

[Tempo](#)

Print version ISSN 1413-7704 On-line version ISSN 1980-542X

Tempo vol.23 no.2 Niterói May./Aug. 2017

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/tem-1980-542x2017v23o207>

DOSSIÊ “O TRÁFICO DE ESCRAVOS AFRICANOS: NOVOS HORIZONTES”

Patterns in the intercolonial slave trade across the Americas before the nineteenth century

Padrões no tráfico intercolonial de escravos nas Américas antes do século XIX


Gregory E O'Malley¹


Alex Borucki²


¹Department of History, University of California – Santa Cruz (CA) – United States. E-mail: gomalley@ucsc.edu


²Department of History, University of California – Irvine (CA) – United States. E-mail: aborucki@uci.edu


Services on Demand


Journal 


 SciELO Analytics


Article 


 text new page (beta)


 English (pdf)


 Article in xml format


 How to cite this article


 SciELO Analytics

 Automatic translation


Indicators 

Related links 

Share 

 More

More

 Permalink

ABSTRACT:

The slave trade within the Americas, after the initial disembarkation of African captives in the New World, has received scant attention from historians, especially before the abolition of the transatlantic traffic. This article examines such intra-American trafficking as an introduction to the digital project Final Passages: The Intra-American Slave Trade Database, which aims to document evidence of slave voyages throughout the New World. This article does not provide statistics on this internal slave trade, as ongoing research will deliver new data. Instead, we consolidate qualitative knowledge about these intercolonial slave routes. As the article focuses on the era prior to British and U.S. abolition of the transatlantic trade (1807-1808), we leave out the nineteenth-century domestic slave trades in the United States and Brazil to focus on survivors of the Atlantic crossing who endured subsequent forced movement within the Americas.

Keywords: Slave Trade; Americas; 16th-18th Centuries

RESUMO:

O tráfico interno de escravos nas Américas, depois do desembarque inicial de africanos cativos no Novo Mundo, tem recebido pouca atenção dos historiadores, especialmente antes da abolição do tráfico transatlântico. Este artigo examina o tráfico interno nas Américas como uma introdução ao projeto digital Final Passages: The Intra-American Slave Trade database, que pretende registrar evidências de viagens de escravos pelo Novo Mundo. Como a pesquisa em curso trará novos dados, este artigo não fornece estatísticas sobre o tráfico interno. Por sua vez, consolidamos um conhecimento qualitativo sobre essas rotas intercoloniais de escravos. Como o artigo se concentra no período anterior à abolição britânica e norte-americana do tráfico transatlântico (1807-1808), não abordamos o tráfico doméstico de escravos nos Estados Unidos e no Brasil para focarmos nos sobreviventes da travessia atlântica, forçados a deslocamentos no interior das Américas.

Palavras-chave: Tráfico de escravos; Américas; Séculos XVI-XVIII

From the publication of Phillip Curtin's *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* in 1969 to the launching of the webpage *Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* in 2008, scholarship on the slave trade has focused primarily on the forced Atlantic crossings of captives from Africa to the Americas. Whether emphasizing the experiences of captives or the economics of the traffic, slave trade historiography almost exclusively examines passages from African ports to a captive's first disembarkation in the Americas. When historians have looked beyond the Atlantic crossing, it has mostly been to analyze the internal African traffic to comprehend how, when, and why captives were forced into slave routes leading to the African littoral or to examine the goods Europeans delivered to Africa to exchange for captives. By contrast, the slave trade within the Americas has received scant attention from historians, especially before the abolition of the transatlantic traffic. Yet hundreds of thousands of African survivors of the transatlantic slave trade endured extensive continued journeys on the American side of the Atlantic. This article serves as an overview of such intra-

American trafficking - its primary routes and causes - and as an introduction to the digital project Final Passages: The Intra-American Slave Trade Database. The Final Passages Database aims to document and make publicly accessible evidence on slave trafficking voyages throughout the Americas. Supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities of the United States, the new database - including the research of the current authors and numerous other scholars - will be added to the website Voyages, which already charts the transatlantic traffic of captives³.

Slave routes within the Americas took a variety of forms depending on the particulars of geography, demand, taxation, politics, and economics at various sites where enslaved people arrived in the Americas and worked. Traders organized the intra-American traffic differently to fit local and regional conditions. This article does not provide statistics on slave trading internal to the Americas, as ongoing research will deliver new data. Instead, we consolidate here more qualitative knowledge about where and why intercolonial slave routes developed within the Americas. The article focuses on the era prior to British and U.S. abolition of the transatlantic trade (1807-1808), which began the long and protracted eradication of this traffic up to the ultimate Spanish prohibition of 1866 in Cuba. Thus, here we leave out the large and better-studied nineteenth-century domestic slave trades within the United States and Brazil after their respective independence to focus primarily on survivors of forced Atlantic crossings who quickly endured subsequent migrations from one American locale to another.⁴

In terms of the physical mechanism for transport in the slave trade only two modes existed: over land by foot, carts, and mules or over water by ship. For traders, however, there were more factors to consider than mode of travel. Their responses to variables of taxation, legality, demand, economic capacity, and imperial politics led to the development of six principal types of intercolonial slave trading, or perhaps more appropriately two broad categories, with three subsidiaries of each. The two broad categories were intra-imperial (i.e., trades within empires) and transimperial (i.e., exchanges across imperial boundaries). The intra-imperial trafficking broke down into categories of inland routes, tax-evasion trades, and market-scale distributions. The categories of transimperial slave trading were the *asiento* commerce for the Spanish colonies, quasi-legal or illegal trading, and free-port trading. One should bear in mind that the lines between these categories often blur, but they are worth considering separately to appreciate the different opportunities and challenges that each type of traffic presented to both traders and captives.

Intra-Imperial Slave Trades

Intercolonial slave trading across the Americas varied with local circumstances - the size and vibrancy of economies, trade and taxation policies, and geography. When the trade crossed imperial boundaries, additional variables affected commerce due to considerations of imperial politics, law, and security. As a result, intercolonial trafficking within single empires offers the most straightforward case with which to start since it tended to be less complicated.

One type of intra-imperial trade was overland transport to interior regions. Sites of demand for slaves did not always sit near navigable waterways, so workplaces inaccessible to vessels often required extensive overland journeys. Such routes appeared first and were quite common in the Spanish Americas because Spain's largest American population centers did not sit on the Atlantic coast. From the sixteenth to the early eighteenth century, Spanish colonists imported African captives to Mexico via the port of Veracruz, and merchants then marched most slaves overland for sale in the colony's most densely populated region - the Valley of Mexico - a journey of about 400 kilometers that circumvented the Sierra Madre Oriental mountain range. In central Mexico, Africans worked mostly in urban occupations, as artisans and servants, but some also worked in the countryside in agriculture, ranching, and mining (Sierra and Siejas, 2016, p. 307-333; Wheat, 2016; Palmer, 1976, p. 27-33, 43-50).

The Spanish also moved captives along several inland routes in South America. Thousands traveled to Peru, where Africans provided myriad services in urban areas and predominated in the agricultural production along the Pacific Coast. Some of these captives marched overland from Portobello across the Isthmus of Panama for transshipment down the Pacific Coast. Others ventured inland from Cartagena along riverine pathways, like the Atrato River. Some of these captives settled in towns near the Pacific and north of Quito, with smaller numbers continuing south along paths through the Andes to Peru (Lockhart, 1994, p. 194-224; [Bowser, 1974](#); O'Toole, 2012). Another overland route to colonial Peru through the Río de la Plata developed from Luso-Spanish merchant networks in the South Atlantic Ocean. Traders often marched the enslaved overland from Buenos Aires across today's Argentina and over the Andes, a journey of nearly three thousand kilometers to Potosí or nearly four thousand to Lima. African arrivals in Peru from Cartagena and Portobello predominated in the sixteenth century, because permanent Spanish settlement in Buenos Aires only began in 1580 (Palmer, 1981, p. 69-72).⁵ The route across the Andes became active in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the late-colonial slave trade to Peru was predominantly from Buenos Aires and Montevideo (Schultz, 2015, p. 424-444; [Borucki, 2011](#), p. 81-107).

Unlike Spain, other European empires saw early colonial settlement remain closer to the Atlantic and its major navigable rivers because they did not subjugate very large Amerindian populations, as the Spaniards did, and their economies focused less on mining and more on agricultural production for European markets, requiring easy access to the sea. As a result, in the non-Spanish New World overland slave trades developed slowly. While both the French and Dutch made forays into the North American interior to increase their access to the fur trade, they did not employ many Africans in these activities, so overland slave trades remained insignificant in their colonies. Britain and Portugal, on the other hand, did eventually expand the exploitation of enslaved Africans into the interior, leading to overland traffic.

Mining was crucial to this development in Brazil. During the Minas Gerais gold rush from the late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries, the slave trade to Salvador da Bahia - the colony's leading entrepôt - boomed, as Luso-Brazilians purchased Africans to march overland. The journey was long - more than 1,000 kilometers. Some Africans hiked even farther to Minas Gerais, from Recife in Pernambuco, almost 500 kilometers north of Salvador. As demand for Africans remained high in Minas Gerais in the early eighteenth century, Rio de Janeiro overtook Salvador and Recife as the major entrepôt for African captives because a shorter overland route to the gold mining sites emerged. Along the Caminho Novo it was only about two hundred miles from Rio de Janeiro to Minas Gerais, and Rio eventually became an entrepôt for inland trade to Mato Grosso and São Paulo as well.

The surging demand in Rio not only drew shipments directly from Africa but also enticed some merchants to transship enslaved people down the coast from Recife and Salvador. This traffic away from sugar-producing regions caused complaints from planters and led to the passage of a law prohibiting such migration from sugar-producing regions to the mines between 1700 and 1709 ([Graham, 2004](#), p. 294, 301; [Curtin, 1969](#), p. 209-210; Russell-Wood, 1982, p. 28-29; [Alden, 1987](#), p. 293-295). This emergent role of Rio in the coastal and overland traffic helped make it the capital of the Viceroyalty of Brazil in 1763. In the late eighteenth century, Rio's importance as an entrepôt only increased, as Brazilian agricultural production expanded in the interior. Overland slave trade supplied the emerging cotton sector, and the larger expansion of coffee plantations during the nineteenth century ([Graham, 2004](#); Miller, 1988, p. 448-9, 474-5; Schwartz, 1985, p. 416, 429).

In the British colonies, much to their chagrin and not for lack of effort, settlers neither systematically coopted the labor of hierarchical Amerindian societies nor found deposits of mineral wealth to rival those of Portuguese or Spanish America. Nevertheless, their

slaving operations did eventually expand inland creating demand for overland dispersal. In the Chesapeake region, by the mid-eighteenth century, a combination of soil depletion and population growth had thousands of planters forging out from the tidewater region to the Virginia piedmont in search of new lands. Many planters brought or purchased creolized slaves from the tidewater region, but a market for newly arrived Africans also emerged in the piedmont. After 1750, transatlantic traders delivering Africans to the Chesapeake typically landed them at ports as far up the James River as possible, such as Bermuda Hundred.⁶ From there, the enslaved marched farther inland, anywhere from 75 to 300 kilometers, but under whose direction is not always clear. Some merchants bought large groups of arriving captives on the James for eventual resale in the piedmont, but planters from remote areas also traveled to ports to acquire captives themselves or sent agents, friends, or relatives to make purchases.⁷

This overland migration to the piedmont also affected North Carolina, which grew rapidly in the mid-eighteenth century, both in coastal regions whose economies were linked to South Carolina and in the piedmont more oriented toward Virginia. In both regions, intercolonial slave trading was crucial to the growth of the colony's enslaved population grew from 2,000 in 1720 to roughly 66,000 in 1775. North Carolina's ports received only a portion of the arriving captives. The North Carolina piedmont exported much of its produce overland to Virginia and received most of its slaves through the same channels because the expanding piedmont region lacked a transportation infrastructure connecting it to the colony's ports. The journey from Virginia's closest entrepôts to settlements in North Carolina was more than 150 kilometers in most cases ([Kay and Cary, 1995](#), p. 16-21; Minchinton, 1994, p. 1-61).

By the late colonial and early national periods, overland slave trading was also important in South Carolina and Georgia. Especially when the transatlantic traffic of captives reopened after U.S. independence, most of the Africans reaching Georgia and South Carolina moved to rapidly growing interior regions - in these states, or even farther west. Some Africans traveled in the possession of planters who ventured to ports to make purchases, but local traders also acquired captives in the entrepôts for delivery and resale in the interior ([Kulikoff, 1983](#), p. 143-171).

Whereas geography largely explains the existence of overland trafficking, colonial governments also created an impulse for intra-American slave trading by levying duties on arriving captives. In British North America, in particular, intercolonial trades developed near borders between colonies with discrepancies in taxation. In the late 1750s and 1760s, for example, Virginia imposed much higher duties on arriving Africans than Maryland did. As a result, Virginia planters often traveled to Maryland to purchase captives, taking advantage of a loophole that made it legal to transport Africans from Maryland to Virginia without paying the duty if the slaves were for one's personal use. Merchants also played a prominent, if illegal, role, smuggling additional captives between the colonies.⁸ A similar tax-evasion trade emerged from New Jersey to neighboring colonies in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1762, New Jersey Governor Josiah Hardy complained of "the inconvenience the Province is exposed to in lying open to the free importation of Negroes, when the Provinces on each side have laid duties on them; for which reason great Numbers of Negroes are landed in this Province every Year in order to be run into New York and Pennsylvania [sic]."⁹ Such tax-evasion trades were unlikely to emerge outside British America, perhaps because the jurisdictional districts of other empires had less authority to impose independent taxes than British colonies did.¹⁰ Even within the British Empire, tax-evasion trades accounted for fewer slave movements than either inland or market-scale dispersals.

The third type of intercolonial slave trading within an empire was market-scale dispersal. The key to understanding this branch of the traffic is recognizing a primary consideration of transatlantic slavers in selling their human cargoes - speed. Rapid sale was crucial to the profitability of slaving voyages because longer trips meant increased mortality among the captives and greater payments to ship crews (which were larger than for regular ships carrying goods due to the security concerns and logistical challenges of slaving). Hopping from port to port in search of the highest prices might lead to slightly higher net income for a voyage, but the extra revenue rarely compensated for the higher operating costs associated with additional time at sea. Most transatlantic traders - whose average voyage carried more than three hundred captives in the eighteenth century - sought to maximize the speed of sale by delivering to an American port where they expected enough demand to sell the entire shipment. Speedy sale required not only a region with strong demand for African laborers, but also an economy robust enough, and with adequate liquidity, to pay for them.¹¹ As a result, a relatively small number of major ports dominated slave disembarkation before the nineteenth century: Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, Cartagena, Willemstad (Curaçao), Kingston (Jamaica), and Charleston (US), among others.

It was possible for merchants to profit from slave trading to smaller ports, but such ventures required an appropriately small scale ([Eltis, 2000](#), p. 128). If the demand for captives was too modest at a port in the Americas, transatlantic traders, who rarely carried fewer than 150 captives, avoided it. Instead, colonial merchants transshipped Africans from the major entrepôts to the outports within an empire, typically carrying smaller numbers of captives alongside cargoes of goods. Since merchants engaged in the intercolonial trafficking of goods already paid crews for these voyages, they did not face additional overhead costs by carrying a few captives as well. Such traders still viewed captive mortality as an economic risk, but intercolonial merchants - like all buyers from transatlantic traders - had discretionary power to purchase only those Africans who seemed to have survived the Atlantic crossing in fairly good health. Transatlantic shippers, meanwhile, feared increasing mortality if they kept sick Africans on board while checking prices and arranging sales at multiple ports. Most important, coastal traders could purchase the number of slaves they believed suited the market at their destination, so the mortality risk was limited to that one additional voyage. By contrast, transatlantic traders - managing large human groups - feared that selling in multiple small ports might mean numerous additional voyages spread over a period of months, as they sold only a fraction of the captives at each port of call.

If these concerns explain why transatlantic slavers did not deliver to every American port with demand for African labor, one might still question why slaveholders in more remote regions did not travel to the entrepôts to supply themselves at lower prices. At times indeed they did, but not often. The two main reasons were timing and economies of scale. Transatlantic traders typically sold their captives quickly upon reaching the Americas, leaving little time for word to spread to remote regions and for planters to travel to the sale. More important, a slave buyer's journey of several days to and from the entrepôt added considerably to his cost of acquiring a laborer or a small group of them. Merchants in the transshipment trade, by contrast, could spread the transportation costs over a whole cargo - either a large number of slaves or a mix of captives and goods. If it cost a planter £15 (not to mention eight days of lost work) to travel from Nevis to Barbados and back again with captives, it made little sense to do so to save £10 on a purchase of two slaves.¹²

Given these economic realities, coastal and inter-island slave trades emerged throughout the Americas. Such trafficking perhaps emerged first in the early slave trade within the Spanish Caribbean, as small numbers of captives were distributed between Spain's early outposts of Santo Domingo, Cuba, Cartagena de Indias, Riohacha, and other Caribbean ports, but this early trafficking was poorly documented and ultimately overshadowed by slave shipments from colonies outside the Spanish Empire. In Brazil, market-scale dispersals may have been most important. Brazil received more captives in the transatlantic trade than any other New World region - more than five million Africans by 1850. Once there, captives entered a "thriving coastal trade" in a variety of goods. This coastwise traffic thrived partly because Portuguese law confined transatlantic importation to three ports - Salvador, Recife, and Rio de Janeiro - until 1680.¹³ In that year, the Portuguese crown added Maranhão to encourage colonization in the region immediately

south of the mouth of the Amazon River ([Domingues, 2008](#), p. 477-501). In these entrepôts, major importers dominated commerce, and they purchased African captives as well as goods for distribution in coastal shipping and inland traffic. Since taxes and fees were minor, transatlantic traders had little incentive to risk smuggling Africans into other ports, which instead depended almost entirely on the transshipment trade.

The situation differed little during the brief period of Dutch control in northern Brazil in the first half of the seventeenth century. Recife remained the region's entrepôt, and arriving Africans entered a coastwise trade from there. To facilitate the traffic, the Dutch built a barracoon in Recife in 1643 to house captives during a mandated two-week quarantine. Afterward, traders sold captives at auction, typically in lots of five to ten. Resale was common not only within Dutch Brazil, but merchants also occasionally sent slaves from Recife to the Dutch Caribbean and even to New Amsterdam, today's New York City ([Boogaart and Emmer, 1979](#), p. 353-375).

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Dutch transshipment remained common, but Recife - which the Portuguese reclaimed in 1654 - was no longer the hub. Instead, Curaçao served as the major Dutch entrepôt, joined briefly by St. Eustatius in the 1720s. The majority of this traffic was transimperial and will be considered later, but a minor slave transshipment trade linked Curaçao to the Dutch colonies of Surinam, Essequibo, and Demerara in the second half of the seventeenth century. Curaçao was a major Atlantic hub at the time and engaged in other types of trading with the less developed colonies of the Dutch mainland ([Postma, 2003](#), p. 299-300, 308; [Jordaan, 2003](#), p. 219-257). By the early eighteenth century, Surinam grew significant enough to attract transatlantic slavers, and settlers from Essequibo and Demerara began to acquire their slaves in Surinam's main port, Paramaribo (Postma, 2003, p. 187-200, 217-221). Curaçao also transshipped small numbers of Africans to New Amsterdam.¹⁴

The French also transshipped slaves between their colonies in market-scaled dispersals. In the early years of settlement, transatlantic vessels often landed at Martinique and then transshipped some of their captives to Guadeloupe on smaller ships. In the eighteenth century the markets of both islands grew large enough to buy entire transatlantic cargoes of captives, but transshipment from Martinique to Guadeloupe continued at times because French imperial policy placed Guadeloupe in a subordinate trade status to Martinique. Slave transshipment from Martinique also became important for populating Grenada (which did not become a British colony until 1762). The island was home to 12,000 enslaved people by the middle of the eighteenth century, but few had arrived directly from Africa. Transshipment from nearby Guadeloupe and Martinique supplied many captives, and others were forced in from foreign colonies. Cayenne also relied partly on transshipment from the French entrepôts of Martinique and Saint-Domingue because transatlantic traders neglected the colony, which "lacked cash, attractive commodities, and solvent clients." Pent-up demand, on the other hand, drove prices there higher than in the entrepôts, making profitable transshipment on a small scale a distinct possibility.¹⁵

In most of these cases, across all of the major empires in the Americas, it was not only arriving Africans that smaller ports received indirectly. They relied on the entrepôts in their regions to transship European goods and other imports as well. The major ports provided less developed colonies and outlying areas with their connections to the broader Atlantic World for goods, and often information and governance. Intercolonial slave trading was incorporated into these exchange networks.

Transimperial Slave Trading within the Americas

If the motives for market-scale transshipments within an empire were mostly economic, the motives for transshipment across imperial boundaries were much more complex. To be sure, merchants in the colonies remained interested in profiting from the purchase and resale of captives, regardless of whether the transactions crossed imperial borders, but commerce and forced migration between empires introduced numerous complicating factors and motivations. At times, empires barred their subjects from trade with foreigners, but differential access to supplies of captives gave rise to price discrepancies across borders, giving great incentive to smugglers. At times individual American ports opened to freer trans-imperial trade, making them emporiums for commerce with surrounding colonies, including the exchange of human captives. Often the intercolonial slave trade operated between those extremes of the spectrum between contraband and free trade. An empire on one end of the exchange might prohibit transimperial slave trading, while the empire on the other side of the exchange encouraged smugglers in hopes of obtaining scarce resources or aspiring to use the slave trade to open other profitable branches of trade. Likewise, empires that generally prohibited trans-imperial commerce sometimes made exceptions to trade barriers for slaves, to address shortages of labor in their territories. As metropolitan and colonial authorities took a variety of stands on exchanges across imperial borders, the intercolonial slave trade took a variety of forms to accommodate the conditions.

A key question about transimperial trafficking is why an empire would not supply its own slaves from Sub-Saharan Africa rather than buy captives from a rival. Part of the answer is that trade in Africa was no simple thing for Europeans in the early modern period. It was risky; it required tremendous outlays of capital (though promising corresponding rewards); and it was facilitated by outposts on the African coast. Maintaining trade factories in West Africa required money, military strength, and long-standing trustful relationships with local African traders and sovereigns (from local chiefs to heads of larger political units). Thus, not all European empires traded with Sub-Saharan Africa equally - and some did not trade there at all, such as the Spanish. This disparity created demand for commerce between empires.

Patterns in transimperial slave trading in the Americas differed markedly from the patterns of intra-imperial trafficking because the colonies on the receiving end of such shipments sometimes had enormous demand for enslaved labor and robust capacities for payment. In other words, these were not market-scale distributions. In transshipments within an empire, traders typically sent small numbers of captives in mixed cargoes from major ports of the slave trade to regions where slave labor was less in demand or the economy was underdeveloped. Vessels crossing imperial boundaries, by contrast, often carried nothing but captives, and sold them in prosperous ports with high demand; these receiving ports just lacked direct shipments of captives from Africa. A colonial trader with connections to allow him safe access to a foreign port might purchase two hundred slaves in Jamaica for delivery to Cuba, or one hundred in Curaçao for delivery to Cartagena. While this generalization about the number of slaves carried tends to distinguish the trade between empires from the trade within empires, all slave trading across imperial boundaries did not look exactly the same. From its range, three main patterns emerge.

The first main type of transimperial trade, and surely the largest, was the traffic to Spanish America, whose unique patterns led to a higher proportion of Africans arriving via transimperial trade than was the case for any other empire. Out of two million enslaved Africans delivered to Spanish America, nearly 600,000 were shipped from other colonies, such as Brazil, Curaçao, and Jamaica, rather than direct from Africa ([Borucki, Eltis and Wheat, 2015](#), p. 433-61). The relationship of Spain to the slave trade was distinct because, unlike her rivals, Spain lacked access to commerce in Sub-Saharan Africa up to the early nineteenth century. This dated back to the fifteenth-century Iberian rivalry between Portugal and the newly unified Castile and Aragon under the Spanish monarchy. The Treaty of Alcaçovas (1479) limited Spanish expansion into West Africa while confirming Spanish rule over the Canary Islands. Likewise, in the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), Spain and Portugal divided sovereignty over the non-European world and left Africa outside of Spanish influence. Spain stuck largely to these treaties and lacked direct access to African trade for most of the colonial period. Castilians engaged in some slave trading from the mid to late fifteenth century, but the Portuguese took over as the main

suppliers to Spanish colonies up to 1640.

From its beginning in the sixteenth century, the commerce delivering enslaved Africans to the Spanish Caribbean and mainland colonies involved Spanish officials and merchants, Portuguese traders and mariners, and Italian (principally Genoese) investment and outfitting. This early traffic also included African and Luso-African middlemen who supplied captives to the Cape Verde, Canary, and São Tomé islands, the first African hubs of the transatlantic slave trade. During the union of the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns (1580-1640), Portuguese slave trading contributed to the repopulation of the Spanish Caribbean and the coastal mainland stretching from Veracruz to Venezuela and down to Peru, making enslaved and free Africans serve as "surrogate colonists" for the Spanish Empire in these regions (Wheat, 2016). As depopulation of indigenous peoples persisted during the first two centuries of Spanish colonialism, the labor shortage in Spanish colonies gave rise to significant demand for enslaved Africans. Meanwhile, the abundance of silver in these territories attracted foreign traders.

In general, Spanish bureaucrats considered foreign trade with their colonies a breach of economic policy, but their labor needs encouraged exceptions. To keep control over this trade and to limit contraband, the Spanish Crown negotiated a series of contracts with a range of merchants and empires for the right (known as the *asiento*) to deliver African captives to Spanish colonies (Eltis, 2001, p. 17-46, 36, 45; Palmer, 1976, p. 1-35). The *asiento* was distinct from other transimperial trades because it involved large contracts between the Spanish Crown and mostly foreign governments or merchant houses like the Genoese Grillo and Lomellino, who lived in Madrid and held the first monopolistic *asiento*. Before 1662, there was a mix, sometimes overlapping, of licenses and *asientos* that lacked the systematic, monopolistic goals of the Grillo and Lomellino *asiento* (1663-1672). The Spanish also negotiated *asientos* directly with foreign governments, such as the French and British Crowns, in the first half of the eighteenth century (García Montón, 2014; Mendes, 2008, p.: 63-92). Because of the long-term nature of the arrangements, companies fulfilling the *asiento* often set up bases in Spanish American ports, and foreign governments inevitably became embroiled in conflicts over the terms of the agreement during the eighteenth century (Palmer, 1976, p. 12).

After 1640, Portuguese independence led the Spanish to look elsewhere for captives, ushering in an era when intercolonial transshipment dominated the trade to Spanish territories. Over the next hundred years, the Dutch, French, and British all controlled *asiento* deliveries at various times, and all relied on transshipment, with the exception of deliveries to Buenos Aires, which almost always came directly from Africa since these European powers lacked bases for transshipment in the South Atlantic.¹⁶ There were several reasons for the pattern of transshipment in and around the Caribbean. The first was logistical. The journey from Africa to the Spanish entrepôts of Veracruz and Cartagena was longer than most transatlantic slaving voyages, and the Dutch, French, and British all held islands en route. Stopping broke up the long journey, giving captives a chance to recover (although Caribbean barracoons were little more healthy than slave ships) and allowing ships to embark on the next phase of the journey well provisioned.

Perhaps more important, transshipment allowed holders of the *asiento* to assemble cargoes tailored to Spanish American markets. Operating from a Caribbean hub allowed traders to sell unhealthy captives before proceeding to Spanish America or to purchase only those captives who had survived the Atlantic crossing in a healthy state. Both British and Dutch traders considered this appearance of health especially important for transshipment to Spanish colonies because they perceived the Spanish as selective buyers.¹⁷ Outfitting a cargo for Spanish America often also involved stowing manufactured goods from Europe or provisions from North America alongside the captives from Africa. Caribbean ports offered convenient sites for the convergence of these branches of commerce and forced migration. The Spanish Crown grudgingly offered the *asiento* as a means to acquire labor, but foreign merchants and empires hoped the agreement would open Spanish markets to foreign goods as well. Spanish law nearly always prohibited such exchange, preferring to keep the trade in goods exclusive to the *consulados* - the merchant corporations in Seville, Cadiz, Mexico City, and Lima. Nonetheless, foreign traders knew that once they entered a Spanish American port to sell captives, Spanish authorities would struggle to prevent them engaging in other trade. In fact, foreign traders often colluded with colonial authorities in such contraband. While the Spanish Crown opposed foreign imports, Spanish colonists and colonial officials often welcomed the trade because it lowered prices and ameliorated local shortages.¹⁸

In the mid-seventeenth century the Dutch introduced enslaved Africans to Spanish colonies through several variations of contraband, and from 1663 through the remainder of the seventeenth century, the Dutch dominated the *asiento* trade using Curaçao as their hub. Although the contract was actually held by an array of Genoese, Dutch, and later Spanish and Portuguese merchants, all of these dealers sub-contracted the Dutch West India Company to provide most of the captives. As early as 1641 the company had made Curaçao the drop off point for all slaves acquired by their privateers, and traders from Africa carried thousands more to the island. Few captives stayed there, as Curaçao was too arid to support plantations. Traders simply branded the slaves and housed them in barracks until transshipment. Curaçao engaged in illicit trade to Spanish America in the 1640s and 1650s, but in 1662, the Dutch West India Company subcontracted with Grillo and Lomellino to fulfill their *asiento*. This arrangement involved the Dutch delivering African people to Curaçao for transshipment by Grillo and Lomellino's representatives to Spanish America. Between 1685 and 1689 the Dutch merchant, Baltazar Coymans, held the *asiento*, but at other times through the end of the seventeenth century the Dutch sub-contracted for a share of the legal trade and continued illicit commerce outside the *asiento* (Klooster, 2003, p. 203-18; Jordaan, 2003). Neither the Grillo and Lomellino contract nor the subsequent seventeenth-century *asientos* included Buenos Aires, which was supplied by contraband Dutch and Portuguese slave arrivals. The Dutch sent transatlantic slave voyages to Buenos Aires, whereas the Portuguese sent both transatlantic shipments from West-Central Africa and intercolonial voyages from Brazil.

While foreign merchants were avid to transship slaves to the Spanish Americas, the *asiento* was never a happy marriage, and those tensions offered another reason for foreign traders to operate from nearby Caribbean territories. The Dutch were always on the verge of being thrown out and having their vessels confiscated due to the persistent religious and political tension with the Spanish. For instance, in 1685 the Inquisition reported its fear to the Spanish Crown that if Dutch traders continued to deliver Africans to Spanish America, they "will try to penetrate inland - from which will arise against our religion those troubles that can be imagined... {and} if the negroes come by way of the Dutch, they may be greatly imbued with doctrines and errors {which could} pervert many of these natives." Under such tense conditions, the latest news was required before making a journey to Spanish America.¹⁹

The French took over the *asiento* in 1703 and held it until 1712 using the *Compagnie de Guinée* to operate it. Like the Dutch they relied on transshipment, but unlike their predecessor they had no single hub for the trade. Instead the French purchased captives from the Dutch in Curaçao and occasionally Bonaire, from the Danish at St. Thomas, from British traders on Barbados and Jamaica (despite the British Empire's attempts to disrupt the French *asiento*), and from other French traders in Martinique. The *Compagnie de Guinée* rarely sent shipments directly to Spanish America from Africa except in the case of Buenos Aires, which was included in this *asiento*. Where the company relied on transshipment, many of their ships carried more contraband goods than captives, leading to persistent conflict with Spanish officials who often confiscated French ships and protested their smuggling (Palmer, 1981, p. 8-9; Palmer, 1986, p. 32-33).²⁰

The French tenure as *asientistas* did not last long because of events in Europe. The War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714)

was fought simultaneously to the French asiento, and the peace of Utrecht (1713) gave the asiento to Britain, as part of agreements regarding the balance of power in Europe. The South Sea Company operated the British asiento (1713-1739), and like its predecessors, the company emphasized transshipment (except when supplying Buenos Aires). In its first decade, the South Sea Company often ventured directly from Africa to Spanish colonies with slaves, supplementing those deliveries with transshipments from Barbados and Jamaica. By the 1720s and 1730s, however, the company relied increasingly on transshipment, from Jamaica in particular. The South Sea Company also emulated its predecessors in exploiting the asiento to smuggle trade goods alongside the legal traffic in human captives. Tensions over that smuggling contributed directly to collapse of the British asiento and the outbreak of war between Britain and Spain in 1739 (Palmer, 1981; O'Malley, 2006: chap. 6; [Nelson, 1945](#), p. 55-67). That rupture marked the end of the asiento system, as it had been known. Thereafter, the Spanish experimented with more localized arrangements to supply specific colonies (Torrez Ramirez, 1973). After the mid-eighteenth century, the Spanish increasingly acquired slaves outside monopoly arrangements until the liberalization of the slave trade to certain ports of the Spanish Caribbean in 1789, which was extended to the rest of the empire in 1791.

Apart from the asiento, trade between empires in the Americas rarely enjoyed sanction from both governments, so many slave shipments across imperial boundaries ran counter to the law - at least its official letter, as handed down by metropolitan authorities. Crowns restricted trade based on adherence to mercantilism, a philosophy that influenced much imperial decision-making in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Adherents to mercantilism viewed the world's wealth as finite. As such, they viewed foreign trade as a paradox - only exchange with a foreign nation (or conquest) could bring in wealth, but only such exchange (or conquest) could give wealth away. Colonies could increase an empire's share of the world's wealth by bringing more territory and resources into the empire's sphere, but only if the colonists' produce was exported to (and their consumption supplied by) the mother country. To maintain oversight, mercantilist policy makers tended to oppose foreign trade in their far-flung colonies (McCusker, 1996, p. 337-362).²¹

European colonists rarely shared the mercantilist goals of the metropolis. Barriers to foreign trade frustrated many American settlers, who lacked reliable access to commodities they desired (including labor) and who preferred selling their produce to the highest bidder, regardless of nationality. To acquire both goods and slaves, colonists consistently disregarded imperial mercantilist aims and encouraged illegal foreign trade. In many cases, the line between legality and illegality blurred as colonial authorities looked the other way - sometimes bribed - when foreign ships came trading because they saw a need for certain goods among settlers or had a stake in the trade themselves. In other cases, as in seventeenth-century Buenos Aires, local authorities effectively legalized contraband by routinely collecting moderate fines from contraband traders rather than confiscating vessels or cargoes. The fines provided revenue for the colonial state, and traders treated the charges more like import taxes - part of the cost of doing business rather than a deterrent (Moutokias, 1988). So while trade between the subjects of different empires was usually illegal, merchants - especially those carrying slaves - could often gain access to foreign ports. The plural legality and overlapping jurisdictions governing trade created room for merchants to maneuver.²²

Such trans-imperial trading was dominated by intercolonial shipments, as the fragile legality of the trade made captains of transatlantic vessels reluctant to sail their valuable slave cargoes directly from Africa to foreign ports without assessing the current political climate.²³ For speed and security, they often headed to major ports flying their own flag, allowing local merchants to distribute their captives to foreign colonies, or at least to get the latest news before venturing to a foreign port themselves. With timely information and connections to assess the risks, it could be highly profitable to transship African captives to foreign colonies, but caution was required.

In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Dutch clandestinely transshipped human captives to the English and French islands, but probably not in large numbers. Some scholars have argued for a pivotal role of the Dutch slave trade in supplying the English and French Caribbean during the foundational years of those islands' sugar cultivation in the mid-seventeenth century, but recent research suggests this Dutch role has been exaggerated, especially with regards to supplying the main English markets. English traders delivered more Africans to their own colonies than previously thought, and Dutch deliveries to foreign colonies mainly targeted more lucrative Spanish American markets (Vos, Eltis and Richardson, 2008, p. 228-248; [Eltis, 1996](#)). Whereas the data on English transatlantic trade indicates that the Dutch played only a minor role in slave deliveries to England's major slaveholding colonies in these years, there is some evidence to suggest that less populous English territories obtained captives from the Dutch via transshipment. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, English traders and colonial officials noted that planters and merchants from the English Leeward Islands traveled to Dutch territories to acquire captives and smuggle them back. Overall, English shipments from Africa supplied most of the English Caribbean's early slaves, but Dutch transshipment also contributed.²⁴

For the early French Caribbean, Dutch slave trading was more important because French traders did not meet the colonies' labor needs in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The French obtained some Africans by capturing foreign vessels and raiding foreign - especially English - colonies, but transshipments from St. Eustatius also delivered thousands of captives (Pritchard, Eltis, and Richardson, 2008, p. 205-227). By the early eighteenth century, the Dutch transatlantic slave trade declined relative to other branches of the traffic, and their African deliveries increasingly supplied their own South American colonies. The Dutch Caribbean also transshipped captives to Venezuela later in eighteenth century ([Postma, 1990](#), p. 289, 300-301).²⁵

With the Dutch traffic in decline in the eighteenth century, British colonies emerged as major suppliers of African captives to the French Caribbean - especially Martinique and Guadeloupe, which received less attention from French traders than Saint-Domingue. Through most of the century, France prohibited such commerce with foreign traders, but struggled to stop it. French buyers rendezvoused with British slave dealers at neutral islands to make transactions away from the prying eyes of officials. Smugglers sneaked captives into unmonitored bays for sales outside the primary ports of Martinique and Guadeloupe, where imperial officials were stationed. And some French colonial officials took bribes to ignore contraband slave trading or participated in the profitable smuggling themselves. Correspondence between French metropolitan and colonial authorities is replete with orders to crack down on smuggling, accusations of toleration for - or complicity in - contraband trade, protestations of innocence, and complaints that blocking the illicit trade was impossible ([Banks, 2005](#), p. 229-251; O'Malley, 2006, p. 152-160, 251-254).

Although colonial officials often ignored laws restricting slave trading with foreigners, there were certainly times and places in which efforts to enforce prohibitions altered the patterns of commerce. These restrictions often occurred, not where governments were particularly concerned about slave trading, but where companies claimed monopoly privileges and thus had a financial stake in seeing laws enforced. A zealous official could also surprise traders by adhering to the letter of the law where others had been more flexible. For instance, in 1660, despite frequent Dutch trade to Spanish territories, the governor of Havana confiscated the Hoop, which belonged to Dutch merchants, for trading without a royal license, much to the surprise of the traders.²⁶ This potential for sporadic zealous enforcement helped ensure that trans-imperial slave trading was commonly conducted between colonies, rather than directly from Africa.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, a third major type of trans-imperial slave trading emerged - commerce through

designated free ports. By the 1760s, the profits from transimperial trading (in both goods and enslaved people) convinced growing numbers of metropolitan policymakers of flaws in mercantilist thinking. Embracing the view that stimulating transimperial trade could benefit the metropolitan economy, some empires relaxed trade restrictions. In this context, many European authorities encouraged slave trading from Africa to their own colonies and then declared these entrepôts open to foreign buyers who could transship captives home again, legally or not according to their own empire's laws.

The experience of the Danish Caribbean was somewhat distinct because Denmark had never maintained a closed, mercantilist system. The Danish Caribbean had "free ports" from the beginning. In the late seventeenth century, merchants from the German state of Brandenburg took advantage of this openness during their fleeting interest in slave trading. They used Danish St. Thomas as a safe stopping point from which to sell enslaved Africans to English buyers who transshipped them to the Virgin Islands, which were neglected by English traders. That particular trade was short-lived, but more extensive Danish transshipment emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century. St. Thomas became a significant hub due to its combination of the free trade policy and an excellent harbor at Charlotte Amalie. Though few enslaved people labored on the island, due to poor soils, Africans passed through St. Thomas in increasing numbers, mostly headed to the Spanish Caribbean. Both Danish and British transatlantic slavers delivered captives to St. Thomas as an indirect way of targeting Spanish markets ([Green-Pedersen, 1971](#), p. 149-97).²⁷

What set the free port trade apart from other transimperial trades was that the Danish often did not undertake the transshipment themselves. They made their free port policy public and allowed foreign merchants or planters to come purchase enslaved people to take home - the legality of the transshipment became the buyer's problem. Merchants and planters who came from restricted ports to buy enslaved Africans had advantages for smuggling them home. They were more likely to have personal connections with port authorities to exploit, and their ships had a legitimate right to be in their home port, leaving only the need to divert attention from illegal human cargo. Knowledge of local geography and local buyers may also have informed such traders or planters of remote locations where the enslaved could be landed covertly without port officials becoming aware. As a result of such advantages, merchants from restricted ports often bought captives in free ports to ship home illegally.

The Dutch experimented with free port policies informally in the seventeenth century. In 1660 - the same year that the Dutch ship Hoop was confiscated in Cuba - Governor Beck of Curaçao reported that Spanish colonists often traveled to his colony to buy slaves. Beck revealed the value he saw in this trade through a number of actions he took to cultivate it. In a 1657 letter, he noted his plans to keep a small supply of captives on hand for any Spaniards who arrived. When that policy failed to meet the demands of prospective Spanish buyers in 1660, he borrowed slaves from Dutch colonists. He sold these enslaved people to the Spanish, promising the slaveholders who loaned them that he would replace the captives from the next shipment from Africa.²⁸

The Dutch also experimented with free ports in the 1720s. The Dutch island of St. Eustatius was an important commercial center for the Caribbean through much of the eighteenth century, and in the 1720s it experienced a brief period of importance in slave transshipment, mainly to the British and French islands of the eastern Caribbean. This trade was largely a search for new markets after the British South Sea Company cut Dutch merchants out of selling captives for the asiento. Though short-lived, the St. Eustatius slave market was significant enough that colonists constructed a building on the island to house captives awaiting transshipment. This market saw a brief resurgence in the 1770s, supplying captives to the emerging United States when revolutionaries were too preoccupied with independence to engage in slave trading ([Postma, 1990](#), 198-200; [Postma, 1992](#), p. 293-294).

In 1767, the British introduced their own free port policy, without opening the British Caribbean entirely to foreign trade. Instead, the British Free Port Act opened a few ports to foreign vessels for trade in specified commodities. Enslaved people and British manufactured goods could be exported, and foreigners could deliver colonial produce or specie in exchange. British policymakers included enslaved Africans in the act because in hopes that increased sales of people would boost British manufacturing. Traders to Africa would need more British goods to exchange for captives, and visitors to the free ports seeking slaves might also purchase manufactures. Parliament chose the free ports for their proximity to foreign colonies. The first were Kingston, Savannah la Mar, and Santa Lucea - all in Jamaica, with good proximity to Saint-Domingue, Cuba, and the Spanish Main; and Roseau and Prince Rupert's Bay, in Dominica, which sat between the, Martinique and Guadeloupe. Over the next few decades, thousands of African captives endured transshipment from the free ports. Eventually the British expanded the act to include other ports and colonies, but Kingston and Roseau remained the most significant hubs of the trade ([Armytage, 1953](#); O'Malley, 2006, p. 301-316).

While free ports facilitated transimperial commerce, easing trade restrictions also obviated some need for the intercolonial traffic by the late eighteenth century. The French legalized some slave deliveries by foreign ships in 1783, making it safer for traders to send captives directly from Africa ([Geaggus, 2001](#), p. 126). Likewise, the 1770s saw reduced trade restrictions in the Spanish Empire, and in the 1790s, loosening trade laws and booming demand in the Spanish Caribbean and the Río de la Plata, enticed many Spanish American merchants to take up the transatlantic slave trade for themselves. The relaxed restrictions also allowed foreigners - mainly British, French, Portuguese, and U.S. - to trade directly from Africa to Spanish colonies (Lynch, 1958, p. 10-19). The transition to direct African trade did not happen overnight, and British free ports continued to send significant numbers of captives to the Spanish Caribbean in the 1790s and smaller numbers of people in the early nineteenth century. But easing trade restrictions gradually ended the era of intercolonial transshipment to Spanish colonies.

Overlap

The different types of slave routes described here were not completely distinct, and some captives experienced successive transshipments by various modes. The most striking example is the traffic to Peru, which followed two main routes, both involving multiple stages after the Atlantic crossing. Up to the early eighteenth century, many Africans bound for Peru first landed in Spanish America at Cartagena. There, Spanish American merchants purchased them from foreign traders and sent them to Portobello, where they waited for weeks while merchants acquired other goods for Peru. The next journey was overland across the Isthmus of Panama, followed by another delay for acquiring goods. Many captives seized the opportunity of this overland journey to flee, and eventually a significant maroon community formed in the Panamanian countryside. Those who did not escape were again transshipped when they reached the Pacific, down the coast to Callao, the port of entry for Lima. This journey was also often interrupted by stops to trade along the Pacific Coast, and some captives disembarked at Trujillo to march south to Callao so that traders could sell some of them in smaller towns along the way. By the early 1630s, Spanish settlers had built a compound outside Callao to house arriving captives, who could then be sold in nearby Lima over a period of months. All told, the Spanish American portion of the voyage to Peru probably added four or five months to Africans' journeys, and even more if an individual was then reshipped from Peru to Chile. These protracted voyages added at least ten percent to the mortality enslaved populations suffered en route from Africa. One must also bear in mind that many captives had not reached Spanish America directly from Africa, but were bought and sold previously on Curaçao or Jamaica before enduring transshipment to Cartagena ([Bowser, 1974](#), p. 26-87; Newson and Minchin, 2004, p. 32-35).

Africans who made the overland journey from the Río de la Plata to Peru also suffered multiples modes of intercolonial slave trading. Most did not reach the Río de la Plata directly from Africa. Instead, they landed first in Brazil in Portuguese vessels and

then were transshipped to Buenos Aires or, later in the eighteenth century, Montevideo. Between 1680 and 1777, this traffic also involved Colonia, the Portuguese enclave on the Río de la Plata. Spanish merchants then marched captives to Upper Peru (today's Bolivia) and often on to Peruvian coastal markets on the Pacific. In other cases, captives marched across the Andes to the Chilean port of Valparaíso, from where traders shipped them to Lima. This Luso-Spanish slave route lasted 230 years from the foundation of Buenos Aires to the revolution of independence in 1810.

An anonymous estimate of the costs of transporting captives from Montevideo to Lima in the 1780s provides details about this route.²⁹ Arriving Africans stayed less than a week in Montevideo before embarking to Buenos Aires, which they reached in a one-day sail across the river. They stayed nearly two weeks in Buenos Aires, while the merchant purchased provisions and rented ox carts for the one-month trip to Mendoza. He also purchased clothing to keep the Africans warm during the crossing of the Andes. After the march, captives stayed in Mendoza for nearly two weeks, to recover from the slow inland trip. Meanwhile, the merchant or his representative found an *arriero* - to guide the Africans through the Andes to Chile - and rented one mule for every two slaves making the crossing. The trader also sent word to Valparaíso about the impending arrival of slaves to coordinate their transshipment up the Pacific Coast to Lima. For sixteen days, captives trudged from Mendoza, across the Andes, to Valparaíso, where they awaited departure an average of twenty days if they missed immediate transshipment. Nearly two weeks of sailing took these Africans to their final destination in Lima. The entire trip from Montevideo could take three months. Less frequently, Africans continued their coerced odyssey from the Río de la Plata to Valparaíso by sail, via the Magellan Straits. These inland and maritime slave routes met in Valparaíso, from where captives were shipped to Lima.³⁰ For some captives, even Lima was not the ultimate destination if they were sold to coastal haciendas as far north as to Ecuador.

While the journey to Peru presents the extreme case of the slave trade's complexity, it was not the only route that combined various types of transshipment and resale. Within the Caribbean, some Africans experienced dizzying series of transshipments across imperial boundaries. For instance, in the early 1790s, the Danes in St. Thomas imported numerous Africans from Dutch St. Eustatius, and smaller numbers from British and French islands, only to re-export them, primarily to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Santo Domingo ([Green-Pedersen, 1971](#), p. 159-65). All such journeys prolonged the forced migration, increasing the likelihood of disease, maritime accidents, privation, and violence. In addition, the repeated experience of being bought and sold drove home a sense of being treated as commodities by European traders - an experience that may have sapped the spirit of some, but that only makes more heroic the struggles of those who resisted through rebellion or assertions of their humanity.

CONCLUSIONS AND OVERALL PATTERNS

In surveying the major modes of slave trading within the Americas, certain patterns emerge. Some routes of intercolonial trade remained stable over time, supplying regions where slavery never took hold on a large scale (e.g. New England); that were too far from the Atlantic for direct deliveries (e.g., the Virginia Piedmont, Minas Gerais, Lima); or island colonies too small to ever warrant much attention from transatlantic slavers (e.g. Bermuda, St. Maarten, St. Lucia). More typical than regions relying primarily on transshipment over the full period of the slave trade was a pattern that saw colonies evolve from early reliance on transshipment to direct transatlantic arrivals. Intercolonial routes emerged to new or expanding areas of settlement that lacked the population or infrastructure to handle entire human cargoes from Africa. Transshipment then declined in relative importance once a region became an attractive market to transatlantic traders. Intercolonial traders continued to compete in these more mature markets when price fluctuations between various ports allowed for profitable transshipment, but they typically played a secondary role once African shipments became common. For example, in the French Caribbean, Guadeloupe relied on Martinique and foreign islands to transship captives from the late seventeenth century until direct imports boomed in the 1750s and 1760s.³¹

Another distinctive feature of intercolonial slave trades was the composition of cargoes. For one thing, in intra-imperial trade, merchants shipping captives tended to assemble small numbers of people in mixed cargoes with goods. Furthermore, the demographics of captives selected for transshipment did not necessarily mirror the larger population of forced migrants from which they were chosen. People transshipped within an empire were often those least desired by the planters near the entrepôt. For instance, the director of New Amsterdam complained to the Dutch West India Company in 1664 that the captives he received from Curaçao were "on average, quite old," most of them having been rejected in the Caribbean market.³² In 1682, Guadeloupe planters asked the French Guinea Company to send more direct shipments from Africa, "and not to send thither the refuse of the slaves of Martinico [i.e. Martinique]."³³ And traders to Saint-Domingue sold more healthy men of prime age in the principal entrepôt - Cap Français - leaving more female, young, sick, and elderly slaves to face additional voyages to smaller ports in the colony where planters had fewer options ([Geggus, 2001](#), p. 127-129).

With traffic across imperial boundaries a different pattern emerged - especially for the *asiento*. In Spanish colonies, the combination of high prices and available specie made foreign merchants willing to assemble relatively large cargoes of captives deemed especially valuable. As John Merewether, a factor for the South Sea Company in Jamaica, explained in 1737, "By the last half years account we sent home, we bought only 940 out of 2907 Negroes imported [from Africa], And we did not put by one, that we thought would please the Spaniards."³⁴ The South Sea Company purchased only the most marketable people for transshipment. As a result, Jamaican planters complained that the fittest captives arriving at their island turned right around and left again. They considered the exporting of "prime slaves" such a problem that the colony's assembly - dominated by wealthy planters - placed a one-pound duty on Africans re-exported from the island in 1716. The South Sea Company convinced the Crown to veto the law, but Jamaica reinstated similar measures repeatedly throughout the company's *asiento* (Sheridan, 1983, p. 1-16).³⁵

Another feature of intra-American slaving was that entrepôts developed special capacity to facilitate transshipment. Many ports built structures to house and confine Africans awaiting resale or enduring quarantine. Settlers built such compounds or barracoons in Charleston, Cartagena, Callao, Curaçao, Recife, St. Eustatius, Kingston, Montevideo, and other ports ([Boogaart and Emmer, 1979](#), p. 368-70; [Jordaan, 2003](#), p. 230; [Bowser, 1974](#), p. 67; Littlefield, 1986, p. 94; Rawley, 1981, p. 59, 87; [Postma, 1990](#), p. 170, 199-200; [Burnard and Morgan, 2001](#), p. 214).³⁶ But it was more than facilities that entrepôts offered. At least as important was the presence of merchants with ample resources and liquidity to engage in high-volume trade. In fact, the major players in slave importation tended to be significant figures in the broader commerce of a given port or colony. The Spanish American merchants who transshipped Africans to Peru were some of the biggest traders in these colonies, and captive Africans found their journeys delayed at numerous trade fairs, while traders conducted other business. In Charleston, as well, a few big importers dominated trade in both captives and goods. Most large-scale slave purchasers were also general merchants in Jamaica ([Bowser, 1974](#), p. 52-87; McMillin, 2004, p. 89; [Higgins, 1964](#), p. 205-17; Burnard, 1996, p. 68-92). Apparently only at peak moments in the slave trade to Brazil did some merchants become specialists in the importation and resale of captives, ignoring the trade in goods ([Florentino, 1995](#), p. 147-180; Miller, 1988, p. 475, 485; Rawley, 1981, p. 47-48).

This article sketches broad patterns in the traffic of captive Africans within the Americas, but much further research is needed. Scholarly understanding of the scale, routes, and lived experiences of the intra-American slave trade lags behind knowledge of the forced migration across the Atlantic. That imbalance is the impetus for the forthcoming Final Passages Database, which we intend to launch online in 2018. As data on enslaved people's forced migrations within the Americas becomes available, we encourage scholars to consider such movements in combination with the transatlantic trade when examining the history and culture of the African diaspora. The importance of the intra-American traffic is not limited to demographics and economics. The data on coerced migrations has major implications for the social possibilities of black communities across the Americas. Scholars must look beyond where on the African coast ships came from and where captives first disembarked in the Americas. The inter-colonial and transimperial dimensions of the slave trade must be incorporated into examinations of the African Diaspora. The slave routes crossing colonial boundaries - as well as the continuous flow of runaways across maritime and land frontiers - created social networks connecting black communities throughout the Americas. Intra-American migrations shaped the political, social, and cultural features of African diasporic communities and the larger societies in which they found themselves ([Borucki, 2017](#), p. 11-36; Schneider, forthcoming 2018).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALDEN, Dauril. Late Colonial Brazil, 1750-1808. In: BETHELL, Leslie (ed.). Colonial Brazil. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 284-343. [[Links](#)]
- ARMYTAGE, Frances. The Free Port System in the British West Indies: A Study in Commercial Policy, 1766-1822. London: Longmans Green and Co., 1953. [[Links](#)]
- BANKS, Kenneth J. Official Duplicity: The Illicit Slave Trade of Martinique, 1713-1763. In: COCLANIS, Peter A. (ed.). The Atlantic Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005, p. 229-251. [[Links](#)]
- BASKES, Jeremy. Staying Afloat: Risk and Uncertainty in Spanish Atlantic World Trade, 1760-1820. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 201 Bottom of Form3. [[Links](#)]
- BEAN, Richard Nelson. The British Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, 1650-1775. New York: Arno Press, 1975. [[Links](#)]
- BOOGAART, Ernst van den; EMMER, Pieter C. "The Dutch Participation in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1596-1650" in: GEMERY, Henry A.; HOGENDORN, Jan S. (Eds.). The Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade. New York: Academic Press, 1979, p. 353-375. [[Links](#)]
- BORUCKI, Alex Borucki. The Slave Trade to the Río de la Plata: Trans-imperial Networks and Atlantic Warfare, 1777-1812. Colonial Latin American Review, vol. 20, n. 1, p. 81-107, 2011. [[Links](#)]
- BORUCKI, Alex Borucki. Trans-imperial History in the Making of the Slave Trade to Venezuela, 1526-1811. Itinerario, vol. 36, n. 2, p. 29-54, 2012. [[Links](#)]
- BORUCKI, Alex Borucki. Across imperial boundaries: Black social networks across the Iberian South Atlantic, 1760-1810. Atlantic Studies, vol. 14, n. 1, p. 11-36, 2017. [[Links](#)]
- BORUCKI, Alex; ELTIS, David Eltis; WHEAT, David. Atlantic History and the Slave Trade to Spanish America. American Historical Review, vol. 120, n. 2, p. 433-461, 2015. [[Links](#)]
- BOWSER, Frederick P. The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524-1650. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974. [[Links](#)]
- BURNARD, Trevor. Who Bought Slaves in Early America? Purchasers of Slaves from the Royal African Company in Jamaica, 1674-1708. Slavery and Abolition, vol. 17, n. 2, p. 68-72, 1996. [[Links](#)]
- BURNARD, Trevor; MORGAN, Kenneth. The Dynamics of the Slave Market and Slave Purchasing Patterns in Jamaica, 1655-1788. William and Mary Quarterly, vol. 58, n. 1, p. 205-228, 2001. [[Links](#)]
- CURTIN, Philip D. The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969. [[Links](#)]
- CUSSEN, Celia, LLORCA-JAÑA, Manuel; DROLLER, Federico. The Dynamics and Determinants of Slave Prices in an Urban Setting: Santiago de Chile, c. 1773-1822. Revista de Historia Económica/ Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History, vol. 34, n. 3, p. 1-29, 2016. [[Links](#)]
- DOMINGUES, Daniel. The Atlantic Slave Trade to Maranhão, 1640-1846: Volume, Routes and Organization. Slavery and Abolition, vol. 29, n. 4, p. 477-501, 2008. [[Links](#)]
- DONNAN, Elizabeth (ed.). Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1930. 4 vols. [[Links](#)]
- DUNN, Richard S. Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972. [[Links](#)]
- ELLIOTT, J. H. Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. [[Links](#)]
- ELTIS, David. The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000. [[Links](#)]
- ELTIS, David. The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment. The William and Mary Quarterly, vol. 58, n. 1, p. 17-46, 2001. [[Links](#)]
- ELTIS, David. The British Transatlantic Slave Trade before 1714: Annual Estimates of Volume and Direction. In: PAQUETTE, Robert L.; ENGERMAN, Stanley L. (eds.). The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996, p. 182-204. [[Links](#)]
- FLORENTINO, Manolo. Em Costas Negras: uma história do tráfico atlântico de escravos entre a África e o Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 1995. [[Links](#)]

GALENSON, David W. *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. [[Links](#)]

GARCÍA MONTÓN, Alejandro. *Génova y el Atlántico (c.1650-1680): emprendedores mediterráneos frente al auge del capitalismo del norte*. PhD Dissertation, European University Institute, Florence, 2014. [[Links](#)]

GEGGUS, David. "The French Slave Trade: An Overview" *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 58, n. 1, p. 119-138, 2001. [[Links](#)]

GRAHAM, Richard. *Another Middle Passage?: The Internal Slave Trade in Brazil*. In: JOHNSON, Walter (ed.). *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. [[Links](#)]

GRANDIN, Greg. *The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014. [[Links](#)]

GREEN-PEDERSEN, Sv. E. *The Scope and Structure of the Danish Negro Slave Trade*. *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, vol. 19, p. 149-197, 1971. [[Links](#)]

HIGGINS, W. Robert. *Charles Town Merchants and Factors Dealing in the External Negro Trade, 1735-1775*. *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, vol. 65, p. 205-17, 1964. [[Links](#)]

JOHNSON, Walter. (ed.). *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. [[Links](#)]

JORDAAN, Han. *The Curaçao Slave Market: From Asiento Trade to Free Trade, 1700-1730*. In: POSTMA, Johannes; ENTHOVEN, Vitor, (eds.). *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817*. Leiden: Brill, 2003, p. 259-285. [[Links](#)]

KAY, Marvin L. Michael; CARY, Lorin Lee. *Slavery in North Carolina, 1748-1775*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995. [[Links](#)]

KLOOSTER, Wim. *Curaçao and the Caribbean Transit Trade*. In: POSTMA, Johannes; VENTHOVEN, Victor (eds.). *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817*. Leiden: Brill, 2003, p. 203-218. [[Links](#)]

KULIKOFF, Allan. *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986. [[Links](#)]

KULIKOFF, Allan. *Uprooted Peoples: Black Migrants in the Age of the American Revolution, 1790-1820*. In: BERLIN, Ira; HOFFMAN, Ronald (eds.). *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983, p. 143-171. [[Links](#)]

LAMIKIZ, Xabier. *Trade and Trust in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World: Spanish Merchants and Their Overseas Networks*. Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2010. [[Links](#)]

³The structure of this article and a significant part of its contents are based on Chapter 1 of the doctoral dissertation of Greg O'Malley (2006); (Curtin, 1969); *Voyages: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (www.slavevoyages.org).

⁴On internal slave trades in the U.S. and Brazil after independence, see, as introduction, (Johnson, 2004).

⁵Bowser asserts the importance of the Pacific route early (Bowser, 1974, p. 30-1).

⁶Allan Kulikoff argues that by the 1760s "nearly all Africans who arrived in Virginia landed at Bermuda Hundred," the best upriver access point for the march to the piedmont (Kulikoff, 1986, p. 75, 323–36). For estimates of the piedmont slave trade, (Morgan and Nicholls, 1989, p. 219).

⁷Morgan and Nicholls note bulk purchasing by some Virginia merchants for inland trade. Lorena S. Walsh argues most planters had acquaintances make purchases (Morgan and Nicholls, 1989); (Walsh, 2001, p.155-156). See also, (O'Malley, 2014, chap. 7).

⁸One merchant engaged in the traffic reported in 1759 that over 2,000 slaves had reached Virginia by this route in the previous year alone, but port records for the Potomac have not survived, so estimating the volume of this trade is difficult. (Sweig, 1985, p. 507-524).

⁹Josiah Hardy to the Board of Trade, Jan. 20, 1762, (Donnan, 1930, p. III, 456).

¹⁰On a comparison of legal practices in the jurisdictions of various empires, see (Pagden, 1995, p. 128-144).

¹¹Numerous scholars of the transatlantic slave trade have noted the preference of merchants for speedy sales in single ports of high demand; see: (Bean, 1975, p. 63; Burnard and Morgan, 2001, p. 211; Morgan, 1998, p. 908-9; Littlefield, 1986, p. 93-105; Geggus, 2001, p.125-128; Postma, 1990: p. 169; Dunn, 1972, p. 235).

¹²David W. Galenson makes a strong argument for the impracticality of planters from remote islands traveling to entrepôts to make slave purchases. He is less convincing, however, in deducing from this that most purchasers of slaves in Barbados and Jamaica resided there. He fails to consider that economies of scale made travel costs less prohibitive for intercolonial merchants (Galenson, 1986, p. 119-120).

¹³For “thriving coastal trade” and the dominance of large importers, see (Miller, 1988, p. 450-455). For redistribution from three legal ports, see (Miller, 1992, p. 77-115).

¹⁴Vice-Director Beck to the Director and Council of New Netherland, July 21, 1664, (Donnan, 1930, III,p. 430-431).

¹⁵For transshipment to Grenada, (Curtin, 1969, p. 70–75). Geggus notes the subsidiary status of Guadeloupe and Cayenne’s high prices, but lack of transatlantic deliveries (Geggus, 2001, quotation p.126).

¹⁶The Portuguese transshipped slaves to both Buenos Aires and Montevideo from their enclave in Colonia (today’s Uruguay) from 1680 to 1777 and also from Brazilian ports.

¹⁷On the high standards of Spanish slave buyers, see (Palmer, 1981, p. 63-64; Jordaan, 2003, p. 250).

¹⁸The British negotiated the right to send one ship per year to Spanish America with goods rather than slaves, and often smuggled additional goods aboard slave ships. The contraband heightened tensions between the empires, helping cause the War of Jenkins’ Ear (La Guerra del Asiento in Spanish). See (Palmer, 1981, 9-11). On the failure of Spanish merchants to meet demand for European goods in Spanish America, causing demand for contraband, see (Walker, 1979, p.: 5, 11-14; Elliott, 2006, p. 109-114, 224-226). On Spanish trade, see (Baskes,201, Bottom of Form3; Lamikiz, 2010).

¹⁹“Report of the Council of the Inquisition to the King” (1685) in (Donnan, 1930, p. I, 339). See also, (Postma, 1990, p. 34-37).

²⁰On French purchases from Curaçao, see (Jordaan, 2003, p. 224-225).

²¹For more on British mercantilist preferences for Spanish trade, see (McCusker, 2005, p. 701).

²²On international trading interests contesting policies from imperial metropolises (McCusker, 2005, p. 698).

²³Because enslaved people sold for high prices relative to the space they were afforded aboard ships, a shipload of captives was typically worth two or three times a cargo of colonial produce, making slaving vessels attractive targets for colonial officials who saw opportunities for confiscation. On relative value of slave cargoes, see (McMillin, 2004, 73).

²⁴See Richard Harris to the Secretary of the Board of Trade, Sept. 21, 1719, and William Hart to the Board of Trade, Feb. 15, 1727, in (Donnan, 1930, p. II, 241-2, 336-7). Vos, Eltis, and Richardson (2008) argue that the British out-competed the Dutch on the African coast by the late seventeenth century due to faster acquisition of slaves: “Dutch in the Atlantic World.” On the prior understanding that the Dutch dominated early slave deliveries to the English and French Caribbean, see (Galenson, 1986, p. 13; Dunn, 1972, p. 59-67).

²⁵On the declining Dutch role, see (Vos, Eltis, and Richardson, 2008: Figure 1). On Venezuela, (Borucki, 2012, p. 29-54).

²⁶Vice-Director Beck to the Directors of the [Dutch] West India Company, Feb. 4, 1660, (Donnan, 1930, p. I, 150-53).

²⁷A similar pattern emerged on Danish St. Jan, on a much smaller scale. Danish St. Croix, by contrast, was a viable producer of sugar and imported slaves mostly for its own use rather than resale.

²⁸Vice-Director Beck to the Directors of the [Dutch] West India Company, June 11, 1657, and Feb. 4, 1660, in (Donnan, 1930, p. I, 136-138, 150-153).

²⁹"Calculo del costo que por razon de daños y transporte tiene un negro comprado en Montevideo." n/d., General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

³⁰The slave market in late-colonial Chile was active, but most captives sold in Santiago were born in Chile rather than Africa. See (Cussen, Llorca-Jaña, and Droller, 2016, p. 1-29; Grandin, 2014).

³¹For transshipment from Martinique to Guadeloupe, see (Pritchard, 2004, p. 218-219; Geggus, 2001, p. 126-127, 130). For direct arrivals in Guadeloupe, see *Voyages*, <http://slavevoyages.org/voyages/8ZarzcF>. (accessed January 5, 2017).

³²Peter Stuyvesant to the Directors at Amsterdam, June 10, 1664, in (Donnan, 1930, p. III, 429).

³³Barbot, "Voyages to Martinique," in (Donnan, 1930, p. I, 303).

³⁴John Merewether to Peter Burrell, Sept. 30, 1737, in (Donnan, 1930: II, 461).

³⁵Palmer notes that part of Jamaicans' objection to the South Sea Company's transshipment from the island was that it cut Jamaicans out of the trade in goods to Spanish America. Jamaican traders could no longer exploit Spanish colonists' desire for slaves to gain entry to ports for the trade in goods (Palmer, 1981, p. 62-68).

³⁶Russell-Wood notes that Brazilian ports had quarantine policies, but they "varied in effectiveness" (Russell-Wood, 1982, p.131-132).

Received: January 19, 2016; Accepted: April 06, 2017



Este é um artigo publicado em acesso aberto sob uma licença Creative Commons

Instituto de História/Universidade Federal Fluminense
Rua Prof. Marcos Waldemar de Freitas Reis, Bloco O, sala 503
24210-201, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil
tel:(21)2629-2920
(21)2629-2920



tempouff2013@gmail.com

Across the Americas, slavery required more than gangs of field laborers. It also needed skilled workers—masons, carpenters, distillers, cattlemen and drovers, nurses and seamstresses. As the slave colonies developed into complex social and economic communities, slavery spilled out into most walks of life. The Cuban sugar industry boomed in the nineteenth century, thanks largely to the decline of British and French sugar production. Despite the supposed efforts of the British and American navies to enforce the legal abolition of the transatlantic slave trade after 1807 and 1808, respectively, upward of 20,000 Africans were landed each year in Cuba. Cuban tobacco plantations also boomed in the same period. Patterns in the intercolonial slave trade across the Americas before the nineteenth century. The slave trade within the Americas, after the initial disembarkation of African captives in the New World, has received scant attention from historians, especially before the abolition of the transatlantic traffic. The article below examines such intra-American trafficking as an introduction to the launching of the The Intra-American Slave Trade Database, which aims to document evidence of slave voyages throughout the New World. This article does not provide statistics on this internal slave trade. In The deaths of slaves in the Americas, and the low birth rate of slave communities, meant that a continual influx of new slaves from Africa was demanded by the plantation owners. Britain did not create the Atlantic slave trade, but there is no denying that it was heavily involved with the trade at its height during the eighteenth century. In spite of this, during the nineteenth century, Britain was to play a leading role in the abolition of the slave trade. Its Parliament passed laws to abolish the trade in 1807 and to stop the use of slaves in British territories in 1833, though it granted slave-owners twenty million pounds in compensation for the latter (equivalent to over £1,000

million pounds today). Slavery did not end with abolition in the 19th century; it still continues today in every country.