoming more distant from Luanda and compelling them to sell to Benguela.

The Dutch Trade

Slave trading became a major sector of the Dutch economy after the capture of Fort St. George Elmina in 1637. Until the end of the seventeenth century, the Dutch supplied slaves not only to their own colonies of Suriname, Curaçao, and St. Eustatius, but also to the French and English Antilles and Brazil (between 1623 and 1657); in addition, they held an *asiento* from 1662 to 1685. Between 1637 and 1675 they must have sold 70,000 to 75,000 slaves (2,000 to 3,000 a year). This business was protected by the West Indies Company set up in 1621, which preserved its monopoly until 1735 and sold approximately 147,000 slaves.

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In 1735 the trade was opened up to individual traders who guaranteed an adequate supply. Statistics show a growth in number of slaves, reaching 8,000 a year, with two peaks between 1744-1746 and 1762-1773. By 1795, 260,000 slaves had been transported. Conditions during passage were far worse than those aboard French or English ships, and mortality rates rose as high as 21.3 percent through 1749, leveling off at 18.6 percent thereafter.[22] The bulk of this trade went to Suriname. Like the Danish Antilles, Curaçao served as a major slave market until 1720. From Curaçao slaves were re-exported to the Spanish colonies. After 1720 St. Eustatius took over this function but solely in order to deal with the incidence of smuggling.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century the Dutch trade declined precipitously. In 1773 the collapse of the Amsterdam stock exchange led to the curtailment of loans to Suriname planters, who could no longer purchase slaves. In addition, Dutch entrepreneurs were reluctant to go to the colonies because their plantations had become less profitable than those of the French.[23]

The Danish Trade

The Danish began to develop an interest in slave trading in 1645, even before they owned colonies in the Antilles. They actually took over St. Thomas in 1672, St. John in 1682, and bought St. Croix from France in 1733. Merchants from Glückstadt established the first West and East India Company in 1649. This ponderous, sluggish institution failed, like its European counterparts, and in 1683 the first licenses were issued to private traders. A new attempt at a corporation from 1733 to 1754 had no more success. Ten years of free slave trade ensued before the Bargum Company obtained a new monopoly (1765 to 1781), as did the Baltic Company of Guinea lasting until 1792, when free trade was resumed.

From 1733 to 1802 the Danish brought in somewhere between 53,000 and 86,000 slaves to meet the needs of their colonies, which acted as distribution points for the trade. St. Thomas was a case in point beginning in 1785. On 2 February of that year, a decree eliminated all customs duties and transformed the island into a financial haven from which 26,400 slaves would be shipped by 1807. In this period the primary destination was Cuba, where the Spanish had planted sugar cane.[24] This final period is of special interest because the Danish were the first Europeans to abolish the trade, in 1803, at the precise moment of its greatest profitability. Between 1803 and 1807, when it had become illegal, Danish slave trading reached its height, but officials did not consider shipments bound for foreign colonies to be outlawed. Between 1790 and 1807, 192 slave ships flying the Danish flag were reported to have entered the port of Havana.

The Austrian Netherlands

The Austrian Netherlands were attracted to the slave trade at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, when one ship was taken at the Fredericksburg Fort and two others at Elmina. Despite the memorandum issued by the Bruges Board of Trade in 1715 requesting the organization of a corporation and the creation of a trading post, nothing came of this effort. These were only short-lived trial balloons.

In contrast, shipments were initiated at Ostend between 1781 and 1783. The organizer, Romberg, requisitioned ships at La Rochelle and Havre and sent eleven to Ostend. Twenty others were outfitted by joint-stock companies in Brussels, Ostend, Bruges, and Ghent.[25] This sudden increase in numbers did not fail to create problems for the royal flag, guarantor of neutrality. Slave ships flying the flag were strongly suspected of being French ships in disguise, especially after 1783 when royally sanctioned slave shipments ended.

Sweden

In 1648, the Swedish founded the Swedish Africa Company that launched several expeditions from Stade, a port located on the Elbe but under Swedish control. The Swedish could not compete with either the Danes or the Dutch, who seized some of their

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219219704517905 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ships in 1661.[26] Initially, they lacked a West Indian base to support their slave trading venture. That came quite late, in 1784, when Louis XVI ceded St. Barthélemy to Gustave III in return for French trading privileges with Göteborg. The island was transformed into a free port,[27] but international conflicts prevented the Swedish from playing a direct role in the trade before the end of the eighteenth century.

Brandenburg

An unexpected force in this movement, Brandenburg (with its capital Berlin!) managed to launch nine expeditions between 1680 and 1700 transporting 4,850 captives to St. Thomas. All activity ceased in the eighteenth century due to an American colonial court decision.[28] An innovative clause in the Brandenburg Company for Africa's contract (1682-1721) gave priority to slave sales to Spain, to Portugal, or to the Canaries, and the keeping of a half dozen "strong and handsome" slaves for the court of the Elector.[29]

The Relationships between the Slave Trade and Capitalism

Basing his reasoning on the inevitability of economic process, Marx considered the dynamic of the slave trade an engine of primitive capital accumulation by means of which the industrial revolution could be constructed. That historical construct was critisized for its juxtaposition of the blood of blacks with the perspiration of proletarians. But nothing, according to Marx, except the logic of a deduction based on chronological inevitability, justified such a process.

Still on the basis of abstract reasoning, Eric Williams in 1944 reconstructed a similar theory. Applying the ideas of economics to the span of British history, Williams concluded that the slave trade had been the foundation for capitalist investment necessary for the industrial revolution.[30] The slave trade, he pointed out, had not only furnished the capital but had been, by means of the shipyards

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219219704517905 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and manufactured goods marketed through the trade, the motivating force behind dynamic technological transformation.

This theory is currently contested by R. Anstey,[31] who shows that with total profits of 9.5 percent, ship owners could not have financed the British industrial revolution. Jean Meyer calculated French profits to have been at 6 percent, thus concurring with Anstey. British historians believe that no more than 0.1 percent of profits per year derived from slavery went into the industrial financing of the nineteenth century.

An Industrial Geography of Europe

The lists of goods intended for the purchase of slaves consistently fell into the same categories in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from the north to the south of slave trading Europe. The selections corresponded to a particular demand of Africans, but it is not clear whether white traders had created those demands or if they were adapted to a pre-existing consumer demand. The answer will be known when we have a more complete knowledge of Africa's internal economic history in the period preceding European contact.

Allowing for a few standard deviations, one finds eighteenth-century cargo compositions averaging 60 percent textiles, 13 percent brandy, 11 percent weapons, 5 percent metal goods, and 11 percent miscellaneous. The proportion of textiles sometimes grew to 74 percent toward the end of the century.[32] Analysis of a cross section of geographic locations shows some variation. From Senegambia to Sierra Leone, firearms were much in demand for both hunting and war – preferably loaded with English gunpowder. As for steel weapons, these were mostly short, sharply curved sabers. Contrary to what one might think, Senegambia, widely infiltrated by Islam, had a taste for wine and alcohol. This religious and cultural penetration determined, on the other hand, the sole African region that imported paper.[33] Equally specific to the region was a demand for equestrian equipment.

For Guinea and Angola the assortment of imports was almost identical, although one must note the addition of cowries imported by the ton to serve as money.[34] In the seventeenth century, Captain Barbot was already writing that, "This is the merchandise that one trades with the most certainty." During the eighteenth century, even customs duties were frequently paid in cowries. All these goods so indispensable for West Africa depreciated significantly when sold on the eastern coasts. Piasters, or "pieces of eight," were more in demand for conducting business in the Indian Ocean and Far East,[35] and the Portuguese in Mozambique and the Arabs farther north needed them for trading with this part of the world. The trade was undeniably an important factor for industrial production in the Europe of the eighteenth century.

Textiles[36]

No longer just a craft in the 1800s, the production of ninety-three varieties of fabric and linen was done by large manufacturing establishments. Basic to the inventories, blue cotton "Guinea cloth" was popular all over Africa. Next in popularity were Shaslas, *nicaneas,* and *bajutapeaux* – made into at least fifteen types of handkerchiefs and cuts of cloth. Lists of freight show merchants charting a course from India to Great Britain, with stops in Holland, Germany, and many French textile centers: the Dauphiné region, with the House of Raby, Alsace and its House of Stackler, Carcassonne, and of course Nantes, Rouen, Cholet, Bordeaux.

Greatly in demand were the Indian cottons printed in vibrant colors, of which the English and Dutch sold large quantities to French traders.[37] Louvain forbade their production in 1686, thinking to protect traditional manufacturers who, unequipped to produce imitations, must have had trouble disposing of their standard lines of goods.

In 1729 Nantes began the first production of imitation *indiennes,* theoretically for export. This was followed in 1742 by an enterprise set up by Pinczon of Sel des Monts at Rennes. At first, Africans rejected this crude counterfeit that they could detect by its odor, but the technique was quickly perfected to the point that it became impossible to distinguish the copy from the genuine. The Seven Years' War provided the critical impetus for the industry because hostilities blocked foreign imports. To compensate for this loss, officials approved production of *indiennes* in 1759. Success was instantaneous. By 1789 a hundred factories spread all across France were producing 500,000 bolts of fabric a year. Nine mills were in production in Nantes, which even supplied Bordeaux, where the Beautiran production was insufficient to satisfy the enormous slave trading commerce of the port.[38] Rouen saw the most intense development of manufacturing – two factories in 1753, fifteen in 1758, twenty in 1772, and fifty in 1753. At first these industries anticipated trade with the Antilles market, but the shipping firms of Le Havre and Honfleur must have seen the benefits to be derived from the trade. According to P.H. Boulle, this led to the sudden opening up of expeditions from these two ports that had until then shown only a mild interest in such voyages.[39] Between 1763 and 1783, the textile industry in Rouen was in crisis, although production of *indiennes* continued to expand, stimulated by the slave trade which was at its height. In 1770 a sulfuric acid plant to manufacture dyes was established in the port.

The problems arose differently in England. Until 1770 one third of the cotton manufacture of Lancashire was earmarked for Africa. Most English trade was with America, divided between the colonies of the West Indies and those of the mainland. From 1753 to 1767, when supplies from India declined because of conflict, the English threw themselves into printing checked cloth, of which 20 percent went to Africa. When peace was restored, exports to the Indies resumed. In 1783 Africa absorbed only 2.41 percent of British output.[40]

Comparable studies are still needed of the textile centers of Alsace, Dauphiné or Languedoc. It is interesting to note that at the time of the debate over the abolition of the slave trade in 1789, the manufacturers of Carcassonne were circulating one of the most impassioned memoranda in support of its preservation.

Weapons

Firearms posed two problems. In Africa, one wonders about the role these weapons played in the wars on the continent. Where were they used? Did they stay in the hands of coastal populations, or were some resold to the interior? Did they directly contribute to upsetting the political economy, and to what extent?[41] The second unresolved issue is the question of how important the manufacture of weapons was to the European economy. Overall, scholars estimate that five to seven million guns were shipped to Africa. The best made and best known were manufactured in England and Denmark.

Liège, Belgium, Holland, and France (basically Tulle, Chateaubriand, and St. Étienne) supplied an inferior quality of guns, but it would generally be unfair to say that Europe disposed of production rejects through the trade. In 1774 the king of Dahomey protested to the French administrator of Whydah after some guns had exploded in the faces of those firing them, and had fragments of guns brought in as exhibits to prove his point. The warning was quickly taken under advisement as a genuine threat to trade.[42] We may note that until the nineteenth century French manufacturers endeavored to counterfeit English guns but without success.

The value of weapons and powder must not have exceeded 11 percent that of all goods,[43] except for the more specialized trade along the east coast of Africa where one finds as much as 18 percent of a cargo's value made up of weapons. However, this statistic pertained to particular shipments for which someone had specified English guns.

Alcohol and Other Goods

Although long considered an agent of depravity for indigenous peoples, alcohol was never anything but a royalty or bonus dispensed to canoe operators, coastal merchants, and rulers who used it in their courts. Representing 5 to 7 percent of most cargoes, liquor could not have intoxicated all of Africa. Nonetheless, the geography of this agronomic segment of the European economy covered a territory that extended from Greece to Portugal (where the English bought wine) to Germany (where the Swedes and the slave traders on the Elbe obtained supplies) to Great Britain that shipped its gin, and of course to France where the

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smallest quantities exported were Calvados and cider and the largest Cognac and Armagnac (not to speak of the wines, especially from Bordeaux, but also Burgundy or Champagne, enjoyed by military commanders and more rarely their staffs). As with gun powder, some captains tried to cheat their customers by adulterating the product – in this case by adding water to the alcohol. After Africans complained, one naval minister reacted severely: "This bad faith shames the nation and threatens to destroy forever the confidence of the natives."[44] To safeguard national alcoholic products, France prohibited her colonists of the Antilles from selling their rum at home.

Metals held an important place on ship manifests. Iron bars or sheets bought from Spain, Sweden, or England were especially in demand. Tin and copper went out as *manilles* (heavy bracelets) or as kitchenware and basins generally bought in Portugal. Glass beads and *rassadas*, purchased in Venice or in Bohemia, miscellaneous items like combs, umbrellas, pipes, mirrors, knives, or Flemish swords, leather boxes, carpets imitating those of Cape Verde but fabricated in the workshops of Rouen – all formed a motley assortment of articles frequently intended to serve as customs and royalty payments. Export production has yet to be quantified, but it is clear that it was a significant activity in French and other European workshops.

On a Global Scale

Two particular items, tobacco and cowries, were exchanged in the great transoceanic trade. Tobacco, particular to the Brazilian trade, was at the heart of an enormous smuggling operation conducted by Lisbon where, under the pretext of picking up damaged goods, the French made brief stops and obtained the tobacco they wanted.

Because cowry shells served as coins in Africa,[45] the English carried fifty tons a year during the eighteenth century, the Dutch seventy-four tons,[46] and the French an equal number. Europeans sought cowries in India (at Balasore and in Bengal), then in Sri Lanka, where Hindu merchants collected stocks of them. Cowries were fished for primarily in the Maldives by a large segment of

https://doi.org/10.1177/039219219704517905 Published online by Cambridge University Press

delays in payment from the colonists, who did not turn over the net results of trading until several years after the purchase, even if a considerable amount had accumulated in the Antilles.[51] All bills were paid in colonial products, and every pretext was used for paying late. Cyclones, caterpillars, droughts, muddy, impassable roads – the list of impediments was lengthy, and the ship owner had no recourse except patience. In contrast, the English issued notes payable in twelve or fifteen months, which explains their profit of four times that of the French. These notes were repaid to the slave ship and were used at once to provision subsequent shipments.[52] The English were likewise much more skilled at obtaining credit from banks or capitalists. In addition, their vessels weighed no more than 160 tons. More quickly loaded, they spent less time in Africa. These small "cargo ships" plied among the smaller islands. Their tonnages grew only in the second half of the eighteenth century, rising to about 200 tons, but they did not always reach that size. Finally, the English augmented the profits of a voyage by downsizing the crew for the last leg of the voyage – the return from the Antilles.[53]

The duration of the Atlantic passage was the only parameter upon which one could boost profits. A rapid crossing reduced mortality and speeded up capital flow. Nevertheless, the price of transport per slave rose steadily, increasing from 5 pounds sterling at the beginning of the eighteenth century to 7 pounds between 1720 and 1750, and 9 pounds around 1790. In the same period, the price of slaves in the Americas stabilized at about 26.4 pounds sterling. Hence the margin of profit declined significantly. Then, too, the triangle route cost much more than legitimate forms of trade.[54] A ship owner paid 16 pounds sterling per ton versus 9.43 pounds for standard cargoes. Slave ships also depreciated more quickly due to damages and wear, and the larger crews necessary raised costs still more.

In general, by the end of the eighteenth century, Europe no longer had a strong interest in continuing the trade,[55] which accounts for the success of abolitionists in affecting English public opinion. The planters' lobby (Club Massiac in France, for example) successfully pleaded everywhere for the preservation of the slave system. They were the ones who persuaded Napoleon to reestablish the system in 1802. Since 1763 officials at Versailles had anticipated the possibility of an eventual loss in the Antilles similar to the loss of the English colonies. If that were to happen, they planned to replace the sugar islands with colonies that did not need to import slave labor. Hence they made an effort to stake out claims on the coasts of Egypt and Senegal.

Given the evidence available today, historians have relinquished the theory proposed by Eric Williams regarding the financing of the industrial revolution by the slave trade.[56] In France, the pioneer study of O. Pétré-Grenouilleau disputes industrial investment.[57] Using the example of Nantes, the author analyzes in intimate detail the most prosperous slave-ship owners, those most able to invest.

Pétré-Grenouilleau states that beginning in the eighteenth century, these owners were reluctant to risk their money outside strictly maritime business. Even closely related sectors, such as ship construction or industries pertaining to ship cargoes, like *indiennes,* did not interest them. On the contrary, their expenditures were channeled into acquisitions that would reinforce their social position and prestige – *follies* (weekend retreats) in the vicinity of Nantes and at vast estates throughout the region. During the Revolution and the period of the Empire, they defended their maritime interests without attempting to save the refineries or the factories for *indiennes*, which collapsed. If shipping families had revealed their accounts during this period, one would see that some had re-entered maritime trade from northern Europe, the Caribbean, especially in Cuba, and the Isle of Bourbon. They had stashed away capital by buying up national resources like town houses and country estates. Most of the money went back into shipping, where the slave trade, even after being outlawed, held an important place until 1850.

After 1815 wealthy Frenchmen were less reluctant to invest in the production of printed cottons, but they often preferred maritime insurance; few gave up their social position, which was linked to a conservatism incompatible with the new industrial enthusiasm of the emerging bourgeois. Although some did venture into industrial concerns, they did so as short-term speculation rather than as long-term investment.

* * *

If the slave trade lacked the impact Marx attributed to it in the industrial development of Europe, it nevertheless did a great deal to position the continent at the center of a world economy and contributed to the rise of an initial capitalism supported by governments of various slave-trading nations. In so doing, it was one of the factors that contributed the most to the inhumanity of the capitalist system, as its merchandise was human beings. Such a chain of violence and suffering, carried on over several centuries and orchestrated with such precision, could not have occurred unless condoned by a secret racism hidden in unspoken but universal acceptance.

Translated from the French by Nan Sumner-Mack.

Notes

1. S. Daget, *La France et l'abolition de la traite des Noirs de 1814 à 1831* (history thesis, third cycle, University of Paris-Sorbonne, 1969)and *La croisière française de répression de la traite des Noirs sur les côtes occidentales de l'Afrique: 1817-1850* (dissertation, University of Paris-Sorbonne; J. Meyer, *L'Armement nantais dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1969); J.-M. Deveau, *La traite rochelaise* (Paris, 1990); E. Saugera, *Bordeaux, port négrier* (Paris, 1995); O. Pétré-Grenouilleau, *L'argent de la traite* (Paris, 1996).
2. For the nineteenth century, see especially E. Corbière, *Le Négrier,* periodically re-edited, and L. Jacolliot, *Le dernier des négriers* (Paris, s.d.).
3. "La traite des Noirs par l'Atlantique: nouvelles approches," special issue of the *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer,* no. 226-227 (1975); "La traite négrière du XVe au XIXe siecle," *Actes du colloque de Port-en-Prince, Histoire générale de l'Afrique, etudes et documents,* vol. II (UNESCO, 1979); S. Daget (ed.), "De la traite à l'esclavage," *Actes du colloque international sur la traite des Noirs* (Proceedings of the International Colloquium on the Black Slave Trade), Centre de recherches sur l'Histoire du Monde Atlantique, 2 vols. (Nantes et R.F.H.O.M., 1988); "Conference de lancement du programme UNESCO 'La Route de l'Esclave,'" (Whydah, 1994).
4. J. Mettas, "Répertoire des expéditions négrières françaises au XVIIIe siècle" (Paris, R.F.H.O.M., 1978).
5. S. Daget, *La traite des Noirs* (Rennes, 1990).
6. In subsequent years the list of ports grew longer. There were sixteen in 1741.
7. This would be reduced to ten pounds in 1720.

8. In the article *"Colonie"* in Diderot and D'Alembert's *l'Encyclopédie*, it is clear that colonies were only justifiable to the extent that they enriched their mother countries.
9. Their journals confirm that with 310,000 slaves and a mortality rate of 4 percent, the Antilles needed 12,500 slaves each year. Using sixty ships, they could bring in 18,000, 2,500 to 3,000 more than were required.
10. The sudden drop of 1770 (down to thirty-seven voyages) relates to the results of the 1769 drought and of the 1770 earthquake.
11. Only Bristol has been studied in any depth. See David Richardson, *Bristol, Africa and the Eighteenth Century Slave Trade to America* (Bristol, 1986).
12. M. Devèze, *Antilles, Guyane, Mer des Caraïbes de 1492 à 1789* (Paris, 1977), p. 166.
13. S. Daget, (see note 5 above), p. 107.
14. R. Anstey, *The Volume of the North American Slave Carrying Trade from America* (R.F.H.O.M., 1975), pp. 44-66; A. Gauthier, "Traite et politique esclavagiste," *Population* 6 (1986): 1005-1024.
15. From 1785 to 1788, no more than 2,200 slaves were deported a year, it seems, according to R. Anstey (see note 14), p. 54.
16. It ceased to be strictly Portuguese after Brazil's independence, even though Brazil was supplied mostly by Angola, still a Portuguese colony.
17. J.B. Ballong-Wen-Mewuda, *São Jorge da Mina (1482-1637)*,vol.I (Paris, 1993), pp.324-325.
18. J.B. Ballong-Wen-Mewuda, *Le commerce portugais des esclaves,* colloquium "De la traite à l'esclavage" (Nantes, 1985), pp.121-147.
19. J.C. Miller, *Legal Portuguese Slaving from Angola (1760-1830)* (R.F.H.O.M., 1975), pp. 135-176.
20. The Portuguese preferred to send out small ships in order to speed up capital rotation.
21. From 1740 to 1750 Benguela's traffic represented 10 percent of Luanda's, and from 1750 to 1760, it represented 25 percent.
22. J. Postma, *The Dutch Slave Trade* (R.F.H.O.M., 1975), pp.232-244.
23. P.C. Emmer, *Surinam and the Decline of the Dutch Slave Trade* (R.F.H.O.M., 1975), pp. 245-251.
24. The order of 28 February 1789 opened a number of Spanish-American colonies to foreign traders to satisfy the huge demand for slaves. Cuba was clearly the primary center of importations.
25. J.G. Everaert, *Commerce d'Afrique et traite négrière dans les Pays-Bas Autrichiens* (R.F.H.O.M., 1975), pp.177-185.
26. H. Kellenbenz, *L'Elbe inférieure et le commerce triangulaire* (R.F.H.O.M., 1975), pp.186-195.
27. E. Ekman, *Sweden, The Slave Trade and Slavery 1784-1847* (R.F.H.O.M., 1975), pp.221-231.
28. A. Jones, *Brandenburg, Prussia and the Atlantic Slave Trade 1680-1700* (Nantes, 1985), pp. 283-298.
29. E. M'Bokolo, *Afrique Noire, Histoire et Civilisation* (Paris, 1995), p.227.
30. *Capitalisme et Esclavage* (Paris, 1944).
31. *Liverpool, The African Slave Trade and Abolition* (1976).
32. J.-M. Deveau, (see note 1 above), p.74; E. Saugera, *Bordeaux, port négrier* (Paris, 1995), p. 247.
33. J.-M. Deveau, (see note 1 above), p. 72.

34. Cited by F. Iroko, *Cauris et esclaves en Afrique occidentale* (Nantes, 1985), pp.193-205.
35. P. Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1989), p. 427.
36. On this problem see: P. Haudrère, (see note 35 above), p. 69; H.R. Allemagne, *La toile imprimée et les indiennes de traite* (Paris, 1942); E. Depitre, *La toile peinte en France aux XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1912); B. Roy, *Une capitale de l'indiennage* (Nantes, 1948); P. Dardel, *Les manufactures de toiles peintes et de serge imprimées à Rouen et à Balbec aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Rouen, 1940).
37. P. Dardel, *Navires et marchandises dans les ports de Rouen et du Havre* (Paris, 1963), p.142.
38. P.H. Boulle, *Marchandises de traite et développement industriel* (R.F.H.O.M., 1975), pp.309-330.
39. E. Saugera, (see note 32 above), p.250.
40. P.H. Boulle, (see note 38 above), pp.316-323.
41. J.-M. Deveau, *Le Commerce rochelais face à la Révolution* (La Rochelle, 1989), p.104.
42. J.-M. Deveau, *(see note 1 above)*, p.78.
43. Between 2.4 percent and 7.5 percent at La Rochelle: J.-M. Deveau, *La traite des Noirs*,vol I (thesis, University of Poitiers), p. 116.
44. J.-M. Deveau, (see note 1 above), p.105.
45. F. Iroko, (see note 34 above), pp. 193-205.
46. S. Daget,(see note 5 above),p. 96.
47. L. Abdoulaye, *La Compagnie du Sénégal* (Paris,1958), p.209.
48. P.E. Isert, *Voyage en Guinée et dans les îles des Caraïbes* (Paris, 1989), p. 17; S.E. Green-Pedersen, *The History of the Danish Negro Slave Trade (1733-1807)* (R.F.H.O.M., 1975), pp.196-200.
49. J.-M. Deveau, (see note 1 above), p.210.
50. Ibid., pp. 208 and 214.
51. J.-M. Deveau, "Les affaires Van Hoogwerff," in *Commerce et plantation dans la Caraïbe* (Bordeaux, 1992), pp. 169-183.
52. D. Richardson, *Profitability in Bristol-Liverpool Slave Trade* (R.F.H.O.M., 1975), pp.301-308.
53. W.E. Minghinton, *The British Slave Fleet* (Nantes, 1985), pp.395-429.
54. D. Richardson, *The Costs of Survival* (Nantes, 1985), pp.169-187.
55. A final indication of the decline in profits is the proportion of British exports intended for the trade out of total export volume: 1730, 11 percent; 1772, 9.95 percent; and 1789, 6.80 percent.
56. E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (North Carolina, 1944); R. Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition* (London, 1975).
57. O. Pétré-Grenouilleau *Négoce maritime et monde moderne* (thesis, University of Rennes, 1994), published in 1966 under the title *L'argent de la traite* (see note 1 above).

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