CAPTIVE PASSAGE

The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Making of the Americas

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I

Human Commerce

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In the beginning, gold was the magnet that attracted Europeans to Africa. It was soon followed by ivory, pepper, beeswax, gum, and the skins of tropical animals. Yet for well over three centuries, it was a trade in human beings that cemented the continents of Europe, Africa, and the Americas together in a commercial relationship.[1] Fueled by the demand for human labor in European enterprises in the New World, the transatlantic slave trade would bring millions of Africans to bondage in the Americas[2] from eight major slave-trading regions—Senegambia, Upper Guinea, the Windward Coast, the Gold Coast, the Bight of Benin, the Bight of Biafra, the Congo, and Angola. At markets situated along a great arc of the west coast of Africa, from Senegal in the north to Angola in the south, ships flying the flags of Spain, Portugal, Holland, England, France, and Denmark all took on cargoes of African captives. Thus began a journey to colonies in the Americas where slave labor would be used to build and sustain mining operations and plantations producing lucrative agricultural commodities—tobacco, cotton, coffee, rice, and, most of all, sugar.

Scene depicting African slaves digging for ore, possibly gold, in a Spanish colony in the New World. *("Nigritae in Scrutandis Venis Metallicis ab Hispanis." Theodor de Brys, Collection of Voyages to the East and West Indies, 1594.)*

Opposite:
An ivory hip mask from the Kingdom of Benin in Africa, c. 1550. At the top are figures of Portuguese visitors, while the brow shows ritual scarification—a pattern of shallow incisions in the skin. Like other masks of this type, this one was intended to be worn on the belt of the *oba*, or king. *(Metropolitan Museum of Art, Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1965.)*

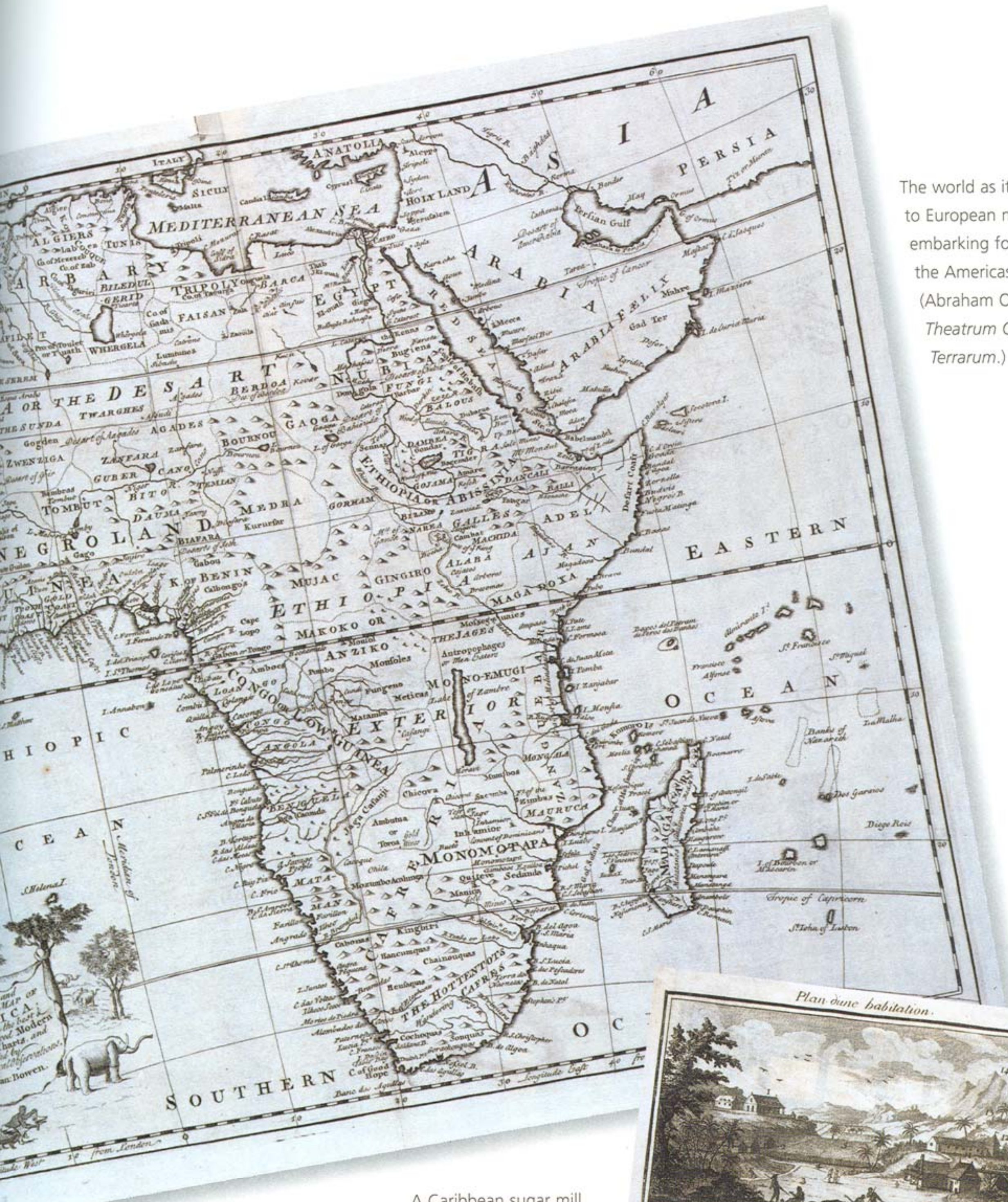
BEGINNINGS

Portuguese traders had introduced African slaves to Europe starting with Portugal's exploration of the west coast of Africa in the fifteenth century. The transport of millions of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas did not begin until Spanish explorers and settlers arrived in the New World during the last decades of the fifteenth century and the first decades of the sixteenth.[3] Lured by the prospect of finding gold, Spanish entrepreneurs and others created permanent settlements in various parts of the Americas, and Spain established a provisional form of government centered on a system of labor and tribute grants (called *encomiendas.*) In theory the grantee was given the responsibility for protecting workers—initially, local Amerindians—and in turn received labor and money tribute from them. In reality, the punishing work in the mines, a form of toil previously unknown to Amerindians, took an often deadly physical toll. In addition, the native peoples' lack of immunity to European diseases such as smallpox, typhus, measles, and influenza cruelly increased Indian deaths.

When the Spanish conquistadores had sailed to the Americas, they had brought with them a few black slaves, and early Spanish settlers soon were reporting that in mining operations the work of one African was equal to that of four to eight Indians. In general, they began promoting the idea that black slaves would be essential to produce goods needed for European colonization. Fueling their demands was the introduction into Spanish America of valuable tropical crops, notably sugarcane. By 1509 the first sugar mills had been established in Spanish colonies, with more soon to follow. Such operations required a substantial initial outlay of capital, and to produce enough sugar to be profitable they demanded a workforce that was both large and controllable. Hence, as Amerindians began to perish in large numbers (and Spanish clerics began interceding on their behalf), the Spanish crown turned to Africa—and African slaves—as a source of labor.

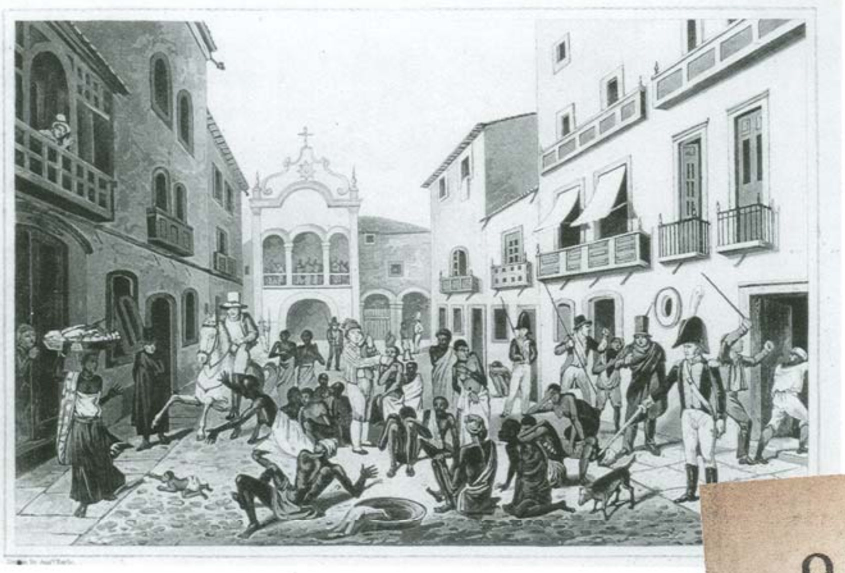
With the labor needs of its New World settlements growing, Spain began regulating the slave trade, granting special licenses known as *asientos* for the importation of slaves into the colonies. The first organized transport of slaves directly from Africa took place in 1518, when Spain's King Charles I granted an asiento to a member of his household. It allowed the importation of 4,000 African slaves into the Caribbean islands known as the Greater Antilles: Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic), Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico. It was a portentous beginning, for during the next two centuries slave merchants representing various European countries would vie for asientos and the opportunity to participate in a profitable trade in human beings. Indeed, during this period asientos became a great international prize, with wars sometimes fought to secure them. The licenses were filling a substantial demand: large numbers of black slaves were being employed in Spanish

Map of seventeenth-century Africa, showing the region Europeans called Negroland, Guinea, and the area that came to be called the Slave Coast.

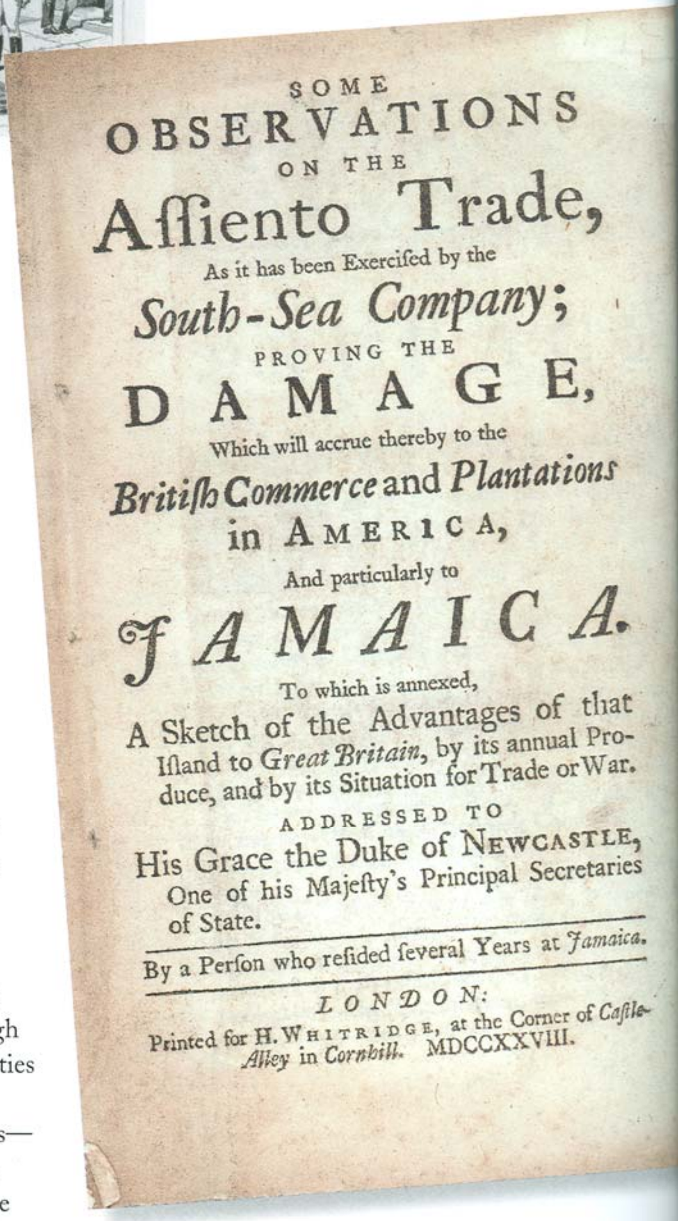


The world as it was known to European mariners embarking for Africa and the Americas in 1592. (Abraham Ortelius, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*.)

A Caribbean sugar mill c. 1750. (Chambon, M. *Le Commerce de l'Amérique par Marseilles …* Avignon, 1764.)



In Brazil, Pernambuco was the locale for a thriving commerce in enslaved Africans, many from the western African region known as Angola. In 1648 the Brazilian cleric Frei Antonio Viera recognized the central role of both the slave trade and its source when he wrote, "Without blacks there is no Pernambuco, and without Angola, there are no blacks." ("Gate and slave market at Pernambuco" c. 1822. Library of Congress.)



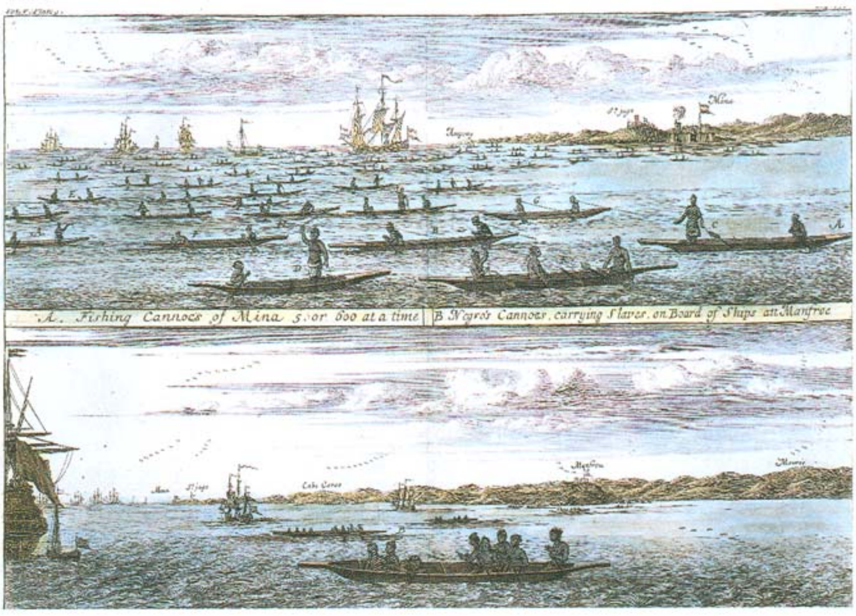
SOME
OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
Aſſiento Trade,
As it has been Exerciſed by the
South-Sea Company;
PROVING THE
DAMAGE,
Which will accrue thereby to the
Britiſh Commerce and *Plantations*
in AMERICA,
And particularly to
JAMAICA.
To which is annexed,
A Sketch of the Advantages of that Iſland to *Great Britain*, by its annual Produce, and by its Situation for Trade or War.
ADDRESSED TO
His Grace the Duke of NEWCASTLE,
One of his Majeſty's Principal Secretaries of State.
By a Perſon who reſided ſeveral Years at *Jamaica*.
LONDON:
Printed for H. WHITRIDGE, at the Corner of *Caſtle-Alley* in *Cornhill*. MDCCXXVIII.

Pamphlet referring to the asiento trade to Jamaica, 1728. (Sample Pittman Collection, New York City.)

gold mines in Peru, Venezuela, and Chile, in sugarcane fields of Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and the Antilles, and in the production of cocoa in Venezuela, grapes and olives in Peru, and wheat in Chile. And although the Spanish crown would stop issuing asientos in the mid-1700s, by then the transatlantic slave trade was an entrenched reality of New World commerce, with slavers from a variety of nations freely supplying slaves not only to the Spanish colonies, but to those of other European nations as well.

Sugar and Slavery Spread

Like Spain, Portugal had visions of New World empire, the Portuguese explorer Pedro Álvares Cabral having "discovered" Brazil in 1500. For several decades before Portugal established a foothold there, however, Portuguese planters had been using African slaves to grow sugarcane on Atlantic islands off the coast of Africa, including Madeira, the Azores, the Cape Verde islands, and São Tomé. Starting around 1516, this experience with the technical requirements of sugarcane cultivation began to prove useful in the development of Portuguese plantations in Brazil, confirming the utility of using slaves for the arduous toil the field work and processing exacted.[4] Meanwhile, problems including high production costs, heavy local consumption, and marketing difficulties suppressed sugar exports from Spanish colonies, and after about 1550 Brazil became the main exporter of sugar from the Americas—and a major importer of black slaves. The success of the Brazilian sugar industry was linked to several factors: excellent soil, adequate rainfall, and the proximity of Brazilian ports to the cane fields, which made it easy to ship sugar to market. In addition, from the end of the fifteenth century marketing channels available in Europe offered



This colored engraving depicts slaves being taken by canoe to Dutch ships anchored near Elmina. (J. Kip, artist. Engraving: Awnsham and John Churchill, *Collections of Voyages and Travels*, vol. 5, London, 1732.)

Brazilian growers optimal distribution of their commodity.

The surge in slave trading to Brazil in the middle 1500s coincided with growing dominance of the Brazilian sugar export business by Dutch traders. The Dutch ascendance in turn reflected the fact that at the time, Holland was the only European nation with the commercial organization and capital to adequately finance sugar distribution; importing African slaves for the plantations became a natural extension of their business operations.[5] Business boomed, and in 1632 the Dutch effectively seized Brazil from the Portuguese, while looking to solidify their trade domination in other ways. Around the same time they took the Caribbean islands of Curaçao, St. Eustatius, and Tobago, and established settlements in Surinam, Demerara, Berbice, and Essequibo in northeastern South America. These outposts, too, developed into productive sugar colonies.

Across the Atlantic other conquests also beckoned, for the Dutch had no trading posts on the West African coast, the source of black slaves. To remedy this deficiency and secure a supply of slave workers, Dutch forces captured the town of Elmina (or El Mina, "the mine") on the Gold Coast in 1637 and took Angola four years later.

All the while, Brazil's sugar industry was thriving. Indeed, the period from 1629 to 1660 saw the heyday of Brazilian sugar production as Dutch merchants strove to maximize sugar exports. Their dominance, and sugar's, was not to last, however. Finally expelled by Portuguese forces in the late 1600s, the Dutch left behind a Brazilian sugar industry that would begin slipping into decline. Yet as it did, other labor-intensive forms of economic activity were developing. For example, as the eighteenth century opened, Brazilian gold mine operators sought both unskilled and skilled slave laborers, including carpenters, masons, and smiths. So, in the 1700s, although Brazil was losing its position as the world's leading sugar producer, the result was another surge in slave imports to its shores.

In all, the Atlantic slave trade brought an estimated 3.5 million Africans to Brazil, including slaves shipped during the 1800s as commercial cultivation of coffee took hold. Like sugarcane planters and mine operators, coffee growers required reliable, efficient labor, and the nineteenth-century slave trade from Africa—as well as internal slave trading from northern to southern Brazil—made the rapid expansion of that nation's coffee agriculture possible.

Having lost Brazil, the Dutch simply took their sugar expertise to the Caribbean and set up operations there. Already in place were fledgling sugar enterprises mounted by other European nations, to which Dutch traders provided technological aid and credit to finance the purchase of equipment, land,

and African slaves. In fact, despite their extensive efforts at colonizing the New World, Dutch traders delivered most of the captives they transported from Africa to colonial outposts of other European nations. Among these were British colonies on the islands of Barbados and Jamaica, and the French colony of St. Domingue.

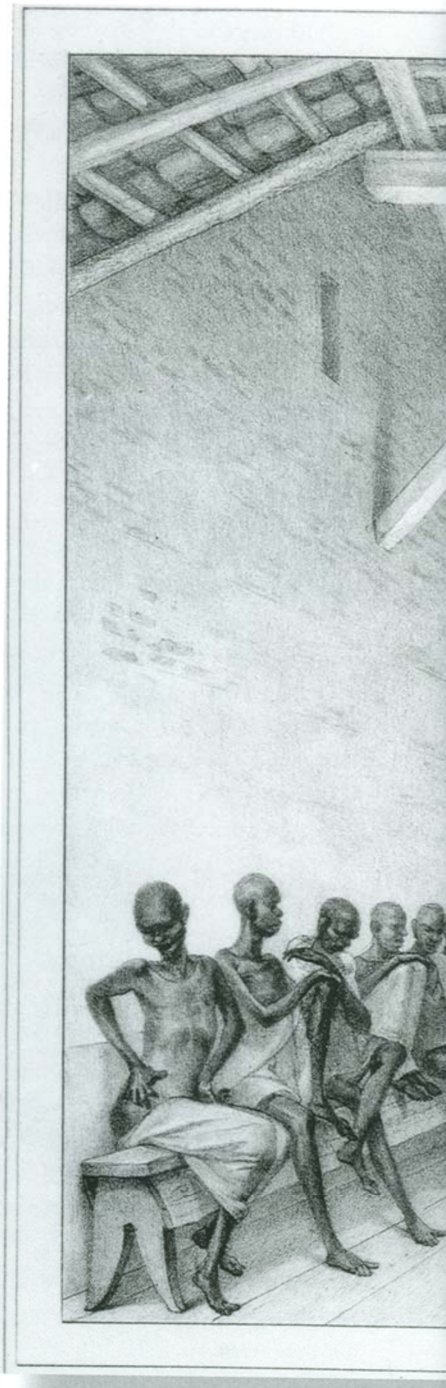
Until the early 1600s, only Spain had possessed colonies in the West Indies. However, those islands were less significant to the Spanish crown than were mainland colonies such as Peru and Mexico. So, while Spaniards had settled on large islands such as Cuba and Hispaniola, the smaller islands of the Lesser Antilles had essentially been left to the native Carib Indians. It was on these islands that the British and other Europeans settled, and during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Britain's colonies would become by far the most successful.[6]

The British founded colonies in Barbados in 1627, in Nevis in 1628, in Montserrat and Antigua in 1632, and in Jamaica in 1655. The first farms on the islands tended to be small, grew mainly tobacco, and employed few slaves. Instead, agricultural labor in the British colonies was performed by workers drawn from Britain's white, lower middle classes, either as voluntary immigrants or as kidnap victims. Working as indentured servants, such people were bound to a plantation owner for four or five years, after which they would receive a plot of land in the colonies.

Around 1640, however, this system started to change as planters began shifting from tobacco and cotton to sugarcane. In Barbados, for instance, with their sugar finding ready markets, Barbadian plantations began to grow larger, eventually averaging 200 acres. Like similar efforts in Brazil, they needed a sure, plentiful supply of workers to maintain the grueling pace of operations. Barbadian planters who had visited Pernambuco to learn how to refine sugar had not failed to notice that Brazilian sugar plantations were operated by African slaves and that slave labor offered clear advantages over employing white workers. They knew also that the substantial revenues to be earned from sugar could justify the purchase of slaves. Even so, for a time British ethnocentrism and a strong aversion to living among black people deterred Barbadian planters from using Africans.

When those attitudes changed, it was in part because white labor was proving increasingly unreliable. Whereas Barbados originally attracted a large number of indentured servants, as time went on the island developed a reputation for cruel conditions and free workers were less and less willing to go there. White labor also was becoming expensive, because wage advances in England had boosted the cost of indentured servants. Slave prices, by contrast, were falling. By the mid-1600s, for example, the cost of purchasing a captive African—which had been the equivalent of about $25 in the 1640s—had dropped to $15, making black slaves simply a better value than white servants. With Dutch traders waiting in the wings, willing and able to provide a steady supply of slaves, once the planters of Barbados started using slaves on their sugar plantations they never looked back.

With the marriage of sugar and slavery, the Barbadian plantation economy could flourish. Moreover, the Dutch merchants who had educated British would-be sugar producers not only supplied their clients with slaves on easy terms, but also sold British sugar on the continent at profitable prices. So successful was the British plantation effort that by 1700 British planters in Barbados, Jamaica, and the Leeward Islands were supplying almost half of the



Terms of Trade

Black Africans were sold to Europeans in exchange for a vast assortment of goods—seashells, rum, brandy, wine, guns and gunpowder, tobacco, knives, and a whole host of metal goods ranging from copper, silver, and pewter to gold and ingots of Swedish iron. Most slavers also carried various kinds of cloth, for while West African weavers produced their own fine-quality textiles, their output could not meet the demand. Africa had ready buyers for cottons, linens, and other fabrics woven in Britain, France, Holland, and India. Representatives of the Dutch East India Company even traded for slaves with exotic Chinese silks. Africans also prized Swedish amber and glass beads manufactured in Italy and England, using them along with precious metals or shells to create exquisite items of personal adornment.

Certain trade items came to be broadly used as currency. Iron bars and copper or brass manillas were in this category at times, as were cowrie shells. Collected mainly from the Maldive Islands in the Indian Ocean, the glossy, brightly marked shells were small and therefore readily portable, and could not easily be counterfeited. It has been estimated that in the 1700s Europeans traded more than 25 million pounds of cowries for slaves and other merchandise, paying over 150,000 shells for a single slave. During that same period, a slave might also be purchased for firearms at the rate of three to six guns per captive. The number of guns required to buy a slave increased along with the European demand for slave labor. As a result, guns manufactured in England and other slave-trading nations allowed some African rulers to outfit large armies for fighting their internal wars—conflicts that produced prisoners of war who were then sold as slaves to purchase more guns.

Surgeon John Atkins, recounting his observations aboard British slave ships in the 1720s, notes that different sorts of items were wanted in different places: "Crystals, orangos, corals, and brass-mounted cutlasses are almost peculiar to the Windward Coast. … Cowries [are wanted] at Whydah, copper and iron bars at Callabar; but arms, gun powder, tallow, old sheets, cottons of all the various denominations, and English spirits are everywhere called for. Sealing wax, and pipes are necessary in small quantities [because] they serve for dashees [tips] and a ready purchase for fish, a goat, kid, or a fowl."

During one voyage Atkins also kept track of equivalent values of slaves and trade goods. During a port call in Sierra Leone, he recorded that a woman slave for his vessel's cargo was purchased for three pieces of chintz, one piece of "handkerchief stuff," another piece of "planes" cloth (a material typically woven in Wales), and seven large brass kettles. A boy cost seven smaller kettles, five pieces of cotton cloth, a length of fabric called "brawls," and one iron bar. At another trading town farther down the West African coast, an adult male slave cost his British buyers "8 trading guns, 1 wicker bottle, 2 cases of spirits and 28 sheets." Additional trade items in Atkins's record include brandy, rum, gunpowder,

Copper Katanga crosses of a type used in trade in the 1730s in the region of modern Nigeria. Their value at the time is said to have been sufficient to purchase several slaves. (Sample Pittman Collection, New York City.)

"pacato beads," beef tallow, pewter tankards and washbasins, small and large brass pans, musket shot, cutlasses, and beer.

A different trader in a different time and place would have encountered other trade terms, and in general the prices Europeans paid for African slaves varied over time. In order to measure profits, traders ultimately converted slave prices into their own currencies. While it is difficult to figure modern equivalents (for example, the United States dollar did not even exist until rather late in the trade), the relative prices paid for slaves during different periods are revealing. In 1550, when the trade was still in its infancy, the average cost of a slave in Africa was the equivalent of £10, increasing 40 percent (to £14) by 1600. Prices remained steady until the 1630s and then declined, falling to less than £5 in the 1670s (a sum nonetheless equal to a year's wages for some English workers of the day). Sixty years later, in the 1730s, New World sugar plantations were thriving, demand was high, and the cost of a slave in Africa had jumped to £25. While wars preoccupied Europe during the 1790s, the slave price dropped sharply (to about £15), and by the 1860s, when the transatlantic trade in slaves had been outlawed in much of the Americas, slaves could once again be purchased for about £10—the same price as 300 years earlier. On the other side of the Atlantic, however, in those places where slavery continued to exist, prices skyrocketed as illegal traders' risks grew. In the waning decades of the nineteenth century, a slave purchased in Africa for the rough equivalent of $15 might sell in Cuba for $1,500. —*B.C.M.*

An artisan of the Kuba peoples (Congo) used cowrie shells, glass beads, and raffia to create this hat. (Hampton University Museum of Art.)

sugar consumed in Europe. By 1724, all available land on Barbados was under cultivation or had been granted. As the plantation system in the British West Indies peaked in the eighteenth century, the interdependence of sugar and slavery was an accepted fact.

Despite the great need for slaves, the supply to British colonies was not always consistent. Jamaica was a case in point. Because of that island's vast area of land suitable for agriculture, the demand for slaves there was especially keen, and during the 1600s British and Dutch slave ships called regularly with cargo holds laden with captive Africans. In 1713, however, British slavers received Spanish asientos obligating them to supply Spain's colonies with 4,800 slaves a year. As a result, instead of receiving slaves for its own plantations, Jamaica became merely the depot for through-shipping slaves to Spanish holdings. Sweetening the pot for the British slavers was the ready payment offered by the Spaniards, whereas resident British planters expected long periods of credit. To secure enough labor for their plantations, in 1732 Jamaican planters even attempted (unsuccessfully) to impose duties on slaves exported from the island.

"A Liverpool slave ship," painted by William Jackson around 1780. (Courtesy Board of Trustees, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside.)

Slavery in French and Danish Colonies

French pirates and privateers were operating in the Americas as early as 1504. It was not until the seventeenth century, however, that France acquired colonies there.[7] The French occupied three islands in the West Indies, settling St. Christopher, Guadeloupe, and Martinique by 1635. They secured the western part of Hispaniola, or Santo Domingo, from the Spanish in 1697, renaming the new French colony St. Domingue. After initially growing tobacco, indigo, cotton, and ginger, colonial French planters, like their British neighbors, shifted to sugar production and proceeded to organize supply monopolies to provide their operations with slave labor. Beginning in 1664, sugar was the primary export of the French West Indies, an activity that transformed the islands' economies. Land values soared and, as in British colonies, smallholders were eventually replaced by large plantations.

The heart of French sugar production lay in Guadeloupe, Martinique, and St. Domingue, and for the first few decades plantations there relied on indentured labor. As a result, the scale of sugar production in the French Caribbean was slow to increase and there were few slaves on the French islands until after 1700. Around that time in St. Domingue, for example, most planters owned at most twelve slaves—a paltry number compared to the slave populations of other European colonies of the time.

In 1710 St. Domingue exported just 2,920 tons of sugar. By the 1740s, however, the island had become the most productive of the French colonies; by 1791, at the pinnacle of its success as a sugar exporter, annual sugar production had grown to 78,696 tons. Given this sizeable enterprise, during the eighteenth century much of the French transatlantic slave trade was directed to that colony. In the end, France became the third most active European slave-trading nation, accounting for just over 20 percent of African slaves imported to the Americas, most coming from Angola and the Bight of Benin.

In 1671 Danish entrepreneurs also had established Caribbean sugar plantations, on the islands of St. Thomas and St. John.[8] By comparison with the French and British, however, their success was limited, and by 1725 there were only about 6,000 slaves on those two Danish islands. On nearby St. Croix, which the Danes purchased from France in 1733, sugar also was produced on a relatively small scale and in 1754 that island claimed a population of only 7,600 slaves.

Slaves Come to North America

The first black people to arrive in the mainland colonies of North America came before the systematic importation of slaves began. As early as 1526, Spain had attempted to establish a North American colony, landing 200 colonists and 100 African slaves near Cape Fear, North Carolina. The venture failed as harsh conditions and disease took their familiar toll, and when a remnant of the Spanish expedition returned to Hispaniola it left behind Africans who subsequently became assimilated into local Indian groups.

The organized delivery of slaves into British North America dates to 1619, when a Dutch slaver sold twenty black Africans to the settlement at Jamestown in Virginia. The year 1625 saw the first Dutch shipment of Africans to New Amsterdam, the settlement that would grow into New York. Indeed, until 1654 enterprising Dutch slavers dominated the supply of captive labor to North America. Later, after the enactment of the Navigation Acts in 1651 (which regulated shipping to Britain's colonies) and the establishment of British monopoly trading companies, providing slaves to American colonial planters would become the business of British and American merchants.

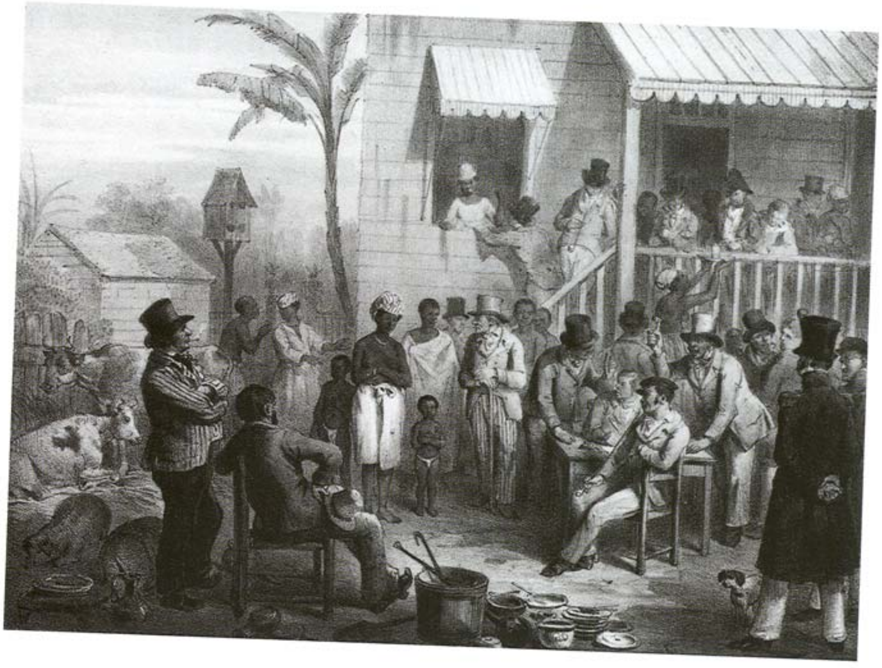
In North America the demand for slaves was relatively limited until the 1700s. By and large, the British colonies there shared a similar climate with the mother country, which hampered efforts to find a new and profitable agricultural export crop that could justify the required investment. In the long term, however,

This leather handbag decorated with cowrie shells would have belonged to an important African personage. (Danny Drain Collection, Walterboro, South Carolina.)

Don Álvare, who became the king of Congo in 1567, is shown here giving an audience to Dutch ambassadors. In addition to selling captive Africans to European slave traders, Álvare used slaves to work his land and as servants in his household, as concubines and soldiers, and to serve in other capacities as well. (Thomas Astley, ed., *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*, London, 1745–47.)

cultivation of tobacco, rice, and later, cotton, in the southern colonies of British North America would bring both economic rewards and large numbers of African slaves to the country.[9]

The need for agricultural labor first became clear as commercial tobacco production increased. In 1627 Virginia exported £500,000 worth of tobacco, grown mostly by white workers. By the eighteenth century, however, Virginia and neighboring Maryland had responded to the increasing difficulty of obtaining indentured servants by turning in earnest to slave labor, a change that was reflected in growth of their exports. The colonists shipped £20 million worth of tobacco to England in 1700, £80 million by the mid-1730s, and £220 million in 1775.



A slave mother and her children being sold at auction, probably in the Caribbean. (John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.)

Colonial South Carolina's economic base also grew slowly until rice became a viable export crop in 1695. And as with tobacco agriculture in Virginia and Maryland, the cultivation of rice in South Carolina came to rely almost entirely on the efforts of black slaves. Beginning in the early 1690s, African slave imports boosted the black population so that it equaled, then surpassed, the white population. By 1708 blacks comprised the majority of South Carolina's population, most of them toiling in the rice fields.

It is interesting to note that initially South Carolina's white settlers had been unable to grow rice because they understood little about how to cultivate it. Their African slaves, however, knew well how to plant and care for the crop because an indigenous variety of rice (*Oryza blaberrima*) was grown in African rain forests. In fact, African rice was routinely part of the provisions loaded aboard slave ships headed for the Americas. Thus enslaved Africans, who before 1700 faced food shortages and had been encouraged to grow their own food, apparently succeeded with rice crops where their white masters had failed.

Slaves harvesting rice. (*Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, November 1859.)

While the use of slave labor allowed various crops to be produced profitably over a wide swath of the American South, the region's land area dedicated to plantations—and the concomitant use of slaves—remained small until the end of the eighteenth century, when Eli Whitney's cotton gin suddenly transformed green-seed upland cotton into a commercial crop. The economic rewards of growing cotton also expanded the plantation region from the narrow confines of the southern Atlantic coast to the rest of the South. Even so, cotton plantations were not a major factor in bringing slaves from Africa to North America, because the spectacular expansion of cotton farming in southern states came mere years before the trade was abolished. The same phenomenon applied to North American sugar; sugar production in Louisiana began to boom in 1795, just a little over a decade before international slaving became illegal. As a result, much of the labor needed for North American cotton and sugar production in the nineteenth century came from the existing slave population, rather than from fresh imports from Africa or elsewhere.

Despite the comparatively slow development of African slavery in North America, American maritime merchants showed interest in participating in the Atlantic slave trade as early as 1643. Their involvement was modest at first, with most slaves being transported north from Barbados and other West Indian islands. Around 1680, however, when the American colonies' need for agricultural workers began to burgeon, slave buyers began showing a preference for slaves from Africa and entrepreneurs eager to fill the demand soon entered the arena. Between 1698 and the outbreak of the American War of Independence in 1775, Boston, New York, and Newport (Rhode Island) became the major ports from which ships were launched into the Atlantic slave trade, with vessels coming also from New London (Connecticut), Providence (Rhode Island), and Philadelphia. After the United States of America came into being, the new nation's major slave-trading ports were Newport, Boston, and Charleston (South Carolina).

Demand and Supply

Whatever the destination of slaves in the New World, the purpose of their enslavement and transport across the Atlantic was purely economic, and their lives in slavery were often brutal. The demands of sugar plantations in particular, which called for sixteen to twenty hours of daily labor in the harvesting seasons, led almost inevitably to high mortality among slaves. Many survived only eight to ten years, and some sugar planters periodically had to replace entire populations of enslaved workers. Gold mining, especially in Brazil, claimed thousands of lives. There, a punishing regimen of prospecting in icy mountain streams brought rapid physical deterioration, and the combination of overwork and disease killed most slaves within ten or twelve years. It is therefore not surprising that overall, the largest number of African slaves went in a steady stream to the mining and sugar-growing areas of Brazil and the Caribbean. During the course of the transatlantic slave trade, Brazil imported about 38 percent of the slaves who came from Africa; another 51 percent were divided roughly equally among the British Caribbean, the French Caribbean, and Spanish America; some 6 percent went to North America, and another 6 percent to the Caribbean colonies of Holland, Denmark, and Sweden.

Initially, the African seacoast furnished a large number of the captives Europeans purchased. With increasing demand, however, African suppliers of those human cargoes were obliged to resort to the backcountry. Regardless of where slaves came from, they were acquired mainly through warfare or subsequent tribute arrangements, through kidnapping, and through judicially sanctioned enslavement. In some places, for example, legal infractions that could lead to enslavement included adultery and the unauthorized removal of sacred and religious objects. Among groups like the Tio and the people of Iboke in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), slavery was often the punishment for convicted adulterers who were unable to pay a fine, which was equal to the value of a slave. The Akwamu kings and chiefs of the Gold Coast could exploit anti-adultery laws for personal gain, taking as wives women who were married to them in name only. At the end of the year, the women were asked to identify men who had slept with them during that time, and these transgressors were then sold into slavery unless relatives ransomed them. Also on the Gold Coast, religious objects were often laid in pathways, and those displacing them could be seized and sold or be required to forfeit the price of a slave.

On the Upper Guinea coast, by the late 1500s a slew of infractions were legal grounds for enslavement. Examples included administering poison to or placing a fetish on others, committing adultery with a wife of the king, soliciting war against the king, or asking the gods to bring about his death. Indebtedness and offenses against taboos were other accepted routes to forced labor. These practices allowed ample opportunity for fraud and abuse, especially in cases involving adultery and witchcraft. In some instances, whole families had to follow the convicted individual into slavery as though they also had committed sins for which their descendants must suffer. In some areas of Africa, misfortune brought on by drought or famine caused children or even entire families to be sold into slavery. As the commerce in slaves stimulated a desire for exotic trade goods that Europeans could provide, it was not uncommon for people to sell their children to gratify new desires or relieve financial difficulties. Among the Tio, for instance, a maternal uncle could approach the father of his niece or nephew for money and if the father could not provide it, he was asked to sell one of his children. These youngsters and other individuals who had been sold by their own people were unlikely to attempt escape, since they had no place to go.

The slave delivery system within Africa was generally characterized by monopolistic restrictions. In the savanna that extends from the Senegambia basin to Lake Chad in central Africa, as in other areas beyond the forest, the trade was controlled by Muslims who, with their agents, formed trading caravans that at times included up to 1,000 people, with slaves bought and sold en route. From the Bight of Benin to the Gold Coast, strong states like Akwamu and Oyo in the seventeenth century, and Oyo, Dahomey, and the Asante nation during the eighteenth century, controlled the procurement and sale of slaves.[10] The king of Oyo and his court prevented merchants in the area north of them from passing through their territory, a restriction that allowed the king's traders uncontested access to the trade. In Dahomey the commerce in slaves was not as complete a monopoly, but the state had a strong commitment to controlling it and severely restricted the internal movements of European traders on the Dahomey coast. The Asante also maintained a state monopoly over the slave trade; after conquering coastal lands they collected ground rent from Europeans who maintained forts there. The same monopolistic practices extended from the area of the Benue River to the Bight of Biafra.

One trading organization, that of the Aro, has particularly intrigued historians of the slave trade. The Aro originally came from the Nigerian town of Arochuku, but from about the seventeenth century they established extensive commercial networks in the interior of southeastern Nigeria. Their trade dominance has been attributed to their exploitation of the respected oracle Arochuku, who demanded from supplicants human "sacrifices" who eventually were sold into the slave trade. While the Aro were heavily involved in the integration, supply, and wholesale aspects of the slave delivery

system, agreements and cooperation with various groups and neighboring communities facilitated their slave transport operation. And although the Aro were one of the most successful slave-trading groups, there were others in southeastern Nigeria that blocked Aro expansion and maintained their own trading networks.

A different delivery system operated around Angola during the early 1600s. Agents were sent to the interior to buy slaves on the region's borders with Congo. Among the most important markets were fairs of the Mpumbu near Stanley Pool. Agents—mulatto sons or trustworthy slaves of the Portuguese—were called *pombeiros* (or *pumbeiros*) from an indigenous word meaning hawker. In some instances, the pombeiros remained in the interior trading for years, periodically receiving merchandise from the coast. Portuguese governors themselves obtained slaves through raids and from tribal chiefs. Slaves were also transported from the Angolan interior by merchants who accompanied Portuguese soldiers during Portuguese wars of conquest and purchased war captives from them.

Whatever the mechanism by which slaves were procured, they were always brought to the coast of Africa for sale. Chained to prevent their escape, many first passed through various markets and masters, some being used along the way as domestics or as field hands during the planting or harvesting season.

European ship captains and slavers who arrived at the African coast were required to obtain a trade license, typically by paying fees or purchasing a number of slaves at a specified price from the local chief. In addition, some form of permission was often necessary for "breaking trade," as this procedure was sometimes called. The fees and numerous presents European slave traders were obliged to give Africans to pave the way for business were governed by a complex protocol and were subject to change at the behest of the local people. In general, customs and dues were payable on all imports and exports, and Europeans strove to comply with such demands to avoid jeopardizing their ability to trade.

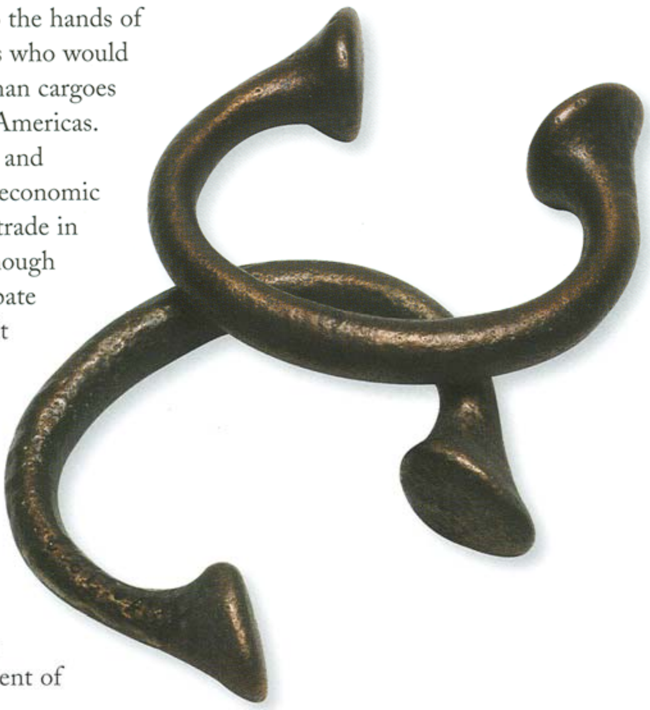
Because of the role Europeans played in the transatlantic slave trade, and the fact that it was the need for labor in the Americas that fostered the commerce in human beings, the trade has sometimes been called the European slave trade. It also has been termed the "triangular trade," reflecting the fact that the trade route often involved a voyage of three legs: from Europe to Africa where trade goods were exchanged for slaves; on to the Americas where slaves were sold for cash, promissory notes, or agricultural products; then back to Europe, where the New World commodities would be sold. Not all slave voyages conformed to this pattern, however; for example, some slave ships originating in Brazil and North America participated in what amounted to a bilateral trade, from the Americas to Africa and back.

On arrival at their American destination, slavers could sell their cargo in three ways: by private treaty, by "scramble," and by public auction. In private treaties, slaves were sold either directly to planters or to specialized wholesalers at an established price. During the early years of the trade, island merchants served as go-betweens, arranging slave sales to planters on commission. Later, the merchants traded for themselves, buying captives from arriving ships and reselling them. When slaves were sold by scramble, prospective buyers rushed on board to select slaves they liked at a fixed price. For the captives a scramble sale could be a frenzied, terrifying event as buyers frantically grabbed and roped their quarry. At public auction, Africans were examined, poked, and prodded, and sold to the highest bidder. Having disposed of its slave cargo, a ship would return to Europe with colonial products such as coffee, sugar, and cotton. Sometimes, though, ships returned to Europe simply in ballast, their economic mission apparently satisfied.

The number of Africans sold into slavery across the Atlantic is great enough to have had significant implications for political development in Africa, for retarded economic growth there, and for what has been called Africa's underdevelopment.[13] Because it was difficult to procure both slaves and ordinary trade goods from the same area, during the decades of the slave trade normal economic activities could not be pursued. At the same time, the threat of enslavement increased fear and insecurity and stifled creativity that might otherwise have led to improvements in Africa. Furthermore, African rulers and the few other key individuals who established the demand for imports to Africa favored consumable goods and luxuries that did little to foster economic diversification or create new wealth in their homelands.

It is sometimes asserted that the goods Africans accepted in return for their slaves were of poor quality or, in some cases, essentially worthless. However, whereas African slave sellers may have been greedy or shortsighted in selling the best asset of their societies, they cannot be accused of stupidity. In fact, Africans met European traders on the coast on equal terms and could accept or reject the commercial items they had to offer. Ample evidence exists that European traders selected their trade goods carefully to suit African tastes and interests. That said, the availability of some products offered in exchange for slaves, especially textiles, iron, guns, and liquor, has been blamed for forestalling their manufacture in Africa.

In the end, African slave traders organized a far-flung commercial network that delivered many millions of their countrymen into the hands of European slavers who would disperse the human cargoes throughout the Americas. Both Europeans and Africans reaped economic profit from this trade in people. And although scholars may debate the level of profit it yielded and the distribution of those profits among the participants, none can deny the profound contribution of African labor to the development of the Americas.



Europeans used the bronze or copper bracelets called manillas to barter for slaves, especially in the Bight of Benin from the Gold Coast to Nigeria. In the early days of the trade a slave might cost between twelve and twenty-five manillas, depending on the captive's age, sex, and health, as well as current market values. By about 1520, when colonial sugar operations were expanding rapidly and the demand for slaves was burgeoning, slave prices had risen sharply to more than fifty manillas for one captive African. Eventually, foundries in Birmingham, England turned out the bracelets in large quantities. The manillas shown here were recovered from the schooner *Douro*, which sank in 1843.