

THE SLAVE TRADE

Bennett, Lerone, Before the Mayflower, Chapter 2, (17 pages of dramatic reading)

Mannix & Cowley, Black Cargoes. Many details on African end of the trade, century by century account, personal stories bring the material to life.

Frazier, E. Franklin, Race and Culture Contacts in the Modern World
Williams, Eric, Capitalism and Slavery. Detailed economic view of the role of slavery in the development of capitalism. Scholarly.

The slave trade grew to its unprecedented modern proportions against the background an ancient tradition of human servitude in Europe, Asia, and Africa. It was the development of capitalism, a European phenomenon that was to turn all European contact with the peoples of Asia, Africa, and America away from reciprocal barter and cultural exchange to slavery and other arrangements for of the exploitation of non-Europeans. The pattern of European-non-European relations has been marked by this relationship of white capital to colored labor since the 18th century. This is not to assign a purely racial interpretation to the development of modern slavery; Europeans also came to dominate and exploit less technologically developed Europeans, like the Irish. But to many who consider the problem of African slavery in America, the factor which refuses to recede into the background is this racial world-wide pattern of forced labor, destruction or displacement of population, and dehumanizing racism, and the attempted destruction of cultures impeding the process. Others examine closely the period before slavery acquired its racial character, and pressing the racial interpretation to the background, outline an economically motivated birthing institution shaped primarily by political and economic expediency, not notions of supremacy.

Ancient slavery seldom regarded slaves as mere property. In Africa, Asia and Europe bondsmen had certain limited rights, were considered to be human, and could acquire a higher status through their own efforts. The ancient slave trade was based on war and kidnapping, and conquest was the principal avenue to enslavement. The early trade was highly "integrated". Arabs carried Europeans to Africa and Asia as well as Africans and Asians to Europe. The direct European-African trade developed from the Portuguese contact with Africa in the 15th century. It fit easily into the already existing African trade in men. By the late 1400's hundreds of black Africans were coming into Spain and Portugal every year. There were parts of Portugal where Africans and mulattos outnumbered the whites before long. These persons were soon assimilated into the general population, as the complexion of many Portuguese today demonstrates.

The trade was not firmly racial even as late as the 1600's. There is an interesting account in Black Cargoes which gives feel for the nature of the early trade. Andrew Battel, an English sailor, joined a British shipscrew in 1594 to prey upon Spanish trade to the New World. While ashore in South America, Battel and others were themselves captured by Brazilian Indians who sold them to the Portuguese governor. The Governor

was himself interested in the trade in men, and he sent Battel on a slave-trading mission to the Congo with the promise of freedom if the enterprise was successful. A Dutch ship captured Battel's ship on the coast of Africa, and imprisoned him along with other Portuguese, Moorish and Egyptian criminals and captives of other sorts. This group engineered an escape taking Battel with them, only to be seized by some Africans who sold them back to the Portuguese. The Portuguese decided to use the company to make war on local Africans in order to secure slaves. But this strange company of "slave-slavers" did so well that they attracted the attention of some Africans who wished to enlist their help in some slaving venture of their own, for a good cut of the profits. The group did so well that the Gaga tribesmen were relectant to let them go and made them slaves to bind them as best they could. Finally a Portuguese captain persuaded the Gaga to let their captives go with promises to return with others. Battel was to stay behind as a hostage to close the deal. The Portuguese never intended to return for Battel, and he remained a slave to the Gaga until he became concerned that he might be used for sacrifice as slaves often were in Africa. He managed an escape and reached the English on the coast of Africa. Early slavery meant every man for himself especially if one were propertyless-- in America, In Africa, and even as we shall see in England.

The first bondsmen used in the West Indies and in North and South America after the failure to use Indians were white. Some bound themselves for passage to the New World, but as the demand grew many were kidnapped in the streets of European cities. Others exchanged the servitude of a prison sentence for servitude on the plantations of America as a matter not of their desires, but of national policy. Although freemen were protected by English law numerous governing bodies and officials changed, bent or broke the law to secure a part of the great profits involved. Many were sentenced to jail on petty charges and then sent to America as criminals. English law recognized 300 capital offenses, and stealing cloth, burning corn stacks, hindering customs officials were offenses for which the penalty was transportation. Jailers, customs officers, court officials looked the other way while the trade swelled to 10,000 between 1654 and 1685 in Bristol alone. The cry of kidnapper in the streets of English cities was enough to start a riot. The accused were sometimes beaten to death by the people of lower class areas before help could reach them. Half of the English immigrants to the New World were bondsmen, in Pennsylvania it was at times as high as two-thirds. Europeans labored in the sugar fields of the West Indies until the late 17th century when desirability of black labor over white became apparent to planters. Europeans could escape and disappear into the free population, they were acquainted with their rights under English law and custom, they could protest harsh treatment on Christian grounds as Christians, and the opposition to kidnapping and the white middle passage was growing in England. Bondsmen had to be offered shorter terms as inducement to come to America willingly. Africans on the other hand could be purchased for life at the same price as white men cost for years, could not claim the rights of Englishmen, were highly visible; and there was sufficient

racial feeling among the populace to play upon his physical characteristics as a mark of inferiority. In European society subordination was still considered essential. The working classes were still considered brutish, sheeplike, mindless. Inferiority on account of color fit well into this view of mankind. In addition, by the end of the 17th century mercantilists were arguing for the development of industry within a country for export as the key to national wealth. The best way to reduce costs in these industries was to keep wages down by means of an oversupply of labor. Fear of depopulation at home contributed to general criticism of the treatment of white bondsmen in the colonies—particularly among those interested in the growing Royal African Company founded in 1672 to control the British trade in African slaves.

Were white bondsmen on staple crop plantations treated more kindly in consideration of their whiteness? Not according to Eric Williams. The condition of white bondsmen degenerated under plantation economy. The Middle Passage was crowded and disease ridden, the planter need not worry about preserving his temporary property because it was temporary. We cannot equate the horrors of passage for, ~~all~~ over, when we consider that African cargoes were all unwilling, that the trade was at points illegal and the temptation to dispose of entire cargoes great, and that new foods, strange looking men, and total unfamiliarity with the sea, and belief that they would be eaten on arrival was added to the burden of Africans in the Middle Passage.

Once the African trade was seized upon as the best source of labor it exploded to new proportions. The Europeans considered it a prize in every important war; the wealth it produced was recognized as the foundation of colonial profits, but also as an impetus to shipping, manufacture, and capital for reinvestment. Bristol, center of the trade in Englishmen, shifted readily to a center of the African trade. Liverpool dominated the trade however, and by 1771 its shipping was one third occupied in the slave trade. The manufacture of European goods for the trade was also stimulated, and Manchester benefitted no less than Liverpool. The American slave trade was of minor importance in this scheme of things, at least to the English. But as sugar died in the West Indies and cotton rose to replace it as a source of wealth, Americans came to dominate the trade, by then illegal. This illegal status did not affect the number of Africans brought to the United States. Between 1808 and 1860 this number was thought to equal the record of the two previous centuries. While the American trade and plantation was a kind of side event to the British, it was to provide the same stimulus to the American economy as the West Indies had provided the British. The pattern was the same, the period of development was the same, the economic practices and development of an ideology and body of law to protect slavery was the same. Americans were only Englishmen up to 1763 and there was considerable movement of planter, poor white, and black slave between the Indies and the mainland.

What of Africa and the trade? The European method was to set up posts called factories on the coast. El Mina castle was built by the Portuguese in the 1480's. It still stands today and in the heyday of the trade it was held in turn by Dutchmen, Englishmen, Germans, Danes, and Africans. Originally the barter trade with Africans included a variety of European goods, gold, ivory, and a few slaves. The American trade specialized in lumber and supplies for sugar in the West Indies, rum for seasoned slaves in New England and southern ports, and rum for men in Africa. To the Africans gunpowder became the most significant commodity. In the increasing internecine warfare stimulated by the trade, it was a necessity if you were to protect yourself from slavers, white and black. The only commodity that could secure these guns was in turn, more black men. The scramble among Africans matched the scramble among Europeans as a response to the trade. In terms of the cost in human life however, the African results were far more devastating. It is estimated that from 50 to 100 millions were taken out of Africa or died in slaving wars. Fifty millions did not make it to the New World. The survival rate was no more than 50% and possibly less. In the years of the trade, roughly 1650-1850, Africa's population remained constant while Europe's population tripled and world population doubled. That is, all of the natural increase of her population was depleted.

The last industrial nation to abolish slavery was the U.S. Possibly the last ship known to have landed in America came to Florida in the spring of 1861 with 600 of the illegal cargo. The forces unleashed by this phase of European capitalism have not yet come to rest either in the United States or in the world. It is our generation which may see them resolved.

Short Fact Sheet

A. Africans Reaching the Americas

1500-1599	900,000
1600-1699	2,750,000
1700-1808	7,000,000
1808 and after	4,000,000

B. Slaves Imported to United States

Prior to 1715	30,000	
1715-1750	90,000	
1751-1760	35,000	
1761-1770	74,500	
1771-1790	34,000	
1791-1808	70,000	Legal trade ended in 1808

After 1808 -there are several estimates ranging from 300,000 to 2,500,000. We think it was between 300,000-500,000.

C. Negroes in the U.S. Population

	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>Negro</u>	<u>Free Negro</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1790	3,929,000	754,000	59,000	19%
1860	31,443,000	4,442,000	500,000	14%

D. States with Heaviest Concentration of Free Negroes in 1860.

Maryland	83,942
Virginia	58,042
Pennsylvania	56,449
New York	49,000
Ohio	36,673
N. Carolina	30,463
N. Jersey	25,000
Delaware	19,829
Louisiana	18,647

Figures are approximate -they are taken from Franklin, Slavery to Freedom, U.S. Census figures, Myrdal, American Dilemma