

Eric Williams, *From Columbus to
Castro...* (1970)

Capitalism and Slavery

'There is nothing which contributes more to the development of the colonies and the cultivation of their soil than the laborious toil of the Negroes.' So reads a decree of King Louis XIV of France, on August 26, 1670. It was the consensus of seventeenth-century European opinion. Negroes became the 'life' of the Caribbean, as George Downing said of Barbados in 1645. The 'very being' of the plantations depended on the supply of Negroes, stated the Company of Royal Adventurers of England trading to Africa to King Charles II in 1663. Without Negroes, said the Spanish Council of the Indies in 1685, the food needed for the support of the whole kingdom would cease to be produced, and America would face absolute ruin. Europe has seldom been as unanimous on any issue as it has been on the value of Negro slave labour.

In 1645, before the introduction of the sugar economy, Barbados had 5,680 Negro slaves, or more than three able-bodied white men to every slave. In 1667, after the introduction of the sugar industry, the island, by one account, contained 82,023 slaves, or nearly ten slaves to every white man fit to bear arms. By 1698 a more accurate estimate of the population gave the figures as 2,330

white males and 42,000 slaves, or a ratio of more than eighteen slaves to every white male.

In Jamaica the ratio of slaves to whites was one to three in 1658, nearly six to one in 1698. There were 1,400 slaves in the former year, 40,000 in the latter. The ratio of slaves and mulattoes to whites increased from more than two to one in Martinique in 1664 to more than three to one in 1701. The coloured population amounted to 2,434 in 1664 and 23,362 in 1701. In Guadeloupe, by 1697, the coloured population outnumbered the whites by more than three to two. In Grenada in 1700 the Negro slaves and mulattoes were more than double the number of whites. In the Leeward Islands and in St. Thomas the whites steadily lost ground.

By 1688 it was estimated that Jamaica required annually 10,000 slaves, the Leeward Islands 6,000, and Barbados 4,000. A contract of October, 1675, with one Jean Oudiette, called for the supply of 800 slaves a year for four years to the French West Indies. Four years later, in 1679, the Senegal Company undertook to supply 2,000 slaves a year for eight years to the French Islands. Between 1680 and 1688 the Royal African Company supplied 46,396 slaves to the British West Indies, an annual average of 5,155.

The Negro slave trade became one of the most important business enterprises of the seventeenth century. In accordance with sixteenth-century precedents its organisation was entrusted to a company which was given the sole right by a particular nation to trade in slaves on the coast of West Africa, erect and maintain the forts necessary for the protection of the trade, and transport and sell the slaves in the West Indies. Individuals, free traders or 'interlopers', as they were called, were excluded. Thus the British incorporated the Company of Royal Adventurers trading to Africa, in 1663, and later replaced this company by the Royal African Company, in 1672, the royal patronage and participation reflecting the importance of the trade and continuing the fashion set by the Spanish monarchy of increasing its revenues thereby. The monopoly of the French slave trade was at first assigned to the French West India Company in 1664, and then transferred, in 1673, to the Senegal Company. The monopoly of the Dutch slave trade was given to the Dutch West India Company, incorporated in 1621. Sweden organised a Guinea Company in

1647. The Danish West India Company, chartered in 1671, with the royal family among its shareholders, was allowed in 1674 to extend its activities to Guinea. Brandenburg established a Brandenburg African Company, and established its first trading post on the coast of West Africa in 1682. The Negro slave trade, begun about 1450 as a Portuguese monopoly, had, by the end of the seventeenth century, become an international free-for-all.

The organisation of the slave trade gave rise to one of the most heated and far-reaching economic polemics of the period. Typical of the argument in favour of the monopoly was a paper in 1680 regarding the Royal African Company of England. The argument, summarised, was as follows: firstly, experience demonstrated that the slave trade could not be carried on without forts on the West African Coast costing £20,000 a year, too heavy a charge for private traders, and it was not practicable to apportion it among them; secondly, the trade was exposed to attack by other nations, and it was the losses from such attacks prior to 1663 which had resulted in the formation of the chartered company; thirdly, the maintenance of forts and warships could not be undertaken by the Company unless it had an exclusive control; fourthly, private traders enslaved all and sundry, even Negroes of high rank, and this led to reprisals on the coast; finally, England's great rival, Holland, was only waiting for the dissolution of the English company to engross the entire trade.

The monopolistic company had to face two opponents: the planter in the colonies and the merchant at home, both of whom combined to advocate free trade. The planters complained of the insufficient quantity, the poor quality, and the high prices of the slaves supplied by the Company; the latter countered by pointing out that the planters were heavily in debt to it, estimated in 1671 at £70,000, and, four years later, at £60,000 for Jamaica alone. The British merchants claimed that free trade would mean the purchase of a larger number of Negroes, which would mean the production of a larger quantity of British goods for the purchase and upkeep of the slaves.

The controversy ended in a victory for free trade. On July 5, 1698, Parliament passed an act abrogating the monopoly of the Royal African Company, and throwing open the trade to all British subjects on payment of a duty of ten per cent *ad valorem*

on all goods exported to Africa for the purchase of slaves.

The acrimonious controversy retained no trace of the pseudo-humanitarianism of the Spaniards in the sixteenth century, that Negro slavery was essential to the preservation of the Indians. In its place was a solid economic fact, that Negro slavery was essential to the preservation of the sugar plantations. The considerations were purely economic. The slaves were denominated 'black ivory'. The best slave was, in Spanish parlance, a 'piece of the Indies', a slave 30 to 35 years old, about five feet eleven inches in height, without any physical defect. Adults who were not so tall and children were measured, and the total reduced to 'pieces of the Indies'. A contract in 1676 between the Spaniards and the Portuguese called for the supply of 10,000 'tons' of slaves; to avoid fraud and argument, it was stipulated that three Negroes should be considered the equivalent of one ton. In 1651 the English Guinea Company instructed its agent to load one of its ships with as many Negroes as it could carry, and, in default, to fill up the ship with cattle.

The mortality in the Middle Passage was regarded merely as an unfortunate trading loss, except for the fact that Negroes were more costly than cattle. Losses in fact ran quite high, but such concern as was evinced had to deal merely with profits. In 1659, a Dutch slaver, the *St. Jan*, lost 110 slaves out of a cargo of 219—for every two slaves purchased, one died in transit to the West Indies. In 1678, the *Arthur*, one of the ships of the Royal African Company, suffered a mortality of 88 out of 417 slaves—that is, more than 20 per cent. The *Martha*, another ship, landed 385 in Barbados out of 447 taken on the coast—the mortality amounted to 62, or a little less than 15 per cent. The *Coaster* lost 37 out of 150, a mortality of approximately 25 per cent. The *Hannibal*, in 1694, with a cargo of 700 slaves, buried 320 on the voyage, a mortality of 43 per cent; the Royal African Company lost £10 and the owner of the vessel 10 guineas on each slave, the total loss amounting to £6,560. The losses sustained by these five vessels amounted to 617 out of a total cargo of 1,933, that is, 32 per cent. Three out of every ten slaves perished in the Middle Passage. Hence the note of exasperation in the account of his voyage by the captain of the *Hannibal*:

'No gold-finders can endure so much noisome slavery as they do who carry Negroes; for those have some respite and satisfaction, but we endure twice the misery; and yet by their mortality our voyages are ruin'd, and we pine and fret our selves to death to think we should undergo so much misery, and take so much pains to so little purpose.'

The lamentations of an individual slave trader or sugar planter were drowned out by the seventeenth-century chorus of approbation. Negro slavery and the Negro slave trade fitted beautifully into the economic theory of the age. This theory, known as mercantilism, stated that the wealth of a nation depended upon its possession of bullion, the precious metals. If, however, bullion was not available through possession of the mines, the new doctrine went further than its Spanish predecessor in emphasising that a country could increase its stock by a favourable balance of trade, exporting more than it imported. One of the best and clearest statements of the theory was made by Edward Misselden, in his *Circle of Commerce*, in 1623:

'For as a pair of scales is an invention to show us the weight of things, whereby we may discern the heavy from the light... so is also the balance of trade an excellent and politique invention to show us the difference of weight in the commerce of one kingdom with another: that is, whether the native commodities exported, and all the foreign commodities imported do balance or over-balance one another in the scale of commerce... If the native commodities exported do weigh down and exceed in value the foreign commodities imported, it is a rule that never fails that then the kingdom grows rich and prospers in estate and stock: because the over-plus thereof must needs come in in treasure... But if the foreign commodities imported do exceed in value the native commodities exported, it is a manifest sign that the trade decayeth, and the stock of the kingdom wasteth apace; because the overplus must needs go out in treasure.'

National policy of the leading European nations concentrated on achieving a favourable balance of trade. Colonial possessions were highly prized as a means to this end; they increased the exports of the metropolitan country, prevented the drain of treasure by the purchase of necessary tropical produce, and provided freights for the ships of the metropolis and employment for its sailors.

The combination of the Negro slave trade, Negro slavery and Caribbean sugar production is known as the triangular trade. A ship left the metropolitan country with a cargo of metropolitan

goods, which it exchanged on the coast of West Africa for slaves. This constituted the first side of the triangle. The second consisted of the Middle Passage, the voyage from West Africa to the West Indies with the slaves. The triangle was completed by the voyage from the West Indies to the metropolitan country with sugar and other Caribbean products received in exchange for the slaves. As the slave ships were not always adequate for the transportation of the West Indian produce, the triangular trade was supplemented by a direct trade between the metropolitan country and the West Indian islands.

The triangular trade provided a market in West Africa and the West Indies for metropolitan products, thereby increasing metropolitan exports and contributing to full employment at home. The purchase of the slaves on the coast of West Africa and their maintenance in the West Indies gave an enormous stimulus to metropolitan industry and agriculture. For example, the British woollen industry was heavily dependent on the triangular trade. A parliamentary committee of 1695 emphasised that the slave trade was an encouragement to Britain's woollen industry. In addition, wool was required in the West Indies for blankets and clothing for the slaves on the plantations.

Iron, guns and brass also figured prominently in the triangular trade and the ancillary West Indian trade. Iron bars were the trading medium on a large part of the West African coast, and by 1682 Britain was exporting about 10,000 bars of iron a year to Africa. Sugar stoves, iron rollers, nails found a ready market on the West Indian plantations. Brass pans and kettles were customarily included in the slave trader's cargo.

The triangular trade presented an impressive statistical picture. Britain's trade in 1697 may be taken as an illustration.

	Imports £	Exports £
British West Indies	326,536	142,795
North America	279,582	140,129
Africa	6,615	13,435
Antigua	28,209	8,029
Barbados	196,532	77,465
Jamaica	70,000	40,726
Montserrat	14,699	3,532
Nevis	17,096	13,043
Carolina	12,374	5,289

	<i>Imports £</i>	<i>Exports £</i>
New England	26,282	64,468
New York	10,093	4,579
Pennsylvania	3,347	2,997
Virginia and Maryland	227,756	58,796
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,220,121</i>	<i>575,283</i>

Barbados was the most important single colony in the British Empire, worth almost as much, in its total trade, as the two tobacco colonies of Virginia and Maryland combined, and nearly three times as valuable as Jamaica. The tiny sugar island was more valuable to Britain than Carolina, New England, New York and Pennsylvania together. 'Go ahead, England, Barbados is behind you,' is today a stock joke in the British West Indies of the Barbadian's view of his own importance. Two and a half centuries ago, it was no joke. It was sound politics, based on sound economics. Jamaica's external trade was larger than New England's as far as Britain was concerned; Nevis was more important in the commercial firmament than New York; Antigua surpassed Carolina; Montserrat rated higher than Pennsylvania. Total British trade with Africa was larger than total trade with Pennsylvania, New York and Carolina. In 1697 the triangular trade accounted for nearly ten per cent of total British imports and over four per cent of total British exports. Barbados alone accounted for nearly four per cent of Britain's external trade.

Mercantilists were jubilant. The West Indian colonies were ideal colonies, providing a market, directly as well as indirectly, through the slave trade, for British manufactures and foodstuffs, whilst they supplied sugar and other tropical commodities that would otherwise have had to be imported from foreigners or dispensed with entirely. The West Indies thus contributed to Britain's balance of trade in two ways, by buying Britain's exports and by rendering the expenditure of bullion on foreign tropical imports unnecessary. On the other hand, the mainland colonies, Virginia and Maryland, and, to a lesser extent, Carolina excepted, where the conditions of labour and production duplicated those of the West Indies, were nuisances; they produced the same agricultural commodities as England, gave early evidence of competing with the metropolitan countries in manufactured goods as well, and were rivals in fishing and shipbuilding.

The British economists enthused. Sir Josiah Child in his *New Discourse of Trade* in 1668, wrote:

'The people that evacuate from us to Barbados, and the other West India Plantations... do commonly work one Englishman to ten or eight Blacks; and if we keep the trade of our said plantations entirely to England, England would have no less inhabitants, but rather an increase of people by such evacuation, because that one Englishman, with the Blacks that work with him, accounting what they eat, use and wear, would make employment for four men in England... whereas peradventure of ten men that issue from us to New England and Ireland, what we send to or receive from them, doth not employ one man in England.'

In 1690, Sir Dalby Thomas stated that every white man in the West Indies was one hundred and thirty times more valuable to Britain than those who stayed at home:

'Each white man, woman, and child, residing in the sugar plantations, occasions the consumption of more of our native commodities, and manufactures, than ten at home do—beef, pork, salt, fish, butter, cheese, corn, flour, beer, cyder, bridles, coaches, beds, chairs, stools, pictures, clocks, watches; pewter, brass, copper, iron vessels and instruments; sail-cloth and cordage; of which, in their building, shipping, mills, boiling, and distilling-houses, field-labour and domestic uses, they consume infinite quantities.'

Charles Davenant, perhaps the ablest of the seventeenth-century economists, estimated at the end of the century that Britain's total profit from trade amounted to two million pounds. Of this figure the plantation trade accounted for £600,000, and the re-export of plantation produce for £120,000. Trade with Africa, Europe and the Levant brought in another £600,000. The triangular trade thus represented a minimum of 36 per cent of Britain's commercial profits. Davenant added that every individual in the West Indies, white or Negro, was as profitable as seven in England.

What the West Indies had done for Seville in Spain in the sixteenth century, they did for Bristol in England and Bordeaux in France in the seventeenth. Each town became the metropolis of its country's trade with the Caribbean, though neither Bristol nor Bordeaux enjoyed the monopoly that had been granted to Seville. In 1661 only one ship, and that ship a Dutch one, came to Bordeaux from the West Indies. Ten years later twelve ships sailed from that port to the West Indies, and six re-

turned from there. In 1683 the number of sailings to the sugar islands had risen to twenty-six. La Rochelle for a time eclipsed Bordeaux. In 1685 forty-nine ships sailed from that port to the West Indies. Nantes also was intimately connected with West Indian trade; in 1684 twenty-four ships belonging to the port were engaged in West Indian trade.

As a result of the triangular trade Bristol became a city of shopkeepers. It was said in 1685 that there was scarcely a shopkeeper in the city who had not a venture on board some ship bound for Virginia or the West Indies. The port took the lead in the struggle for the abrogation of the Royal African Company's monopoly, and in the first nine years of free trade shipped slaves to the West Indies at the rate of 17,883 a year. In 1700 Bristol had forty-six ships in the West Indian trade.

The basis of this astounding commercial efflorescence was the Negro slaves, 'the strength and sinews of this western world'. In 1662 the Company of Royal Adventurers trading to Africa pointed to the 'profit and honour' that had accrued to British subjects from the slave trade, which King Charles II himself described as that 'beneficial trade... so much importing our service, and the enriching of this Our Kingdom'. According to Colbert in France, no commerce in the world produced as many advantages as the slave trade. Benjamin Raule exhorted the Elector of Prussia, on October 26, 1685, not to be left behind in the race: 'Everyone knows that the slave trade is the source of the wealth which the Spaniards wring out of the West Indies, and that whoever knows how to furnish them slaves, will share their wealth. Who can say by how many millions of hard cash the Dutch West India Company has enriched itself in this slave trade!' At the end of the seventeenth century all Europe, and not England only, was impressed with the words of Sir Dalby Thomas: 'The pleasure, glory and grandeur of England has been advanced more by sugar than by any other commodity, wool not excepted.'

The Negro slave trade in the eighteenth century constituted one of the greatest migrations in recorded history. Its volume is indicated in the following table, prepared from various statistics that are available.

<i>Years</i>	<i>Colony</i>	<i>Importation</i>	<i>Average Importation per year</i>
1700-1786	Jamaica	610,000	7,000
1708-1735 & 1747-1766	Barbados	148,821	3,100
1680-1776	Saint-Domingue	800,000	8,247
1720-1729	Antigua	12,278	1,362
1721-1730	St. Kitts	10,358	1,035
1721-1729	Montserrat	3,210	357
1721-1726	Nevis	1,267	253
1767-1773	Dominica	19,194	2,742
1763-1789	Cuba	30,875	1,143
1700-1754	Danish Islands	11,750	214

Average annual importations do not provide a complete picture. In 1774 the importation into Jamaica was 18,448. In fourteen of the years 1702-1775, the annual importation exceeded 10,000. Imports into Saint-Domingue averaged 12,559 in the years 1764-1768; in 1768 they were 15,279. In 1718 Barbados imported 7,126 slaves. During the nine months in which Cuba was under British occupation in 1762, 10,700 slaves were introduced. The British introduced 41,000 slaves in three years into Guadeloupe whilst they were in occupation of the island during the Seven Years' War.

These large importations represented one of the greatest advantages which the slave trade had over other trades. The frightful mortality of the slaves on the plantations made annual increments essential. Consider the case of Saint-Domingue. In 1763 the slave population amounted to 206,539. Imports from 1764 to 1774 numbered 102,474. The slave population in 1776 was 290,000. Thus, despite an importation of over one hundred thousand, without taking into account the annual births, the increase of the slave population in thirteen years was less than 85,000. Taking only importations into consideration, the slave population in 1776 was 19,000 less than the figure of 1763 with the importations added, and the imports for one year are not available.

A much clearer illustration of the mortality is available for Barbados. In 1764 there were 70,706 slaves in the island. Importations to 1783, with no figures available for the years 1779 and 1780, totalled 41,840. The total population, allowing for

neither deaths nor births, should, therefore, have been 112,546 in 1783. Actually, it was 62,258. Thus despite an annual importation for the eighteen years for which statistics are available of 2,324, the population in 1783 was 8,448 less than it was in 1764, or an annual decline of 469. The appalling mortality is brought out in the following table.

Year	Slaves	Imports	Potential Pop. of next year	Actual Pop. of next year	Decrease of Imports	Decrease as %
1764	70,706	3,936	74,642	72,255	2,387	60
1765	72,255	3,228	75,483	73,651	1,832	57
1766	73,651	4,061	77,712	74,656	3,056	75
1767	74,656	4,154	78,810	76,275	2,535	61
1768	76,275	4,628	80,903	75,658	4,345	90
1769	75,658	6,837	82,495	76,334	6,161	90
1770	76,334	5,825	82,159	75,998	6,171	106
1771	75,998	2,728	78,716	74,485	4,231	155
1764-1771		35,397	106,103	74,206	31,897	90

Thus, after eight years of importations, averaging 4,424 a year, the population of Barbados was only 3,411 larger. 35,397 slaves had been imported; 31,897 had disappeared. In 1770 and 1771 the mortality was so high that the importation in those years, heavy though it was, was not adequate to supply the deficit. Half the population had had to be renewed in eight years.

In 1703 Jamaica had 45,000 Negroes; in 1778, 205,261, an average annual increase from all causes of 2,109. Between 1703 and 1775, 469,893 slaves had been imported, an average annual importation of 6,807. For every additional slave in its population, Jamaica had had to import three. The total population in 1778, excluding births and based only on imports, should have been 541,893, and that figure excludes imports for 1776, 1777 and 1778. Allowing 11,000 a year for those three years, the total population in 1778 should have been 547,893. The actual population in that year was less than forty per cent of the potential total.

Economic development has never been purchased at so high a price. According to one of the leading planters of Saint-Domingue, one in every three imported Negroes died in the first three years. To the mortality on the plantations must be added the mortality on the slave ships. On the slave ships belonging to the port of

Nantes in France, that mortality varied from 5 per cent in 1746 and 1774 to as high as 34 per cent in 1732. For all the slave cargoes transported by them between 1715 and 1775, the mortality amounted to 16 per cent. Of one hundred Negroes who left the coast of Africa, therefore, only 84 reached the West Indies; one-third of these died in three years. For every 56 Negroes, therefore, on the plantations at the end of three years, 44 had perished.

The slave trade thus represented a wear and tear, a depreciation which no other trade equalled. The loss of an individual planter or trader was insignificant compared with the basic fact that every cargo of slaves, including the quick and the dead, represented so much industrial development and employment, so much employment of ships and sailors, in the metropolitan country. No other commercial undertaking required so large a capital as the slave trade. In addition to the ship, there was its equipment, armament, cargo, its unusually large supply of water and food-stuffs, its abnormally large crew. In 1765 it was estimated that in France the cost of fitting out and arming a vessel for 300 slaves was 242,500 livres. The cargo of a vessel from Nantes in 1757 was valued at 141,500 livres; it purchased 500 slaves. The cargo of the *Prince de Conty*, of 300 tons, was valued at 221,224 livres, with which 800 slaves were purchased.

Large profits were realised from the slave trade. The *King Solomon*, belonging to the Royal African Company, carried a cargo worth £4,252 in 1720. It took on 296 Negroes who were sold in St. Kitts for £9,228. The profit was thus 117 per cent. From 1698 to 1707 the Royal African Company exported from England to Africa goods to the value of £293,740. The Company sold 5,982 Negroes in Barbados for £156,425, an average of £26 per head. It sold 2,178 slaves in Antigua for £80,522, an average of £37 per head. The total number of Negroes imported into the British islands by the Company in these years was 17,760. The sale of 8,160 Negroes in Barbados and Antigua, less than half the total imports into all the islands, thus realised 80 per cent of the total exports from England. Allowing an average price of £26 per head for the remaining 9,600 Negroes, the total amount realised from the sale of the Company's Negroes was £488,107. The profit on the Company's exports was thus 66 per

cent. For every three pounds' worth of merchandise exported from England, the Company obtained two additional pounds by way of profit.

The Negroes taken on by the *Prince de Conty* on the coast of Africa averaged 275 livres each; the survivors of the Middle Passage fetched 1,300 livres each in Saint-Domingue. In 1700 a cargo of 238 slaves was purchased by the Danish West Indies at prices ranging from 90 to 100 rixdollars. In 1753 the wholesale price on the coast of Africa was 100 rixdollars; the retail price in the Danish West Indies was 150 to 300 rixdollars. In 1724 the Danish West India Company made a profit of 28 per cent on its slave imports; in 1725, 30 per cent; 70 per cent on the survivors of a cargo of 1733 despite a mortality in transit of 45 per cent; 50 per cent on a cargo of 1754. It need occasion no surprise, therefore, that one of the eighteenth-century slave dealers admitted that, of all the places he had lived in, England, Ireland, America, Portugal, the West Indies, the Cape Verde Islands, the Azores, and Africa, it was in Africa that he could most quickly make his fortune.

The slave trade was central to the triangular trade. It was, in the words of one British mercantilist, 'the spring and parent whence the others flow;' 'the first principle and foundation of all the rest,' echoed another, 'the mainspring of the machine which sets every wheel in motion'. The slave trade kept the wheels of metropolitan industry turning; it stimulated navigation and ship-building and employed seamen; it raised fishing villages into flourishing cities; it gave sustenance to new industries based on the processing of colonial raw materials; it yielded large profits which were ploughed back into metropolitan industry; and, finally, it gave rise to an unprecedented commerce in the West Indies and made the Caribbean territories among the most valuable colonies the world has ever known.

Examples must suffice. In 1729 the British West Indies absorbed one-quarter of Britain's iron exports, and Africa, where the price of a Negro was commonly reckoned at one Birmingham gun, was one of the most important markets for the British armaments industry. In 1753 there were 120 sugar refineries in England—eighty in London, twenty in Bristol. In 1780 the British West Indies supplied two-thirds of the six and a half million

pounds of raw cotton imported by Britain. Up to 1770 one-third of Manchester's textile exports went to Africa, one-half to the West Indian and American colonies. In 1709 the British West Indies employed one-tenth of all British shipping engaged in foreign trade. Between 1710 and 1714, 122,000 tons of British shipping sailed to the West Indies, 112,000 tons to the mainland colonies. Between 1709 and 1787, British shipping engaged in foreign trade quadrupled; ships clearing for Africa multiplied twelve times and the tonnage eleven times.

The triangular trade marked the ascendancy of two additional European ports in the eighteenth century, Liverpool in England and Nantes in France, and further contributed to the development of Bristol and Bordeaux, begun in the seventeenth century. Liverpool's first slave ship, of 30 tons, sailed for Africa in 1709. In 1783 the port had 85 ships, of 12,294 tons, in the trade. Between 1709 and 1783, a total of 2,249 ships, of 240,657 tons, sailed from Liverpool to Africa—an annual average of 30 ships and 3,200 tons. The proportion of slave ships to the total shipping of the port was one in a hundred in 1709, one in nine in 1730, one in four in 1763, one in three in 1771. In 1752, 88 Liverpool vessels carried upwards of 24,730 slaves from Africa. Seven firms, owning 26 vessels, carried 7,030 slaves.

Liverpool's exports to Africa in 1770 read like a census of British manufactures: beans, brass, beer, textiles, copper, candles, chairs, cider, cordage, earthenware, gunpowder, glass, haberdashery, iron, lead, looking glasses, pewter, pipes, paper, stockings, silver, sugar, salt, kettles.

In 1774 there were eight sugar refineries in Liverpool. Two distilleries were established in the town for the express purpose of supplying slave ships. There were many chain and anchor foundries, and manufacturers of and dealers in iron, copper, brass and lead in the town. In 1774 there were fifteen roperies. Half of Liverpool's sailors were engaged in the slave trade, which, by 1783, was estimated to bring the town a clear annual profit of £300,000. The slave trade transformed Liverpool from a fishing village into a great centre of international commerce. The population rose from 5,000 in 1700 to 34,000 in 1773. It was a common saying in the town that its principal streets had been marked out by the chains, and the walls of its houses cemented by the

blood, of the African slaves. The red brick Customs House, blazoned with Negro heads, bore mute but eloquent testimony to the origins of Liverpool's rise by 1783 to the position of one of the most famous—or infamous, depending on the point of view—towns in the world of commerce.

What Liverpool was to England, Nantes was to France. Between 1715 and 1775, vessels belonging to the port exported 229,525 slaves from Africa, an annual average of 3,763. In 1751 Nantes ships transported 10,003 Negroes. Slave ships constituted about one-fifth of the total shipping of the port. But the slave trade conditioned all others. The slavers brought back sugar and other tropical produce. The number of sugar refineries declined from fifteen in 1700 to four in 1750. But five textile factories were established by 1769, together with manufactures of jams and sweetmeats dependent on sugar. As in Liverpool, a slave trading aristocracy developed, of big capitalists each owning four or six ships.

The West Indian trade was worth twice as much to eighteenth-century Bristol as the remainder of her other overseas commerce. In the eighties the town had 30 vessels engaged in the slave trade, and 72 in the West Indian trade. Some of its most prominent citizens were engaged in sugar refining. The Baptist Mills of Bristol produced brass manufactures for the slave trade.

As Nantes was the slave trading port *par excellence* of France, Bordeaux was the sugar port. In 1720, Bordeaux had 74 ships, of 6,882 tons, in the West Indian trade; in 1782, 310 ships, of 108,000 tons. In 1749 the town's trade with the West Indies exceeded 27 million livres; in 1771, at its peak, it approximated 171 millions. An enormous stimulus was given to shipbuilding: 14 ships, of 3,640 tons, in 1754; 245 totalling 74,485 tons, between 1763 and 1778. Sugar imports into Bordeaux, less than 10 million livres in 1749, attained the huge figure of 101 millions in 1780. A mere 22 livres of coffee were imported in 1724; in 1771, the figure was 112 millions. Indigo, less than 5 million livres up to 1770, amounted to 22 millions in 1772. Bordeaux, in return, exported codfish from Newfoundland, salted fish from Holland, salted beef from Ireland, flour and wine to the West Indies. There were 26 sugar refineries in the town in 1789. Population rose from 43,000 in 1698 to 110,000 in 1790.

The West Indian basis of Bordeaux' prosperity was symbolised by the aggrandisement of a naturalised Portuguese Jew, Gradis. The founder of the dynasty was David, who became a citizen in 1731. Devoting himself exclusively to West Indian trade, he established a branch in Saint-Domingue, which he entrusted to a brother-in-law, Jacob, and another in Martinique, which was supervised by a nephew. His son, Abraham, became the greatest merchant in eighteenth-century Bordeaux. At the government's order, he supplied Canada in the Seven Years' War, six ships in 1756, fourteen in 1758. He loaned large sums to the State and to the greatest in the land. He died in 1780, leaving a fortune of eight million livres, having lived to hear himself denominated by contemporaries, 'the famous Jew Gradis, King of Bordeaux'.

The remarkable value of the triangular trade can best be presented statistically. As for the seventeenth century, we shall take as an illustration the British West Indies. The table that follows gives British imports from, and British exports to, the several colonies for the year 1773 and the period 1714 to 1773.

Colony	Imports (1773)	Exports (1773)	Imports (1714-1773)	Exports (1714-1773)
Total British	11,406,841	14,763,252	492,146,670	730,962,105
Antigua	112,779	93,323	12,785,262	3,821,726
Barbados	168,682	148,817	14,506,497	7,442,652
Jamaica	1,286,888	683,451	42,259,749	16,844,990
Montserrat	47,911	14,947	3,387,237	537,831
Nevis	39,299	9,181	3,636,504	549,564
St. Kitts	150,512	62,607	13,305,659*	3,181,901*
Tobago	20,453	30,049	49,587†	122,093‡
Grenada	445,041	102,761	3,620,504‡	1,179,279‡
St. Vincent	145,619	38,444	672,991	235,665
Dominica	248,868	43,679	1,469,704§	322,294§
Tortola	48,000	26,927	863,931	220,038
Carolina	456,513	344,859	11,410,480	8,423,588
New England	124,624	527,055	4,134,392	16,934,316
New York	76,246	289,214	1,910,796	11,377,696
Pennsylvania	36,652	426,448	1,115,112	9,627,409
Virginia & Maryland	589,803	328,904	35,158,481	18,391,097
British West Indies	2,830,583	1,270,846	101,264,818	45,389,988
Mainland Colonies	1,420,471	2,375,797	55,552,675	69,903,613
Africa	68,424	662,112	2,407,447	15,235,829
	* 1732-1773	† 1764-1773	‡ 1762-1773	§ 1763-1773
				1748-1773.

Thus Jamaica in the eighteenth century was what Barbados had been in the seventeenth, the most important colony in the British Empire. Its exports to Britain from 1714 to 1773 were three times those of Barbados; its imports from Britain more than double. In these years one-twelfth of total British imports came from Jamaica, nearly one-fortieth of total British exports went to Jamaica. In 1773 one-ninth of total British imports came from the island, one-twenty-second of British exports went to it. Jamaica's exports to Britain were ten times those of New England; the exports to the two colonies were about the same. Jamaica's exports to Britain from 1714 to 1773 were one-fifth larger than those of Virginia and Maryland combined; its imports from Britain about one-tenth less.

From 1714 to 1773 Barbados' exports to Britain were more than one quarter larger than those of Carolina, imports from Britain about one-tenth less. Antigua's exports to Britain were 15 per cent larger than those of Pennsylvania; imports from Britain about two-fifths the figure for that mainland colony. St. Kitts' exports to Britain were seven times the figure for New York; its imports more than one-quarter those of New York. Grenada's exports to Britain in twelve years, 1762-1773, were more than five times as large as Georgia's in forty-two, 1732-1773; Grenada's imports were half as large as those of Georgia.

In 1773 total British imports from the British West Indies amounted to one quarter of total British imports, British exports to the West Indies to about one-eleventh of the total export trade. Imports from the mainland colonies were one-half the West Indian figure; exports less than double. For the years 1714-1773, British imports from the West Indies were one-fifth of the total import trade; from the mainland colonies they were slightly more than half the West Indian figure; from Africa they were half of one per cent. British exports to the West Indies during the period were one-sixteenth of the total export trade; to the mainland, they were one-tenth; to Africa, one-fiftieth. For these sixty years the triangular trade accounted for 21 per cent of British imports; 8 per cent of British exports; and nearly 14 per cent of Britain's total external trade.

The population of the British West Indies in 1787 was 58,353 whites; 7,706 free Negroes; 461,864 slaves—a total of 527,923.

The annual British export of slaves from Africa by 1783 was approximately 34,000. This was the human and social basis of one in every five pounds of British imports, one in every twelve of British exports, and one in every seven of Britain's total trade.

The situation in the French West Indies was essentially similar. In 1715 France's external trade amounted to 175 million livres—imports, 75; exports, 100. West Indian trade accounted for one-sixth of the whole, 30 millions; their imports, of 20 millions, amounted to one-fifth of France's export trade; their exports, 10 millions, constituted one-eighth of France's import trade. In 1776, though France had lost some of the smaller West Indian islands, exports from the French West Indies amounted to 200 million livres, imports to 70 millions, the total external trade of the islands representing more than one-third of total French commerce, which oscillated between 600 and 700 million livres; West Indian trade employed 1,000 ships, outward and inward cargoes in the proportion of 5 to 4. The population of the French West Indies about 1780 amounted to 63,682 whites, 13,429 free Negroes, and 437,738 slaves—a total of 514,849. France's annual export of slaves from Africa was estimated at 20,000.

Magnum est saccharum et prevalebit! Great is sugar, and it will prevail! Mercantilists were jubilant. The colonies, wrote Horace Walpole, were 'the source of all our riches, and preserve the balance of trade in our favour, for I don't know where we have it but by the means of our colonies'. The statistics given above identify the colonies which Walpole had in mind. An annual profit of 7s per head was sufficient to enrich a country, said William Wood; each white man in the colonies brought a profit of over seven pounds, twenty times as much. The Negro slaves, said Postlethwayt, were 'the fundamental prop and support' of the colonies, 'valuable people,' and the British Empire was 'a magnificent superstructure of American commerce and naval power on an African foundation'. Rule Britannia! Britannia rules the waves. For Britons never shall be slaves.

But the sons of France arose to glory. France joined in the homage to the triangular trade. 'What commerce,' asked the Chamber of Commerce of Nantes, 'can be compared to that

which obtains men in exchange for commodities?' Profound question! The abandonment of the slave trade, continued the Chamber, would be inevitably followed by the ruin of colonial commerce; 'whence follows the fact that we have no branch of trade so precious to the State and so worthy of protection as the Guinea trade'. The triangular trade was incomparable, the slave trade precious, and the West Indies perfect colonies. 'The more colonies differ from the metropolis,' said Nantes, 'the more perfect they are... Such are the Caribbean colonies: they have none of our objects of trade; they have others which we lack and cannot produce.'

But there were discordant notes in the mercantilist harmony. The first was opposition to the slave trade. In 1774, in Jamaica, the very centre of Negro slavery, a debating society voted that the slave trade was not consistent with sound policy, or with the laws of nature and of morality. In 1776 Thomas Jefferson wrote into the Declaration of Independence three paragraphs attacking the King of England for his 'piratical warfare' on the coast of Africa against people who never offended him, and for his veto of colonial legislation attempting to prohibit or restrain the slave trade. The paragraphs were only deleted on the representations of the states of South Carolina, Georgia and New England. Two petitions were presented to Parliament, in 1774 and 1776, for abolition of the slave trade. A third, more important, was presented in 1783 by the Quakers. The Prime Minister, Lord North, complimented them on their humanity, but regretted that abolition was an impossibility, as the slave trade had become necessary to every nation in Europe. European public opinion accepted the position stated by Postlethwayt: 'We shall take things as they are, and reason from them in their present state, and not from that wherein we could hope them to be... We cannot think of giving up the slave-trade, notwithstanding my good wishes that it could be done.'

The second discordant note was more disturbing. Between 1772 and 1778, Liverpool slave traders were estimated to have lost £700,000 in the slave trade. By 1788 twelve of the thirty leading houses which had dominated the trade from 1773 had gone bankrupt. Slave trading, like sugar production, had its casualties. A slave trader in 1754, as his supreme defence of the slave

trade, had adumbrated that 'from this trade proceed benefits, far outweighing all, either real or pretended mischiefs and inconveniencies'. If and when the slave trade ceased to be profitable, it would not be so easy to defend it.

The third discordant note came also from the British colonies. The British Government's ambition was to become the slave carriers and sugar suppliers of the whole world. Britain had fought for and obtained the *asiento*. The supply of slaves to foreign nations became an integral part of the British slave trade. Of 497,736 slaves imported in Jamaica between 1702 and 1775, 137,114 had been re-exported, one out of every four. In 1731, imports were 10,079; re-exports, 5,708. From 1775 to 1783, Antigua imported 5,673 slaves and re-exported 1,972, one out of every three. Jamaica resorted to its seventeenth-century policy, an export tax on all Negroes re-exported. In 1774, the Board of Trade, on the representation of the slave traders of London, Liverpool and Bristol, disallowed the law as unjustifiable, improper and prejudicial to British commerce, pointed out that legislative autonomy in the colonies did not extend to the imposition of duties upon British ships and goods or to the prejudice and obstruction of British commerce, and reprimanded the Governor of the island for dereliction of duty in not stopping efforts to 'check and discourage a traffic... beneficial to the nation'.