

Gold, God, Race, and Slaves

Slavery in the Americas was justified by racist ideology. Many scholars as well as the wider public believe that black Africans were enslaved because they were viewed by whites as inferiors. But the identification of race with slavery is largely a projection backward in time of beliefs and ideologies that intensified during the four centuries of the Atlantic slave trade, the direct European occupation and colonization of Africa during the late nineteenth century and into the second half of the twentieth, and the brutal exploitation of Africa's labor and natural resources ever since.

Before the Atlantic slave trade began, racism justifying slavery in medieval Spain and Portugal was aimed at people with light skin. Although there were some enslaved blacks there, slave status was identified with whites. The very word "slave" is derived from "Slav": whites who were captured in Eastern Europe and shipped into medieval Spain in large numbers. Racist ideology was based on climatic determinism, but it was the Slavs who were considered natural slaves. A scholar who lived in Spain during the eleventh century wrote:

All the peoples of this category who have not cultivated the sciences are more like animals than men. . . . They live very far from southern countries . . . in glacial temperatures with cloudy skies. . . . As a result, their temperament has become indifferent and their moods crude; their stomachs have become enlarged, their skins pale and their hair long. The finesse of their minds, the perspicacity of their intelligence is null. Ignorance and indolence dominate them. Absence of judgment and grossness are general among them. Thus are the Slavs, the Bulgarians, and neighboring peoples.¹

In medieval Spain and Portugal, dark-skinned people were often identified as conquerors and rulers rather than as slaves. The Islamic conquest of Spain began in 711 under Arab leadership. The Moorish conquest began in 1085.

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Moors ruled in the Iberian Peninsula for almost 400 years before the Atlantic slave trade began. The trans-Saharan trade linking sub-Saharan Africa with the Mediterranean world predated the birth of Islam. Pure, unadulterated gold arrived via the ancient camel caravan trade across the Sahara Desert. The purity and reliable weight of the coins minted in medieval Spain stimulated trade throughout the Mediterranean world. D. T. Niane has written:

In the tenth century the king of Ghana was, in the eyes of Ibn Hawḳal, “the richest sovereign on earth . . . he possesses great wealth and reserves the gold that have been extracted since early times to the advantage of former kings and his own.” In the Sudan it was a long-standing tradition to hoard gold, whereas in Ghana the king held a monopoly over the nuggets of gold found in the mines: “If gold nuggets are discovered in the country’s mines, the king reserves them for himself and leaves the gold dust for his subjects. If he did not do this, gold would become very plentiful and would fall in value . . . The king is said to possess a nugget as big as a large stone.” However, the Sudanese always kept the Arabs in the most complete ignorance regarding the location of the gold mines and how they were worked.

Salt, silver, copper, and kola nuts were also used as trading currencies. Ivory, skins, onyx, leather, and grain were important export items. The black slaves exported were mainly female domestics in demand by the Berber Arab aristocracy. Niane states that the numbers of black male slaves exported in medieval times for labor across the Sahara to Egypt and the Mediterranean has been exaggerated.²

As the Reconquest advanced, the Iberian Christian kingdoms sought to bypass the trans-Saharan trade controlled by the Moors, sail down the West African coast, and exploit the sub-Saharan gold deposits directly. Rather than slaves, gold was the main concern of the Portuguese rulers, merchants, and explorers who first sailed down the Atlantic coast of West Africa. Black slaves, initially a byproduct of the search for gold, became an increasing source of wealth in the Iberian Christian kingdoms.

The Senegal River Valley had deep, sustained economic, technological, cultural, religious, and political ties with Spain and Portugal. These contacts began very early. Jewish trading communities in sub-Saharan West Africa evidently preceded Islam. As early as the eighth and ninth centuries, Arab chronicles report Jewish farmers in the Tendirma region on the Niger River. A Portuguese chronicle dating from the early sixteenth century speaks of very rich but oppressed “Jews” in Walata.³

The Almoravids, a puritanical religious movement, were the first Islamic



Nok-Sokoto Culture, Nigeria, "Head of Court Figure," terra cotta, ca. 300 B.C.–A.D. 200. This piece is among the oldest sculptures found in sub-Saharan West Africa. (New Orleans Museum of Art: Gift of Mrs. Françoise Billion Richardson, 95.357.)

conquerors in sub-Saharan Africa. Established by Ibn Yasin among the Sanhaja Berbers, they moved south across the Sahara Desert to control the gold trade of Galam and the gold mines of Bambuk and Buré along the upper Senegal River. Wardjabi, king of Takrur, was an early convert. He and his son Labi allied themselves with the Almoravids and began to attack Godala, king of Ghana, in 1056. They captured Koumbi Saleh, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Ghana, in 1076. The kingdom of Takrur then controlled the Senegal River and its basin and monopolized the famous gold trade of Galam. The Almoravids had almost simultaneously moved north across the Sahara, founded Marrakech, and established their capital there in about 1060. In Spain, Toledo fell to the Christians in 1085. The Islamic Taïfa kingdoms had allowed the Christians to advance by intriguing and fighting among themselves. They invited the Almoravids in to protect them. The Almoravids defeated the Christians, withdrew, and then were reinvited in after the Taïfa kingdoms had failed again to stop the Christian advance. This time the Almoravids remained as rulers. By 1090, they had taken back much of the Iberian Peninsula from the Christians, stopped the gold payments made to the Christian kingdoms by the Taïfas, and created the first Moorish dynasty in Spain. This dynasty merged Western Islam into a huge state stretching from the Senegal River Valley, Mauritania and the western Sudan, Morocco, and most of what is now Spain and Portugal.

Thus four centuries before the Atlantic slave trade began, black Africans from the Senegal region were quite familiar in the Iberian Peninsula. Many dark-skinned peoples appeared in the late eleventh century not as slaves but as warriors, conquerors, rulers, bards, and musicians. In paintings portraying meetings and negotiations among Christians and Moors during the Spanish Reconquest, the Moorish generals, negotiators, and rulers were often portrayed as blacks.⁴ The Almoravids recruited black mercenaries as soldiers. In Seville during the first half of the twelfth century, officials tried to make distinctions between the Almoravids rulers and their black mercenary troops, requiring them to wear masks (*abid*) different from those worn by the Almoravids rulers (*litām*).⁵

The rule of the Almoravids in Spain was given an unjustifiably bad reputation by two nineteenth-century Northern European historians: Philip K. Hitte and Reinhart Dozy.⁶ These eminent founders of the European history of the Islamic world did not escape from the intense, overt racism of their times. They sometimes relied uncritically on sources of questionable objectivity. Resentful apologists for the Taïfa Kingdoms wrote some of these sources. Other sources derived from apologists for the Almohads Dynasty, which overthrew the Almoravids. The Almoravids are rarely discussed in his-



Map 1.1. Almoravid Dynasty, 1090–1146. Adapted from maps by O. Saidi and P. Ndiaye, in *UNESCO General History of Africa*, vol. 4, ed. D. T. Niane, and vol. 5, ed. B. A. Ogot (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984 and 1992); copyright © 1984 and 1992 UNESCO.

tory, and when they are, their bad reputation persists. Nevertheless, they were highly praised by their contemporaries and by Spanish historians, some of whom have proudly proclaimed that Africa began at the Pyrenees.⁷ Some Spanish historians have emphasized the unacknowledged debt Renaissance Europe owed to Moorish Spain. In 1899, Francisco Codera, citing an early chronicle in Arabic, argued against racist interpretations of the Almoravids' rule in Spain. The chronicler wrote:

The Almoravids were a country people, religious and honest. . . . Their reign was tranquil, and was untroubled by any revolt, either in the cities, or in the countryside. . . . Their days were happy, prosperous, and tranquil, and during their time, abundant and cheap goods were such that for a half-ducat, one could have four loads of flour, and the other grains were neither bought nor sold. There was no tribute, no tax, or contribution for the government except the charity tax and the tithe. Prosperity constantly grew; the population rose, and everyone could freely attend to their own affairs. Their reign was free of deceit, fraud, and revolt, and they were loved by everyone.

Even after its overthrow, other chroniclers of Islamic Spain praised the rule of the Almoravids. They wrote that learning was cherished, literacy was widespread, scholars were subsidized, capital punishment was abolished, and their gold coins were so pure and of such reliable weight that they assured prosperity and stimulated trade throughout the Mediterranean world. Christians and Jews were tolerated within their realms. When the Christians rose up in revolt, they were not executed but were exiled to Morocco instead. The Almoravids were criticized, however, for being excessively influenced by their women.⁸

When the Moors ruled Western Islam, a great variety of trade goods passed abundantly within this vast region. Horses and cattle, hides, leather goods, skins, dried fruits, arts and crafts, tools, swords and other weapons, ivory, onyx, grain, gold, silver, copper, precious gems, textiles, tapestries, pottery, salt, and kola nuts were widely traded. The coins of the Almoravids were minted mainly from gold coming from Galam in the upper Senegal River, which arrived via long-established camel caravan routes across the Sahara. Knowledge as well as technology moved across the Sahara in all directions.⁹ Al-Šaquḍī (d. 1231/32) identified nineteen musical instruments including the guitar found throughout Western Islam. He attributed the origin of most of these instruments to pre-Moorish Islamic Spain. The accuracy of this attribution should not be taken at face value. His book was a defense and glorification of pre-Moorish Spain.¹⁰ Music is, of course, the most transportable cul-

tural feature because it speaks a nonverbal, universal language. Musical style, musical instruments, and systems of musical notation traveled freely back and forth across the Sahara. Some Renaissance and post-Renaissance European music, including notation of pitch and rhythm, probably was transmitted from Moorish Spain.¹¹ Alonso de Sandoval, a Jesuit missionary working in Cartagena de Indias during the first half of the seventeenth century, wrote that the Guineans taught the Spanish and Portuguese a famous dance called “Canarios.”¹² Transculturation of music and dance throughout Greater Senegambia, Northwest Africa, Spain, Portugal, and thence to the Americas is an open question. The origins and directions of this flow of music remain to be studied. Rhythm, singing, dance, and musical instruments demonstrate cross-culturation across the Sahara in all directions. This ancient cradle of music might help explain the universal appeal of jazz as well as what is now called World Music.

Iberian languages contain substantial vocabulary derived from Arabic words for law, administration, public offices, military and naval terms and ranks, architecture, irrigation, manufacturing, and other technologies. Spain exported principles of the Spanish Reconquest to the Americas. During its early stages, the pope justified the Atlantic slave trade as an extension of the Reconquest to sub-Saharan Africa and gave Portugal a monopoly of the maritime trade there. Christian beliefs, laws, and practices in Spain and Portugal were deeply influenced by Islamic concepts of international law, the rights and privileges of the conqueror and the conquered, the justification for enslavement, the law of slavery, and the mutual obligations and rights of masters and slaves. The concepts of just war and legal enslavement, including limitations on the right to enslave coreligionists, stemmed largely from Islamic law. Discussions about legal enslavement in early America involved mainly the mutable concept of religion rather than the immutable concept of race. When African slavery was introduced into the English colonies in the Americas during the seventeenth century, Christianity, not race, continued to dominate discussions of legal slavery, just enslavement, and whether enslaved Africans who converted to Christianity had to be freed. The link between religion and race centering on the curse of Ham played a minor role in these early discussions.¹³ Racist justifications for enslavement and slavery of black Africans increased over time.

Despite the relative fluidity of color prejudice in medieval Spain and Portugal, as the Atlantic slave trade developed, slavery became associated with blacks, and antiblack racism became very powerful in Portuguese and Spanish America. Although its forms were different, racism was just as strong as in other American colonies. Corporatism was the foundation of law. The corpo-

ratist legal system was based on inequality before the law. It made legal and social distinctions among groups of people defined in accordance with comparative amounts of white blood among mixed-bloods and how many generations they were removed from slavery. Thus important distinctions were made among nonwhites, creating conflicts among them. It was a very efficient mechanism of social control for societies where the Spanish and Portuguese were a small minority ruling and exploiting a large subaltern population. It enabled the Iberian elite to exercise more effective control over all of the social layers beneath them. Thus some white blood in the lower casts carried much more weight in Latin America than it did in the British colonies. In insecure frontier societies like Spanish Florida and Louisiana and elsewhere in Latin America, military and police use of slaves and their descendants was promoted as a strategic policy. Manumission of slaves was encouraged to expand the layer of protection enjoyed by Spanish colonists and rulers against their own subjects as well as against foreign threats.¹⁴ These more privileged, militarized population sectors were expected to keep order, chase runaway slaves, and serve as militias during the frequent wars among the European colonizers of the Americas. Purity of blood, *pureza de sangre*, was highly valued among the Latin American elite, although its Native American and African antecedents can sometimes be documented. Antiblack racism was and remains very powerful in Latin America. Some scholars from the United States, impressed by these formal contrasts with racism in their own country, have spread still widely believed myths of mild slavery and benign race relations in Latin America, making it much harder to combat racism because its existence is often denied.¹⁵

Not enough has changed since W. E. B. Du Bois lamented the state of denial and the high level of rationalization among historians of the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the Americas. Some eminent historians are still excusing and rationalizing it, and their ideas are spreading in Europe and even in Africa. One popular argument is that slavery was widespread in Africa before the Atlantic slave trade began and that Africans participated in this trade on an equal basis with Europeans. Many “Western” historians deny that European and American wealth and power was built up to a great extent from the Atlantic slave trade and the unpaid labor of Africans and their descendants in the Americas.

Slave trade and slavery existed throughout the world for millennia. But it was not the same in all times and places. Slavery is a historical — not a sociological — category. The transatlantic slave trade was uniquely devastating. It was surely the most vicious, longest-lasting example of human brutality and exploitation in history. It was an intrusive, mobile, maritime activity carried

out by faraway powers insulated from retaliation in kind. For over 400 years, it involved the hemorrhaging of the most productive and potentially productive age groups among the population in African regions deeply affected by it.¹⁶

Why was it Africans who were enslaved and dragged to the Americas to fulfill the colonists' needs for labor? Why did Europeans victimize Africans instead of sending their own people or other Europeans to the Americas either as voluntary immigrants or forced laborers? Until very recent times, when advanced technology became the primary basis for the wealth and power of nations, population was the most crucial factor. The populations of Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands were very thin and their empires huge. France was a continental power with long, vulnerable borders. Its efforts to find significant numbers of French volunteer workers for its colonies failed. Its ministers expressed deep concern about the loss of the country's "useful" population and outlawed deportation of French men and women as forced laborers unless they were military deserters, criminals, prostitutes, or considered useless and/or troublemakers. Widespread rioting in Paris and elsewhere forced France to stop the kidnapping of French citizens for deportation to its colonies. The land of the Netherlands was tiny, and its populace commensurately small. The Dutch empire in the Americas was largely commercial. Dutch merchants supplied enslaved Africans primarily to the colonies of other European powers, bought raw sugar for their country's refineries in Amsterdam, and sold it throughout Europe.

England had a greater population surplus than the Continental powers. Located off the European coast and protected by the English Channel, she was much better placed strategically than France. Former peasants were removed from their land by sheep enclosures as the woolen industry grew. Irish war captives, English "criminals," and religious dissenters were available to send, or to go voluntarily to the Americas. David Eltis concluded that equal numbers of Europeans and Africans (about 300,000 of each) arrived in English America during the last half of the seventeenth century while African "immigrants" vastly outnumbered Europeans in Dutch, French, and Portuguese colonies.¹⁷ But as the labor-hungry sugar plantation system developed in the Caribbean, the need of the British for labor in their own colonies and to sell elsewhere in America could not have been satisfied internally without risking labor shortages, rising labor costs, and internal rioting and disruption. The European powers avoided disorganizing their own societies and undermining their own wealth and power by sharply limiting the number of their own people sent to America. They did not engage in warfare to obtain slaves from neighboring powers, thereby avoiding retaliation in kind. Instead, they

imposed on faraway Africa the financial cost, destruction, social disorganization, demoralization, and population loss resulting from warfare and kidnapping to obtain captives for enslavement. European colonizers imported millions of young Africans to work in their colonies in the Americas. Africa bore the burden of nurturing and supporting the very young and the very old. Many of the most productive Africans died in warfare connected with the Atlantic slave trade, in famines and social disruptions, in slave coffles headed to slave trade ports, and in filthy pens with little food and water, which was often contaminated, while awaiting embarkation on slave trade ships; more died during the crossing of the Atlantic on crowded, filthy, pestilent ships or shortly after landing and as they were being transhipped to their final destinations. These are the main reasons that Africans, not Europeans, were enslaved and sent across the Atlantic.¹⁸

During the past decade, David Eltis has been arguing that Africans were enslaved and shipped to the Americas because whites considered other whites as insiders who could not be enslaved and blacks as outsiders who could. He concludes that the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the Americas should be seen as an “ideological” phenomenon and not rooted in economics. He has written that “freedom as it developed in Europe first made possible the slavery of America and then brought about its abolition.” This “ideological” explanation for the Atlantic slave trade—and, indeed, for its abolition—is flattering to Europeans. It dismisses economic motives and exploitation. It assumes that only whites (“Westerners”) had a concept of freedom, which they finally, magnanimously extended to blacks. According to this argument, enslaved Africans in the Americas had nothing to do with their own liberation. The Haitian Revolution is dismissed as “arguably a Western phenomenon.”¹⁹ David Brion Davis has commented, “In a pathbreaking exercise in counterfactual history, David Eltis has argued that Western Europeans would have populated the New World with white European slaves if cultural inhibitions had not checked pure economic interest.”²⁰

The brutality of the ruling elite of Europe toward their own people before the French Revolution of 1789 is worth noting. In 1760, a memorandum of the office of the king of France stated casually that 60,000 French troops had been executed for desertion. French colonial authorities in Louisiana proposed giving the Choctaw Indians a sum equal to what they received for the scalps of Chickasaw Indians for the scalps of French military deserters. The tender heart of the French crown toward the poor and unprotected of France is well revealed by a report to the king of France: “Populating Louisiana has been absolutely neglected since France has taken possession of the colony. Men and women who were criminals and prostitutes whom one wished to

get rid of in Paris and throughout the kingdom were sent at various times, but the little care taken of them upon their arrival as well as their laziness and licentiousness resulted in their destruction and there are practically none of them left today. It can be regarded as fortunate for this colony that such a bad race was wiped out at its beginning and did not give birth to a vicious people with corrupt blood.”²¹

There is an increasingly popular argument that Africans and Europeans shared equal responsibility for the Atlantic slave trade.²² Unfortunately, some Africans, the vast majority of whom were the victims, not the perpetrators, are accepting the blame. There have been ceremonies in Africa where Africans accepted responsibility and apologized for the Atlantic slave trade. It is not true that African industriousness and productiveness made Africans equal, active participants in the Atlantic slave trade. Sub-Saharan Africans were indeed productive. They had to be in order to nurture the tens of millions of people destroyed and gobbled up by the Atlantic slave trade. Although European maritime traders had to negotiate as equals—and often as inferiors—with African traders along the Atlantic coast, in broad perspective over time, African power was undermined and fractionalized by the slave trade and the warfare, social disorganization, and population loss that it involved. Europe and Africa were not equal partners in this gruesome activity.

There was a vast distinction between slavery in Africa and slavery in the Americas. Many forms of labor systems existed in sub-Saharan Africa. They involved a variety of mutual obligations. Many different words were used for the various forms of slavery. In Africa, slavery was often a system of incorporation into the society. According to Robert Harms:

When a newly purchased slave arrived in a Bobangi village, he was either a *montambu*, a purchased slave, or a *montangi*, a prisoner of war. War prisoners were usually sold again to get them as far as possible from the point of capture, but purchased slaves were generally incorporated into the society[, which] would generally lead to full membership. . . . While slave status gave the dispossessed person a master to protect him from others, it provided only limited security because there was nobody to protect him from the master. . . . The main difference between a slave and a freeman was that a freeman could not be killed at the whim of his master or at the funeral of his master. This was not only a legal distinction, but also a practical one derived from the fact that a freeman's family would protect him, while a slave had nobody. A rich and powerful slave, however, had his own slaves to protect him, so there was little practical difference in legal rights. . . . The slaves defined their re-

relationship to their master and his family as well as their relationships to each other by employing the idiom of kinship. A slave called his master “father,” and whichever of the master’s wives had been chosen to take care of him was called “mother.” Slaves of the same age as well as free-born children of the master were called “brother” and “sister.” . . . A young slave might call an older slave of the same master “uncle,” even though they both called their master “father.”

During the first years of slavery, the purchased slave was in great danger of being killed at the death of his master, so that he could accompany him to the next world, or as part of a ritual to seal an agreement between chiefs. But this danger diminished after he learned the language and was incorporated into the family.²³

Some scholars claim that before the Portuguese arrived, there was no word for “slave” in the Bantu languages of West Central Africa. Costa e Silva describes a mild form of slavery. The children, nieces, and nephews of these “slaves” were absorbed into the society. It was widely accepted throughout much of Africa over the centuries that the children of slaves were free. Distinctions were made between slaves kept in Africa and those collected for shipment into the Atlantic slave trade. They were sometimes referred to by a different name. The military use of slaves and the use of female slaves as concubines and sometimes co-wives and mothers of the children of elite men continued to allow for significant upward mobility for some slaves and their descendants in Africa. Some of them rose to the highest ranks of society. These patterns existed long before the Atlantic slave trade began and continued well into the modern period.²⁴

Distinctions made between slaves kept in Africa and slaves sold abroad continued to be operative throughout the history of the Atlantic slave trade. There were rules governing who could be enslaved. Slaves were often viewed and treated as inferior members of extended families while in the process of being absorbed by them. They or their descendants normally could not be sold. In 1738, F. Moore wrote, “Tho’ in some Parts of Africa they sell their Slaves born in the Family, yet in the River Gambia they think it a very wicked thing; and I never heard of but one that ever sold a Family-Slave, except for such Crimes as would have made them to be sold had they been free. If there are many Family-Slaves, and one of them commits a Crime, the Master cannot sell him without the joint Consent of the rest; for if he does, they will all run away, and be protected by the next Kingdom to which they fly.” These rules were still rigorously enforced in Greater Senegambia during the late eighteenth century. Slaves born in the master’s house or whom he had

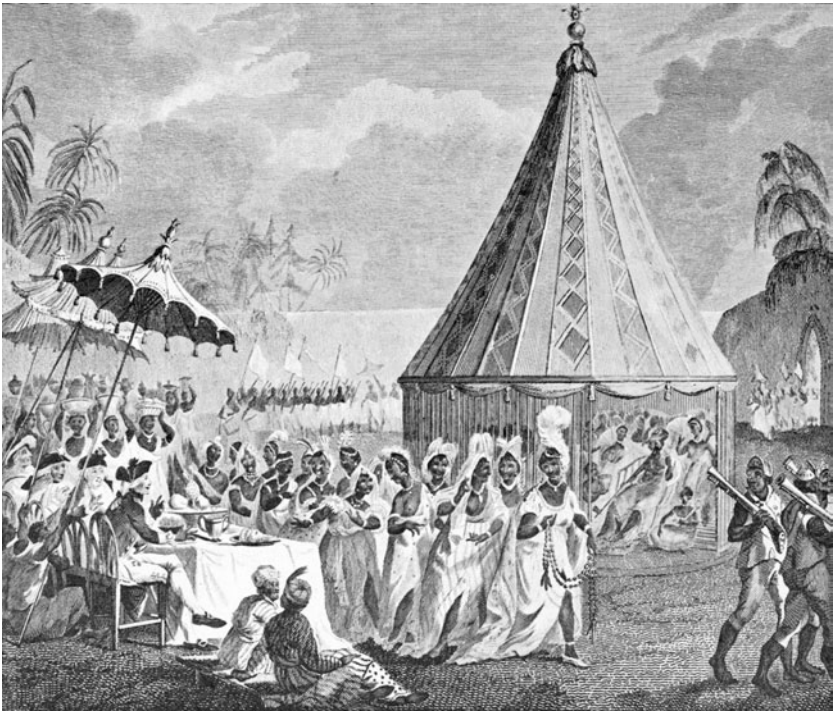
owned for more than twelve months could not be sold “unless they escaped, threatened the life of a free person, or engaged in incorrigible behavior.”²⁵

Robin Law has written:

In Dahomean tradition, one of the fundamental laws attributed to the founder-king Wegbaja, in the seventeenth century, prohibited the sale as slaves of anyone born within the kingdom, contravention being a capital offence; in principle, this rule was enforced so rigorously as to prohibit the sale even of female captives who became pregnant while in transit through Dahomey. . . . Slaves in Dahomey were in principle foreigners, captives taken in war or purchased from outside the country; Dahomeans should be enslaved only in punishment for some specific and serious offence. When kings of Dahomey, in default of sufficient supplies of foreign slaves, resorted to “selling their own subjects” as was alleged both of Tegbesu in the last years of his reign and of Gezo in the early 1820s, this was considered aberrant and illegitimate, in effect an index of social breakdown.²⁶

Interviews conducted as late as 1972–73 by David Northrup in southeastern Nigeria with forty informants indicate that distinctions were made between slaves destined to be retained in Africa and those to be sold into the Atlantic slave trade. The children of slaves kept in Africa became free.²⁷

In the Americas, Europeans called everyone they bought by one word: “slave.” Incorporation into the master’s family was rarely a possibility, although there were a few exceptions for female concubines and their children during the early stages of colonization. Slavery in the Americas varied, but not by legal definition, form, and linguistic distinction as in Africa. Slavery in the Americas was no doubt more exploitative and brutal than slavery in Africa before the nineteenth century because it was geared toward maximizing the production of goods for an inexhaustible international market while minimizing costs. Slavery on plantations producing valuable, highly labor-intensive export crops, especially sugar, differed from that on plantations producing other, less demanding crops. Rural and urban slavery were substantially different. Slavery in mines where African skills were heavily relied on was different from slavery in other occupations. Mining for silver, gold, and copper was carried out under distinctive conditions. Mining for diamonds, emeralds, and other precious stones differed from mining for metals. Diving for pearls was an especially dangerous occupation. Although by definition, slaves could be bought and sold, restrictions on family breakup during sale varied over place and time in both law and practice. Enforcement



Women warriors parading before the Dahomey king and European men. (Archibald Dalziel, *The History of Dahomey: An Inland Kingdom of Africa*, 1793.)

was uneven. Depending on timing, demographic patterns, and varying traditions among colonists, slave concubines and children of white masters were sometimes freed by custom if not by law. Manumission rights and regulations varied over time and place as well. Skilled male slaves were more likely to have wives and children than unskilled slaves did. At many times and places in the Americas, slaves could sell products from the garden plots assigned to them; the domestic animals they raised; the berries, herbs, and shellfish they gathered; the fish, birds, and game they caught; the firewood and finer woods they cut and carried to sawmills and markets; and the craft products they made. Indeed, many American colonies and states depended almost entirely on food produced and sold by slaves in the markets of villages, towns, and cities as well as along the roads. Domestic slaves generally ate better and were better clothed than field slaves. Thus there was no one rigid condition or system of slavery in America. But it differed from African patterns of in-

corporating slaves and their descendants into the families of the masters and the broader community. Although paternalism was a factor in slave control in the Americas, its possibilities were more limited. Extremely restricted social advancement for slaves in the Americas, as compared to the upward mobility of slaves in Africa, left few alternatives to brutal methods. Masters had a more limited repertoire for controlling their slaves and less to offer besides contempt and fear.

The Atlantic slave trade had a devastating impact on Africa. Escalating prices paid for millions and millions of people over the centuries transformed the methods of procuring and treating slaves and undermined productive but less profitable activities. It created a progressively increasing level of violence and disorganization in African societies. As early as 1526, Affonso, king of Kongo, a close ally of the Portuguese and a devout Christian, complained, "There are many traders in all corners of the country. They bring ruin to the country. Every day, people are enslaved and kidnapped, even nobles, even members of the king's own family."²⁸

King Affonso tried to ban Portuguese traders and expel all whites except teachers and missionaries, but he failed. John K. Thornton's study of the early correspondence of West Central African rulers establishes that it was not slavery itself but the European violation of African rules limiting and controlling it that motivated their complaints.²⁹ Chaos, warfare, and empire building connected with the slave trade had an incalculably destructive, disruptive, and demoralizing effect. Warfare in Africa is difficult to disaggregate from the escalating Atlantic slave trade. Although it was often propelled by internal considerations, it became increasingly provoked, inspired, greased, and supported by the European demand for slaves in the Americas as the frontiers for the capture, kidnapping, and sale of Africans supplying the Atlantic slave trade expanded and moved inland. By 1650, the Gold Coast became a major market for European guns and powder. Guns were incorporated into the military by phalanxes firing from a distance before engaging in hand-to-hand combat. Akwamu and Mina mercenaries were used in the Slave Coast. One can indeed find in Lower Guinea after 1650 a proliferating slave trade driven by large-scale, escalating purchases of European arms.³⁰ It is hard to divorce warfare in Africa from the Atlantic slave trade. Philip D. Curtin's attempt to separate political from economic warfare in Africa has been cogently criticized by Boubacar Barry.³¹ John K. Thornton is right that discussion of warfare in Africa cannot be reduced to "primitive" raiding for slaves. But he continues to defend the analytical separation of economic from political warfare in Africa—a distinction that is hard to make in regard to any place in the world—and he projects the limited usefulness of European firearms in

West Central Africa during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries much too broadly to other times and places in Africa.³²

Europeans did not simply tap into a preexisting supply of slaves or a slave trade in Africa. Slaves could not be easily purchased on various coasts for decades after the Europeans first arrived and began to look for human chattel. A new market in slaves had to be created. Although early chronicles by Portuguese entrepreneurs indicate that domestic slavery existed in Senegal when they arrived and that slaves were being exported into the trans-Saharan trade, there is little evidence that a major slave trade operated along the West African coast before the first Portuguese ship collected slaves in Senegambia in 1444.³³ That ship's crew attacked and kidnapped their victims.³⁴ It was always safer and easier to buy people who were already enslaved than to attack, kidnap, and capture them directly. Africans sold into the Atlantic slave trade were rarely slaves in African societies. They were largely free people captured to satisfy the insatiable market for slaves in the Americas. As the demand for slaves increased and prices rose, the judicial system became corrupted in order to "produce" more slaves for export to the Americas. The victims included free people as well as slaves. It was only after the Atlantic slave trade ended that internal dynamics as well as the European demand for "legal" goods produced by slaves in Africa resulted in massive enslavement, slave trading, and an increasingly brutal slave system within Africa.³⁵

There was no visible slave trade in Aja/Yoruba lands of the Slave Coast when the Europeans first visited there. They described markets where many goods were bought and sold. They looked hard for and inquired about slave markets but were told that such markets only existed 800 miles inland. This was, of course, not true and might have been a means to encourage the Portuguese to move on. The earliest Portuguese slave trade from the Bight of Benin began in the kingdom of Benin not very far away, but it lasted for only a few decades before the king put a stop to it. During the eighteenth century, a group of Aja peoples told an English traveler that the root of their unhappiness was "that they were ever visited by the Europeans. They say that we Christians introduced the traffick [*sic*] in slaves and that before our coming they lived in peace."³⁶

The development of large African states along the west coast of Africa and along major interior trade routes was often driven by the desire to exert control over the maritime trade and to take advantage of the European demand for slaves. The kingdom of Segu relied on selling war captives into the Atlantic slave trade and incorporated some of them into its armies. While capturing warriors and selling them was probably not the main motive for the expan-

sion of Segou, it certainly helped enlarge its military force and finance its wars of expansion.

The kingdom of Dahomey captured Whydah in 1727, advancing to the Atlantic Coast. After Dahomey destroyed the port of Jakin in 1732, Whydah became the exclusive outlet for the maritime trade on the Slave Coast. According to Robin Law, “The general view of contemporary European observers, that Agaja (King of Dahomey) sought control of Ouidah [Whydah] principally in order to secure more effective and unrestricted access to the European trade, remains persuasive.”³⁷

Two of the major polities that developed in West Africa, Asante in the Gold Coast and Dahomey in the Slave Coast, tried to protect their own people from the Atlantic slave trade. But this did not mean they opposed enslavement and sale of other peoples, including their close neighbors.³⁸ There were substantial numbers of Fon and Arada listed in American notarial documents. But this designation might have been broad. Arada was a commonly used ethnic designation in St. Domingue/Haiti. Very few Mahi or Savaru, neighbors to the north regularly raided for slaves by Dahomey, have been found listed in notarial documents in North America. One Mahi and one Savaru were found in documents in Bahia, Brazil, dating from between 1816 and 1850.³⁹ Marisa Soares has found that Mahi and Savaru who spoke Gbe languages eagerly differentiated themselves from Dahomeans in religious brotherhoods in Rio de Janeiro during the eighteenth century.⁴⁰

European trade goods made modest contributions to the needs of Africa. The most useful products introduced by Europeans were the food crops domesticated over thousands of years by Native Americans. They included maize/corn, manioc/cassava, pineapples, avocados, tomatoes, peanuts, white potatoes, some sweet potatoes, squash, pumpkins, and some forms of peppers and beans. African goods had been produced to high standards and traded over great distances many centuries before the Atlantic slave trade began. Textiles and medals were often of high quality. The Atlantic slave trade imported massive quantities of cheap substitutes to exchange for slaves and other goods, disrupting to some extent the established, traditional trade networks from the coastal regions of Africa into the interior and creating enclave economies along the coasts to supply the Atlantic slave trade. Europeans brought in and exchanged some useful products: various forms of currency including cowries from the Indian Ocean, cheap cloth—at first mainly from India and later in the form of mass-produced textiles from Britain—iron, copper, brass and other metals also from Britain, and luxury goods from all over the world.

Some of the imported products were destructive and addictive. Europeans introduced large quantities of firearms, including some cannons, and gunpowder. Regardless of their quality, muskets and rifles had a profound military and psychological impact in Africa and certainly helped escalate warfare and slave raiding. Warfare was subsidized by the sale of captured warriors and of villagers kidnapped in warfare as well as in private raids. The role of addiction in promoting the Atlantic slave trade is only beginning to get the attention it deserves. Tobacco domesticated by Native Americans was introduced. Some varieties were cultivated in Africa, but the market for tobacco in Africa was specialized. Powerful, cheap, sweetened tobacco from Bahia, Brazil, was in great demand along the Slave Coast. Virginia tobacco was popular in Upper Guinea. Light alcoholic beverages—palm wine, for example—existed in Africa before the Atlantic slave trade began. European and American slave traders introduced increasingly potent alcohol, first mainly wine and then brandy and rum. Such imports clearly undermined the physical and mental health of many Africans and made them increasingly dependent on the Atlantic slave trade.⁴¹

In West Central Africa, Portuguese wine was introduced very early. It was overproduced abundantly in Portugal as well as in its Atlantic Islands off the coast of Africa. The sale of wine in Africa was an especially profitable trade for Portugal because export and re-export of goods to Africa from Asia and northern Europe via Portugal raised costs and reduced profits. It played a ceremonial role in the process of trade negotiations. It was sometimes used to intoxicate African rulers and merchants in order to promote trade and obtain the best terms. The sale of wine was widespread in West Central Africa before 1640. But the introduction of rum with much higher alcohol content was particularly devastating. The first references to the sale of distilled rum in West Central Africa date from the beginning of the 1640s. Dutch traders began to sell rum to obtain control of the slave trade in the port of Mpinda on the Atlantic coast on the south bank of the Kongo River. Enslaved Africans from the kingdom of Kongo as well as some from north of the Congo River were shipped through this port.⁴²

Although the Dutch captured Luanda, Angola, in 1641, the Portuguese and Afro-Portuguese continued to control the trade routes of its hinterland. After 1648, when the Dutch were chased out of Luanda by a Brazilian fleet led by Salvador da Sá, Brazilian merchants began to replace Portuguese slave traders in Angola, expanding direct trade between Brazil and Luanda. They sold extremely potent Brazilian rum (*cachaça* or *gerebita*) and bought large numbers of enslaved Africans “produced” by escalating warfare.⁴³

For over a hundred years, New England rum played a significant role in

the Gold Coast and Greater Senegambian slave trade. It was extremely popular in the Gold Coast, where 80.8 percent ($n = 198$) of the 245 voyages leaving from Rhode Island with identified buying regions in Africa sold their cargoes.⁴⁴ In Greater Senegambia, New England rum and Virginia tobacco were in great demand. Neither West Indian rum nor French brandy would do. During the American Revolution, in the absence of New England rum, the slave trade there nearly collapsed.⁴⁵ In Sierra Leone during the early 1790s, one observer wrote, "Without rum [exchanged for rice and for slaves], we must already shortly starve."⁴⁶ New England rum and gold were the only products that attained the status of currency. Joseph E. Inikori's studies of British exports to West Africa show that between 1750 and 1807, "spirits" were 5 percent or less rising to over 10 percent thereafter and then 20 percent during the 1840s. Evidently, British "spirits" were not popular when New England rum was available.⁴⁷

African slavery in the Americas is usually discussed within the context of the need for brute, unskilled labor on sugar, rice, indigo, coffee, and cotton plantations. But Africans were especially needed in the Americas because of their skills. Spain and Portugal began to colonize the Americas well over a century before Britain and France. The Spanish American colonies focused mainly on the mining of silver, gold, and precious stones and the large-scale construction of harbors, docks, warehouses, roads, bridges, houses, churches, cathedrals, and fortresses. Skilled labor was desperately needed, and African skills were known long before the conquest and colonization of America began. The Native American population was decimated by conquest, warfare, forced labor, and diseases spread from Europe and Africa to which they had no immunity. While protection of Native Americans was couched in religious, humanitarian, and ideological terms, the main reason why these protective policies were adopted was to stop the total destruction of the native labor force in Spain's colonies so they could continue to be exploited through forced labor on heavy construction projects and by paying tribute in the form of food, clothing, craft products, labor, and currency. Although many Africans were relied on for their skills, especially in port cities, some of them were systematically substituted for Native Americans in the most brutal and dangerous occupations in early Spanish America—in mines, on sugar plantations, and in pearl-diving. Spain soon outlawed Indian slavery because it feared the utter annihilation of the Indian population in its American colonies. Slavery of Africans and their descendants remained legal in Spanish America throughout the entire colonial period and well after independence in many Latin American nations.

The colonization of America depended very heavily on skills brought from

Africa. Enslaved Kongo Africans developed and worked in the copper industry at Santiago de Cuba where they remained in high demand for centuries.⁴⁸ Africans who were experienced gold miners were in demand very early in Colombia to develop mining there. Africans designated as “Minas” were brought to Brazil from gold-producing regions of West Africa, including Greater Senegambia and the Gold Coast, in order to discover and develop panning and digging for gold.⁴⁹ Enslaved Africans were blacksmiths, metallurgists, toolmakers, sculptors and engravers, silversmiths and goldsmiths, tanners, shoemakers, and saddle-makers. They were designers and builders of warehouses and docks, barracks and homes, public buildings, churches, canals, and dams. They were coopers, draymen, and coach drivers; breeders, groomers and trainers of horses; and cowboys skilled in cattle rearing and herding. They were hunters and fishermen, as well as pearl divers. They were ship builders, navigators, sounders, caulkers, sailmakers, ship carpenters, sailors, and rowers. They were indigo-makers, weavers and dyers of cloth, tailors and seamstresses. They were basket weavers, potters, and salt-makers. They were cooks, bakers, pastry chefs, candy-makers, street vendors, innkeepers, personal servants, housekeepers, laundresses, domestics, doctors or surgeons, and nurses. They cultivated corn, rice, garden crops, tobacco, poultry, pigs, sheep, and goats.⁵⁰

For four centuries, the political and economic elites of the nations of Europe and the Americas were enriched by the foreign and domestic slave trade and the unpaid labor of slaves. The transatlantic slave trade was enormously profitable to the crowned heads of Europe. Licensing and taxing of the Atlantic slave trade became a major source of wealth for the Iberian kingdoms. The Spanish crown reaped extraordinary revenues by selling licenses to engage in the Atlantic slave trade and then collecting tax on every slave landed while passing all risks on to the Atlantic slave traders. The English crown invested in and profited directly from the Atlantic slave trade. The French crown subsidized the Atlantic slave trade by paying a gratuity to the maritime slave traders for each African landed in France’s American colonies. This subsidy encouraged the slave trade to French colonies so the crown could then profit by taxing its wealthy sugar islands in the Caribbean and the valuable products they produced and exported. French rulers, merchants, maritime traders, and sugar refiners reaped a windfall.

A vast amount of the wealth accumulated by European nations derived directly or indirectly from the Atlantic slave trade and slavery. Eric R. Williams argued that Britain’s industrial revolution was financed by the wealth derived from the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in its colonies in the Americas. The Williams thesis, published in 1944, has held up very well against criticism

leveled against it ever since. It is valid beyond Britain, although perhaps on a more modest scale. Its greatest weakness is that it does not make the necessary global links among European nations involved in the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the Americas.⁵¹ Joseph Inikori has corrected this. He discusses the role of the English slave trade and slavery in the Americas in the industrial revolution in England in a global context over the *longue durée* (between 1650 and 1850), emphasizing the growing hegemony of Britain in international maritime trade, including the transatlantic slave trade, the production in the Americas of increasing quantities of export commodities produced by cheap African labor, and the rise of the shipbuilding, banking, and insurance industries in England to support this trade. His work is well informed by a comparative approach; but it tends to downplay the wealth accumulated by other European and American powers through the exploitation of Africa and Africans. Inikori's definitive work concerning England should inspire other scholars to focus on these same questions in regard to Spain, Portugal, France, the Netherlands, the United States, Brazil, and Spanish America.⁵²

At many times and in many places, African coastal polities exerted considerable power and control over conditions of trade with maritime slave traders. But the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the Americas formed a system that operated over a span of four centuries. It ripped out Africa's most precious possession, its people, to create the wealth and power of faraway lands at an extremely high cost in suffering and human lives. This simple fact is not debatable.