

PART

III

The Middle Passage



VARIETY OF OPINION

We were thrust into the hold in a state of nudity . . . ; the hold was so low we could not stand up. . . .

MAHOMMAH GARDU BAQUAQUA

Here we have nearly one-third given apparently for the average loss on the passage, and this estimated by the slave-dealers themselves on the American side of the Atlantic.

THOMAS FOWELL BUXTON

One conclusion that might be drawn is that, in reducing the estimated total export of slaves from about twenty million to about ten million, the harm done to African societies is also reduced by half. This is obvious nonsense.

PHILIP D. CURTIN

Thousands of ship crossings have now been statistically analyzed, and none show a correlation of any significance between either tonnage or space available and mortality.

HERBERT S. KLEIN

The evidential base for the study of the Atlantic slave trade . . . has been revolutionized. . . . Perhaps this book will be the last to devote a major part of its thrust to assessing the overall size of the slave trade.

DAVID ELTIS AND DAVID RICHARDSON

Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua

An African's Ordeal

Few Africans who crossed the Atlantic on a slave ship had both the opportunity and the desire to write of their experiences. One who did was Mahommah G. Baquaqua, who was sold from the infamous port of Whydah on the Slave Coast in the 1840s. Though his autobiography is less well known than that of Olaudah Equiano, modern scholars have confirmed the authenticity of Baquaqua's account of the Middle Passage whereas Equiano's has been questioned. Both authors emphasized the physical and mental ordeals of their Atlantic voyages.

When all were ready to go aboard, we were chained together, and tied with ropes round about our necks, and were thus drawn down to the sea shore. The ship was lying some distance off. I had never seen a ship before, and my idea of it was, that it was some object of worship of the white man. I imagined that we were all to be slaughtered, and

From Samuel Moore, "Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua, a Native of Zoogoo, in the Interior of Africa" (Detroit: Geo. E. Pomeroy & Co., 1854), p. 41-44. Printed from the electronic edition in "Documenting the American South," Copyright © 2001, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

were being led there for that purpose. I felt alarmed for my safety, and despondency had almost taken sole possession of me.

A kind of feast was made ashore that day, and those who rowed the boats were plentifully regaled with whiskey, and the slaves were given rice and other good things in abundance. I was not aware that it was to be my last feast in Africa. I did not know my destiny. Happy for me, that I did not. All I knew was, that I was a slave, chained by the neck, and that I must readily and willingly submit, come what would, which I considered was as much as I had any right to know.

At length, when we reached the beach, and stood on the sand, oh! how I wished that the sand would open and swallow me up. My wretchedness I cannot describe. It was beyond description. The reader may imagine, but anything like an outline of my feelings would fall very short of the mark, indeed. There were slaves brought hither from all parts of the country, and taken on board the ship. The first boat had reached the vessel in safety, notwithstanding the high wind and rough sea; but the last boat that ventured was upset, and all in her but one man were drowned. The number who were lost was about thirty. The man that was saved was very stout, and stood at the head of the boat with a chain in his hand, which he grasped very tightly in order to steady the boat; and when the boat turned over, he was thrown with the rest into the sea, but on rising, by some means under the boat, managed to turn it over, and thus saved himself by springing into her, when she righted. This required great strength, and being a powerful man gave him the advantage over the rest. The next boat that was put to sea, I was placed in; but God saw fit to spare me, perhaps for some good purpose. I was then placed in that most horrible of all places, **THE SLAVE SHIP.**

Its horrors, ah! who can describe? None can so truly depict its horrors as the poor unfortunate, miserable wretch that has been confined within its portals. Oh! friends of humanity, pity the poor African, who has been trepanned and sold away from friends and home, and consigned to the hold of a slave ship, to await even more horrors and miseries in a distant land, amongst the religious and benevolent. Yes, even in their very midst; but to the ship! We were thrust into the hold of the vessel in a state of nudity, the males being crammed on one side and the females on the other; the hold was so low that we could not stand up, but were obliged to crouch upon the floor or sit down; day and night were the same to us, sleep being denied as from the confined position of our bodies, and we became desperate through suffering and fatigue.

Oh! the loathsomeness and filth of that horrible place will never be effaced from my memory; nay, as long as memory holds her seat in this distracted brain, will I remember that. My heart even at this day, sickens at the thought of it.

Let those humane individuals, who are in favor of slavery, only allow themselves to take the slave's position in the noisome hold of a slave ship, just for one trip from Africa to America, and without going into the horrors of slavery further than this, if they do not come out thorough-going abolitionists, then I have no more to say in favor of abolition. But I think their views and feelings regarding slavery will be changed in some degree, however; if not, let them continue in the course of slavery, and work out their term in a cotton or rice field, or other plantation, and then if they do not say hold, enough! I think they must be of iron frames, possessing neither hearts nor souls. I imagine there can be but one place more horrible in all creation than the hold of a slave ship, and that place is where slaveholders and their myrmidons are the most likely to find themselves some day, when alas, 'twill be too late, too late, alas!

The only food we had during the voyage was corn soaked and boiled. I cannot tell how long we were thus confined, but it seemed a very long while. We suffered very much for want of water, but was denied all we needed. A pint a day was all that was allowed, and no more; and a great many slaves died upon the passage. There was one poor fellow became so very desperate for want of water, that he attempted to snatch a knife from the white man who brought in the water, when he was taken up on deck and I never knew what became of him. I supposed he was thrown overboard.

When any one of us became refractory, his flesh was cut with a knife, and pepper or vinegar was rubbed in to make him peaceable(!) I suffered, and so did the rest of us, very much from sea sickness at first, but that did not cause our brutal owners any trouble. Our sufferings were our own, we had no one to share our troubles, none to care for us, or even to speak a word of comfort to us. Some were thrown overboard before breath was out of their bodies; when it was thought any would not live, they were got rid of in that way. Only twice during the voyage were we allowed to go on deck to wash ourselves—once whilst at sea, and again just before going into port.

We arrived at Pernambuco, South America, early in the morning, and the vessel played about during the day, without coming to anchor. All that day we neither ate or drank anything, and we were given to

understand that we were to remain perfectly silent, and not make any out-cry, otherwise our lives were in danger. But when "night threw her sable mantle on the earth and sea," the anchor dropped, and we were permitted to go on deck to be viewed and handled by our future masters, who had come aboard from the city. We landed a few miles from the city, at a farmer's house, which was used as a kind of slave market. The farmer had a great many slaves, and I had not been there very long before I saw him use the lash pretty freely on a boy, which made a deep impression on my mind, as of course I imagined that would be my fate ere long, and oh! too soon, alas! were my fears realized.

When I reached the shore, I felt thankful to Providence that I was once more permitted to breathe pure air, the thought of which almost absorbed every other. I cared but little then that I was a slave, having escaped the ship was all I thought about. Some of the slaves on board could talk Portuguese. They had been living on the coast with Portuguese families, and they used to interpret to us. They were not placed in the hold with the rest of us, but come down occasionally to tell us something or other.

These slaves never knew they were to be sent away, until they were placed on board the ship. I remained in this slave market but a day or two, before I was again sold to a slave dealer in the city, who again sold me to a man in the country, who was a baker, and resided not a great distance from Pernambuco.

Thomas Fowell Buxton

An Abolitionist's Evidence

Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton was a member of the British Parliament who turned his attention from domestic prison reform to the abolition of the slave trade. His major work, the *African Slave Trade*, was published in 1839, long after Britain had ceased carrying slaves but before other nations had done so. The grisly details of the slave trade Buxton gleaned from eyewitnesses and official sources were meant to keep up pressure on governments to end the trade.

From Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London, 1840), pp. 122, 124-133, 135-139, 172-175.

It was well observed by Mr. Fox, in a debate on the Slave Trade, that

True humanity consists not in a squeamish ear; it consists not in starting or shrinking at such tales as these, but in a disposition of heart to relieve misery. True humanity appertains rather to the mind than to the nerves, and prompts men to use real and active endeavours to execute the actions which it suggests.

In the spirit of this observation, I now go on to remark, that the first feature of this deadly passage, which attracts our attention, is the evident insufficiency, in point of tonnage, of the vessels employed, for the cargoes of human beings which they are made to contain. . . .

We have a faithful description of the miseries of the middle passage, from the pen of an eye-witness, Mr. Falconbridge. His account refers to a period antecedent to 1790. He tells us that

The men Negroes, on being brought aboard ship, are immediately fastened together two and two, by handcuffs on their wrists, and by irons riveted on their legs. . . . They are frequently stowed so close as to admit of no other posture than lying on their sides. Neither will the height between decks, unless directly under the grating, permit them the indulgence of an erect posture, especially where there are platforms, which is generally the case. These platforms are a kind of shelf, about eight or nine feet in breadth, extending from the side of the ship towards the center. They are placed nearly midway between the decks, at the distance of two or three feet from each deck. Upon these the Negroes are stowed in the same manner as they are on the deck underneath.

After mentioning some other arrangements, he goes on to say,

It often happens that those who are placed at a distance from the buckets, in endeavouring to get to them, tumble over their companions, in consequence of their being shackled. These accidents, although unavoidable, are productive of continual quarrels, in which some of them are always bruised. In this distressed situation they desist from the attempt, and . . . this becomes a fresh source of broils and disturbances, and tends to render the situation of the poor captive wretches still more uncomfortable.

In favourable weather they are fed upon deck, but in bad weather their food is given to them below. Numberless quarrels take place among them during their meals; more especially when they are put upon short allowance, which frequently happens. In that case, the weak are obliged to

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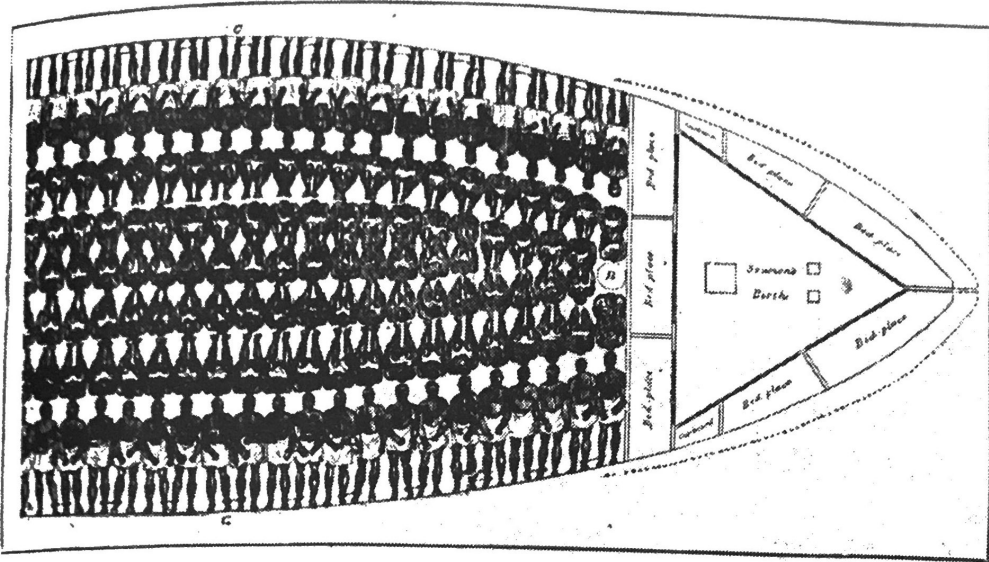
ndon, 1840).

be content with a very scanty portion. Their allowance of water is about half a pint each, at every meal.

Upon the negroes refusing to take sustenance, I have seen coals of fire, glowing hot, put on a shovel, and placed so near their lips as to scorch and burn them, and this has been accompanied with threats of forcing them to swallow the coals, if they any longer persisted in refusing to eat. These means have generally the desired effect. I have also been credibly informed that a certain captain in the Slave Trade poured melted lead on such of the negroes as obstinately refused their food.

Falconbridge then tells us that the negroes are sometimes compelled to dance and to sing, and that, if any reluctance is exhibited, the cat-o'-nine-tails is employed to enforce obedience. He goes on to mention the unbounded licence given to the officers and crew of the slavers, as regards the women; and, speaking of the officers, he says, they

are sometimes guilty of such brutal excesses as disgrace human nature. . . . But, . . . the hardships and inconveniences suffered by the negroes during the passage are scarcely to be enumerated or conceived. They are far more violently affected by the sea-sickness than the Europeans. It frequently terminates in death, especially among the women. The exclusion of the fresh air is among the most intolerable. Most ships have air-ports; but, whenever the sea is rough and the rain heavy, it becomes necessary to shut these and every other conveyance by which air is admitted. The fresh air being thus excluded, the negroes' rooms very soon grow intolerably hot. The confined air, rendered noxious by the effluvia exhaled from their bodies, and by being repeatedly breathed, soon produces fevers and fluxes, which generally carry off great numbers of them. During the voyages I made, I was frequently a witness to the fatal effects of this exclusion of the fresh air. I will give one instance, as it serves to convey some idea, though a very faint one, of the state of these unhappy beings. Some wet and blowing weather having occasioned the portholes to be shut, and the gratings to be covered, fluxes and fevers among the negroes ensued. My profession apartments became so extremely hot as to be only sufferable for a very short time. But the excessive heat was not the only thing that rendered their situation intolerable. The deck, that is, the floor of their rooms, was so covered with the blood and mucus which had proceeded from them in consequence of the flux, that it resembled a slaughter-house. It is not in the power of human imagination to picture to itself a situation more dreadful or more disgusting. . . .



Slave Transport, circa 1750, A diagram showing how slaves were packed into the hull of a ship, some standing, some sitting. (Illustration source unknown/Photo by Henry Guttman/Getty Images)

He proceeds to notice the case of a Liverpool vessel which took on board at the Bonny River nearly 700 slaves (more than three to each ton!); and Falconbridge says,

By purchasing so great a number, the slaves were so crowded, that they were even obliged to lie one upon another. This occasioned such a mortality among them, that, without meeting with unusual bad weather, or having a longer voyage than common, nearly one-half of them died before the ship arrived in the West Indies.

He then describes the treatment of the sick as follows:

The place allotted for the sick negroes is under the half-deck, where they lie on the bare plank. By this means, those who are emaciated frequently have their skin, and even their flesh, entirely rubbed off, by the motion of the ship, from the prominent parts of the shoulders, elbows, and hips, so as to render the bones in those parts quite bare. The excruciating pain which the poor sufferers feel from being obliged to continue in so dreadful a situation, frequently for several weeks, in case they happen to live so long, is not to be conceived or described. Few indeed are ever able to withstand the fatal effects of it. The surgeon, upon going between decks in the morning, frequently finds several of the slaves dead, and, among the men, sometimes a dead and a living negro fastened by their irons together.

He then states that surgeons are driven to engage in the "Guinea Trade" by the confined state of their finances; and that, at most, the only way in which a surgeon can render himself useful, is by seeing that the food is properly cooked and distributed to the slaves:

When once the fever and dysentery get to any height at sea, a cure is scarcely ever effected.

One-half, sometimes two-thirds, and even beyond that, have been known to perish. Before we left Bonny River no less than fifteen died of fevers, and dysenteries, occasioned by their confinement.

Falconbridge also told the Committee of 1790, that,

in stowing the slaves, they wedge them in, so that they had not as much room as a man in his coffin: that, when going from one side of their rooms to the other, he always took off his shoes, but could not avoid pinching them; and that he had the marks on his feet where they bit and scratched him. Their confinement in this situation was so injurious, that he has known them to go down apparently in good health at night, and be found dead in the morning.

Any comment on the statement of Falconbridge must be superfluous: he had been a surgeon in slave-ships, he was a respectable witness before the Committee of Inquiry in 1790, and gave the substance of this statement in evidence. And it ought to be borne in mind that he was an eye-witness of the scenes which he has described. His evidence is the more valuable, when it is considered that we have long been debarred from testimony equally credible and direct: as, since 1807, Britain has taken no part in the slave-traffic; and it has been the policy of the foreign nations who have continued the trade to conceal, as far as they could, the horrors and miseries which are its attendants.

Mr. Granville Sharpe (the zealous advocate of the negro) brought forward a case which aroused public attention to the horrors of this passage. In his Memoirs we have the following account taken from his private memoranda:

March 19, 1783. Gustavus Vas[s]a called on me with an account of 132 negroes being thrown alive into the sea, from on board an English slave-ship.

The circumstances of this case could not fail to excite a deep interest. The master of a slave-ship trading from Africa to Jamaica, and having

440 slaves on board, had thought fit, on a pretext that he might be distressed on his voyage for want of water, to lessen the consumption of it in the vessel, by throwing overboard 132 of the most sickly among the slaves. On his return to England, the owners of the ship claimed from the insurers the full value of those drowned slaves, on the ground that there was an absolute necessity for throwing them into the sea, in order to save the remaining crew, and the ship itself. The underwriters contested the existence of the alleged necessity; or, if it had existed, attributed it to the ignorance and improper conduct of the master of the vessel. This contest of pecuniary interest brought to light a scene of horrid brutality which had been acted during the execution of a detestable plot. From the trial it appeared that the ship *Zong*, Luke Collingwood master, sailed from the island of St. Thomas, on the coast of Africa, September 6, 1781, with 440 slaves and fourteen whites on board, for Jamaica, and that in the November following she fell in with that island; but, instead of proceeding to some port, the master, mistaking, as he alleges, Jamaica for Hispaniola, ran her to leeward. Sickness and mortality had by this time taken place on board the crowded vessel: so that, between the time of leaving the coast of Africa and the 29th of November, sixty slaves and seven white people had died; and a great number of the surviving slaves were then sick and not likely to live. On that day the master of the ship called together a few of the officers, and stated to them that, if the sick slaves died a natural death, the loss would fall on the owners of the ship; but, if they were thrown alive into the sea, on any sufficient pretext of necessity for the safety of the ship, it would be the loss of the underwriters, alleging, at the same time, that it would be less cruel to throw sick wretches into the sea, than to suffer them to linger out a few days under the disorder with which they were afflicted.

To this inhuman proposal the mate, James Kelsal, at first objected; but Collingwood at length prevailed on the crew to listen to it. He then chose out from the cargo 132 slaves, and brought them on deck, all or most of whom were sickly, and not likely to recover, and he ordered the crew by turns to throw them into the sea. "A parcel" of them were accordingly thrown overboard, and, on counting over the remainder the next morning, it appeared that the number so drowned had been fifty-four. He then ordered another parcel to be thrown over, which, on a second counting on the succeeding day, was proved to have amounted to forty-two.

On the third day the remaining thirty-six were brought on deck, and, as these now resisted the cruel purpose of their masters, the arms of twenty-six were fettered with irons, and the savage crew proceeded with the diabolical work, casting them down to join their comrades of the former days. Outraged

misery could endure no longer; the ten last victims sprang disdainfully from the grasp of their tyrants, defied their power, and, leaping into the sea, felt a momentary triumph in the embrace of death. . . .

Such were some of the cruelties of the middle passage towards the end of the last century; and it might have been expected that, since that time, some improvement should have taken place; but it is not so: the treatment of slaves by the British, subsequent to the Slave Regulation Act, and down to 1808, was mildness itself, when compared with the miseries consequent on the trade, and the system which has been pursued in the vain attempt to put it down, since that period to the present time. . . .

Since 1808 the English Government has, with various success, been indefatigably engaged in endeavouring to procure the co-operation of foreign powers for the suppression of the Slave Trade. In virtue of the treaties which have been entered into, many vessels engaged in the traffic have been captured; and much information has been obtained, which has been regularly laid before Parliament. A few of the cases which have been detailed will now be noticed, for the purpose of ascertaining whether the miseries which have been narrated have ceased to exist; or whether they do not now exist in a more intense degree than at any former period.

The first case I notice is that of the Spanish brig *Carlos*, captured in 1814. In this vessel of 200 tons, 512 negroes had been put on board (nearly 180 more than the complement allowed on the proportion of five slaves to three tons). The captor reported that

they were so miserably fed, clothed, &c., that any idea of the horrors of the Slave Trade would fall short of what I saw. Eighty were thrown over-board before we captured her. In many instances I saw the bones coming through the skin from starvation.

In the same year (1814) the schooner *Aglæ*, of 40 tons, was captured with a cargo of 152 negroes (nearly four to each ton).

The only care seemed to have been to pack them as close as possible, and tarpaulin was placed over tarpaulin, in order to give the vessel the appearance of being laden with a well-stowed cargo of cotton and rice.

In 1815 a lieutenant of the navy thus describes the state of a Portuguese slaver, the *St. Joaquim*: he says,

That within twenty-two days after the vessel had left Mozambique thirteen of the slaves had died: that between the capture and their arrival at Simon's Bay, the survivors of them were all sickly and weak, and ninety-two of them afflicted with the flux; that the slaves were all stowed together, perfectly naked, and nothing but rough, unplanned planks to crouch down upon, in a hold situated over their water and provisions, the place being little more than two feet in height, and the space allowed for each slave so small, that it was impossible for them to avoid touching and pressing upon those immediately surrounding. The greater part of them were fastened, some three together, by one leg, each in heavy iron shackles, a very large proportion of them having the flux. Thus they were compelled,

&c. (here a scene of disgusting wretchedness is described.)

The pilot being asked by Captain Baker how many he supposed would have reached their destination, replied, "About half the number that were embarked."

We have next the case of the *Rodeur*, as stated in a periodical work, devoted to medical subjects, and published at Paris. This vessel, it appears, was of 200 tons burden. She took on board a cargo of 160 negroes, and after having been fifteen days on her voyage, it was remarked that the slaves had contracted a considerable redness of the eyes, which spread with singular rapidity. At this time they were limited to eight ounces of water a-day for each person, which quantity was afterwards reduced to the half of a wine-glass. By the advice of the surgeon, the slaves who were in the hold were brought upon deck for the advantage of fresh air; but it became necessary to abandon this expedient, as many of them who were affected with nostalgia threw themselves into the sea, locked in each other's arms. The ophthalmia, which had spread so rapidly and frightfully among the Africans, soon began to infect all on board, and to create alarm for the crew. The danger of infection, and perhaps the cause which produced the disease, were increased by a violent dysentery, attributed to the use of rain-water. The number of the blind augmented every day. The vessel reached Guadaloupe on June 21, 1819, her crew being in a most deplorable condition. Three days after her arrival, the only man who during the voyage had withstood the influence of the contagion, and whom Providence appeared to have preserved as a guide to his unfortunate companions, was seized with the same malady. Of the negroes, thirty-nine had become perfectly blind, twelve had lost one eye, and fourteen were affected with blemishes more or less considerable.

This case excited great interest, and several additional circumstances connected with it were given to the public. It was stated that the captain caused several of the negroes who were prevented in the attempt to throw themselves overboard, to be shot and hung, in the hope that the example might deter the rest from a similar conduct. It is further stated, that upwards of thirty of the slaves who became blind were thrown into the sea and drowned; upon the principle that had they been landed at Guadaloupe, no one would have bought them, while by throwing them overboard the expense of maintaining them was avoided, and a ground was laid for a claim on the underwriters by whom the cargo had been insured, who are said to have allowed the claim, and made good the value of the slaves thus destroyed.

What more need be said in illustration of the extremity of suffering induced by the middle passage, as demonstrated by the case of the *Rodeur*? But the supplement must not be omitted. At the time when only one man could see to steer that vessel, a large ship approached,

which appeared to be totally at the mercy of the wind and the waves. The crew of this vessel, hearing the voices of the crew of the Rodeur, cried out most vehemently for help. They told the melancholy tale as they passed along,—that their ship was a Spanish slave-ship, the St. Leon; and that a contagion had seized the eyes of all on board, so that there was not one individual sailor or slave who could see. But alas! this pitiable narrative was in vain; for no help could be given. The St. Leon passed on, and was never more heard of! . . .

I will endeavour to give a summary of the extent of the mortality incident to the middle passage. Newton states, that in his time it amounted to one-fourth, on the average, of the number embarked.

From papers presented to the House of Lords, in 1799, it appears that, in the year 1791, (three years after the passing of the Slave Carrying Regulation Act,) of 15,754 negroes embarked for the West Indies, &c., 1378 died during the passage, the average length of which was fifty-one days, showing a mortality of $8\frac{3}{4}$ per cent.

The amount of the mortality in 1792 was still greater. Of 31,554 slaves carried from Africa, no fewer than 5,413 died on the passage, making somewhat more than 17 per cent in fifty-one days.

Captain Owen, in a communication to the Admiralty, on the Slave Trade with the eastern coast of Africa, in 1823, states

That the ships which use this traffic consider they make an excellent voyage if they save one-third of the number embarked: some vessels are so fortunate as to save one-half of their cargo alive.

Captain Cook says, in the communication to which I have before alluded, as to the East coast traffic,

If they meet with bad weather, in rounding the Cape, their sufferings are beyond description; and in some instances one-half of the lives on board are sacrificed. In the case of the Napoleon, from Quilimane, the loss amounted to two-thirds. It was stated to me by Captains and Super-cargoes of other slavers, that they made a profitable voyage if they lost fifty per cent.; and that this was not uncommon.

Caldcleugh says, "Scarcely two-thirds live to be landed."

Governor Maclean, of Cape Coast, who has had many opportunities of acquiring information on the subject, has stated to me, that he considers the average of deaths on the passage to amount to one-third.

Captain Ramsay, R.N., who was a long time on service with the Preventive Squadron, also stated to me, that the mortality on the passage across the Atlantic must be greater than the loss on the passage to Sierra Leone, from the greater liberty allowed after capture, and from the removal of the shackles. He believes the average loss to be one-third.

Rear-Admiral Sir Graham Eden Hamond, Commander-in-Chief on the South American station, in 1834, thus writes to the British Consul at Monte Video:

A slave-brig of 202 tons was brought into this port with 521 slaves on board. The vessel is said to have cleared from Monte Video in August last, under a licence to import 650 African colonists.

The licence to proceed to the coast of Africa is accompanied by a curious document, purporting to be an application from two Spaniards at Monte Video, named Villaca and Barquez, for permission to import 650 colonists, and 250 more—to cover the deaths on the voyage.

Here we have nearly one-third given apparently for the average loss on the passage, and this estimated by the slave-dealers themselves on the American side of the Atlantic.

Philip D. Curtin

A Historian's Recount

The horrors that abolitionists such as Buxton catalogued remain central to our understanding of the Middle Passage, but many modern historians have worked hard to define what was typical of a slaving voyage. Philip D. Curtin's immensely important 1969 study did much to start this trend by showing that the once accepted estimates of the size and destinations of the slave trade were of dubious accuracy. In the last part of this excerpt, this historian of Africa and the Atlantic summarizes his recalculation of the origins, destinations, and overall size of the slave trade.

This book . . . seeks to explore old knowledge, not to present new information. Its central aim is to bring together bits and pieces of incommensurate information already published, and to do this for only one aspect of the trade—the measurable number of people brought across the Atlantic. How many? When? From what parts of Africa? To what destinations in the New World? . . .

This book is . . . written with an implicit set of rules that are neither those of monographic research, nor yet those of a survey. Historical standards for monographic research require the author to examine every existing authority on the problem at hand, and every archival collection where part of the answer may be found. This has not been done. The rulebook followed here sets another standard. I have surveyed the literature on the slave trade, but not exhaustively. Where the authorities on some regional aspect of the trade have arrived at a consensus, and that consensus appears to be reasonable in the light of other evidence, I have let it stand. Where no consensus exists, or a gap occurs in a series of estimates, I have tried to construct new estimates. But these stop short of true research standards. I have not tried to go beyond the printed sources, nor into the relevant archives, even when they are known to contain important additional data. The task is conceived as that of

Philip D. Curtin, "A Historian's Recount," from *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, pp. xvi–xvii, 3–8, 165–173. Copyright © 1969. Reprinted by permission of the University of Wisconsin Press.

building with the bricks that exist, not in making new ones. This often requires the manipulation of existing data in search of commensurates. In doing this, I have tried to show the steps that lead from existing data to the new synthesis. Not everyone will agree with all the assumptions that go into the process, nor with all the forms of calculation that have been used. But this book is not intended to be a definitive study, only a point of departure that will be modified in time as new research produces new data, and harder data worthy of more sophisticated forms of calculation. It will have served its purpose if it challenges others to correct and complete its findings.

This point is of the greatest importance in interpreting any of the data that follow. One danger in stating numbers is to find them quoted later on with a degree of certitude that was never intended. This is particularly true when percentages are carried to tenths of 1 per cent, whereas in fact the hoped-for range of accuracy may be plus or minus 20 per cent of actuality. Let it be said at the outset, then, that most of the quantities that follow are wrong. They are not intended to be precise as given, only approximations where a result falling within 20 per cent of actuality is a "right" answer—that is, a successful result, given the quality of the underlying data. It should also be understood that some estimates will not even reach that standard of accuracy. They are given only as the most probable figures at the present state of knowledge. These considerations have made it convenient to round out most quantities to the nearest one hundred, including data taken from other authors.

All of this may seem to imply estimates of limited value on account of their limited accuracy. For many historical purposes, greater accuracy is not required, and some of the most significant implications of this quantitative study would follow from figures still less accurate than these. Their principal value is not, in any case, the absolute number, an abstraction nearly meaningless in isolation. It is, instead, the comparative values, making it possible to measure one branch of the slave trade against another.

Some readers may miss the sense of moral outrage traditional in histories of the trade. This book will have very little to say about the evils of the slave trade, still less in trying to assign retrospective blame to the individuals or groups who were responsible. This omission in no way implies that the slave trade was morally neutral; it clearly was not. The evils of the trade, however, can be taken for granted as a point long since proven beyond dispute. . . .

The principal secondary authorities and the principal textbooks are, indeed, in remarkable agreement on the general magnitude of the [Atlantic slave] trade. Most begin with the statement that little is known about the subject, pass on to the suggestion that it may be impossible to make an accurate numerical estimate, and then make an estimate. The style is exemplified by Basil Davidson's *Black Mother*, the best recent general history of the slave trade.

First of all, what were the round numbers involved in this forced emigration to which the African-European trade gave rise, beginning in the fifteenth century and ending in the nineteenth? The short answer is that nobody knows or ever will know: either the necessary records are missing or they were never made. The best one can do is to construct an estimate from confused and incomplete data.

... For the grand total of slaves landed alive in the lands across the Atlantic an eminent student of population statistics, Kuczynski, came to the conclusion that fifteen millions might be "rather a conservative figure." Other writers have accepted this figure, though as a minimum: some have believed it was much higher than this.

Roland Oliver and J. D. Fage in their *Short History of Africa*, the most widely-read history of Africa to appear so far, are less concerned to express their uncertainty, and they too come to a total estimate in the vicinity of fifteen million slaves landed. They go a step farther, however, and subdivide the total by centuries. . . .

The total is again given as a minimum, and it is clearly derived from R. R. Kuczynski. Indeed, Professor Fage gave the same breakdown in his *Introduction to the History of West Africa* and in his *Ghana*, where the citation of Kuczynski is explicit. The estimate is repeated by so many other recent authorities that it can be taken as the dominant statement of present-day historiography. Some writers cite Kuczynski directly. Others, like Robert Rotberg in his *Political History of Tropical Africa*, strengthen the case by citing both Kuczynski and a second author who derived his data from Kuczynski. Rotberg, however, improved on his authorities by raising the total to "at least twenty-five million slaves," an increase of two-thirds, apparently based on the general assurance that the fifteen-million figure was likely to be on the low side. Another alternative, chosen by D. B. Davis for his Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, is not to bother with Kuczynski (who wrote, after all, more than thirty years ago), but

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to go directly to a recent authority—in this case to the words of Basil Davidson quoted above.

Since Kuczynski is at the center of this web of citations, quotations, and amplifications, it is important to see just how he went about calculating his now-famous estimates. The crucial passage in *Population Movements* does indeed present a general estimate of fifteen million or more slaves landed in the Americas, and it includes the distribution by centuries. . . . But Kuczynski himself shows no evidence of having made any calculation on his own. He merely found these estimates to be the most acceptable of those made by earlier authorities, and the particular authority he cited is none other than W. E. Du Bois.

Du Bois was, indeed, an eminent authority on Negro history, but Kuczynski's citation does *not* lead back to one of his works based on historical research. It leads instead to a paper on "The Negro Race in the United States of America," delivered to a semi-scholarly congress in London in 1911—a curious place to publish something as important as an original, overall estimate of the Atlantic slave trade—and in fact the paper contains no such thing. Du Bois's only mention of the subject in the place cited was these two sentences:

The exact number of slaves imported is not known. Dunbar estimates that nearly 900,000 came to America in the sixteenth century, 2,750,000 in the seventeenth, 7,000,000 in the eighteenth, and over 4,000,000 in the nineteenth, perhaps 15,000,000 in all.

The real authority, then, is neither Kuczynski nor Du Bois, but Dunbar. Though Du Bois's offhand statement was not supported by footnotes or bibliography, the author in question was Edward E. Dunbar, an American publicist of the 1860s. During the early part of 1861, he was responsible for a serial called *The Mexican Papers*, devoted to furthering the cause of President Juárez of Mexico and of the Liberal Party in that country. The Liberals had just won the War of the Reform against their domestic opponents, but they were hard pressed by European creditors and threatened with possible military intervention—a threat that shortly materialized in the Maximilian affair. Dunbar's principal task was to enlist American sympathy, and if possible American diplomatic intervention, in support of Juárez' cause. But Dunbar was a liberal, by implication an anti-slavery man in American politics, and he published *The Mexican Papers* during the last months of America's drift into civil war. It was therefore

natural that he should write an article called "History of the Rise and Decline of Commercial Slavery in America, with Reference to the Future of Mexico," and it was there that he published a set of estimates of the slave trade through time. . . . He remarked that these were only his own estimates, and he made the further reservation (so often repeated by his successors) that they were probably on the low side. . . .

The sequence is an impressive tower of authority, though it also suggests that even the best historians may be unduly credulous when they see a footnote to an illustrious predecessor. Basil Davidson should have identified the original author as "an obscure American publicist," rather than "an eminent student of population statistics," but the *ad hominem* fallacy is present in either case. Dunbar's obscurity is no evidence that he was wrong; nor does Kuczynski's use of Dunbar's estimates make them correct. The estimates were guesses, but they were guesses educated by a knowledge of the historical literature. They earned the approval of later generations who were in a position to be still better informed. Even though no one along the way made a careful effort to calculate the size of the trade from empirical evidence, the Dunbar estimates nevertheless represent a kind of consensus. . . .

It is now possible to look at the long-term movement of the Atlantic slave trade over a period of more than four centuries. The data make it abundantly clear that the eighteenth century was a kind of plateau in the history of the trade—the period when the trade reached its height, but also a period of slackening growth and beginning decline. The period 1741–1810 marks the summit of the plateau, when the long-term annual average rates of delivery hung just above 60,000 a year. The edge of the plateau was reached, however, just after the Peace of Utrecht in 1713, when the annual deliveries began regularly to exceed 40,000 a year, and the permanent drop below 40,000 a year did not come again until after the 1840s. Thus about 60 per cent of all slaves delivered to the New World were transported during the century and a half, 1710–1850. . . .

It would be premature to generalize about the impact of the slave trade on African societies over these four centuries. On the other hand, historians have already begun to do so. The range of opinion runs the gamut from the view that the slave trade was responsible for virtually every unfavorable development in Africa over these centuries, to the opposite position that even the slave trade . . .

that it was therefore a positive benefit to the African societies that participated. Since the results of this survey could be brought into the argument on either side, it is appropriate to enter a few caveats.

One conclusion that might be drawn is that, in reducing the estimated total export of slaves from about twenty million to about ten million, the harm done to African societies is also reduced by half. This is obvious nonsense. The demographic consequences of moving any number of people from any society can have meaning only in relation to the size of the society, the time-period concerned, the age and sex composition of the emigrants and of the society from which they depart. Until we know at least the size of the African population that supplied the slaves, the demographic implications of the ten-million estimate are just as indeterminate as those of the twenty-million estimate. As for the social or political consequences of the slave trade to African societies, these would not necessarily vary directly with the number exported. . . .

At best, the export data of the slave trade can be suggestive. If the dominant African pattern at the height of the slave trade was that of the militarized, slave-catching society, systematically preying on its neighbors, the export projections should show a relatively large and continuous supply of slaves from these hunter societies; and the slaves themselves should have been mainly from the less organized neighbors. This pattern does not emerge clearly from the slave-export data of eighteenth-century Africa. Some ports, notably the city-states of the Bight of Biafra, did produce a continuous supply that may imply slave-catching as an economic enterprise. Elsewhere, the rapid shift in sources of supply from one region to another suggests that by-product enslavement was the dominant feature, or that, if systematic slave-hunting were tried, it could not be maintained.

These weaknesses of quantitative evidence are important to keep in mind, if only because of a popular tendency to regard numbers as more "scientific" and reliable than other kinds of data. A great deal more could nevertheless be profitably done with the quantitative study of the slave trade. More and better samples of slave origins and better data on the numbers carried by the trade at particular times should make it possible to project the annual flow of slaves from particular societies, to take only one example. Even if the dimensions of the slave trade outlined here were as accurate as limited sources will ever allow—and they are not—still other dimensions of far greater significance for African and Atlantic history remain to be explored.

Herbert S. Klein

Profits and Losses

A professor of Latin American history at Columbia University, Herbert Klein summarizes a generation of research by scholars inspired by Curtin's statistical approach. Klein finds that the financial profits and the losses of human life associated with the slave trade, although substantial, were much smaller than the rough guesses of earlier historians. Like Curtin, he finds careful measurement a more useful tool than moral outrage in discovering the trade's secrets.

In recent decades there has been a fundamental change in the study of the Atlantic slave trade. From almost total neglect, the trade has become an area of major concern to economists and historians who have dedicated themselves to analyzing the African experience in America. Especially since the publication by Philip Curtin of his masterly synthesis *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* in 1969, a massive amount of archival research has resulted in publications both of collections of documents from all the major archives of Europe, America, and Africa and of major works of synthesis on the demography, politics, and economics of the slave trade. . . .

From the work of the European economic historians, it is now evident that slave trade profits were not extraordinary by European standards. The average 10 percent rate obtained in studies of the eighteenth-century French and English slave traders was considered a good profit rate at the time but not out of the range of other contemporary investments. From a recent detailed study of the nineteenth century, it would seem that profits doubled in the next century largely as a result of rising slave prices in America, which in turn were due to the increasing suppression of the trade by the British navy. On average (except for some extraordinary voyages to Cuba in the 1850s), the rate of profit for nineteenth-century slavers was just under 20 percent. Thus, while profits in the special period of suppression in the nineteenth century were quite high, even these profits were not astronomic. . . .

Herbert S. Klein, "Profits and Losses," from "Economic Aspects of the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Slave Trade" in *The Rise of the Merchant Empires*, ed. by James D. Tracy, 1990, pp. 287, 299, 303-308. Reprinted by permission of Cambridge University Press.

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The conceptions prevalent in the popular literature about the relative costs of African slaves have their corollary hypotheses about the economics of their transportation. It was assumed that the low cost of the slaves made it profitable to pack in as many as the ship could hold without sinking and then accept high rates of mortality during the Atlantic crossing. If any slaves delivered alive were pure profit, then even the loss of several hundred would have made economic sense. But if the slaves were not a costless or cheap item to purchase, then the corresponding argument about "tight packing" also makes little sense. In fact, high losses on the crossing resulted in financial loss on the trip, as many ship accounts aptly prove.

Even more convincing than these theoretical arguments against reckless destruction of life is the fact that no study has yet shown a systematic correlation of any significance between the numbers of slaves carried and mortality at sea. Thousands of ship crossings have now been statistically analyzed, and none show a correlation of any significance between either tonnage or space available and mortality.

This does not mean that slaves were traveling in luxury. In fact, they had less room than did contemporary troops or convicts being transported. It simply means that after much experience and the exigencies of the trade, slavers only took on as many slaves as they could expect to cross the Atlantic safely. From scattered references in the pre-1700 period it seems that provisioning and carrying arrangements were initially deficient. But all post-1700 trade studies show that slavers carried water and provisions for double their expected voyage times and that in most trades they usually carried slightly fewer slaves than their legally permitted limits.

This increasing sophistication in the carrying of slaves was reflected in declining rates of mortality. In the pre-1700 trade, mean mortality rates over many voyages tended to hover around 20 percent. In turn this mean rate reflected quite wide variations, with many ships coming in with very low rates and an equally large number experiencing rates of double or more than double the mean figure. But in the post-1700 period the mean rates dropped, and the variation around the mean declined. By mid-century the mean stood at about 10 percent, and by the last quarter of the century all trades were averaging a rate of about 5 percent. Moreover the dispersion around these mean rates had declined, and two-thirds of the ships were experiencing no more than 5 percent variation above or below the mean rate.

These declines in mortality were due to the standardization increasingly adopted in the trade. First of all there developed a specialized and specifically constructed vessel used in the slave trade of most nations. By the second half of the eighteenth century slave ships were averaging two hundred tons among all European traders, a tonnage that seemed best to fit the successful carrying potential of the trade. Slave traders were also the first of the commercial traders to adopt copper sheathing for their ships, which was a costly new method to prolong the life of the vessels and guarantee greater speed. It should be stressed that these slave trade vessels were much smaller ships than Europeans used in either the West Indian or East Indian trades. This in turn goes a long way to explaining why the famous model of a triangular trade, long the staple of western textbooks, is largely a myth. This myth was based on the idea that the slave ships performed the multiple tasks of taking European goods to Africa, transporting slaves to America, and then bringing back the sugar or other slave-produced American staple for Europe all on the same voyage. In fact, the majority of American crops reached European markets in much larger and specially constructed West Indian vessels designed primarily for this shuttle trade; the majority of slavers returned to Europe with small cargoes or none at all; and in the largest slave trade of them all—that of Brazil—no slavers either departed from or returned to Europe.

All traders carried about two and a half slaves per ton, and although there was some variation in crew size and ratios, all slave trade ships carried at least twice the number of seamen needed to man the vessel, and thus double or more than that of any other long-distance oceanic trade. This very high ratio of sailors to tonnage was due to the security needs of controlling the slave prisoners. All the European slave traders were also using the same provisioning, health, and transportation procedures. They built temporary decks to house the slaves and divided them by age and sex. Almost all Europeans adopted smallpox vaccinations at about the same time, all carried large quantities of African provisions to feed the slaves, and all used the same methods for daily hygiene, care of the sick, and so on. This standardization explains the common experience of mortality decline, and it also goes a long way to rejecting contemporaneous assertions that any particular European trader was "better" or more efficient than any other.

Although these firmly grounded statistics on mortality certainly destroy many of the older beliefs about "astronomic" mortality and tight

packing, there does remain the question of whether a 5 percent mortality rate for a thirty- to fifty-day voyage for a healthy young adult is high or low. If such a mortality rate had occurred among young adult peasants in eighteenth-century France, it would be considered an epidemic rate. Thus, although Europeans succeeded in reducing the rate to seemingly low percentages, these rates still represented extraordinary high death rate figures for such a specially selected population. Equally, although troop, immigrant, and convict mortality rates in the eighteenth century approached the slave death numbers, in the nineteenth century they consistently fell to below 1 percent for transatlantic voyages. For slaves, however, these rates never fell below 5 percent for any large group of vessels surveyed. There thus seems to have been a minimum death rate caused by the close quarters during transport, which the Europeans could never reduce.

Death in the crossing was due to a variety of causes. The biggest killers were gastrointestinal disorders, which were often related to the quality of food and water available on the trip, and fevers. Bouts of dysentery were common and the "bloody flux" as it was called could break out in epidemic proportions. The increasing exposure of the slaves to dysentery increased both the rates of contamination of supplies and the incidence of death. It was dysentery that accounted for the majority of deaths and was the most common disease experienced on all voyages. The astronomic rates of mortality reached on occasional voyages were due to outbreaks of smallpox, measles, or other highly communicable diseases that were not related to time at sea or the conditions of food and water supply, hygiene, and sanitation practices. It was this randomness of epidemic diseases that prevented even experienced and efficient captains from eliminating very high mortality rates on any given voyage.

Although time at sea was not usually correlated with mortality, there were some routes in which time was a factor. Simply because they were a third longer than any other routes, the East African slave trades that developed in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were noted for overall higher mortality than the West African routes, even though mortality per day at sea was the same or lower than on the shorter routes. Also, just the transporting together of slaves from different epidemiological zones in Africa guaranteed the transmission of a host of local endemic diseases to all those who were aboard. In turn, this guaranteed the spread of all major African diseases to America.

Along with the impact of African diseases on the American populations, the biases in the age and sex of the migrating Africans also had a direct impact on the growth and decline of the American slave populations. The low ratio of women in each arriving ship, the fact that most of these slave women were mature adults who had already spent several of their fecund years in Africa, and the fact that few children were carried to America were of fundamental importance in the subsequent history of population growth. It meant that the African slaves who arrived in America could not reproduce themselves. The African women who did come to America had lost some potential reproductive years and were even less able to reproduce the total numbers of males and females in the original immigrant cohort, let alone create a generation greater than the total number who arrived from Africa. Even those American regions that experienced a heavy and constant stream of African slaves still had to rely on importation of more slaves to maintain their slave populations, let alone increase their size. Once that African migration stopped, however, it was possible for the slave populations to begin to increase through natural growth, so long as there was no heavy out-migration through emancipation.

It was this consistent negative growth of the first generation of African slaves which explains the growing intensity of the slave trade to America in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As the demand for American products grew in European markets because of the increasingly popular consumption of tobacco, cotton, coffee, and above all sugar, the need for workers increased and this could be met only by bringing in more Africans. It was only in the case of the United States that the growth of plantation crop exports to Europe did not lead to an increasing importation of African slaves. This was largely due to the very early North American experience of the local slave population achieving a positive growth rate and thus supplying its increasing labor needs from the positive growth of its native-born slave population. Although most demographic historians have shown that the Creole slave populations had positive growth rates from the beginning and that it was the distortions of the African-born cohorts that explain overall decline, more traditional historians have tried to explain the increasing demand for slaves due to the low life expectancy of the Afro-American slave population. Much cited is the contemporary belief found in the planter literature of most colonies that the Afro-American slave experienced an average working life of "seven years." This myth of a short-lived labor force was

related to the impact of heavy immigration on the age and sexual imbalance. Recent studies suggest a very negative population growth rate for native-born slaves and a decline as related to a very young age seven working years.

The average life expectancy in Brazil, for example, which might suggest a decline in Brazil and twenty-five years in the U.S. slave population, of course, takes into account the only ones we are talking about. The life expectancy for the U.S. slave population was [sic] at a minimum, twenty years. The U.S. ones—both postulated in most h

The Achievement "Number"

Although Curtin's work inspired many and eventually led to the end of the slave trade. David Eltis at the University led a

David Eltis and David Galenson in *Extending the Frontiers*, p. 43. Copyright ©

related to the observed reality of slave population decline under the impact of heavy immigration of African slaves. Observers did not recognize the age and sexual imbalance of these Africans as a causal factor for the negative population growth of the slave labor force. Rather, they saw this decline as related to a very high mortality and low life expectancy. Yet all recent studies suggest both a positive rate of population growth among native-born slaves and a life expectancy well beyond the so-called average seven working years in all American societies.

The average life expectancy of slave males was in the upper twenties in Brazil, for example, and in the midthirties for the United States, which might suggest an average working life of at least twenty years in Brazil and twenty-five years in the United States. But this average figure, of course, takes into account the very high infant mortality rates. For those slaves who survived the first five years of life—and these are the only ones we are concerned with here—the comparable life expectancies was [*sic*] in the midthirties for the Brazilians and lower forties for the U.S. slaves. This suggests that the average working life was, at a minimum, twenty-five years for Brazilian slaves and thirty years for the U.S. ones—both figures far from the supposed seven-year average postulated in most histories.

David Eltis and David Richardson

The Achievements of the "Numbers Game"

Although Curtin was well aware that his recalculations were still flawed, his work inspired massive new research, provoked some heated controversies, and eventually led to the publication of more definitive tallies of the slave trade. David Eltis of Emory University and David Richardson of Hull University led a large international effort to compile a database, whose

David Eltis and David Richardson, "A New Assessment of the Transatlantic Slave Trade," in *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, 2008, p. 43. Copyright © 2008 Yale University Press. Reprinted by permission.

first public version included details of 27,233 slaving voyages and that has now grown to nearly 35,000. The new Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD2), available at www.slavevoyages.org, permits Internet users to analyze the African sources and New World destinations of the slave trade, both overall and year by year. This excerpt from their new guide is accompanied by charts from the database.

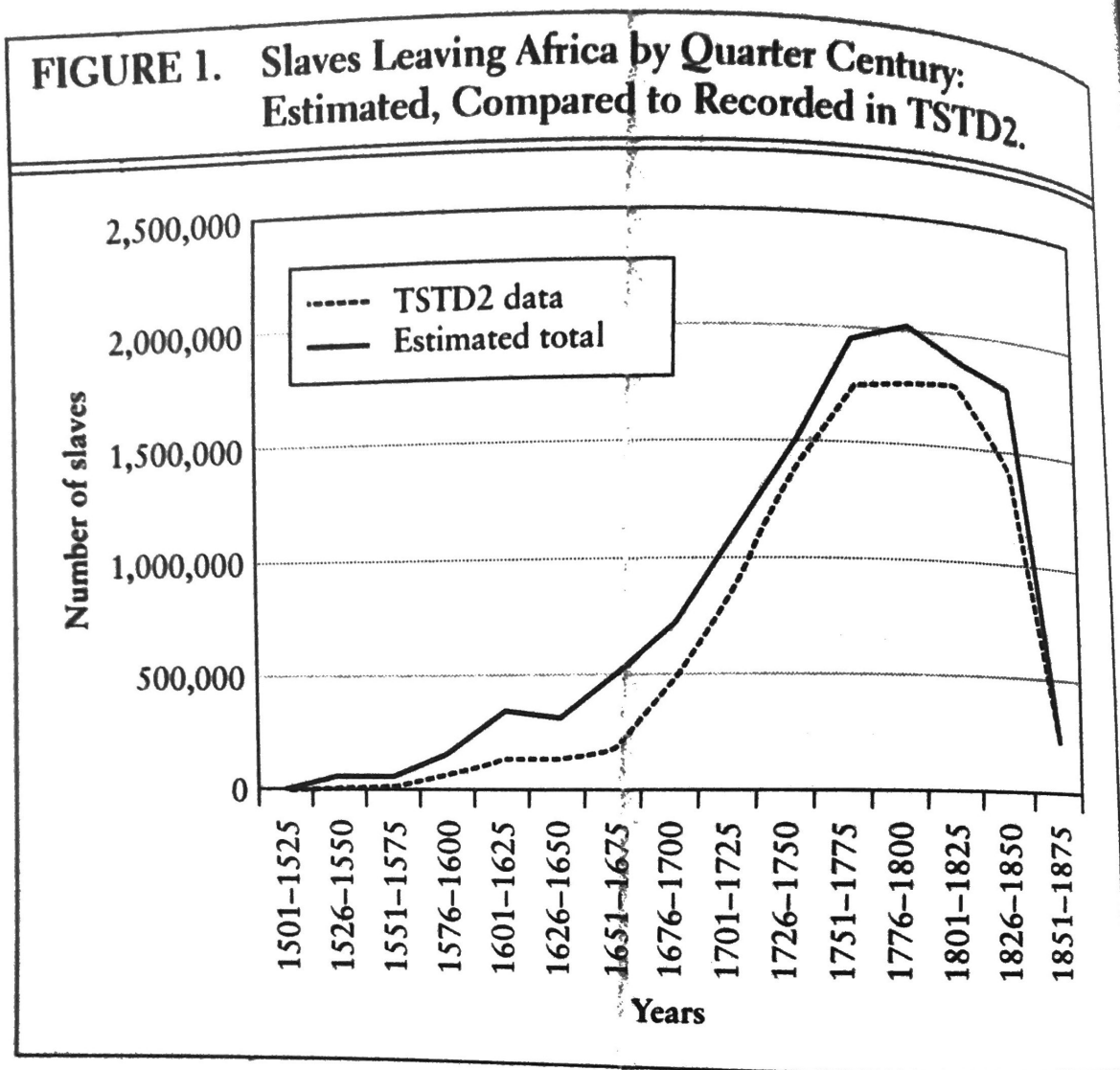
Philip Curtin's well-known 1969 book *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* initiated the modern era of slave-trade studies and triggered a wave of research into slave-trading records in Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Almost forty years later, we are on the brink of a complete reconstruction of the history of the transatlantic slave trade from the early sixteenth century through to its close in 1867. The level of detail now possible was unimaginable when Curtin published his book. Where Curtin sought to track slaving activities by centuries or quarter centuries, we can now do so on an annual basis, at least from the mid-seventeenth century onward. Where Curtin grouped ship departures to Africa by nationality, and embarkations and disembarkations of slaves by African coastal regions or American colonies, we can now do the same on a port-by-port basis. Where Curtin could only identify places of embarkation and disembarkation of slaves separately, we can now reveal links across the Atlantic and track how they changed through time. Where Curtin could only measure shipboard mortality through the percentage of losses of slaves in transit, we can now estimate shipboard mortality rates and the factors that helped to shape them. The evidential base for the study of the Atlantic slave trade (and the computational capacity for storing and interrogating it) has been revolutionized. . . .

In assessing the size of the trade, Curtin had to choose between totals taken from the African side (using shipping records) and totals from the American side (using a combination of shipping and demographic data). He chose the latter and then projected what the departures from Africa must have been if mortality had averaged 15 percent of those taken on board. On this basis, he estimated just under 9.6 million arrivals in the Americas and then about 11.25 million departures from Africa. Curiously, the debate and extensive research activity that Curtin's book triggered concentrated primarily on his total estimates, rather than on the implicit challenge he had thrown down to scholars to reconcile the differences between his arrivals and departures estimates.

One of the main contributions of recent research on shipping data, both transatlantic and intra-American, has been to eliminate these discrepancies between African departures and American arrivals. First, more detailed information on individual voyages has shown significant losses of ships before they embarked slaves at the African coast. Such losses stemmed from natural hazard and from the actions of Africans, privateers, pirates, and European rivals. Second, much more is now known about the forced movement of slaves after their arrival in the Americas. The largest intra-American movement of slaves before the nineteenth century was in Brazil and was by land, but in the Caribbean the British organized a large water-borne traffic that also redistributed slaves from the British to the Spanish and French Americas. Thanks to the new data in TSTD2, discrepancies in shipping data between departures and arrivals no longer exist. Scholars may now use migration estimates derived from demographic data as an independent check on the voyage-based data, rather than as method for filling in gaps in the shipping records—at least after 1700.

A summary of our assessment of the completeness of the current database is presented in Figure [1], which lays out a crude time profile of the transatlantic slave trade over three and a half centuries. The top function in Figure [1] is taken from the new estimates . . . , grouped in twenty-five-year . . . intervals. The lower function, by contrast, is based on the data taken directly from TSTD2. The difference between the two functions represents our present assessment of the voyages that occurred but which have not left a record. . . .

. . . Portuguese vessels are now thought to have accounted for 46.5 percent of the traffic, and the British around 26 percent. The difference between the two is largely explained by the late arrival of the British into the trade and their early departure with the 1807 abolition act. As long as they continued in the business, they dominated the northern wind and current system almost as much as the Portuguese dominated the traffic south of the equator. Of the others, the Spanish pattern of involvement was the inverse of that of the British. After major involvement with the Portuguese prior to the separation of the Iberian crowns in 1640, the Spanish carried almost no slaves in the eighteenth century prior to the last decade. They then reentered the traffic to the point where they came to dominate the northern wind and current routes as effectively as the British had in the previous century. For the French, the major determinant of participation was war. From 1689 to 1831, the French



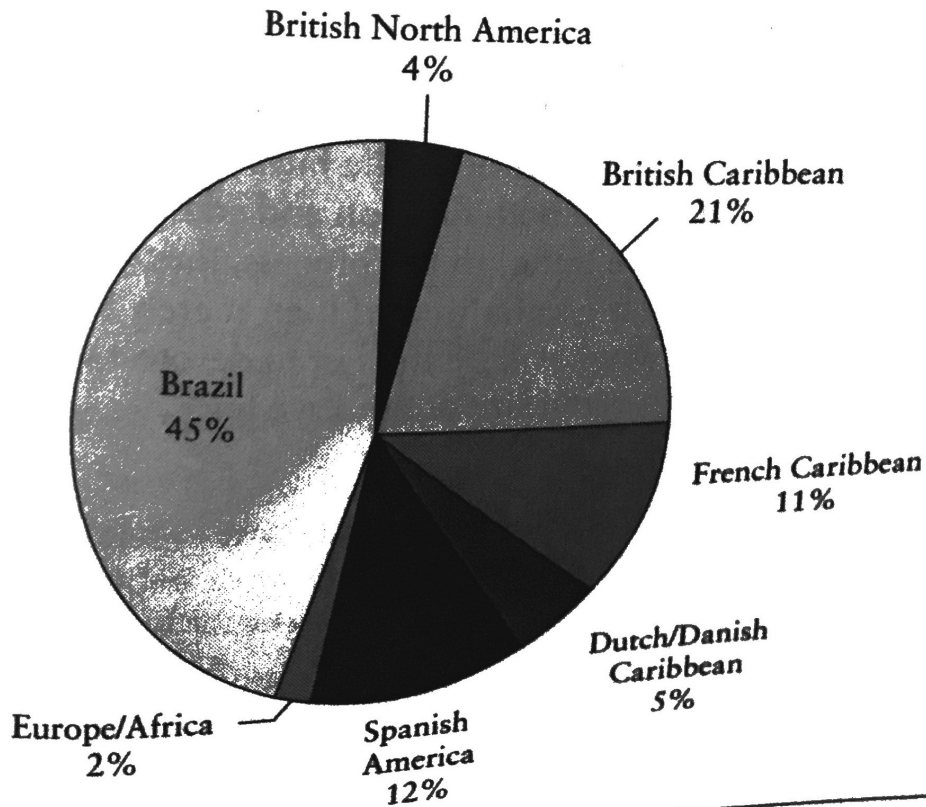
flag frequently disappeared altogether during hostilities. This apart, the trajectory of their trade was similar to the British, except that it continued for a further quarter century after British withdrawal. The Dutch, by contrast, were most important in the seventeenth century and carried few slaves after the British destroyed a good part of their merchant marine between 1780 and 1784. . . .

How do the new totals compare with the 2001 attempt to provide an overall assessment of the slave trade's size? As already noted, in 2001 one of us estimated total slave departures from Africa at 11.062 million. We now think that 12.521 million were carried off—an increase of 13 percent. At the time of this writing, aggregate arrivals in the Americas are thought to have been 10.703 million, an 11 percent increase over 2001's estimate of 9.657 million. On the African side, the infusion of new material has not changed the regional distribution by much. Upper Guinea and the Gold Coast are now seen to have been slightly more

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important relative to the rest of Africa, and the Bights of Benin and Biafra slightly less. West Central and Southeast Africa, by contrast, remain in the same relative positions. On the American side of the Atlantic, the relative distribution has shifted toward Bahia [in northeast Brazil] and away from the British Caribbean, especially Jamaica, with most of the other major regions keeping the shares that they held in 2001. The new data [see Figure 2] thus have not threatened the dominance of West Central Africa and Brazil, but this is hardly surprising. The major benefit of the new information has been to increase our understanding of the links between Africa and the Americas and, of course, to provide much more detail about those links. Space constraints mean that a fuller explication of this facet of the trade must be reserved for a different occasion. Our major hope is that the revised data set will be used for purposes far beyond estimating the size of the slave trade.

FIGURE 2. Destinations of the Transatlantic Slave Trade by Importing Regions, 1519–1868.



Source: Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, www.slavevoyages.org.

Most debates over issues of agency, identity, cultural patterns, gender, and resistance would not exist without an often implicit quantitative component. . . .

With the appearance of a renewable voyage-based data source, and the major infusion of younger blood as represented in the present essays, we hope that a new era of engagement, debate, and critical evaluation is about to begin. But the issues of this new work will no doubt differ from past concerns. It may seem that the major thrust of the research presented here is to add weight to Curtin's critics. This is, of course, a central part of the present volume, although we expect that the . . . estimates of close to or in excess of 13 million transported slaves are too high to find support in voyage-based evidence. The main contribution of the new work in quantitative issues should be viewed as reconciling the discrepancies to which Curtin pointed between the estimates of arrivals in the Americas and estimates of departures from Africa—an issue that few of Curtin's critics engaged. For the first time in forty years, it is possible to see a broad picture that offers mutually reinforcing data on both sides of the Atlantic. We argue that there is now a high degree of internal consistency and reliability about the aggregate estimates of the slave trade. More important, we would like to think that TSTD2 will shift attention away from the overall assessment of the slave trade and toward a tighter focus on individual branches of the slave trade and the thousands of ports that were involved in the business. Researchers now have the means with which to both draw on and add details to voyages for all branches of the slave trade. In the process, they will find it possible to address issues of far greater import than merely the size of the slave trade. Perhaps this book will be the last to devote a major part of its thrust to assessing the overall size of the slave trade.