African History

From Earliest Times to Independence

SECOND EDITION

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THE WEST AFRICAN COAST IN THE ERA OF THE SLAVE TRADE

From the broadest perspective, the slave trade was part of a more general exchange of plants, diseases, and people that followed the worldwide maritime revolution of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The process, however, was slow to unfold. The great discoveries began with Portuguese experiments off the Saharan coast, but the full consequences took centuries to make themselves felt. In the sixteenth century, for example, Africa had little part in the new patterns of maritime trade. European interest in African gold was soon overshadowed by the gold and silver of the Americas. India and China were economically the most developed regions of the world at that time. Economic opportunities for European traders were more important there than they were in Africa.

Many of the most significant consequences for Africa were indirect, growing out of the general redistribution of people, crops, and diseases within the Atlantic basin. New crops from the Americas made it possible for tropical Africa, and especially the forest regions, to sustain populations several times larger than those of the past. Maize, peanuts, and manioc – to name only three – permanently altered the way Africans could deal with their environment. But it took time before these crops were known on the coast, and still more before farmers in the interior found out how to adapt them to local conditions of soil and climate. Some of the most important changes were not complete until the nineteenth century, or even later.

The movement of people and diseases brought about changes that were equally basic, and equally time consuming. When Europeans and Africans began to move to the New World in the early sixteenth century, they took with them diseases that were unknown in the Americas. Within a century, these new diseases had wiped out most of the Indian communities of the tropical lowlands and reduced highland populations to less than half their pre-Columbian levels. This was of great importance for Africa, because, in the longer run, Africa was to supply most of the new population of the tropical American lowlands.

Africa had a peculiar and important place in the history of human diseases. Both humans and their non-human ancestors lived there for hundreds of thousands of years. During these millennia, humans and their parasites passed through a complex process

of mutual adaptation. New species of parasites evolved; humans develope
to respond through their immune system. Each human community tende
countervailing immunities against the prevalent diseases of the region. So
immunities could be passed from one generation to the next. Others were
childhood, like the immunities almost all adults have against the common
diseases" such as measles or mumps or chickenpox. Many of these disea
less serious for children than they are for adults. All adults, in any event, a
to some degree against the diseases of their childhood environment.

Most of Africa had close enough contact with the rest of the Afro-Euras
have acquired the same diseases – including the common childhood
Europe and Asia. Africans of the tropical belt had less immunity than E
tuberculosis and pneumonia, but they were far safer than the American I
most of the world's diseases. Africa was also the place of origin of a numbe
that were uncommon elsewhere before the sixteenth century – including
and the most fatal species of malaria. These diseases made it dangerous f
to visit Africa. They were also the principal causes of death to the America
the tropical lowlands.

An unfamiliar disease might occasionally be imported, followed by an e
would seriously injure the population in that generation, without impairing
recover in the next. The cholera epidemics of the nineteenth century did
damage, and similar epidemics may well have followed the early Europea
western Africa. Some African peoples, however, were so isolated from
humankind that they were susceptible to the same kind of devastation that
the Americas. The Khoikhoi peoples of South Africa, for example, h
isolated from the smallpox prevalent in tropical Africa that they endure
smallpox epidemics in the eighteenth century – epidemics that practical
them as a community separate from the European settlers and the slav
imported.

In West Africa, the epidemiological weakness lay on the other side
shared most of the African disease environment, but not the diseases p
tropical climate. Yellow fever and falciparum malaria were especially ser
fever is rarely fatal when contracted as a child, and an attack brings lifelon
but it is often fatal when contracted as an adult. Falciparum malaria is th
species of malaria, and the anopheles mosquitos of tropical Africa are the
tive vectors found anywhere in the world.

In the past, these conditions made for extremely high death rates among
from Europe – death rates that could often run to more than 25 per cent a
efficient tropical medicine was known. Similar death rates were prev
beginning of European trade on the West African coast, and North Africa
sustained high death rates when they crossed the Sahara. African mosqui
swamp or forest breeders. The open savanna country north and south of
forest was even more dangerous than the forest itself. These disease condi
explain why the maritime revolution had so little impact on the West Afri
such a long time. Any European activity there exacted an enormous price
mortality, but the indirect impact of Europe was nevertheless very importa

The Atlantic plantation complex

In the 1480s, the Portuguese seized the uninhabited island of São Tomé in the Gulf of Guinea, almost on the equator some two hundred miles west of Gabon. There, they set up plantations to produce sugar for the European market, under European direction but using the labor of slaves imported from the adjacent coasts of Africa. This form of production was not entirely new; it was modeled after similar plantations on Madeira and in southern Portugal, and it served in turn as a model for still other plantations run in the same way – first in Brazil in the late sixteenth century and then in the Caribbean during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These plantations created the economic demand for slaves from Africa, a demand that was to make the African slave trade of later centuries the largest intercontinental migration in human history up to that point.

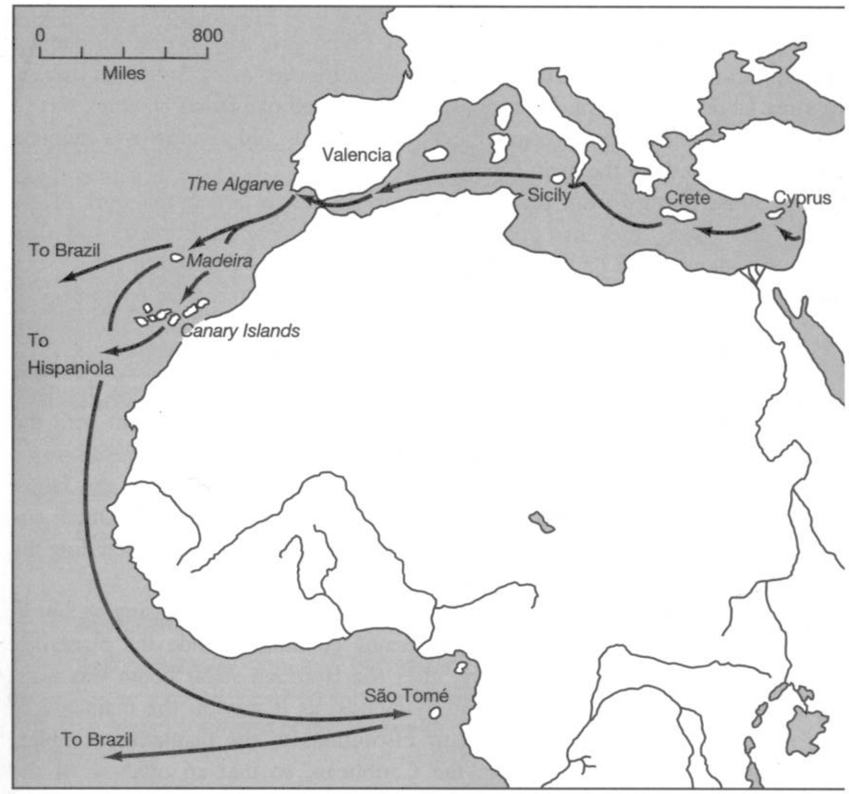
The whole system of plantation agriculture is sometimes called the plantation complex or the Atlantic system. Its productive centers were mainly in the Americas, and used slave labor from Africa and managerial staff from Europe, to produce tropical staples for the European market. Its origins go back to the Mediterranean in the period of the Crusades, when the Europeans first encountered cane sugar, which was already grown in the Levant and North Africa. After the Muslims expelled the Europeans from the Levantine mainland, Europeans continued to produce sugar on Cyprus. Later plantations based on eastern models were established in Sicily, southern Spain, and Portugal. The overseas production of exotic crops was an important economic innovation, based largely on improving maritime technology and the early capitalism of the Italian cities, especially Genoa, which supplied much of the capital and managerial skill.

Sugar production was a business that posed unusual problems. It was partly agriculture in the form of cane cultivation, and partly manufacturing, to reduce the cane juice to semi-refined sugar. The whole process was very labor-intensive, which meant that large concentrations of people had to work a small piece of land. No ordinary agricultural population was dense enough to provide such a concentration of manpower. Massive labor migration was always called for wherever the sugar industry was introduced. In the Mediterranean Middle Ages, the institution for forced labor migration was slavery. Unlike northern Europe, where slavery had given way to various forms of serfdom, it survived in the Mediterranean basin among Christians and Muslims alike. A small-scale slave trade carried war prisoners and other unfortunates for sale as domestic servants, as rowers in the galleys that still dominated maritime warfare, or as laborers in mines and plantations. Most agricultural labor was controlled in other ways, but its workers, secured through the slave trade, often continued in slavery.

Slavery also gave the early plantation owners a degree of control over their workers that was rare for medieval agriculture. The ordinary village in Mediterranean Europe required very little detailed management. Custom controlled the sequence of operations and the distribution of the product. New plantations, on the other hand, called for careful supervision simply because they were new and because the operations were unfamiliar to the workers. Sugar plantations also needed precise timing in the delivery of cane to the mill. As a result, organization on Mediterranean sugar plantations took

the form of gang labor working under constant supervision day after day, hour by h
The unskilled workers were easily thought of as interchangeable labor units, and
dehumanizing element of supervised gang work distinguished plantation slavery f
other forms of social subordination and forced labor.

At first, the slaves on Mediterranean plantations were mainly war prisoners t
within the region, principally in wars between Christians and Muslims. In time, h
ever, the demand for mobile labor exceeded the local supply, and slaves were dr
from a distance, especially from the seaports of the northern and eastern coasts o
Black Sea. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Africans derived from the tr
Saharan trade also began to be sold to southern Europe.



Map 7.1 The westward movement of sugar planting

As Europeans moved out onto the Atlantic, the plantation complex moved
them. The Spanish set up sugar plantations in the Canary Islands. In 1455,
Portuguese began to plant sugar on Madeira – with Genoese capital and Sic
technicians – and the next step carried them on to São Tomé. In the sixteenth cen
the plantation complex moved on from the Canaries to Hispaniola in the Caribb
and from Madeira to Brazil.

Each onward movement raised new problems of labor supply. Europeans often enslaved non-Christian war prisoners, but these were too few to solve the labor problem. The Portuguese voyages down the African coast, however, opened an alternate supply. Just as it was possible to short-circuit the trans-Saharan gold trade, it was possible to short-circuit the trans-Saharan slave trade and purchase slaves on the Guinea coast. During the second half of the fifteenth century, even before an American demand for slaves appeared, Africa appears to have exported about 500 to 1000 slaves a year to Portugal and the Atlantic islands.

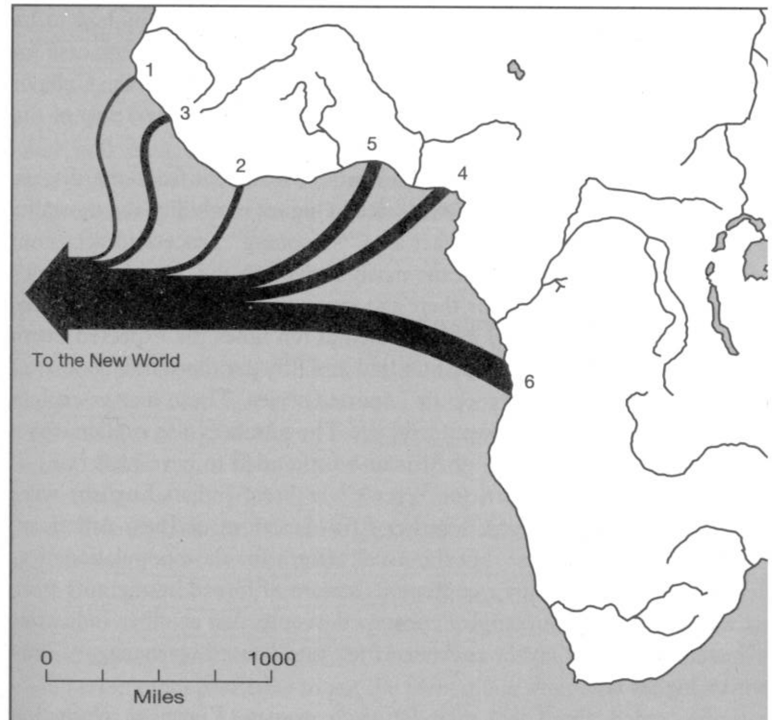
Each forward move of the sugar industry led to larger plantations, with the latest technology. These plantations were farther from the European market, but their "clean-slate advantage" over smaller plantations with outmoded technology more than made up for the longer voyage to market. In the second half of the sixteenth century, sugar from the old centers on Madeira and São Tomé gave way to new production from Brazil. Growth forced Brazilian planters to turn from enslaving American Indians to importing labor from Africa. By 1600, the fully formed plantation complex was in place, not yet with the scale or geographical extension it would assume over the next two centuries, but with all the main elements present.

The next move onward from Brazil to the Caribbean was largely the work of the Dutch. By the 1630s, they had the most efficient shipping in Europe. and they mounted a sustained attack on the Portuguese in the East and West Indies alike. They occupied northeast Brazil for nearly a quarter-century and mastered the technology of the plantation complex. They captured some of the Portuguese posts on the African coast, including Elmina. Even after 1654, when the Portuguese finally drove them from Brazil, they could offer their knowledge and slaves for sale to the newly founded English and French colonies in the Caribbean. The Dutch were content with the profits of the carrying trade, leaving the actual planting to others. The result was a "sugar revolution" in the Lesser Antilles from the 1640s, extending to the larger islands Jamaica and Saint Domingue, toward the end of the century. As Dutch supremacy passed, the English and French began to carry their own trade, including the trade in slaves from Africa.

With the forward movement of the plantation complex and its increasing weight in the economies of tropical America, slaves became common outside the plantation complex itself. In the eighteenth century, after the Brazilian sugar boom was over, African labor was set to mining gold and diamonds, as it was on the mainland of Spanish America. In North America, many institutions of the plantation complex, including slavery, were imported from the Caribbean, so that an offshoot of the plantation complex grew up alongside European settler agriculture, where farmers of European origin did their own work. All of these fringe areas absorbed some of the export of people from Africa, but over the whole history of the slave trade at least 80 per cent of the total went to the tropical plantations.

The historical demography of plantation slavery

The forward movement of the slave plantations was not so much a leapfrog as a process of continuous growth behind moving frontiers. The older, outmoded plantation areas



Coastal Region		Thousands shipped	Perc
1	Senegambia	337	5.0
2	Gold Coast	645	9.7
3	Sierra Leone	726	10.9
4	Bight of Biafra	1,203	18.2
5	Bight of Benin	1,229	18.4
6	West Central Africa	2,523	37.8

Map 7.2 Origins of the eighteenth-century slave trade

were sometimes left behind with diminished production, but the system continued to expand. The growth in the slave trade tells part of the stor estimated annual average import of about 2000 slaves to the Americas in tl century, the figure rose to an annual average of more than 80,000 in the peak decade of the trade. After 1808, one European country after another o trade, but slaves were still the most important export from tropical West Afi the decade of the 1840s. The trade then declined sharply and ended by th

One of the most peculiar aspects of the plantation complex in the period trade was the fact that neither the African nor the European population c tation colonies could sustain itself by natural increase. Both populations had to be supported by continuous immigration from Europe or Africa. This was not the case for the American south, or for backwaters outside the main plantation zone – like Cuba or Spanish Santo Domingo in the eighteenth century – but net natural decrease of the population was the rule at the economic core of the system.

The explanation is partly disease and partly sex ratio. Movement from one disease environment to another normally exacted some price in higher morbidity and mortality from those who moved. Planters saw this fact as a "seasoning" process to accustom newcomers to the "climate." Young Africans newly arrived in the American tropics died at about twice the rate expected for their age group in Africa itself. Europeans, with less resistance to yellow fever and malaria, died at ten times the expected death rate in Europe – with deaths as high as one hundred and fifty per thousand, compared to thirty to forty per thousand among recently imported slaves. These figures explain why planters preferred African to European workers. The numbers also explain why a slave population with a high proportion of African-born tended to have high rates of net natural decrease. The native-born (or "creole" in West-Indian English) were comparatively safe. Creole populations, whether Afro-American or Euro-American, could grow from net natural increase, but the usual pattern for slave populations was net natural decline, sustained only by a continuous stream of forced immigrants from Africa. In this way, the plantation complex consumed people, just as other industries consume raw materials. It used up slaves from Africa, and it used up managers from Europe at an even higher rate.

The slave trade carried about two men for each woman. European plantation workers, merchants, or soldiers had an even more unbalanced ratio of men to women. The number of women of child-bearing age was low in both racial groups, and the fertility rates were necessarily low as well – at least during the first generation in America. The American-born were, of course, roughly balanced between the two sexes. Which meant that populations receiving few new immigrants, like eighteenth-century Cuba, could have a self-sustaining population of both races. These demographic patterns are related in curious ways to economic development or the lack of it. When an immigrant population from Europe or Africa was set down in the New World, its first response to the new environment was a sharp decline in numbers as a result of "seasoning." After a few generations, however, it would level off and then begin to rise slowly. But one-shot immigration of this kind was a sign of comparative economic stagnation. Wherever the plantation economy grew vigorously, more population was added so rapidly that the stage of net natural growth was constantly put off, in most cases until after the effective end of the slave trade. Barbados, however, was a small island where the plantations soon occupied all available land. The slave population, which began to grow about 1640, ended its first phase of rapid growth in the 1680s and stabilized after about 1750. Thereafter, slaves were imported only to supply the difference between births and deaths. By about 1805, the slave population had become self-sustaining and largely creole, and few new slaves were brought from Africa.

This Barbadian demographic pattern was repeated with variations in other colonies. Everywhere in the plantation zone, the volume of the slave trade was tied to the rate of

economic growth, but with a multiplier if production was to rise faster than the nat
growth of the population. Sugar production, for example, could increase at the s
rate as natural population growth without any additional slave trade, once a creole s
population had been established. A greater rate of growth, however, required
labor, and the new populations were those with low fertility and high death rates. T
each economic boom in the Americas multiplied the cost to Africa in human suffe
while economic backwaters in the New World had little or no demand for immigrat

The economics of the Atlantic slave trade

In retrospect, the Atlantic slave trade seems irrational as well as immoral. It is har
imagine why Europeans of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were willin
send young men to the African coast, where their life expectancy was hardly more
a year. About a quarter of the crew of each slave ship died on the voyage. The
expectancy of a young immigrant from Europe to the West Indies was only five to
years. The explanation, of course, lies in the fact that the decision to build and run
plantation complex was not made by a whole society; it was made by individuals filli
limited number of roles, and these individuals responded, decade after decade, t
array of conditions that made the system appear profitable – at least to themselves

One apparent irrationality of the system was to locate the plantations in Americ
would seem more profitable to put the plantations where the labor was – in Africa.
Europeans died in Africa even more rapidly than they did in the West Indies;
African land was suitable for sugar; and good sugar land lay unpopulated in the
World. The decision therefore favored the Americas as soon as the comparative va
of Brazil and São Tomé were known. Though Europeans tried several times in
centuries to set up plantations on the African coast, most failed until the twen
century.

The American tropics required population from somewhere. The Indians
dying; Europeans died too; but Africans had some degree of immunity to the com
Afro-Eurasian diseases, and to tropical diseases as well. Africa was obviously the
desirable source of people for the New World, but costs had to be taken into acco
If voluntary emigrants from Europe had been available, cheap but inferior Euro
labor might well have been preferred, but voluntary emigrants were not available f
either Europe or Africa. Most Europeans sent overseas to work the plantations
political prisoners, convicts, and other unfortunates. They were expensive and sup
were limited. Most of the labor force came, at low cost, from Africa.

The low real cost of a slave purchased on the African coast was a crucial factor in
slave trade. West Indian planters of the early eighteenth century believed the pric
slaves was so low in Africa that it actually cost less to buy a newly imported field h
than it did to raise a slave child from birth to working age at about fourteen. It
appears that they were generally correct in early decades, in spite of the high death
of the newcomers. About the middle of the eighteenth century, however, the ri
price of slaves began to change the calculation. Especially from the 1770s, plan
began to encourage the natural growth of their slave gangs. They tried to have a n

balanced sex ratio. Some began to give time off for pregnancy and prizes for motherhood.

Such policies may have been common enough toward the end of the eighteenth century to affect the demand for slaves from Africa. The long-term trend in slave exports first turned downward in the 1790s. Even without the planters' new concern about natural growth, it would have come with the passage of time and the increased numbers, but the planters' concern accelerated the tendency.

The eighteenth-century increase of slave prices was important to the African side as well. The real price of slaves rose steadily from about 1680 to the 1840s, a fivefold increase over the century and a half. Few of the people sold into the trade were working slaves sold by their African masters. Most were war captives; with a mixture of condemned criminals, political prisoners, kidnap victims, relatives sold for debt or for food in time of famine. The economy of the slave trade called for a decision to sell on the African side, just as it involved a decision to buy on the American.

An abstract model can illustrate the economic forces at play. The total purchase price paid for a slave delivered to an American plantation had to be divided among those who participated along the way. Part went to the African merchants who bought slaves at the point of capture and took them to the coast for sale. Part went to the European merchants who brought them across the ocean. Part went to the men who performed the act of enslavement. The African and European slave merchants were in business, buying and selling for profit. Their decisions were market decisions. That was not necessarily the case for the original captor. He might have acted for a variety of motives. At one extreme, he might have acted for purely political reasons. A ruler or military commander might make war for reasons having nothing to do with the slave trade. In that case, his supply of captives would simply be a by-product of the war; they would have no assignable costs. In an extreme case, he might prefer to kill them rather than sell them into the trade. Where this political model was prevalent, the supply of slaves could not be expected to respond to price but only to political and military considerations.

At the opposite pole is an economic model. The commander or ruler in this case is assumed to be in the business of enslaving people as an economic enterprise. If he made war only to capture prisoners for sale, then the costs of warfare were the costs he had to cover to make a profit. In Africa, wherever this model was dominant, the supply of slaves would increase when the price rose, and decrease when the prices fell.

But this leaves the merchants out of the picture. They, both African and European, also received a share of the selling price of a landed slave. As men of business, they would tend toward the economic model. In Africa, rising prices would make it possible to travel further into the interior in search of slaves for sale. Thus, even where the political model might dominate the decision to make war, the supply of slaves would rise somewhat with rising prices.

Rising prices would influence the political decision. As the price of slaves rose, even the politically motivated commander might well try to maximize the number of prisoners so as to pay some of the costs of the war, treating prisoners as a kind of war dividend. As the price of slaves rose, political commanders would feel this temptation all the more strongly. In theory, then, rising prices would be expected to bring in slaves

from the far interior and to increase the incidence of slave raiding as opposed to product enslavement following military action begun for other reasons.

Life and decision-making in the era of the slave trade were far more complex these simple abstractions suggest, but they help to explain some changes in the co of the slave trade. One of the clearest of these was the inland penetration of the traders during the second half of the eighteenth century and in response to increa real prices. Where the slave trade of the sixteenth century had drawn its victims al entirely from a band within a few miles of the coast, the trade of the late eighteenth early nineteenth centuries drew slaves from the western Sudan and some from southern savanna in the heart of Central Africa.

The early supply to the slave trade was also marked by a tendency to jump errati from one place to another in response to periods of warfare or political upheaval. pattern, combined with the very low real price paid for slaves, suggests that the poli model of enslavement was dominant at the beginning of the slave trade and for s time afterward. It is impossible to say when or to what degree the rising price of sl made the economic model a possibility. It may never have been a possibility in the sense that the sale of slaves could pay the full cost of warfare, but by the 1730s some African societies began to behave in ways that suggest enslavement had bec at least partly an economic enterprise. The kingdom of Dahomey is a possible exam The organized extraction of slaves from Iboland may be another. The Bambara s of Segu and Kaarta may be a third, and still other possibilities are found in Ce Africa.

The second half of the eighteenth century was thus marked by a rising price increasing flow of slaves from Africa, a further reach into the interior, and a gr incidence of enslavement approaching the economic model. It was, of course, same price rise that simultaneously encouraged planters in Brazil and the Caribbe try to encourage the natural growth of their slave property.

The institutional pattern of the slave trade

Until the end of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese dominated West African n time trade in spite of sporadic rivalry from other European powers. During this pe a body of Afro-European commercial custom came into existence, with pattern exchange and cross-cultural behavior that were to be remarkably stable until second half of the nineteenth century. By 1600, the Portuguese had given up prospect of controlling any West African territory beyond their forts – a precedent competitors and successors followed as well.

By common consent, Europeans gave up the kind of massive intervention in Afr military and political affairs that was represented by the Portuguese Jolof expeditic 1490, though the Portuguese continued to play a more modest military role to south of the Congo and in the Zambezi valley. They and their successors also al doned the early effort to support Christian missions and provide technical assista as they had done at first in the Congo. Except for isolated efforts in scattered pl the Christian missionary effort in West Africa stopped from the second half of sixteenth century to the early part of the nineteenth. São Tomé became a f plantation society; neither the Portuguese nor any other Europeans were to attempt agricultural management on a similar scale until the nineteenth century. Where the Portuguese had begun with an emphasis on the gold trade, after about 1700 they and their successors thought first of the slave trade.

Certain patterns of trade laid down before 1600 became fixed. One was the convention in West Africa (though not for Angola or Mozambique) that European traders should stop at the waterside and not move into the interior. The Africans insisted on this to protect their position as middlemen; Europeans had to accept it because they already had enough trouble manning the waterside posts in the face of fantastic death rates among the newly arrived. Their only long-term inland penetration in West Africa was to the head of navigation on the Senegal and Gambia rivers.

Governments, both African and European, tried to exercise as much control over trade as they could. Many tried to monopolize some part of the coastal trade, but they rarely succeeded in the face of opposition from private traders, both African and European. African governments most often wanted to monopolize the trade passing through to the sea. European governments tried at first to control the whole national sector of their trade to Africa, mainly to improve their competitive position against other Europeans. The African trade was rarely an important part of total trade, but the sugar colonies were dependent on a steady supply of slaves. Many policy-makers believed, probably mistakenly, that sugar colonies were the most valuable part of any European empire overseas. Each European state thought it important to supply its own colonies with slaves, for fear a foreign supplier might cut off the trade at some later date. Spain alone was content to leave the slave trade to others most of the time, though it controlled the importation of slaves into Spanish America through a system of permits, or *asientos*. The other powers also surrounded the slave trade with their own cloud of laws and regulations. Many granted a monopoly over the national sector of the trade to a single, chartered, joint-stock company, endowed with certain governmental powers. The companies were expected to use their monopoly profits as a subsidy to repay the cost of maintaining fortified trading posts in Africa. The burden of defending the slave trade in wartime was thus passed over to a private firm – at least in theory.

In fact, it was impossible to enforce the monopoly rights. Planters were always willing to buy slaves from foreigners rather than pay a monopoly price. Private shippers were always willing to enter the African trade as "interlopers" infringing the legal monopoly. With 6000 miles of coastline open to trade, all the interlopers had to do was to stay clear of the official fortified trading posts. Against such competition, the chartered companies found their profits were insufficient to pay for the upkeep of the forts. That was the probable outcome, even if the company's employees in Africa had been honest, which they rarely were. The employees, after all, went to Africa with less than a fifty-fifty chance of returning home; few were willing to take such risks for the sake of a small salary. In the end, all of the principal monopolistic companies failed financially. Some received state subsidies, but the great bulk of the slave trade after the seventeenth century was carried by independent shippers in fierce competition with one another. This competition, in turn, caused the Europeans to bid up the real price of slaves, in spite of occasional half-hearted attempts to keep it low by joint action.

The mode of trade between the seaborne Europeans and the African merchants was

remarkably uniform over long stretches of coastline, perhaps because the Euro picked up the customs of one trade area and spread them more broadly. All alo coast, bargains were struck in a currency of account that was neither a Eur currency nor the usual African currency of the region. One such currency w "bar", originally a bar of iron weighing about twelve to thirteen kilograms. Thes were about three meters long, but they were usually notched for subdivisio smaller units of twenty-five to thirty centimeters each, a size corresponding ancient form of iron currency used on certain parts of the upper Guinea coast b maritime contact. Bars became the currency of account from the Senegal River and east to the present-day Côte d'Ivoire.

The next currency area centered on the Gold Coast, and here the local curren the trade currency were both gold dust for large transactions. In the course seventeenth century, a new fictitious currency came into use – the "trade ounce" half the value of a measured ounce of gold dust. In the eighteenth century, the " ounce" spread further east until it reached into present-day Nigeria, displacing currencies of brass and copper and a currency of account that represented the va a slave. The Bight of Biafra used a great variety of different currencies, cha through time and including a horseshoe-shaped object of brass called a "ma cowrie shells from the Indian Ocean, and a form of cloth currency based on the of a standard piece of handwoven African cotton. Two or more currencies sometimes used in the same place, and cowrie shells were often used for purchases where the currency of account had an inconveniently large value.

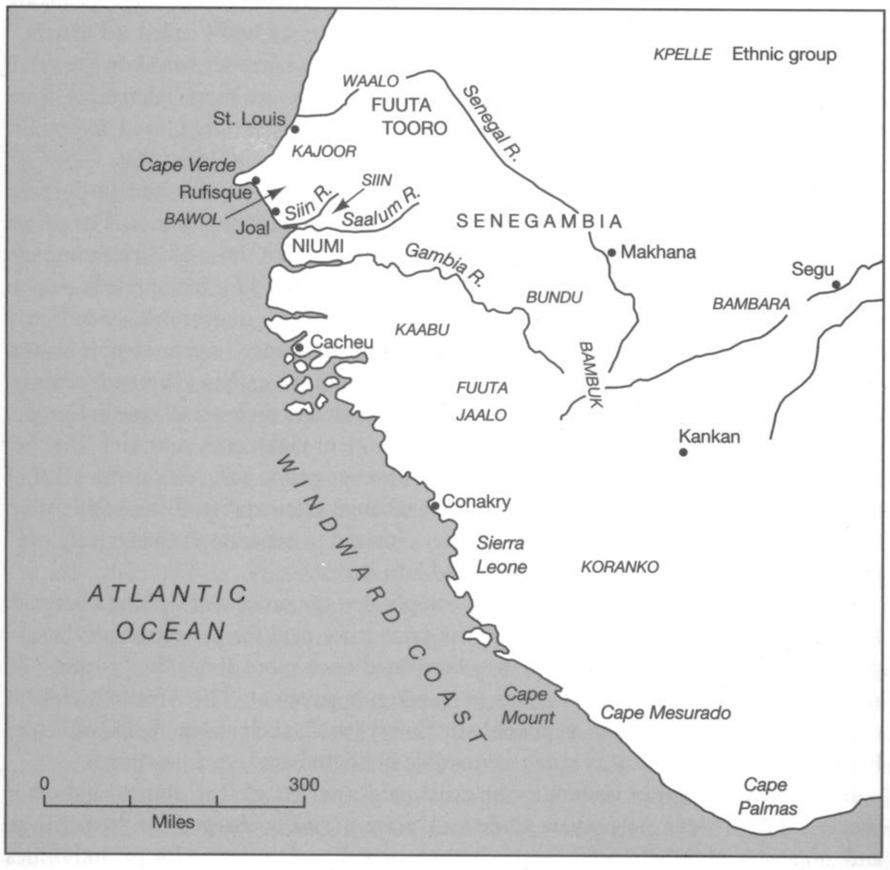
Whatever the trade currency, it rarely played the same role as a modern all-pu currency. One of the main problems was the inflexibility of certain prices. The of African exports varied according to market conditions, but those of African in tended to be set by custom at an early date and remained fixed for long periods – a century or more. A "bar" or an "ounce" worth of slaves or ivory depended bargain struck between buyer and seller, but a "bar" or "ounce" worth of guns o or textiles was a fixed quantity. At some time, perhaps in the early seventeenth ce the bar values of these products must have corresponded to their actual cost in Eu but this was no longer the case in the late seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. O worth of blue bafts, an Indian textile, might represent a prime cost several times t a bar worth of brandy. In effect, no single exchange rate expressed the relatio between "bars" and any European currency. Instead, a separate exchange rat vailed for each of the commodities imported into Africa.

This system of multiple exchange rates complicated the process of striking a ba Buyers and sellers had to agree first on the price to be paid for the export prod gold, wax, slaves, and so on. Then they bargained once more about the "sortin actual makeup of the bundle of goods to be taken in payment. The African mer would try to be paid as much as possible in "heavy bars", such as blue bafts, whi European would try to pay as much as possible in "light bars", such as rum.

In addition, European visitors to the coast paid a variety of fees, duties, and charges. The African state where trade took place normally charged for the pri and imposed additional fees for anchorage, wood and water, African auth required ceremonial gifts at the opening and closing of a bargaining session, variety of brokers, interpreters, and other service personnel had to be paid. These charges varied greatly from place to place, depending on the local commercial culture and the kind of control the African authorities exercised over trade. This, in turn, depended on the political circumstances in each region along the coast.

Senegambia

The first region to the south of the Sahara was Senegambia, traditionally the shores of the Senegal and Gambia rivers and the country between them. It was the first sub-Saharan region to enter into maritime contact with Europe, and it was especially important in the first centuries of the slave trade – furnishing perhaps a third of all the slaves exported from Africa before 1600. This temporary boom in the Senegambian slave trade followed the mid-sixteenth-century break-up of the Jolof empire into a reduced Jolof and a number of successor states. Once the new political situation



Map 7.3 Senegambia and the Windward Coast

stabilized toward the end of the sixteenth century, Senegambia took on new impor ance as the closest maritime approach to the Bambuk goldfields. The Gambia Riv was navigable by ocean-going ships for some two hundred miles and river shipping the Senegal could reach four hundred miles into the interior. These rivers contribut to Senegambia's prominence in a mixed trade, where gold and slaves were oft second in importance to cotton textiles, hides, beeswax, ivory, and gum. After t seventeenth century, most of the slave exports from this region originated in the f interior, beyond the head of navigation on the two rivers.

Portuguese neglected the Senegal in favor of trade along the coast from Cape Ver to the Gambia and up the Gambia River. On the open coast, they traded at a series small ports. On the Gambia, the country was also divided politically into a number small states, the successors of the great empire of Mali, just as the Senegalese stat were successors of Jolof. A series of small Mande-speaking states lined the banks the river, and at least one of these, Kaabu, was still a functioning province of Mali the earliest period of Portuguese trade.

Rather than having a fortified factory on the coast itself, the Portuguese tried organize their trade with Senegambia from their base on the Cape Verde Islands, b many individual Portuguese, contrary to official policy, went to live on the mainland. I the end of the sixteenth century, all the principal port towns had an Afro-Portugue community descended from these early traders and identifying themselves as Port guese and Catholic, though their appearance was African and their way of life was Luso-African mixture. By the early seventeenth century, the Afro-Portuguese const tuted the main trade community on the coast and up the Gambia, willing to trade wi any ship, regardless of nationality. Their trade network reached to the head of nav gation on the Gambia and all its tributary creeks.

Long-distance trade from the far interior, however, lay outside their sphere. Ove land caravans required another kind of specialization, and the caravan leaders som times came right through from the upper Niger to the coast at Rufisque or Joal. Mo often, they stopped at a convenient point on the middle or upper Gambia, where the goods were transferred to the waterborne transport of the Afro-Portuguese. In ad dition to the slaves and ivory for export overseas, these caravans brought down iro cotton textiles, and kola nuts for Senegambia in return for Senegambian mats, textile and salt for distribution to the interior. This long-distance trade therefore represente regional exchanges within Africa as well as overseas trade, and this regional trade ha been going on before the Europeans ever arrived on the coast.

The trade route eastward from Gambia to the upper Niger was dominated in th seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the Jahaanke (French Diakhanké). The people were never part of a single state: they were, instead, a people whose sense nationality was born of a trade diaspora that had originated, according to tradition, in near the Niger bend. By the seventeenth century, they lived in separate villages th were semi-autonomous from the local political authorities and linked by ties nationality and kinship to other Jahaanke villages, no matter how distant. In ma respects, they resembled the Juula of northern Ghana, the Côte d'Ivoire, and Upp Volta, who claimed Soninke ancestry, spoke a Mande dialect, and were traders living i scattered towns who traced their origins to Ja. The Jahaanke cultivated the role of th clerical, pacifist, politically neutral, and commercially oriented mercantile community. The remains of their former trade network can be seen today in a string of Jahaanke towns running in a line eastward from the Gambia to Segu on the Niger, and north and south through Bundu connecting the desert edge with the kola forests of Fuuta Jaalo.

The middle decades of the seventeenth century were a period of commercial uncertainty for Senegambia, with the Afro-Portuguese serving all comers, while the Dutch, French, English, and even such unlikely contenders as the Duke of Kurland (in later Latvia) tried to tighten their grip on part of the trade. It was only at the end of the century that a relatively stable situation emerged. The British were usually dominant on the Gambia, trying to control the trade of the river from James Island, a few miles upstream from the river's mouth; the French held a similar position on the Senegal, which they controlled from the island of Saint Louis. In fact, neither post was very strong; both fell at various times to European enemies, or even to mere pirates, though they were always reoccupied by their usual owners.

The Gambia was tidal to the normal head of navigation. The British sometimes dealt with the Afro-Portuguese, who sailed the river in large vessels called pirogues, capable of carrying ten to twenty tons, but the British also maintained a series of unfortified factories upriver, served by sloops that carried the goods back and forth from their main post at James Island. The island lay within the territory of the north-bank state of Nyumi or Barra, and it had no independent supply of fresh water. Most of the time, Nyumi was content to milk the trade by taxing passing ships, exacting payments from the British and from the French who often kept an unfortified post at Albreda, also in Nyumi, a little below James Island. The result was constant bickering between the Europeans and the African authorities, largely because the Europeans were never strong enough to overawe the Africans, while no single African state was strong enough to control the passing trade.

The Senegal, on the other hand, was not tidal and it was consequently less useful as a transportation route. Sea-going ships could hardly go beyond Saint Louis; even river craft could reach the upper river only during the few months of high water – though they could then go some four hundred miles toward the heart of the western Sudan. In the 1690s, the French placed a fortified post at Makhana, not far from the present city of Kayes in the Republic of Mali. With a permanent store of trade goods on the upper river and annual expeditions to maintain contact with the coast, they had a viable alternative to the British position on the Gambia. African merchants coming down from the interior had a choice of trading partners. Competition between the two river routes affected African states as well, because no single state could cut off both routes. Thus, while all states charged tolls on passing caravans or boats, the amount they could exact was limited by the fear of driving traffic to the other route.

The Senegal route also lacked an Afro-Portuguese community to serve as middlemen. Partly as a result, an Afro-French community grew up at Saint Louis. Even when the Compagnie des Indes tried to exercise its monopoly over the river trade, it used African boatmen and commercial agents. By the second half of the eighteenth century, the "French" trade on the Senegal had fallen completely into the hands of the merchants of Saint Louis – who were generally Wolof in language and culture, at least formally Muslim by religion, and African in appearance. A few were racially Afro-

European, but the whole community blended more European traits into its cultu
the passage of time. The Afro-Portuguese of the Gambia, by contrast, were o
of European descent, but they gradually became more African in culture as
descent.

The Senegambia was never a major source of slaves after the sixteenth centu
the Senegambian slave trade reached a peak in absolute numbers about the be
of the eighteenth century. As it declined thereafter, it became an even smaller
of the whole. The Wolof states, the main source of slaves in the mid-sixteenth
now sent as few as fifty or a hundred a year from each state, normally sold by t
as a royal monopoly. Fuuta Tooro generally tried to prevent the sale of its own
into the slave trade; and the policy was successful for the Atlantic trade. Fr
north, however, the anarchy of Moroccan military operations must have meant
large drain of captives across the Sahara. The only eighteenth-century slave
real consequence was *through* Senegambia, not *from* it. The victims came from
interior and were largely Mande in culture, captives taken during the rise and
sion of the new Bambara states.

Upper Guinea and Sierra Leone

To the south of the Gambia, the open savanna gives way first to thicker woodl
then to high forest. The coast is deeply indented by a series of drowned river
and numerous offshore islands. Political organization was also different; lack
legacy of former empires such as Jolof or Mali or of persistent state structu
Fuuta Tooro. Instead, the region was one of micro-kingdoms intermixed wi
stateless societies. Nor was Islam the major religious force it was in Sene
though Muslim-controlled trade routes reached down into the forest in search
products like kola nuts.

During the period of Portuguese dominance, this coastal region was one of t
important for the slave trade. Perhaps a third of the slaves exported by sea du
sixteenth century came from here, even though the Portuguese had no fortifi
on the coast itself until nearly the end of the century, when they built a fort at
Their trade was organized from the entrepôt of the Cape Verde Islands, and mu
was carried by individual Portuguese who went to live on the mainland under
jurisdiction, collecting slaves and bulked local produce for sale to passing s
time, they too became a separate Afro-Portuguese community, similar to thos
Gambia further north.

Although the southern part of this region, the present Republic of Sierra Le
only on the fringe of the Portuguese trade zone, it was briefly a large contribut
slave trade in the mid-sixteenth century. In the early part of that century, th
region of micro-kingdoms inhabited by culturally similar people whom the Eu
called Sape. They were, in fact, the ancestors of the present-day Bullom,
Limba, Baga, Nalu, and Landuma. About the middle of the century, the reg
swept by a series of invasions by people called Mane, now recognized to have
offshoot of the Mande people of the savanna. It was not so much a military con
a migration by the Mane and their allies, some of whom were related to the

present-day Liberia. The warfare as usual produced slaves for sale until relative peace returned early in the seventeenth century, leaving a new configuration of small states, many of them ruled by descendants of the invaders. A new pattern of culture also appeared, as Mane and Sape merged to form ethnic groups ancestral to the present-day Loko and Mende.

Once the Mane invasions had stopped, the region dropped from the mainstream of the slave trade. During the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, it depended partly on the sale of local products like beeswax, camwood, and ivory and partly on transshipping inland products like the gold of Buré and Bambuk. Some slave trade continued, but at less than half the value of the total exports. It recovered briefly at two points in the eighteenth century – in the 1720s through the 1740s, reflecting the fighting associated with the Fulbe jihad in Fuuta Jaalo, and again in the 1780s and 1790s – but the region's contribution to the total slave trade of the century was small.

This may be one reason why Upper Guinea and Sierra Leone attracted little attention from the major slave trading companies. Instead, private traders of several nationalities came to settle on the coast, as the Afro-Portuguese had done in the past. Some of them married into important local families, which made it possible for their children to inherit chiefdoms. In the vicinity of Sierra Leone, the dominant politico-mercantile figure of the early eighteenth century was the Afro-Portuguese, Jose Lopez de Maura, but in the second half of the century he was joined by a number of powerful Afro-English families – the Rogers, Caulkers, Clevelands, and Tuckers. Trading forts began to appear in the Sierra Leone estuary only late in the century, with the French on Gambia Island and the English on Bunce Island.

The Windward Coast

Further east, beyond Cape Mount, was the region the English called the Windward Coast – to the windward, that is, of the permanent fortified posts on the Gold Coast, though it was sometimes called the Grain Coast (for its malagueta pepper, sometimes called "grains of paradise") in its western section and the Ivory Coast in the east. Its principal distinguishing characteristic is the absence of natural harbors or even of good landing spots in the lee of rocky promontories, so common along the Gold Coast. Instead, the beach is characteristically very steep, with heavy surf close to shore and poor anchorages further out. Maritime trade was mainly what the Europeans called a "ship trade," without resident Europeans on shore. Instead, a ship would call here and there along the coast, or simply sail along watching for a signal that Africans on shore had something to trade.

One result of this kind of contact was that Europeans rarely stayed long enough to find out much about the country or people, and historical sources are more meager here than they are for any other part of the African coast. If there had been large African states in the area, oral traditions might fill the gap; but traditions carrying back two hundred years or more are rarely preserved unless they serve some political function, usually connected with a state or a royal lineage. Nothing recorded so far among the maze of stateless societies and micro-kingdoms backing the Windward Coast goes back as far as 1700, though oral traditions preserved to the north of the

forest belt make it possible to fill in the outlines of historical change in the wester Sudan.

For lack of natural harbors, trade along this coast was fragmented, divided amon many small ports or shipping points. One French survey of 1783 listed thirty-five por of call in this region, none of them evaluated as normally supplying more than a fe hundred slaves a year. It can be assumed that most of these ports drew on the immediate hinterland within the forest. Yet a few also drew slaves from the savann country, especially during two particular periods in the eighteenth century.

A heavy export from the region of Cape Mount and Cape Mesurado (the neighbo hood of the present Monrovia) occurred from the 1720s through the 1740s. This spu may be associated with the warfare that accompanied the Fulbe jihad in Fuuta Jaalo i the 1720s and afterward, but the natural outlet for Fuuta Jaalo would have been furthe west at Sierra Leone. It may also be associated with important commercial changes sti further in the interior. Kola nuts had long been exported from the forest region northward to the savanna country, especially along the north–south trade routes fro the Akan goldfields to Jenné. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, similar trad routes carried south into the forests of Sierra Leone, Guinea-Conakry, and northwe Liberia. By the eighteenth century, they penetrated through the forest to the coast, s that European goods entered the flow of trade to and along the Niger.

One political reflection of these commercial changes was a set of movements some times called the "juula revolution" – that is, a political revolution organized by mer chants. Just as the traders already controlled many of the towns along the route southward from Jenné, traders now began to establish their own control over politica units south of the upper Niger. One of the most important crossroads was the town o Kankan in upper Guinea-Conakry. In the late seventeenth century, the juula, o merchants, who worked that region were dominantly Muslims of Soninke origin bu now Mande in speech and other aspects of culture. That is, they were very similar t the Juula of the Jenné-to-Akan route, or to the Jahaanke who worked the trade of th Gambia. Sometime in the late seventeenth century, they seized control of Kankan an its region and set up the independent city-state of Bate – an important stepping-ston for the trade headed toward the kola region or the coast, and an example to other juul who had trouble dealing with the non-Muslim and non-mercantile micro-kingdom through which they had to pass.

A second spurt of trade from the Windward Coast took place in the 1770s an centered on the export of slaves from the port of Grand Lahou at the mouth of th Bandama River in the present-day Côte d'Ivoire. This increase was again associate with a new trade route through the forest along the line of the Bandama River. It was in effect, a new branch of the main north–south route from the Akan region to Jenné Increased slave exports of the late eighteenth century seem to be associated with th westward expansion of Asante, but the hinterland of the Bandama route had alread experienced its own "juula revolution" earlier in the century. About 1700, juula force under a certain Seku Watara began to create a new state based on the trading city o Kong. By the 1730s, it had become the largest kingdom created so far in Africa sout of the Niger River, with control stretching to the fringes of Asante, north nearly t Jenné, and westward to the Bambara kingdoms. Some of Kong's military operation