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The African Diaspora

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The most significant recent tendency in the historiography of the African diaspora is the recognition that such a thing existed. Historians wrote about the slave trade and slavery, but only in a national context. North American historians dealt with slavery in the United States; British, with the British slave trade to the Caribbean; French and Dutch and Portuguese, with similar aspects of their own imperial economies. The East African slave trade of the nineteenth century was a minor note in British imperial history, and hardly anyone paid attention to the trans-Sahara trade – or to older branches that carried at least a trickle of people from Africa to India and even further east. As for the general public, the majority of Americans educated before the 1960s came away with the impression that the vast majority of slaves exported from Africa ended the voyage in the American South. And the Africa continent, from which all these people came, was covered in the public mind by an image of savage existence in deep forest, derived mainly from Tarzan movies reinforced by the echoes of pseudo-scientific racism, suggesting the inferiority of black people, even though the best scientific circles had begun to dispel the racist myth before the First World War.

A number of new tendencies of the 1960s began to suggest a major revision. Perhaps the earliest was the African independence movement beginning in the late 1940s. One aspect of decolonisation was the appearance of African universities and a new curiosity about African history in Europe and America as well. By the early 1950s, African history began to be taught in Legon, Ibadan, Makerere, and Khartoum – and here and there in France and Britain. By the late 1950s, African history in the United States emerged from its segregation as a branch of "Negro history" appropriately taught only in black colleges and universities. More important than the new dissemination of knowledge, was a wave of new research that produced as many as a thousand new monographs on the history of sub-Saharan Africa during the decade of the 1960s alone.[1] Over the two decades beginning about 1955, the whole structure of African history was re-examined, revised and presented in a new light that got rid of the racist myth, got rid of the worst of the myth of a savage continent, and brought Africa into the larger framework of world history.

A second change was the decline of elitism and ethnocentricity in the attitude

[1] Michael Bratton, *American Doctoral Dissertations on Africa, 1886-1972* (Waltham, Mass., 1973).

of historians. They had tended to write all too often only about great men, great ideas, and the centres of political power. They had tended to regard the proper task of history as one of telling how "our" society came to be as it is today.[2] These attitudes lived on into the 1970s, but other historians began to be concerned with the history of the working class, including slaves; some even began to investigate the history of women's place in past societies. After the Second World War, some historians began to strive for a denationalised history that could be acceptable across national frontiers in Europe. Others became interested in the world beyond Europe and America, whose importance was all the more obvious as it threw off European rule. Still others began to seek understanding of their own society by looking at comparable developments abroad. Frank Tannenbaum's *Slave and Citizen*[3] was the crucial catalyst reminding United States historians of what specialists in Latin American history already knew – that North American participation in a system of plantation slavery fed by the slave trade from Africa was only one facet, by no means the most important, in a much larger social and economic order that spanned the tropical Atlantic, drew management from Europe, labour from Africa, and built a web of economic interrelations that sent out rum for the North American fur trade, and drew in Indian cotton textiles for sale on the African coast. Most historians still wrote and did research in the existing national compartments, but they were more conscious that their work formed part of a broader South Atlantic System.

A third tendency came from outside the academy. The civil rights revolution in the United States directed attention to Afro-American history in the same way the African Independence movement called attention to the African past. In the 1950s and early 1960s, however, Afro-Americans were concerned with equality and racial integration in the United States and paid comparatively little attention either to Africa or to other branches of the diaspora. Then, about the time of Martin Luther King's death in 1968, the emphasis began to shift from integration to independence – to the assertion of a separate Afro-American identity that would be equal but different. That course led back to Africa. Alex Haley began to work on *Roots* at about that time. The academic 1968-69 saw the first massive student demand for the creation of Black Studies programmes. Toward the end of 1969, a group of Afro-American scholars seceded from the African Studies Association to form a separate and racially segregated African Heritage Studies Association. These were all symptoms of a much more fundamental recognition by the Afro-American community that they belonged historically to something that was now beginning to be called the African diaspora.

In the broadest sense, the history of the diaspora would include the whole history of sub-Saharan Africa and of African-derived communities overseas or across the desert. In a narrower sense, taking in simply the history of the dispersal, one of the major themes in the past ten years has been a revival of slave-trade studies after a long period of comparative neglect. This came about,

[2] See, for example, Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Rise of Christian Europe," *The Listener* 70 (November 28, 1963): 871-875.

[3] Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen* (New York, 1947).

for the African side of things, as part of the revival of African history in general. It also drew from a tendency toward increased care with quantitative data, and especially from the "new economic history," which was both more quantitative and better informed by economic theory than the "old" economic history had been. Aside from individual studies like my own book, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census,*[4] a whole series of international conferences have focussed on aspects of the Atlantic diaspora. One held at Rochester University in 1973 led to the volume entitled *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere. Quantitative Studies.*[5] A series of separate sessions on aspects of the slave trade were organized at the International Congress of Economic History at Copenhagen in 1974, and a number of these emerged as still another volume in 1975.[6] Still another conference organised by Henry Gemery and Jan Hogendorn led to the publication of *The Uncommon Market*[7] in 1978. In 1976, Arthur Tuden and Vera Rubin organized still another major conference in New York, leading to the publication of *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies,*[8] including some papers dealing with the slave trade. Also in 1976, Martin L. Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg published a similar collection of articles by various authors under the title, *The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays,*[9] which attempted to take the emphasis away from the Atlantic slave trade to the dispersal as a whole. This broadening of the survey continued in 1978 with a UNESCO-sponsored conference at Port-au-Prince, publication of the proceedings announced for 1979.[10] Still other conferences on more restricted aspects of the slave trade were held in 1978, at Bellagio in Italy and Aarhus in Denmark, and they too should lead to further publications.[11]

Taken together, the slave-trade studies of the past decade represent an enormous advance over the knowledge previously available in print. With all these new data, it is a little surprising that more people have not tried new works of synthesis summing up the new state of knowledge. Comparatively little in this

[4] Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, 1969).

[5] Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese, eds., *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies* (Princeton, 1975).

[6] "La traite des noirs par l'Atlantique: nouvelles approches," in *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer,* 62, Nos. 226-227 (1975).

[7] Henry Gemery and Jan Hogendorn, *The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1978).

[8] "Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies," in *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences,* vol. 292 (New York, June 1977).

[9] Martin L. Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg, eds., *The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976).

[10] Final Report, Meeting of Experts on the African Slave Trade, Port-au-Prince, 31 January – 4 February 1978, mimeographed UNESCO document CC-78/CONF.601/7. Cited hereafter as "Final Report."

[11] Among publications by individual scholars, Herbert S. Klein, *The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Princeton, 1978), and Jean Mettas and Serge Daget, eds., *Répertoire des expéditions négrières françaises au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1978) are also worthy of notice as recent and careful contributions to this body of literature.

whole body of literature tries to get above a parochial level of analysis to assess the whole phenomenon in the framework of world history.[12] How, for example, does the African diaspora compare with similar movements at other times and places, or does the sheer size of this migration make it unique in world history? The term "diaspora" suggests obvious comparison to the Jewish diaspora. Both were a dispersal of people, but the Africans moved mainly as slaves and for very different ends. To compare the Jewish and African diaspora has about the same (very low) explanatory value as some historians' attempts to compare the Roman and British empires. The Jewish and African diasporas were both migrations, just as the Roman and British polities were "empires" in one or more of the many senses of that term; but the similarity ends there.

The common factor of migration, however, suggests a point of departure for setting the African diaspora in the context of world history. Furthermore, as migrations go, it was very *large* – probably the largest inter-continental population movement up to that time. It was also movement over a *long distance* and it was *involuntary* on the part of the migrants. Putting together these three factors – size, distance, and coercion – the movement could appear to be unique in human experience. But it is still susceptible to comparative analysis, because aspects of the African diaspora are paralleled by other migrations. As a first approximation, aspects of this dispersal belong to three separate, if overlapping, categories of migration – the process of repopulating the tropical Americas after the death of the Indians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the process of concentrating people for pre-industrial occupations that required peculiarly high population densities, like mining and sugar plantations; and, finally, a process for recruiting alien workers for particular occupations in some Muslim societies, especially domestics, soldiers, and concubines.

In the first of these senses, the Atlantic sector of the African diaspora belongs in part to *The Columbian Exchange*[13] of people, crops and diseases between the New World and the Old following the maritime revolution in the Atlantic basin. The previously-isolated Amerindian populations of the Americas had no childhood-acquired immunity to the common diseases of Europe and Africa – like smallpox, measles, whooping cough, mumps, and the broad range of endemic diseases common to the Afro-Eurasian landmass. They also lacked immunity to the tropical diseases common to Africa but not to Europe. As a result, the people of the tropical lowlands suffered most heavily, and most of them were killed off within a century and a half, though they left a genetic strain in present-day populations of the Caribbean and the South American mainland. The tropical highland populations in Mexico and the Andes declined sharply, but they recovered once they had acquired immunities to their new endemic diseases. The more sparsely settled populations of the temperate north and south escaped the first wave of destruction, but they too suffered in later centuries as their contact

[12] An exception would be two thoughtful articles by George Shepperson, "The African Abroad,or the African Diaspora," in T.O. Ranger, ed., *Emerging Themes in African History* (Nairobi, 1968), pp. 152-176; and "Introduction" in Kilson and Rotberg, *The African Diaspora,* pp. 1-10.

[13] Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange* (Westport, Conn., 1972).

with Europeans increased. The full scale of this devastation can only be roughly estimated, but it appears that something like 15 percent of the world's population as of 1500 had died without descendants by 1650. In the first instance, even before plantations became significant in Spanish America, the dying Indians were replaced, partly by Spanish but in larger part by Africans recruited through the slave trade. By the end of the sixteenth century, there were more Africans than Europeans in Mexico, Peru, and Brazil, though northeast Brazil had a nascent sugar industry by that time.

Later phases in the African diaspora to the New World also belong to second category of migration to concentrate people for new enterprises. Most pre-industrial populations were agricultural and their population densities were strictly limited by technology and resource endowment. Cities, of course, were concentrations of people that were fed from the countryside. Mining and certain forms of peculiarly labour-intensive plantation agriculture also required dense populations. The Amerindian civilisations of the New World already had had their own ways to recruit labour and move it to the mines, and these devices were kept and extended under Spanish rule. Even with the seventeenth-century nadir of Indian populations in the American highlands, mine labour in Mexico and Peru was carried on without much input from Africa. But new discoveries required new population, and this normally came from Africa. Placer gold operations in present-day western Colombia were worked mainly with newly imported slaves from Africa. The gold rush to Minas Gerais in eighteenth-century Brazil was to be the most important New World source of gold of all, and it too was worked by slaves from Africa or drawn in from plantation areas in Brazil itself.

Sugar cane was peculiar in the fact that it involved both the production of cane and at least the initial refining of the sugar on the spot. This made a sugar plantation part farm and part factory, with a high demand for labour in the harvest season, usually estimated at about one worker for each 0.4 hectares of cane land, in addition to whatever manpower was needed for food production.[14] Sugar grown anywhere in the world under Western supervision was typically grown by some kind of bondsmen, brought to the sugar growing region from a distance. This was the case in the medieval Mediterranean.[15] It was continued in the Atlantic Islands, and especially with São Tomé off the African coast. In the Americas, these institutions were transferred to Brazil in the mid-sixteenth century, spread in the mid-seventeenth to the Caribbean, and in the early eighteenth to the North American mainland. The Americas, then, shifted from the first to the second category of migration as a gradual process.

But this plantation aspect of the African diaspora was not confined to the

[14] This figure, that planters tended to see as one slave per acre of cane land, obviously varied considerably from place to place or according to managerial decisions depending on the current labour costs. The range in the eighteenth century nevertheless seems to have been in the vicinity of 0.3 to 0.5 hectares per worker. See Michael Craton, *Sinews of Empire* (New York, 1974), p. 132 ff.; Elsa V. Goveia, *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, 1976), p. 107.

[15] Charles Verlinden, *Modern Colonization* (Ithaca, 1970), pp. 33-51.

Atlantic. Eighteenth-century Europeans bought slaves in Africa and settled them on sugar plantations in the Mascarene Islands, especially Réunion and Mauritius, which rapidly took on a West Indian pattern of society. Further north, an Indian Ocean slave trade had operated in comparatively small numbers for centuries. Though most of this trade in most centuries belonged to the Islamic category, some of it did go to supply workers for mines or plantations. This was the case for the salt flats of Basra at the head of the Persian Gulf, where the *Zanj* or African slaves were concentrated and where they rebelled several times from the seventh century onward, with an especially impressive rebellion from 868 to 883 A.D. Other small plantation pockets existed from time to time in Egypt and elsewhere along the Persian Gulf, but the largest sector of plantations supplied by the slave trade from Africa developed in the nineteenth century – clove plantations on the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba, with less intensive agriculture worked by slave labour on nearby sections of the present-day Kenya coast.[16]

This kind of intensive labour on tropical plantations, however, did not necessarily involve Africans. In the late nineteenth century, after the African diaspora had been damped down through the abolition of legal exports by sea, those who wanted to extend the plantation regime looked elsewhere for labour – no longer formally slave labour, but the equivalent in all but name. Chinese were taken to Cuba, Peru, and Hawaii; Melanesians from the Pacific Islands to the canefields of Queensland in Australia; Indians to Trinidad and British Guiana, to South Africa and Fiji, among other destinations.[17] Thus, where the African diaspora to the New World fell into a category that was only partly African (since European settlers also crossed the Atlantic), the African diaspora to provide dense population for mines and plantations had both an Atlantic and an Indian Ocean sector, and again the African diaspora shared this category with other migrants from other places.

Other segments of the African diaspora belonged to a third category. For a variety of reasons that appear non-economic in origin, many Muslim societies developed the practice of using alien slaves in preference to local people for a restricted range of occupations. The military role was prominent from Morocco to India, partly because slave-soldiers could be trained from childhood and had no local kinship network to stand in the way of their loyalty to the ruler. Slaves were sometimes recruited as bureaucrats for similar reasons, like the Turkish Janissaries, who were often soldiers as well. Others were used as domestic servants,

[16] Bernard Lewis, "The African Diaspora and the Civilization of Islam," in Kilson and Rotberg, *The African Diaspora*, pp. 37-56, and *Race and Colour in Islam* (New York, 1971); Joseph E. Harris, *The African Presence in Asia* (Evanston, 1971); Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven, 1977); Gabriel Baer, "Slavery in Nineteenth-Century Egypt," *Journal of African History* 8 (1967): 417-441.

[17] Watt Stewart, *Chinese Bondage in Peru: A History of the Chinese Coolie in Peru, 1849-1874* (Durham, 1951); James E. Duffy, *A Question of Slavery* (Oxford, 1967); Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920* (New York, 1974); Noel Deerr, *The History of Sugar*, 2 vols. (London, 1949-50).

and especially those whose duties required a degree of intimacy with the master, such as concubines and harem guards. In theory these slaves had to be drawn from beyond the frontiers of Islam, since it was unlawful to enslave a Muslim. They came not merely from Africa but from beyond the fringes of Islam in almost every direction. Slaves from the region north of the Black Sea were so prominent in the early Islamic centuries (and in the Christian Mediterranean as well) that one word for slave in Arabic came to be a variant of the word Slav, just as the word for slave in medieval Latin changed the classical *servitus* to the new *sclavus*.[18] But captured Christians from the north shore of the Mediterranean were widely used in North Africa. With the rise of the Ottoman Empire, the Jannissary force was recruited partly in the Balkans and, in later phases, from the Caucasus and the region between the Black Sea and the Caspian. And, of course, sub-Saharan Africa was also involved, more deeply at some times than at others. Morocco was especially dependent on the region beyond the Senegal through the late seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, so much so that the principal standing army was African and dominated Moroccan political life during a good part of that century. Sub-Saharan Africans were also found as slaves in Egypt, and in Libya, where part of the trans-Saharan trade north from the Lake Chad region was transhipped to serve ultimate destinations scattered through the Ottoman Empire.[19] This service slavery was also widely practised in Muslim India, not only on the west coast opposite Africa but as far away as Bengal.[20]

One lesson seems clear. The African diaspora may have been unique, but aspects of it clearly belong to other aggregates of human experience that should be studied comparatively. This has barely begun, probably because fields of historical research are too narrowly compartamentalised. Take, as an example, the trans-Atlantic migration. We had a rough census of the slave trade ten years ago. Nothing similar has yet been produced for immigration from Europe; what estimates do exist cover only one colony or one of the various European imperial systems with no effort at synthesis. We have some really spendid studies of death rates at sea for the black immigrants, some equally good studies of slave demography, looking with care at the multitude of factors that might correlate with birth and death rates, hence with population growth.[21] We know in a vague way that, in the Caribbean, the net natural decrease for Europeans was higher than it was for Africans, but not by how much or how long this situation persisted. For the East coast, we have Cooper's work in the Kenya coast and nearby islands, we

[18] Verlinden, *Modern Colonization, pp. 35-36.*

[19] Ralph Austen, "A Census of the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade or Approximating the Uncountable," in Gemery and Hogendorn, *The Uncommon Market,* is a general survey of this trade. The most convenient summary treatment of sub-Saharan Africans in Islamic societies is Bernard Lewis, *Race and Colour in Islam.*

[20] Joseph E. Harris, *The African Presence in Asia* (Evanston, 1971), is the most recent general treatment of this theme.

[21] See in particular Barry W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica 1807-1834* (Cambridge, 1976); Herbert Klein, *The Middle Passage*; and H. A. Gemery, "Emigration from the British Isles to the New World, 1630-1700: Inferences from Colonial Populations" (forthcoming).

have other work on the Mascarenes, but little or nothing that examines the Indian Ocean diaspora as a whole – or even its plantation sector as a whole.[22]

The need for more comparative studies in all the varieties of Muslim service slavery also seems clear, but the obstacles are considerable. Specialists in the Atlantic diaspora are likely to know Portuguese, Dutch, and French. They are not likely to know either Turkish or Arabic, much less the Persian that would open up Mughal India for comparative research.

The West had a fixation on commerce and profit. Western nations therefore kept population records of their sugar colonies, sometimes better records than they had for their Euro-American subjects. They also kept shipping records in long series that require little interpolation. These records do not tell much about the numbers of slaves imported into the Americas, but they do tell a good deal about departures from Africa and the performance of various carriers.[23] On the other side of Africa, or for the trans-Sahara trade, we have no comparable data base. Various of the serious and studied recent estimates therefore differ considerably. Ralph Austen's phrase, "approximating the uncountable" is telling.

In addition to its membership in these three separate families of migrations, the African diaspora belongs to broader field of migration studies, where a body

[22] Cooper, *Plantation Slavery;* J.M. Filliot, *La Traite des esclaves vers les Mascareignes au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1974). A symposium was held at Saint Denis, Réunion, in 1974 on *Les Mouvements de population dans l'Océan Indien,* publication in preparation.

[23] So far, lacking complete immigration records, the only reliable way of estimating global slave imports into the Americas has been a combination of population figures and evidence about the probable net natural increase or decrease of the slave population. In *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census,* I used shipping data from estimating total imports only for the slave trade to Brazil. The most significant correction to my figures so far has been the work of David Eltis, who has refined the published data I used by further archival research. (D. Eltis, "The Export of Slaves from Africa, 1820-43," *Journal of Economic History* 37 [1977]: 409-433.) Richard Bean and others, however, have refined the import estimates for the British Caribbean and North America using demographic data. (Richard N. Bean, *The British Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, 1660-1775* [New York, 1975] pp. 213-255; Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross,* 2 vols. [Boston, 1974], 2:27-31.)

The range of difference between estimates of the slaves exported from East Africa is considerable. Ralph A. Austen has made some estimates for this area as well as for the North African trade ("The Islamic Slave Trade out of Africa Red Sea and Indian Ocean: An Effort at Quantification," forthcoming, originally presented to Conference on Islamic Africa: Slavery and Related Institutions, Princeton University, 1977). Part of these estimates overlap those done nearly simultaneously be Esmond B. Martin and T. C. I. Ryan ("A Quantitative Assessment of the Arab Slave Trade of East Africa, 1770-1896," *Kenya Historical Review* 5 [1977]:71-91), but for the overlapped segment, Austen's estimate is more than twice that of Martin and Ryan. Austen's total estimate of eighteen million for the African Diaspora to the east and north taken together seems a little high, in the light of what is known about the currents of the trade, the forms of slavery, and the demographic remains of slave communities outside sub-Saharan Africa. But data here are so rare and uncertain that competing estimates are half or double one another represent a narrowing, not a widening of the exciting gap of possibility.

of theory has been developing over several decades. Migration studies began as immigration studies, a branch of U.S. history. In 1960, Frank Thistlewhaite delivered a critique at the Stockholm meeting of the International Congress of Historical Sciences, pointing out that Americans were far too ethnocentric, that the points of departure in the Old World should also be taken into account. In 1975, Sune Akerman took the equivalent occasion in San Francisco to deliver a critique of migration studies since 1960. The European side was now much better in focus, but migration studies were still far too much limited to the Western world – or, to put the facts more frankly, the Western students of migration history paid little or no attention to non-Western patterns of migration. As the latest stage in this progress, in 1976, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences sponsored a conference at New Harmony, Indiana to look into all of the implications of present-day migrations – historical, moral, legal, economic or social.[24]

The historical aspect of migration studies focusses on three key questions. First, who moved, whence, where, and why? Second, what was the impact of their departure on the society they left? Third, what was the impact of their arrival on the new society they entered? It might appear that the first of these questions has no obvious relationship to the departure of un-free emigrants. But societies that send away part of their population do so for a reason; and they do so through some set of political, social, and economic mechanisms. It may be that a cross-cultural comparison would show a vast range of differences, not similarities, but differences can also tell something about human behaviour. Social science based on Western data alone is the poorer for it. For that matter, no one has yet paid much comparative attention to the regions that tended to supply large numbers of involuntary emigrants – not just Africa but also the Caucasus, the steppes north of the Black Sea, and the Balkans at certain periods.

The second question, the impact on the receiving society, has had the most attention in Atlantic Slave-trade studies, as it has in Atlantic free-immigrant studies. It takes, in fact, the whole broad field of comparative New World slavery. But one aspect has generated a good more heat than others. This is the possible economic implications, not merely for the slave-receiving regions, but for the broader Western economy of Europe and North America. C.L.R. James and then Eric Williams first advanced the idea that the economic complex of the South Atlantic System fed profits into Europe, and these profits contributed in large measure to the Industrial Revolution. The question never was the subject of much detailed research, though it seems to be open to systematic measurement.[25]

[24] William M. McNeill and Ruth Adams, *Human Migration* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1978). Sune Akerman, *From Stockholm to San Francisco* (Upsala, 1975) provides a useful survey of changes in migration studies over the period 1960 to 1975, but somewhat slighting those outside the Atlantic region. For non-Western migration studies see especially Michael Adas, *The Burma Delta* (Madison, 1974), and G. William Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History* (Ithaca, 1957).

[25] C. L. R. James, *Black Jacobins*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1963); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, 1944). The debate over this issue was peculiarly slow to pick up speed, and the Williams-James thesis about the causes of industrialisation got caught up in another and separate contention – that the abolition of the slave trade and the

But the James-Williams answer was enormously attractive – first of all in former slave societies that lagged behind in economic development, and then in the third world as a whole. In 1978, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, the Director-General of UNESCO, opened his meeting of exports on the African diaspora with the position he expected to emerge from the conference.

> *It is becoming increasingly clear that the slave trade had a fundamental part to play, as far as Europe was concerned, for the first industrial revolution can no longer be isolated from the primitive capital accumulation deriving from the "triangular trade" and from the monopoly system. In recent years many historians and economists, belonging to different schools of thought, have endeavoured to ascertain how this kind of trade, based on the exploitation of slave labour, can have stimulated the technological explosion.*
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> *These studies have clearly shown that the contribution of the slave trade to the industrial and commercial development of countries embarked on an era of capitalist expansion was decisive, as was therefore its influence on the socio-economic and political institutions of Europe and North America.*[26]

In fact, the final report of that particular conference was less certain than the Director-General, largely because the necessary research had simply not been done. The original debate was framed in the parochial setting of the British empire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but this was not even the largest segment of the South Atlantic System at that period. What with the profound lack of knowledge about the net impact of the slave trade and slavery on the Portuguese, Spanish – or even French economy (given the loss of investment placed in Saint-Dominigue) – it was hardly possible to begin an answer. In fact, the only generalised answer attempted so far comes from two economists, arguing almost entirely on theoretical principles rather than hard data.[27]

Even the more direct and mundane aspects of the African diaspora at the receiving end have not been well integrated with the broader body of migration studies. Anthropologists who study African cultures in the Caribbean have paid little attention to the work of historians and sociologists on Euro-American culture in northern cities. Immigration historians of the U.S. tend to leave out

emancipation of the slaves were, in the British system, both results of economic, not moral causes. A number of recent studies, however, provide some data bearing on the measurement of the possible economic impact of the British sector South Atlantic System on the British economy. (See Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760-1810* [Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1975]; Stanley Engerman, "The Slave Trade and Capital Formation in the Eighteenth Century," *Business History Review* 46 [1972]:430-443; R Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery;* R. B. Sheridan, "The Wealth of Jamaica in the Eighteenth Century," *Economic History Review* 2nd ser. 18 [1965]:292-311, and "A Rejoinder," *Economic History Review,* 2nd ser. 21 [1968]: 46-61, R.P. Thomas, "The Sugar Colonies of the Old Empire: Profit or Loss for Great Britain?" *Economic History Review,* 2nd ser. 21 [1968]: 30-45; Robert Paul Thomas and Richard Nelson Bean, "The Fishers of Men: The Profits of the Slave Trade," *Journal of Economic History* 34 [1974]:885-94).

[26] UNESCO, "Final Report," Annex III, p. 4.

[27] Bean and Thomas, "Fishers of Men."

black immigration, perhaps because it centred in the late eighteenth century, not at the end of the nineteenth, when European immigration peaked. They also tended, though less so in recent years, to treat the "melting pot" of urban America as a place where "new Americans" faced a general American culture, without taking account of the fact that a lot of "old Americans" from the south, both black and white with their own regional culture, were also trying to make it in Detroit or Chicago.

The assimilation of immigrants and their impact on local society is also worthy of comparative study across the whole range of the diaspora. All were uprooted people, thrust into an alien society as individuals or small groups. This alone would make for greater culture change following migration than one would find where a relatively homogeneous community moved to a new setting – say, Kentucky farmers to southern Illinois. But the assimilation of a slave-soldier in Morocco was bound to be different, and his cultural contribution was bound to be different, from that of a field hand in Bahia or a domestic in colonial Williamsburg. Here, again, the obstacles are considerable, but research results so far are negligible.

The third question, the impact of the slave trade on Africa, has a long history in Western scholarship, going back to nineteenth-century debates over the abolition of the trade and the emancipation of the slaves. No one argues seriously any more that the slave trade was good for Africa, but space remains for some profound differences of opinion – and here African scholars are involved alongside Europeans and North Americans. Two schools of African opinion have been discernible in recent decades. Both are to some degree an ideology of independence – a way of asserting African self-respect in the wake of colonialism and pseudo-scientific racism. One appears most frequently in anglophone West Africa, though it may not be dominant even there. Its members take the view that Western scholarship overestimated the Western impact on Africa and underestimated the internal, African dynamic in African history. For many decades, the most-written-about aspect of African history was the slave trade, and the Westerners wrote with a policy decision in mind – whether or not to abolish the slave trade. They believed their decision would have vital consequences for Africa, an otherwise static society. In contrast, the revisionists insist that Africa was not static; that it had processes of economic, social, and political change that were largely independent of the slave trade; that Africans fought wars, built empires, tore them down, changed their gods or their culture for the same combination of human greed, pride, ambition, or genius that has generally been present in most societies at most times in the past.[28] I agree with the main lines of

[28] The strength of this sentiment among African historians in Africa is hard to estimate accurately because there is no need to make an explicit argument. It seems, however, to be detectable as an attitude going back to K. O. Dike's *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta* (London, 1956) where the revision was to show the operations of the African side of the Afro-European relationship. It continues with works like the description of Yoruba warfare by J. E. Ade Ajayi. See especially Ajayi and Robert S. Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* Cambridge, 1964), pp. 49-85, where the outbreak of the Ijaye war is discussed without serious mention of a European factor in the background. The theme

this argument, but the ideological aspect is obvious; it tends to reinforce African pride by showing that African history was made in Africa – not in Europe.

The opposite revisionist position has its main following in francophone West Africa, among African expatriates living in Paris, and at the University of Dar es-Salaam. Instead of playing down the influence of the slave trade, this school tends to emphasise it. Its members have been especially strong in opposition to quantification, with the fear that smaller numbers of slaves exported might reduce the importance of the trade. In Dakar in 1967, I was hissed by a scholarly audience when I announced for the first time my global estimates for the Atlantic slave trade. The apparent misconception was that numbers lower than some of the old estimates were an effort to reduce European responsibility for the sad condition of Africa. It implied the nonsensical position that morality could be quantified, which is certainly not so within the range of rational argument. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, a former historian as well as Director-General of UNESCO, opened the UNESCO Port-au-Prince conference with a denial that much faith could be put in any estimates of the size of the slave trade. That might be taken to imply healthy distrust of incomplete data, but he went on, with no evidence at all, to say that "... for more than four centuries, population growth in Africa lagged greatly behind that in other continents over the same period."[29]

The conference, heavily francophone in composition, concluded that the slave trade was responsible for the present economic backwardness of Africa – a position that is somewhat problematical, given the weight of European influence since 1880. But it refused to support the Director-General on the size of the diaspora, concluding that the most likely figure lay between 15 and 30 million exported by way of the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Red Sea, or Sahara, though it also noted that some specialists (unnamed) thought that it was probably closer to 210 million for loss of life from all causes.[30] In fact, 15 to 30 million strikes me as a reasonable figure for an area where so much guesswork is involved.

Meanwhile, and somewhat apart from the ideological battles, scholarly investigation has been moving in new directions – including a deeper kind of investigation of the slave trade in a broader setting of pre-colonial African economic history. Trade and politics along the West African coast have received a good deal of attention over the years since K. Onwuka Dike's pioneering *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta*. These studies did much to illuminate the history

appears more explicitly in Kwame Arhin's work on Asante expansion in the eighteenth century. Arhin contends that this expansion was not motivated by a mere search for gain through the slave trade. (K. Arhin, "The Structure of Greater Ashanti," *Journal of African History* 8 [1967]:65-85 and "The Financing of Ashanti Expansion," *Africa* 27 [1967]:283-291). Still another straw in a more recent wind comes from the standard and dominantly African-authored work on West African History, J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder, eds., *History of West Africa*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London, 1976. Where the first two editions had a separate chapter on the Atlantic slave trade, the third edition is to have two chapters on commerce – one on internal commerce and one on external commerce, including the slave trade, but reducing its exclusive role.

[29] UNESCO, "Final Report," Annex III, p. 3.

[30] UNESCO, "Final Report," pp. 2-3.

of Afro-European relations, but they had an unintended consequence of causing readers to overrate the European factor, simply because these studies concentrated on relations with the Europeans. The newer tendency is to try for an understanding of foreign trade in a setting of trade in general. Werner Peukert's recent study of Dahomey can serve as an example. He attacks what he calls the "Atlantic theory," or over-emphasis on the role of Atlantic trade, and his is only one of a number of similar studies of regional economics, several of these still unpublished.[31] And Peukert's conclusions were a direct contradiction of the UNESCO conference. He held that, as far as Dahomey was concerned it was not economically backward in the first place – given the time and circumstances – and, secondly, European influences on economic development at this period were comparatively small one way or the other.[32] This revisionist view may not be the case for other slave-supplying regions, and considerable social and political differences in places like the Ibo country to the east, or the Congo basin, suggest that the Dahomean pattern will not turn out to be generalisable – even though the "Atlantic theory" may need to be overthrown elsewhere as well.

Meanwhile, another branch of new research concentrates on the "Atlantic" factor in West African economies, especially on the economics of the slave trade. This subject received comparatively little attention until the 1970s, partly because economic historians whose major discipline was economics were comparativley rare in African studies before then. The old and half-unconscious myth about the slave trade as an economic institution was based on racist assumptions – that African workers were especially docile, coming from a "primitive" continent, where people were both indolent and redundant. Meanwhile, European plantation enterprise had a use for these same workers in the Americas. The idea should have been attacked outright long before it was. How could a truly "primitive" commercial organisation recruit and deliver one hundred thousand people to the coast for sale in a single year? And that figure appears to have been reached in a few peak years. Other problems became obvious to some observers as early as the eighteenth century. Malachi Postelthwayt noticed the enormous cost of carrying workers across the Atlantic, when the African environment was not very different from that of the tropical Americas. Why, then, not have the plantations in Africa and save the cost of the slave trade?[33] Plantations were later tried and failed, but

[31] Werner Peukert, *Der Atlantische Sklavenhandel von Dahomey 1740-1797: Wirtschafts-anthropologie und Sozialgeschichte* (Wiesbaden, 1978), English summary pp. 371-378; P. D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Pre-Colonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade,* 2 vols. (Madison, 1975); Patrick Manning, "Growth Despite Slavery and Taxes: The Bight of Benin, 1640-1960," (unpublished paper presented at the African Studies Association, annual meeting, Baltimore, November 1978), and Manning's forthcoming book on the economy of the Bight of Benin; Paul Lovejoy's forthcoming research on the kola trade from the Gold Coast to northern Nigeria, the Borno salt trade, and other topics in the economic history of the central Sudan and northern Nigeria are taking the shape of a regional study of that pre-colonial economy.

[32] UNESCO, "Final Report," p. 6; Peukert, *Atlantische Sklavenhandel,* pp. 374-375.

[33] Malachy Postelthwayt, "Africa," in *Universal Dictionary of Trade,* 2 vols. (London, 1774).

the problem remained. How was it possible to bring labour from Africa, to have that labour sustain a net natural decrease, and still produce sugar and other tropical staples for sale on the world market at competitive prices?

Much of the recent research on the economics of the slave trade has had this implicit problem in the background, one way or another. One early step toward its solution was to recognise that the death of the Indians freed American resources for development. Studies in historical epidemiology showed that people from the African disease environments survived transplantation to the New World tropics far better than Europeans did – hence a differential demand for African, rather than European labour.

The supply side of the slave trade has only recently come under investigation. R. P. Thomas and R. N. Bean produced an interesting theoretical article, suggesting that the economic patterns of fisheries might also apply to the slave trade.[34] Other studies have been concerned with the price elasticity of the supply of slaves to the trade. The point of departure was a striking rise in the real prices offered for slaves on the African coast, with a four-fold rise over the period from about 1680 to 1780. In the same period, annual deliveries rose by a similar factor. This apparently high price-elasticity suggests either that African slave-catching increased in response to prices offered, or that African merchants were able to go further into the interior as rising prices made it possible for them to cover higher costs of longer journeys.[35] One apparent implication is that Africans were far more sophisticated economically than earlier authorities had claimed, but also that increasing economic demand must have had an increasingly disastrous set of consequences for African societies.

On the other hand, this picture of highly elastic supply response is drawn from the aggregated total supply from all the individual regions that sent slaves into the trade. But there were marked regional differences. In Senegambia, slave exports reached a peak in the 1730s and then declined steadily in the face of rising prices. Other regions, like the present-day Ivory Coast and Liberia, showed peaks of slave exports at intervals, but in circumstances where the peaks correlate very closely with local military and political events and very badly with slave prices.[36] Again, the solution will have to be detailed studies, region by region but also comparative with other regions so that we can know with confidence why slave supply correlated closely with price changes in some places but not in others.

African supply conditions are involved in still another apparent paradox – or a part of Postelthwayt's puzzle. Up to the mid-eighteenth century, and sometimes afterwards, planters in the American tropics believed that it was cheaper to import a slave from Africa than it was to raise a child to working age. Since the cost of subsistence to the age of, say, fourteen, ought not be very different on the two

[34] Thomas and Bean, "Fishers of Men."

[35] E. Phillip LeVeen, "The African Slave Supply Response," *African Studies Review* 18 (1975):9-28; D. Eltis, "The Impact of British Efforts to Suppress the Slave Trade," (unpublished paper, presented at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association, Baltimore, November 1978).

[36] P. D. Curtin, "Measuring the Atlantic Slave Trade," in Engerman and Genovese, *Race and Slavery*, pp. 107-128.

sides of the Atlantic, the planters' belief might have been taken to imply that Africans sold people at less than the replacement cost. So far, investigation has not gone far, though the problem has important implications for African as well as American economic and social history. One problem is the difficulty in comparing subsistence costs over a range of different dietary patterns and other social conditions. No form of measurement, perhaps, can be very accurate, but the range of uncertainty is so great that an answer probably accurate within the range of half-or-double would be a considerable addition to knowledge. With this warning, it is possible to construct an index for measuring the price of slaves in relation to the cost of food. Everywhere in Africa, the main source of calories was in starchy staples – yams, cassava, millet, maize, rice, bananas, and so on. People also ate meat, fish, and other food, but one kilogram would represent a possible daily ration in the starchy staple of the region. The price paid for a slave can then be translated into a food-cost index by dividing the money value of the slave by the money value of one kilogram of the starchy staple of the region, to arrive at the length of time the price of a slave would support an individual. This index does not cover the whole cost of "subsistence." For children, it cannot possibly cover the cost of adult care and supervision; but it should indicate a possible range of costs, and it may make possible very rough comparisons between societies that are otherwise very different.

Market conditions that actually prevailed at the mouth of the Gambia in the 1680s can serve as an illustrative example of the possibilities. The f. o. b. value of a slave at that time and place was about £5.50 sterling in the prime (or European) cost of the goods actually traded. In local terms the price of a slave would have been a little more than 17 trade muskets, or 200 litres of brandy, or 350 kilograms of wrought iron in bars. At the going price ofmillet, it would have been enough to buy one kilogram per day for about six years. However rough the index, it suggests that a family could hardly have raised a child to the age of fourteen for that amount. But the f. o. b. price was only the last transaction in a series. In fact, the European slave dealers on James Island paid their suppliers only about £3.40, prime cost, or a four-year subsistence index. An individual actually making the capture near the coast would have received much less – something in the vicinity of a forty-month index. But if the slave had been sent, as most were, from the far interior, the original enslaver got less than a one-year index. At this price, it is clear that (however inaccurate the index) slaves were sold by their captors for much less than the cost of reproduction.For this particular region, in fact, it looks as though more of the f. o. b. price went to tolls paid along the trade routes than went to the original enslavers.[37]

With these factors in mind, the appropriate economic model in the present world is not fishery but burglary. Most slaves taken in Africa were captured in war, kidnapped, or judicially condemned. The captors could have a "cost of production" no higher than that involved in breaking and entering – some tools and weapons, an allowance for risk, and so on. The only costs governing the resale price were opportunity costs – the value of alternative possibilities of use

[37] These calculations are based on data in Curtin, *Economic Change*, passim.

or sale. For the captor of young men taken in battle, opportunities were not favourable. He might put them to work, but only under continuous guard. The more common solution was to sell newly captured slaves into the slave trade – and slave merchants followed armies in the field. Once the new slaves had been marched two or three hundred miles under guard, it was harder to escape and they might be sold to other societies that could try to assimilate them and use their labour under conditions requiring a measure of consent by the slaves themselves. Trade slaves were often sold for less than the cost of reproduction, but as they were assimilated by their new societies, their value to that society rose, until, in time, it might approximate the value of a slave born into that society. At that point the value might very well be equal to the cost of reproduction, which is one explanation why so few African societies permitted the sale of second-generation descendants of slaves, or even of long-term assimilated slaves. At the present state of knowledge, these conditions appear to be generally true for Senegambia and much, if not all, of the western Sudan. Whether they are true elsewhere, or require modification even for that region, remains to be seen.

The patterns of the East African slave trade appear in some respects to be quite different, and here the timing of the maximum levels of exports made a great deal of difference. For West Africa, maximum exports appear to have been in about the 1780s; for Central Africa, in the 1830s and 1840s; for East Africa, three to five decades later. While the West and Central African diasporas were started on their way mainly by local people, often people who lived near the scene of capture – and this would include people like the Yao and Bisa who were important in the trade of East Central Africa, leading to the Indian Ocean coast of Mozambique or southern Tanzania[38] – the trade of East Africa from central Tanzania northward began to take another turn about the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Swahili-speaking coastal Africans became increasingly important in the trade inland into what is now eastern Zaire. The "Khartoumers" from the Nile valley became increasingly important in the commercial penetration from the north into what is now northern Uganda, southern Sudan, the eastern part of the Central African Empire, and northeastern Zaire. With both of these groups, the level of political and military intervention by slave dealers appears to have been high enough to change the economic nature of the trade as well. Here again, detailed and comparative studies of a kind already beginning should help to clarify the situation.

Still another important new kind of research on the African diaspora within Africa has to do with the forms of slavery within Africa itself and with the economic use of people in slave status. Alongside the older generalisation, that most African slavery was "domestic" and similar to the Muslim service slavery, it is beginning to become clear that some Africans also took advantage of the low prices of slaves within Africa to use some of them in economic enterprises that bear comparison with "plantation slavery" – not, perhaps, on a full West Indian model, but still within range of useful comparative study.[40]

[38] Edward A. Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa* (London, 1975), esp. pp. 1-38.

[39] Cooper, *Plantation Slavery;* Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa*

Over the past decade, the progress of knowledge about the African diaspora has been enormous. To judge from work in progress and directions of research now being followed, it could very well be even more dramatic in the decade to come. Scholars have managed to circumvent, if not to sublimate completely, the national parochialism that was once so oppressive. The fact that the African diaspora went many directions for several different purposes is now beginning to fall into the perspective of world history, even though many aspects remain unclear. A field that was once the province of historians alone has been much illuminated by a partial victory over past elitism and by a growing influence from economics and anthropology – both in the hands of anthropologists and economists and in those of historians who pay increasing attention to the theory and findings of neighbouring social sciences. Along with this came a lowered tone of emotional involvement – not because the slave trade can now be considered to be less immoral than it was ten years ago, but because the people who bought and sold other people in the era of the slave trade are now more clearly recognised to be beyond the range of moral condemnation. We may also be a trifle less inclined than we were, to transfer moral condemnation from the past malefactors to living communities or individuals thought to be descended from them. If the popular understanding of the African diaspora is still impeded by the self-conscious mythmaking of *Roots* or the pseudo-scholarly special pleading to the UNESCO committee, the net result of this decade of research seems to me to be far more favourable than either – to the ultimately enhanced reputation of the African people. Where the previous image tended to show them as victims, whose very victimisation suggested their inferiority, the pattern of the recent work shows them as people with all the faults that other people have shown on other continents, but also all the intelligence and ability to respond inventively and with imagination to the pressures and opportunities of their time.

(Madison, 1977); Claude Meillassoux, ed., *L'Esclavage en Afrique précoloniale* (Paris, 1975); Paul Lovejoy, "Plantations in the Economy of the Sokoto Caliphate," *Journal of African History* 19: (1978):341-368; Jan Hogendorn, "The Economics of Slave Use on Two 'Plantations' in the Zaria Emirate of the Sokoto Caliphate," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10: (1977):369-383.