



The Intellectual Origins of American Slavery

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The Intellectual Origins of American Slavery

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of Government

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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in the subject of
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The Intellectual Origins of American Slavery

Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to recover the context of moral and political ideas in which slavery in America began. The focus is English culture during the early-modern period or from around 1550 to 1700. During this time the English commerce in enslaved persons from Africa helped to establish slave systems from Barbados and Jamaica to Carolina and Virginia. What most strikes the modern observer is the ease with which the English accepted the rise of slavery. Very few writers felt a need to defend it as right and almost none protested that it was wrong. For the most part a thought that seems to us unthinkable appears to have required little sustained reflection from them. This dissertation inquires into how that came to be the case.

Chapter One examines the ideas of slavery that were current in early-modern England and argues that these were informed by the account of slavery that had been set down in the legal texts of the Roman Empire. Chapter Two observes that the English often refused to trade in slaves from Africa during the first three quarters of a century after their traders arrived on the western coast and explains why this was so. Chapter Three traces a shift in English perceptions of Africa during this same period. Chapter Four explores the manner in which this shift allowed English observers to see slavery as a distinct product of the state in Africa and the slave trade as legitimate in the terms of the Roman legal

tradition. Chapter Five considers English attitudes toward the black skin of African peoples and finds that slavery and skin color were most often regarded as separate subjects in early-modern thought. An extended epilogue describes the transition in eighteenth-century American culture to an understanding of slavery founded upon a certain conception of race.

The close historical work presented here is animated throughout by the hope that, if we are able better to understand this particular subject, then we will gain insight as well into such more general themes as the relation between slavery and modernity, the manner in which ideas shape practices and practices inform ideas, and the limits of moral perception.

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When I began graduate school, I never imagined that I would write a dissertation like this one; but over time, this came to seem like the only dissertation I could imagine writing.

As I did so, I incurred many intellectual debts, which are indicated as much as possible in the text and footnotes. My greatest such debt is to my advisor, Eric Nelson, who gently suggested a number of years ago that a young Americanist look into Roman law. I also owe a great deal to the other members of my dissertation committee: to Nancy Rosenblum, who was always willing to talk, and to Richard Tuck, who always wanted to know more. One other thing that I never imagined I would do in graduate school was to write a dissertation that sprang from a footnote in a book by my advisor. But of course that is almost exactly what I have done, since the central argument developed here is at least suggested in an aside in Tuck's *Natural Rights Theories*.

On what is perhaps a more personal note, I want to thank five members of the faculty who did not serve on my committee: Jim Engell, Jill Lepore, Russ Muirhead, John Stauffer, and Cheryl Welch. Each one has now been a mentor and indeed friend to me for a long time. It is possible that this dissertation could have been finished without their friendship, but not likely; and regardless the life of its author would not have been quite so nice as it has been for knowing them. To John in particular—from the moment we met, it has been one of the great privileges of my life to know you.

I have not dedicated this dissertation to anyone: I would like to save that task for the book; and I suppose that this will supply one more reason to work quickly. But the

most important people to me are my mother and my father. In very different ways, they have made me who I am.

One lesson that I learned early on as I worked on this project was that I could always depend upon the kindness of librarians. For consistent kindness and crucial guidance, I would like to thank the librarians of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University; the Special Collections & Archives in the Davis Family Library at Middlebury College; and most of all the Houghton Library, Widener Library, and Harvard Map Collection at Harvard University.

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CHAPTER ONE

From Freedom to Slavery

In early-modern Europe, two traditions of slavery survived from the ancient world. The first was derived from the *Politics* of Aristotle, which held that some men were fitted by nature to be ruled as slaves, regardless of their actual status. The second was drawn from the Roman law, as compiled under Justinian in what had come to be known as the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, which maintained that all men were free by the law of nature, but that some men were legitimately made slaves as a result of their actions or choices. As the influence of Aristotle declined, the theory of natural slavery was widely rejected; but the Roman theory of slavery was received and re-fashioned in the long European Reception of Roman law and in the classic early theories of natural rights. Historians who have searched for the origins of American slavery have often grounded their accounts in the development of racial prejudice toward the natives of Africa; and in turn, scholars of American racial attitudes have frequently suggested that these contain the true sources of American slavery.¹ But in the seventeenth century, when slavery in the English colonies took root,

¹ The principal work on these subjects remains Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Williamsburg, V.A., 1968). Although Jordan once suggested that “rather than slavery causing ‘prejudice,’ or vice versa, they seem rather to have generated each other,” the general tenor of his argument was that the debasement of Africans in English culture preceded, and would eventually enable, their enslavement (80). For historians of American slavery who have similarly identified race as the root of slavery, see for example Wesley Frank Craven, *The Southern Colonies in the Seventeenth Century, 1607-1689* (Baton Rouge, L.A., 1949); Carl Degler, “Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Oct., 1959), 49-66; Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (New York, 1997); and David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (New York, 2000). For historians of race whose accounts have run along a parallel path, see for example, in addition to Jordan, Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of An Idea in America* (Dallas, T.X., 1963); Alvin O. Thompson, “Race and Colour Prejudices and the Origin of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade,” *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3/4 (Oct., 1976 – Jan., 1997), 29-59; Ronald Sanders, *Lost Tribes and Promised Lands: The Origins of American*

the idea of race was only just beginning to emerge, and the most important theory of slavery in England was a fundamentally Roman view premised on the natural freedom of all mankind. These facts suggest an original account of the intellectual origins of American slavery—one in which the perception of racial difference was only one facet in a complex network of beliefs, and in which a certain notion of slavery grew instead out of a certain notion of freedom.

The Roman law of slavery was as vast and intricate as Roman law itself, and the passages Aristotle devoted to slavery have seemed to generations of scholars profoundly to express his entire sense of the political world. But for the writers of the seventeenth century, the differences between these two views of slavery converged on one particular point. These writers were most interested not in how slaves ought to be treated, the state of their souls, the manner in which they could be bought and sold, or the conditions under which they might be set free, but rather in the sources or origins of slavery—that is, in the reasons for which a person might come to be a slave in the first place. The power of the Roman law and the challenge of Aristotle were precisely that both had sought to explain

Racism (Boston, M.A., 1978); Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1995); Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York, 1995), 128-174; James H. Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Jan., 1997), 143-166; and Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, "Before Othello: Elizabethan Representations of Sub-Saharan Africans," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Jan., 1997). For historians who have argued, by contrast, that racism was "the child of slavery," in the phrase of George Fredrickson, and that slavery was the product of economic, social, or political forces, see for example Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1944); Oscar Handlin and Mary F. Handlin, "Origins of the Southern Labor System," *WMQ*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Apr., 1950), 199-222; Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975); Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, M.A., 1987); and George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, 2002). The phrase quoted above appears in George M. Fredrickson, *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality* (Middletown, C.T., 1988), 3. In recent years, this debate, once one of the most heated in historical scholarship, has lost some of its immediacy, as scholars have recognized that rather than slavery causing race, or race producing slavery, the two may in some complex process have "generated each other," as Jordan wrote in 1968. But for the purpose of the present argument, each of the works noted here has neglected an essential strain of thought in the origins of American slavery: the birth of the concept of slavery in the early-modern period out of the conviction that all men were by nature free.

this original point of enslavement. For when Atlantic slavery was still in its early stages, the European powers and their New World colonists were far more eager to account for the origins of slavery than they would later become. And indeed the cause of the immense changes in defenses of slavery over time was not that, by the nineteenth century, writers had to contend with a newly developed antislavery critique—since, as we will see, there were critics of slavery long before that time: it was instead that, by the antebellum period, slavery was spoken of as the basis of an aged social order to be cherished and preserved, whereas, in the seventeenth century, the problem of the day was how such a world might be made in the first place—how, when so many persons were free, some might rightly be made to serve them as slaves.²

The answer, for Aristotle, was embedded in the very structure of the universe. In all things that formed a whole made up of parts, he explained, “a distinction between the ruling and the subject element comes to light.” Just as the soul ruled the body in a man, and men ruled animals among forms of animate life, so the same tiered scheme held true even among men, since, as he famously remarked, “from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.” The men marked out to serve Aristotle termed slaves, who were thus clearly human, but who formed those parts of mankind which most closely resembled beasts of burden, in that both were made to be used as tools. The defect

² On the American proslavery argument, which is commonly but mistakenly thought to have arisen in the antebellum period, see William Sumner Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1935); Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York, 1969); George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny* (New York, 1971), 1-96; Drew Gilpin Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Baltimore, M.D. 1977), 112-131; Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens, G.A., 1987); James Oakes, *Freedom and Slavery: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York, 1990); Eugene D. Genovese, *The Slaveholder's Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia, S.C., 1992); Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004), 939-992; and Lacy Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil* (New York, 2009).

of the slave was that, although he “participate[d] in reason” as a man, he was able to do so only in order to apprehend the reason of his master and not in order to possess reason of his own, much less to lead the political life defined by the exercise of that faculty. The fate of a slave was in other words sealed neither by force of law nor some terrible event but rather by the fact of his given place in a stable natural order. Aristotle once referred to a slave as “he who can be, and therefore is, another’s”; and here was his theory of slavery captured in a phrase. A slave by nature was always a slave, no matter his status in fact: he could be a slave, and therefore he was one. To enslave such a man, even in war, was only to allow him fully to realize his own proper end. Aristotle noted that some actual slaves were by no means natural slaves, and that some persons who may not have been held as slaves, notably “natives of Asia” and “barbarians” in general, were slaves by nature; but these facts seem to have troubled him less than scholars aiming to recover a critical intent in his theory have suggested. For Aristotle aimed not so much to justify or to indict the practice of slavery as he did to define a slave as a certain type of man, for whom a certain type of rule was intrinsically appropriate.³

Aristotle presented this account of slavery as an attempt to refute certain unnamed authors who, he reported, had argued that “the rule of a master over slaves is contrary to nature,” and existed only by convention or agreement. The Roman law of slavery began

³ Aristotle, *The Politics*, ed. Steven Everson in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (New York, 1988), 1254a30-31; Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254a22-23; Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254a22-23; and Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254b21-22. On the natural slavery of “natives of Asia,” see Aristotle, *Politics*, 1327b27-29; and on the natural slavery of “barbarians,” see Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252a5-9. For the mistaken view that, in Aristotle, “natural slavery is some kind of subhuman condition,” see for example Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge, U.K., 1996), 113, as well as 123-125. For the attempt to recover a critique of actual slavery in the doctrine of natural slavery, see for example Wayne Ambler, “Aristotle on Nature and Politics: The Case of Slavery,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Aug., 1987), 390-410; Gerald Mara, “The Near Made Far Away: The Role of Cultural Criticism in Aristotle’s Political Theory,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (May, 1995), 280-303; and S. Sara Monoson, “Navigating Race, Class, Polis and Empire: The Place of Empirical Analysis in Aristotle’s Account of Natural Slavery,” in *Reading Ancient Slavery*, eds. Richard Alston, Edith Hall, and Laura Proffitt (London, 2011), 133-151.

from that same premise: the principal statement of Roman law, Justinian's *Digest* (533), introduced the status of slavery in a passage from the third-century jurist Ulpian, who observed that "of course everyone would be born free by the natural law." For Aristotle's contemporary opponents, to assert that slavery was not natural was to say that it was not just, just as, for Aristotle, to argue that slavery may be natural was to show that in some cases it *was* just or, as he put it, "both expedient and right." But in the Roman law, that all men were free by nature did not mean that they might never justly be made slaves: nature had left that issue in a sense unsettled. And indeed the natural law was not the only source of law in Roman legal texts; the sources of law were several.⁴

The crucial fault line in the Roman law of slavery ran in fact between the law of nature and what the jurists called the law of nations. Ulpian had defined natural law in the *Digest* as that which nature taught to all animals—"land animals, sea animals, and the birds as well," he said—and it included the most basic principles of animate life, such as the union between male and female and the rearing of children. Since every animal was thought to have been born free and equal with respect to every other, slavery had no place in the order established by natural law. The law of nations, by contrast, was common to mankind alone, and was composed—again, according to Ulpian—of the customs "which all human peoples observe." Not all of the Roman jurists drew such a sharp distinction

⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253b20-21; *The Digest of Justinian*, trans. and ed. Alan Watson, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1985), 1.1.4; and Aristotle, *Politics*, 1255a3. On slavery and natural law in the *Digest*, see also the assertion by the second-century jurist Florentinus that slavery was an institution "whereby someone is against nature made subject to the ownership of another" (1.5.4), as well as the claim by Ulpian that slavery did not exist by natural law, "because as far as concerns the natural law all men are equal" (50.17.32). See also, in Justinian's *Institutes*, the legal textbook promulgated in the same year as the *Digest*, the statement that slavery was "contrary to the law of nature," since, "By the law of nature all men were initially born free." *Justinian's Institutes*, trans. Peter Birks and Grant McLeod (Ithaca, N.Y., 1987), 1.2. On Roman slave law, see also for example W.W. Buckland, *The Roman Law of Slavery: The Condition of the Slave in Private Law from Augustus to Justinian* (Cambridge, U.K., 1970; orig. pub. 1908); Barry Nicholas, *An Introduction to Roman Law* (Oxford, U.K., 1962), 69-76; and Alan Watson, *Roman Slave Law* (Baltimore, M.D., 1987).

between these two sources of law. Gaius, for example, whose second-century textbook, the *Institutes*, became the model for Justinian's manual of the same name, held that the law of nations was itself "the law that natural reason establishes among all mankind"; and as a result, the law of nature played little independent role in his thought. Even in Ulpian, and in the *Digest* in general, natural law and the law of nations were said to differ only on one particular issue: that issue, of course, was slavery. For although nature had made men as free and equal as beasts, the human world had soon begun to fracture in ways that the natural world never had done: property was made private, land was divided, nations were formed—and as a result of all these, wars had begun. And in war a custom had grown up, so widespread as to become legitimate under the law of nations, that captives were sold as slaves and that—on the general principle under the law of nations that children followed the status of their mothers—the children born to slave mothers were kept as slaves as well. ("Slavery," Ulpian thus concluded, "came in by the *ius gentium*," or law of nations.) This was the primary source of slavery in Roman law, as it seems to have been in the Roman world at large; and it was supplemented only by enslavement under the civil law—the third source of law, which included provisions particular to Rome—for persons convicted of certain crimes. Slavery arose in the Roman law in short as a product of history rather than nature, as a tragedy of modern life rather than a timeless feature of the universe.⁵

⁵ *Digest*, 1.1.1; *Digest*, 1.1.1; *The Institutes of Gaius*, trans. Francis de Zulueta, 2 vols. (Oxford, U.K., 1946), Vol. 1, 1.1; and *Digest*, 1.1.4. See also Justinian's *Institutes*, which confusedly referred both to natural law, in Ulpian's terms, as "the law instilled by nature in all creatures" and to the law of nations, in Gaius's terms, as "the law which natural reason makes for all mankind" (1.2.2). As indicated above, the *Institutes* nevertheless repeated the conclusion of the *Digest* that slavery was contrary to the law of nature, and was introduced instead as an institution of the law of nations. For this conclusion elsewhere in the *Digest*, see also the assertion from Tryphoninus that "freedom is the condition of natural law and subjection the invention of the law of the world." *Digest*, 12.6.64. A considerable and quite contentious scholarly literature on the sources of Roman slavery has suggested that, even though captivity in war and (perhaps most importantly) natural reproduction were primary, slaves were also acquired in far more various ways than law by the time of Justinian allowed, including self-sale, foreign trade, and child exposure. See for example

There have been very few surveys of ideas of slavery. But one of these did appear in perhaps the greatest twentieth-century piece of historical scholarship, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (1966), by David Brion Davis. Davis aimed here to trace the origins of the eighteenth-century antislavery movement; and his central claim was that antislavery arose out of a particular set of cultural and religious developments, rather than as a response to any shift in the character of slavery. In fact, from the ancient world to the modern world, from region to region, and indeed from Aristotle to Locke, he argued, “the hard core of slavery was much the same.” The core of slavery was in turn the “problem” that it posed in Western culture, as a “contradiction arising from the ultimately impossible attempt to define and treat men as objects.” There was, then, for Davis, fundamentally just one ancient concept of slavery that had been passed down to the modern world: in fact, however, there were two. And in early-modern Europe, to accept what I have termed the Roman concept of slavery was directly to reject the view inherited from Aristotle that any men were by nature slaves. This chapter examines the discourse that emerged from out of that rejection, a discourse that was defined in the first instance by the attempt to draw the slavery of some men out of the natural freedom of men in general.⁶

Walter Scheidel, “Quantifying the Sources of Slaves in the Early Roman Empire,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* (JRS), Vol. 87 (1997), 156-169; W.V. Harris, “Demography, Geography and the Sources of Roman Slaves,” *JRS*, Vol. 89 (1999), 62-75; and Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275-425* (New York, 2011), 67-99. It is true that, similar to the children of slave mothers, the offspring of domestic animals belonged to their owners as the “fruits” of their property, which also included (according to the *Digest*) “milk, hair, and wool.” *Digest*, 22.1.28. The Roman lawyers made clear, however, that the children of slaves were not themselves to be regarded as fruits, because “it seemed absurd that a human being should count as fruits, since nature provided all fruits for man.” *Digest*, 22.1.28; see also *Digest*, 5.3.27. The rule that governed the succession of slaves was purely that of the law of nations as it pertained to all persons, known as *partus sequitur ventrem*—though of course in practice this most often had the effect that the children of slave mothers were born as the property of their owners in the same way as were the offspring of animals. On this rule, see for example *Digest*, 1.5.5; and *Institutes of Gaius*, 1.82-86.

⁶ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1966), 288; and David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975), 82. See also, for surveys of ideas of slavery, Russell Parsons Jameson, *Montesquieu et l’esclavage: étude sur les origines*

The early modern period in political thought began in the works of Hugo Grotius (1583-1645). That was at least how Grotius himself saw the matter; and as Richard Tuck has demonstrated, he was joined in this opinion by all the major figures of the seventeenth century. In the famous phrase of his eighteenth-century French translator Jean Barbeyrac, Grotius had been “the first who broke the Ice” after the long medieval winter, for he had developed a new system of morals grounded in the rights derived from natural law. The thinkers who followed Grotius, from Hobbes to Pufendorf to Locke, would in many ways alter that system, or emphasize some parts of it at the expense of others; but they all saw themselves as heirs to a tradition that Grotius had founded.⁷ Nowhere was this debt more evident than in views on slavery, because as an integral and fully intentional component of the first modern theory of natural rights, Grotius also developed the first modern theory of slavery.

de l'opinion antiesclavagiste en France au XVIII^e siècle (Paris, 1911); Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*; and Mary Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule: Slavery, Tyranny, and the Power of Life and Death* (Chicago, I.L., 2013).

⁷ Jean Barbeyrac, “An Historical and Critical Account of the Science of Morality,” in *The Law of Nature and Nations*, trans. Basil Kennett (London, 1749), 1-75, 67. The view of Grotius and his successors presented here is indebted to the works of Richard Tuck, in, for example, Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge, U.K., 1979); Richard Tuck, “The ‘Modern’ Theory of Natural Law,” in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (New York, 1987), 99-119; Richard Tuck, “Grotius and Selden,” in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought*, ed. J.H. Burns (New York, 1991), 499-529; Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651* (Cambridge, U.K., 1993); and Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (New York, 1999). For an alternative interpretation, which sees Grotius as far more profoundly influenced by the medieval scholastic tradition, see for example Annabel S. Brett, *Liberty, Right and Nature: Individual Rights in Later Scholastic Thought* (Cambridge, U.K., 1997); Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law and Church Law, 1150-1625* (Atlanta, 1997); Annabel Brett, “Natural Right and Civil Community: The Civil Philosophy of Hugo Grotius,” *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Mar., 2002), 31-51; and Francis Oakley, *Natural Law, Laws of Nature, Natural Rights: Continuity and Discontinuity in the History of Ideas* (New York, 2005).

The basis for that theory of slavery lay in a shift from Aristotle to Roman law. The story of Grotius's intellectual life was in large part the story of what Tuck has called his "treachery" against the Aristotelian culture in which he was educated. His first substantial work of political thought, a defense of Dutch expansion into the East Indies, written in 1607, remained avowedly (if incompletely) in line with the Aristotelian tradition; and in what little space Grotius devoted here to slavery, he followed the Philosopher, who, he noted, was not mistaken "when he says that certain persons are by nature slaves." But by the time he composed his masterpiece, *The Rights of War and Peace*, which appeared in 1625, Grotius was prepared to make a final break with Aristotle, and his subtle treatment of slavery reflected that broader betrayal. Now he declared, "There is no Man by Nature Slave to another"; and to support this new position, he turned to a source whose influence on Grotius has only recently begun to be recognized: the scholars of Roman law he called "the Lawyers," who held that "Slavery is against Nature." Like the lawyers, though, Grotius aimed not only to deny that there might be slaves by nature, but also to affirm that some persons born free may be made into slaves or, as he put it, that "it is not repugnant to natural Justice, that Men should become Slaves by a human Fact, that is, by Vertue of some Agreement, or in Consequence of some Crime."⁸ These were the first two sources of slavery that Grotius identified—agreement and crime—and although they were not the main sources of slavery in Roman law, Grotius here drew on the character of Roman slavery.

⁸ Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories*, 58; Hugo Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, ed. Martine Julia van Ittersum (Indianapolis, 2006), 95; and Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace, in Three Books* (London, 1738), 3.7.1. On the influence of Roman law on Grotius, see for example Benjamin Straumann, "'Ancient Caesarian Lawyers' in a State of Nature: Roman Tradition and Natural Rights in Hugo Grotius's 'De iure praedae,'" *Political Theory*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Jun., 2006), 328-350; and Daniel Lee, "Popular Liberty, Princely Government, and the Roman Law in Hugo Grotius's 'De Jure Belli ac Pacis,'" *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (July 2011), 371-392.

Slavery was compared most closely in Roman law, not with the status of beasts or instruments (as in Aristotle), but instead with the status of the dead. “We compare slavery closely,” Ulpian wrote in the *Digest*, “with death.” When a Roman was taken captive as a slave abroad, he was regarded as having died “at the moment when he was captured”: his will was executed and his marriage was dissolved. Under the civil law, slavery was most often reserved as punishment for crimes which might also have merited death; and under the law of nations, the very term for slave (*servus*) was said to have come from the term for spare (*servare*), as in the practice of selling captives one might simply have executed. Slavery was as a line that lifted persons out of death into life, but it offered a tenuous and uncertain kind of mercy. The essence of mastery in Roman legal texts was the “power of life or death” over the slave, a power that was only gradually restrained over the course of the Empire, because slavery as such was thought to be a form of life defined as a form of death.⁹

Grotius took from the Roman law this sense of the closeness between slavery and death, but wove around both a fabric of rights that Roman treatments of slavery had not at all anticipated. The basic natural right, in Grotius, was not to liberty, strictly speaking, but to *life*: the right to preserve oneself, which entailed the rights to seek out those things that were useful for living and to use force to avert harm. When liberty and life came into conflict, Grotius thus argued that one had a right to give up the one in order to secure the

⁹ *Digest*, 50.17.209; *Digest*, 49.15.18; and *Digest*, 1.6.1. On the status of Romans taken captive abroad, see also *Digest*, 50.49. On slavery as punishment for civil-law crimes, see *Digest*, 48.19, as well as Buckland, *Roman Law of Slavery*, 397-436. On the etymology of *servus* under the law of nations, see *Digest*, 1.5.4.2, from Florentinus, translated by Watson as: “Slaves (*servi*) are so-called, because generals have a custom of selling their prisoners and thereby *preserving* rather than killing them.” On the “power of life or death,” see also *Institutes of Gaius*, 1.52-53, from which the *Digest* passage is derived. On the restraints on that power, see *Digest*, 1.6.1-2; *Institutes of Gaius*, 1.52-53; and, for example, Watson, *Roman Slave Law*, 115-138. The great works on the paired themes of slavery and death are Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, M.A., 1982); and, more recently, Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, M.A., 2008).

other. It was for this reason that he thought a person in dire straits—indeed, in a famous passage, an entire country “upon the Brink of Ruin”—might offer himself up in “perfect and utter Slavery” to a master in return for what he needed to survive. And it was also as an exercise of the right of self-preservation that Grotius saw the right to punish wanton injury with force and even, for “he who has deserved to lose his Liberty,” enslavement.¹⁰

These were the ways in which a person could be enslaved in accord with natural right. Slavery here stemmed only from some specific action, either self-sale or crime, and applied in principle only to the subjects of that act themselves (although Grotius did allow that parents might also sell their free-born children and even their “future Progeny,” on the basis of “mere Necessity,” if they had no other means to keep them alive). Slavery in these two forms, arising from the right of every person to preserve his own life, demanded that the health of the slave be maintained, and denied to the master the power of life or death, except over slaves guilty of capital crimes. But Grotius also noted that there was another source of slavery, one which was less carefully restrained: it was the form of enslavement drawn from Roman notions of the law of nations; and as in Roman law, it allowed for the slavery of “all Persons whatsoever” captured in war, as well as “their Posterity for ever” (again according to the rule that children inherited the legal status of their slave mothers), whether they were parties to the conflict or not. Derived from the right to kill prisoners, “either in the Fight, or some Time after,” the authority of the master here was “infinite,” Grotius said, “so that there is nothing that the Lord may not do to his Slave.” Scholars in recent years have tended to assert that this conception of slavery was the one that Grotius

¹⁰ Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 1.3.8; Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 2.5.27; and Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 2.5.32. On the natural right of self-preservation, which Grotius most clearly summarized as “the first Duty of every one to preserve himself in his natural State, to seek after those Things which are agreeable to Nature, and to avert those which are repugnant,” see Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 1.2.1.1. On the right to use force in defense of this right, see Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 1.2.1.

himself endorsed. But he said only that, as an aspect of the law of nations, slavery of this kind drew support from custom and positive law; and in fact, in several later chapters on moderation in war, Grotius urged that the “extravagant Licence of War” in this respect be brought within the bounds of natural right. “I must now reflect,” he wrote, “and take away from those that make War almost all the Rights, which I may seem to have granted them; which yet in Reality I have not.” He argued that in order to adhere to what he variously called “natural Equity,” the “Rules of Equity,” and “natural Right,” nations were required not to exert against captives the full measure of cruelty that the law of nations allowed: to take captives only in “just” wars initiated in order to assert or to defend one’s rights, for example, to take as captives only those persons themselves guilty of an offense, and to exercise the power of life or death only over captives who had committed capital crimes. Grotius in essence proposed that slavery in a time of war be made to resemble slavery in a time of peace, and the ambivalent effect of his argument was to so constrain the practice of slavery that in all cases it would take place under the cover of natural right.¹¹

Already, in the works of Grotius, many of the themes that would come to define the discourse of slavery in the seventeenth century were in place: the turn from Aristotle to Roman law as a model, the attempt to restrain without rejecting the expansive form of

¹¹ Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 2.5.29.1; Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 2.5.29.2; Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 3.7.1.2; Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 3.7.2; Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 3.7.5; Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 3.7.3.1; Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 3.12.8.1; Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 3.10.1.1; Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 3.12.8.1; Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 3.15.1; and Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 3.14.2.3. Grotius did allow that children of parents who had sold themselves into slavery might be kept as slaves as well, if there were no other way of keeping them alive—and that, though only for the same reason, parents might sell their free-born children into slavery. Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 2.5.29.1. For the chapters on moderation in war, see Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 3.11-3.16. For a recent study of early-modern theories of slavery that speaks of Grotius’s “endorsement of the slaveholder’s unlimited, unregulated power” under the law of nations, see Mary Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule: Slavery, Tyranny, and the Power of Life and Death* (Chicago, 2013), 226. See also James Farr, “Locke, Natural Law, and New World Slavery,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Aug., 2008), 495-522, 502. Even Tuck makes the curious claim that it was “more or less Grotius’s view” that “‘perfect’ slavery” was slavery as it had been under the law of nations, in which a master acquired absolute power of life or death over captives in war. Tuck, *Rights of War and Peace*, 171.

Roman slavery, the role of slavery as a substitute for death, and in this context the view of slavery as an exercise of the natural right of self-preservation. Grotius of course wrote in Latin, and in seventeenth-century England that was the language in which he was most often read, even though *The Rights of War and Peace* was translated into English in 1654 and 1682. But the Roman conception of slavery was also carried into English culture, in a version less subtle than that of Grotius, in early Stuart-era studies of the common law.¹²

This may appear as an unusual claim, since, for many years, scholars held that the early-modern reception of the Roman law did not at all reach the shores of England. The common law was at this time “a purely insular form of law,” according to J.G.A. Pocock, which stood, in the phrase of Donald Kelley, “like a wall built of stone and oak to defend a city,” or in this case a country. And yet the authors of the common law were well aware of the civil-law tradition. Several standard medieval texts on law in England, such as those of Bracton and Britton in the thirteenth century, had drawn openly on the principles and the language of Roman law. In the Stuart era, the many proposals for legal reform—by lawyers such as William Fulbecke, John Cowell, and Francis Bacon—had in common the attempt to integrate common and civil law into a single system, rather “as bretherne, then as enemies,” as Fulbecke put it. The very premise of the major works on English law during this period was inspired by Justinian: to draw together a thick sprawl of unwritten custom in a single text—often titled the *Institutes* and often in four parts, after the famous Roman manual.¹³

¹² For the seventeenth-century English translations of *The Rights of War and Peace*, see (in abridged form) Hugo Grotius, *The Illustrious Hugo Grotius Of the Law of Warre and Peace*, trans. Clement Barksdale (London, 1654); and Hugo Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, trans. William Evats (London, 1682).

¹³ J.G.A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century (A Reissue with a Retrospect)* (New York, 1987; orig. pub. 1957), 55; Donald R. Kelley, “History, English Law, and the Renaissance,” *Past & Present*, No. 65 (Nov., 1974), 24-51, 37

The treatments of slavery in English common-law texts were borrowed as well from the Roman law. The key source in this respect was Bracton—first printed in 1569, and again in 1640—which began as a gloss on the fundamental concepts of Roman law, foremost among them the freedom of all mankind under the law of nature and the origins of slavery in the law of nations. Britton—first printed in 1533, and again in 1640—was on these accounts a gloss on Bracton, and in content added only that the law of nature was set apart in historical time from the law of nations by the flood described in *Genesis*. And in the first part of his *Institutes of the Lawes of England* (1628), Edward Coke, the leading jurist of the early-Stuart era (whose mind, Pocock said, “was as nearly insular as a human being’s could be,” but whose personal library reveals a sustained interest in the texts of the civil-law tradition), copied almost word for word the account in Britton on the rise of slavery. “Of antient time,” Coke reported, it “grew by constitutions of Nations” (and “not by the Law of Nature”), according to which “he that was taken in battell, should remaine bond to his taker for ever . . . to give, or to sell, or to kill.” Coke offered this as a description of “how Villenage or Servitude began,” and although the distinction between these statuses was to become more important later in the century, Coke followed Bracton in that he understood them equally as types of un-freedom for which the term of the civil law, *servus*, was appropriate.¹⁴ Hence in England, where slavery had come to an end by

(quoting the sixteenth-century antiquarian William Lambarde); and William Fulbecke, *A Parallele or Conference of the Civill Law, the Canon Law, and the Common Law of This Realme of England* (London, 1601), iii. For a more recent interpretation similar to those of Pocock and Kelley, see Glenn Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution: An Introduction to English Political Thought, 1603-1642* (Basingstoke, U.K., 1992). On the important role of the civil law in proposals for legal reform, see Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago, 1992), 65-104.

¹⁴ Pocock, *Ancient Constitution*, 56; and Edward Coke, *The First Part of the Institutes of the Lawes of England* (London, 1628), 2.11.172. See *Henrici de Bracton De Legibus & Consuetudinibus Angliæ Libri Quinq* (London, 1569); *Henrici de Bracton De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliæ Libri Quinque* (London, 1640); and in English, *Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England*, trans. Samuel E. Thorne (Cambridge, M.A.,

the thirteenth century, and the last villeins had died off by the early seventeenth century, the concept of slavery that was developed in one of the few true slave societies in history was preserved, through the logic of legal inheritance, in an almost pristine condition.

As in Bracton—and in its most faithful Stuart-era reproduction, *Institutiones Iuris Anglicani* (1605), by Cowell—the main divide in the Roman law of persons, Gaius noted, “is this: all men are either free men or slaves.” Slavery was defined in Roman law as that status in which a person was in the jurisdiction or power of another. To be free was to be in the power of oneself alone. These Roman notions of slavery and freedom formed the basis for what has come to be known as the republican tradition in political thought, which took shape in the Florentine Renaissance, and in the seventeenth century flourished most of all in England. The republican tradition was largely absent from the mature thought of Grotius, and has never been thought to run through the works of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679): Hobbes was in truth its most influential critic. The core of the republican theory was the attempt to define slavery and freedom in the broadest possible terms: not only as the effects of specific acts which did or did not inhibit the exercise of the will, but also as entire ways of life, modes of government, and (as in Roman law) kinds of personal status. Hobbes came to conceive of slavery and freedom in more narrow terms. But even though he rejected the Roman-inflected republican account of what slavery and freedom them-

1968). See *Britton Cum Privilegio Regali* (London, 1533?); *Britton: The Second Edition*, ed. Edm. Wingate (London, 1640); and in English, *Britton*, trans. Francis Morgan Nichols (Oxford, U.K., 1865). On villenage and slavery, see also the assertion in Cowell’s well-known legal dictionary that “Villein” meant “in our common lawe a bondman, or as much as *Servus* among the Civilians.” John Cowell, *The Interpreter, Or Booke Containing the Signification of Words* (Cambridge, U.K., 1607). For another early-Stuart treatment of villenage and servitude modeled closely on Bracton’s gloss on Roman slavery, see John Cowell, *Institutiones Iuris Anglicani* (Cambridge, U.K., 1605); and in English, John Cowell, *The Institutes of the Laws of England, Digested into the Method of the Civill or Imperiall Institutions*, trans. W.G. (London, 1651). For Coke’s library, see *A Catalogue of the Library of Sir Edward Coke*, ed. W.O. Hassall (New Haven, 1950), nos. 293-434 (on English law) and nos. 435-491 (on civil law).

selves were, on the critical question of how a person might become a slave, Hobbes wrote in an idiom that was recognizably, and perhaps surprisingly, Roman.¹⁵

The structure of Hobbes's argument followed that of Grotius. Hobbes had of course studied Aristotle: in the library of his employers, he seems closely to have read a copy of the first English translation of the *Politics*, printed in 1598—which noted that “some are naturally bondslaves, others naturally freemen” and, in commentary that accompanied the text, contrasted this view with that of the “Romane Civill lawyers,” who held that slavery had begun instead in war. In his political thought, Hobbes was at pains to discredit as no more than a mark of pride the doctrine, which he attributed to Aristotle, “That some Men are by Nature worthy to Govern, and others by Nature ought to serve.” For precisely what made life in a state of nature so memorably insecure, for Hobbes, was that all men were so *equal*: each could kill any other; and all could hope to satisfy their desires. In turn, what rendered government possible, as an end to the state of nature, was that each person possessed the primary natural right to preserve his own life and to determine for himself the means that were required for that end. Hobbes may in part have drawn the premise of natural freedom from many sources; by the time he wrote, it had become a commonplace even among scholastics, as well as defenders of absolute monarchy. But Hobbes certainly had studied the works of Grotius and the strand of thought derived from the civil law—

¹⁵ *Digest*, 1.5.3; see also Gaius, *Institutes*, 1.9, as well as Cowell, *Institutiones*, 7: as noted above, the last was translated into English in 1651. On the republican tradition in political thought, see for example Zera S. Fink, *The Classical Republicans: An Essay in the Recovery of a Pattern of Thought in Seventeenth Century England* (Evanston, I.L., 1945); J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N.J., 1975); Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1978); Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought, 1570-1640* (New York, 1995); Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (New York, 1997); Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge, U.K., 1998); and Eric Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* (Cambridge, U.K., 2004).). On the brief appearance of republicanism in the early thought of Grotius, see Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, 154-169. On Hobbes as a critic of the republican tradition, see Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge, U.K., 2008). For a different interpretation of Hobbes's political theory, as principally an argument from Roman law, see Brett, *Liberty, Right and Nature*, 205-235.

from Justinian to Bracton to Coke—to which Grotius’s writings on slavery in *The Rights of War and Peace* belong. And in the common pattern of this tradition, once Hobbes had established that all men were by nature free and equal, he then set out to construct a theory that would show just how some men might be made into slaves.¹⁶

Over the course of its three major versions—*The Elements of Law* (1640), *On the Citizen* (1642), and *Leviathan* (1651)—the structure of Hobbes’ theory in these respects remained the same. But as Quentin Skinner has shown, the meanings Hobbes attached to freedom and slavery changed dramatically. In *The Elements of Law*, the strongest defense

¹⁶ *Aristotles Politiques, or Discourses on Government* (London, 1598), 32; *Aristotles Politiques*, 33; and Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico. Or The Elements of Law* (London, 1650), 31. *The Elements of Law* was completed and circulated among a number of friends in 1640, but was not printed until 1650, in two volumes, as Thomas Hobbes, *Humane Nature: or, the Fundamental Elements of Policie* (London, 1650); and the volume cited above. For a modern edition, which combines these two volumes, see *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (London, 1969; orig. pub. 1889). See also, for Hobbes’s critique of Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or The Matter, Forme, & Power of A Common-wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill* (London, 1651), 76-77. For his position on equality in nature, see Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico*, 2-3; Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ed. and trans. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (Cambridge, U.K., 1998), 31; and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 60-61. For his definition of the primary natural right, see Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico*, 4; Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 27-29; and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 64. References to the works that Hobbes seems to have read are drawn from the contents of the Hardwick library as described in James Jay Hamilton, “Hobbes’s Study and the Hardwick Library,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Oct., 1978), 445-453. For the widely accepted premise of natural freedom during this period see Kinch Hoekstra, “Hobbesian Equality,” in *Hobbes Today: Insights for the 21st Century*, ed. S.A. Lloyd (New York, 2013), 76-112, 90-99. On the scholastics, see Harro Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought: The Society of Jesus and the State, c. 1540-1630* (Cambridge, U.K., 2004), 186-223. On the defenders of absolute monarchy, see for example—in addition to Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*, 38-39—the critical remark of Sir Robert Filmer that, even among those who have “bravely vindicated the right of kings in most points, yet all of them, when they come to the argument drawn from the natural liberty and equality of mankind, do with one consent admit it for a truth unquestionable.” Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha: The Naturall Power of Kinges Defended against the Unnnatural Liberty of the People*, in Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (Cambridge, U.K., 1991), 1-68, 3. Filmer of course noted the same “conceit of original freedom” as well in “the authors of the principles of the civil law, and Grotius, Selden, Hobbes, Ascham and others.” Sir Robert Filmer, *Observations Upon Aristotles Politiques* in Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, 235-286, 237. But even though he thought that men were not by nature free, Filmer did not hold that any men were by nature slaves in the sense Aristotle described. “No man,” he wrote in a passage on Roman law that was included in the Cambridge but not the Chicago manuscript of *Patriarcha*, “is born a servant, or subject to the power of a master by the law of nature, yet every man is born subject to the power of a father” (65). Finally, although Hobbes’s treatment of slavery is here treated as an instance of a tradition drawn from the Roman law, it is nevertheless important to recall that, in the texts of Roman law themselves, slavery was said to be a feature of the law common to *all* nations. Hobbes was a great translator of the works of ancient Greece, and also encountered the view of slavery as a status that might be attached to captives in war in such works as *Eight Bookes of the Peloponnesian Warre Written by Thucydides the Sonne of Olorus*, trans. Thomas Hobbes (London, 1629); and *The Iliads and Odysses of Homer*, trans. Thomas Hobbes (London, 1677).

of absolute power Hobbes ever wrote, the right of nature was unlimited, in the sense that it could be given up without reserve. Indeed, to enter civil society from a state of nature was to do exactly this: to transfer to a sovereign one's very right to protect oneself. "And because it is impossible for any man really to transfer his own strength to another, or for that other to receive it," Hobbes concluded, "It is to be understood, that to transfer a man's power and strength, is no more, but to lay by, or relinquish his own Right of Resisting him to whom he so transferreth it." The first source of a society formed on the basis of that absolute relinquishment of the right to resist was the mutual agreement of each member; the second was simply force—the "Covenant from him that is overcome, not to resist him that overcometh." Begun in either way, though, the power of the sovereign was as absolute as that of a master, Hobbes said, and the "losse of Liberty" in the subject was of the same extent as in what he referred to as a servant. It was only a "Servant taken in the Wars" who had not formed a covenant with his master, and so was "kept bound in natural Bonds, as Chaines and the like, or in prison," who was that "kind of Servant . . . which ordinary and without Passion, is called a *Slave*." "The *Romanes* had no such distinct Name," Hobbes observed, as servant or slave, "but comprehended all under the Name of *Servus*." For the difference between slaves and other servants was merely that, kept bound in chains or in prison, slaves stood at the farthest possible point down a long spectrum of un-freedom.¹⁷

¹⁷ Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico*, 57; Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico*, 92; Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico*, 111; Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico*, 93; and Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico*, 93. In *The Elements of Law*, Hobbes did once suggest what would later become his considered position on the matter, that a man who submitted to a sovereign "should retain his Right to some things; To his own Body (for example) the Right of Defending, whereof he could not transfer." Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico*, 32. And yet the general thrust of his several statements on this score was rather to assert, as stated above in the text, that in order to enter civil society a subject had necessarily to transfer to the sovereign the right of defending his own body. "It followeth therefore," as Hobbes made clear elsewhere in the text, "that no man in any Common Wealth whatsoever, hath right to resist Him, or Them, on whom they have transferred this Power Coercive, or (as men use to call it) the Sword of Justice, supposing the Not Resistance possible." Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico*, 66. Despite this suggestive final phrase, Hobbes does indeed seem to have supposed at this point in his career that

The Elements of Law was, then, concerned with subjection far more than freedom. Hobbes there remarked that freedom in civil society was no more than the hope of honor and gain among subjects. By the time he composed *On the Citizen*, however, in which he revised and translated into Latin his earlier work, Hobbes had developed a powerful new account of freedom, which entailed a new view of slavery. He again defined the right of nature as the right of each man to “*protect his life and limbs as much as he can*” and to judge for himself how that ought to be done; but now he argued that this right need not be renounced in civil society, and that in fact what he now called “civil liberty” was the right every person retained, against all forms of civil authority, of “doing all he can and trying every move that is necessary to protect his life and health.” Liberty as such, he continued, was “simply the *absence of obstacles to motion*.” Because only captives taken in war who were forced into labor “inside workhouses or in chains” were unable to direct the motions of their bodies in order to protect themselves, only these persons were at all un-free. And so while in *The Elements of Law* the basic feature of civil society was the loss of freedom in every subject, in *On the Citizen* freedom had become the almost universal condition of civil life.¹⁸

This was the key pivot in Hobbes’s attempt over the course of his career to define slavery and freedom. *Leviathan*, in these respects, only sharpened the claims and clarified the terms that had appeared first in *On the Citizen*. On the one hand, Hobbes here insisted

“Not Resistance” of that kind was possible. On these subjects, see Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories*, 119-124. Now, similar to *The Elements of Law*, *On the Citizen* was circulated among friends in 1642, but was not published in a generally available edition until 1647, as Thomas Hobbes, *Elementa Philosophica de Cive* (Amsterdam, 1647). The work was rendered into English in an unauthorized and imperfect edition, as Thomas Hobbes, *Philosophicall Rudiments Concerning Government and Civil Society* (London, 1651). *De Cive*, as it has always popularly been known, was most often read in Latin, though, and since it is a more accurate translation, the modern Cambridge edition cited above is the one used here.

¹⁸ Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 27; Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 111; Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 111; and Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 103.

with even more definite arguments that the right of nature could not be renounced in civil society; and he also added that only what he called “externall Impediments of motion,” as distinct from the inner inability of a body to move—“as when a stone lyeth still, or a man is fastned to his bed by sicknesse”—could be seen as blocks on freedom. And on the other hand, Hobbes at last found a word in English to describe the condition of the un-free. For whereas in *The Elements of Law* slaves, servants, and even subjects alike lacked freedom; and in *On the Citizen* Hobbes used the term *servus* to cover both servants, who were free, and bound prisoners (*ergastuli*, in Latin), who were not free (and likened the status of the former to that of a *serviteur*, in French, while he compared the status of the latter to that of a *serf* or *esclave*); in *Leviathan* Hobbes made clear that when a captive in war made a covenant with his enemy, “after such Covenant made, the Vanquished is a SERVANT,” but that until then, when the captive was “kept in prison, or bonds,” and was thus unable to move on his own or to act on his will in any way, he alone, of all the characters in the political world, was not free—and merited, for that reason, the special designation that he was one of such persons as were “Commonly called Slaves.”¹⁹

After Grotius, then, Hobbes marked a return to a more purely Roman account of slavery. Grotius had held a complex view of the sources of slavery, which included self-sale, crime, and war. But Hobbes followed the Roman conception of the law of nations, and its legacy in the English common law, when he argued that war was the only context in which slavery might emerge—and after *The Elements of Law*, the only context in which a person might lose his freedom. Hobbes also adhered to the law of nations in that, unlike

¹⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 107; Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 103; and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 104. On these subjects, see for example Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories*, 119-142; Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*, 82-177; and Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule*, 293-325. For the key passage in *On the Citizen* in which Hobbes distinguishes between the two types of *servus* described above, see Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 103. Despite the important distinctions drawn here, the modern Cambridge edition of the text in all cases renders *servus* as slave.

Grotius, he placed no limits on who could be taken as a slave in war, and never required that such a war be just in anything like the sense described by Grotius (although he also never mentioned whether the children of slaves would inherit the status of their mothers). Both Grotius and Hobbes began from the distinctively modern premise that every person possessed the natural right to preserve his own life. But whereas Grotius argued that this right ought to be made the sole basis for slavery, Hobbes said only that it explained the covenant between master and servant, both of whom thus aimed to ensure their safety. He spoke of slavery, on the other hand, as it had been under the law of nations: as a matter of discretion rather than rights—the choice of the captive not to submit and the choice of the victor, as a result, to keep him in chains until, as Hobbes put it in *Leviathan*, he “shall consider what to do with him.”²⁰

The essence of slavery, for Hobbes, was thus the absence of consent on the part of the captive. But for Grotius slavery and consent had been bound up with one another: one might consent to sell oneself to a master; and even in crime or in war, those who violated the rights of others had in a sense consented to their slavery as punishment, Grotius noted, since they knew that they had done wrong. In the decades after *Leviathan* appeared, the principal theorist in the tradition of Grotius and Hobbes was the Saxon Samuel Pufendorf (1632-1694), whose masterpiece, *The Law of Nature and Nations*, was published in Latin in 1672, and in English in 1703. Pufendorf started from the familiar insight that the belief “derived from the ancient *Greeks*, of *some Mens being Slaves by Nature*,” was incorrect: each man was by nature free and equal in relation to every other; and each man possessed the right to do what he judged best in order to defend his life. Pufendorf insisted that men

²⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 104. On the covenant between master and servant as an exercise of the natural right of self-preservation, closely similar to the agreement among subjects to form a civil society, see for example Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 30, 102-103, and 111.

formed society, not simply in order to secure their rights, but also to satisfy their natural desire to live in concert with others. But the real nerve of his political theory was consent, the argument that the only legitimate source of civil authority was an agreement initiated by the subject. And to a greater extent even than Grotius, Pufendorf also made consent the basis for his theory of slavery.²¹

Slavery had in fact begun, Pufendorf argued, in consent rather than in war. “In the early Ages of the World,” he said, when social forms had only just started to emerge, men and women had contracted in marriage, children consented to obey their parents, peoples asked to be governed by rulers, and, “as Men began to quit their primitive Plainness and Simplicity,” some of the poor, finally, had agreed to serve some of the rich as slaves for life, in return for food and shelter. Under the law of nations, slavery had only arisen when the social world began to unravel in war; but for Pufendorf, the rise of slavery was itself part of the massive process in which peoples had first knit themselves together in states.

²¹ Samuel Pufendorf, *Of the Law of Nature and Nations. Eight Books.*, trans. Basil Kennett (London, 1703), 3.2.8. On the role of consent in cases of slavery as punishment, see Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 2.20.2.3. Tuck has argued that Pufendorf’s theory of rights represented the “repudiation of Grotius,” to the extent that it “laid stress on the fact that general agreements for social utility confer rights,” rather than people “having rights or property *in themselves*, outside the network of social obligations.” Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories*, 157, 161, and 161. Pufendorf did indeed argue that a person’s right of exclusive dominion, or property, in objects and animals could only be established, in Tuck’s phrase, by “general agreements for social utility.” (See for example Pufendorf, *Law of Nature and Nations*, 4.4; and Stephen Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property* [New York, 1991], 53-124.) But with respect to a person’s dominion over himself, Pufendorf made precisely the claim that Tuck said he did not make: that is, that people had “rights *in themselves*, outside the network of social obligations.” Pufendorf’s theory of rights was in this respect fundamentally Grotian, and supported the more general claim later made by Barbeyrac that Pufendorf had “pursu’d the Design, and Method of *Grotius*.” Barbeyrac, “The Science of Morality,” 68. What Pufendorf said was that men in a natural state “may use not only their own Strength, but their own Judgment and Will (provided they are form’d and guided according to the Law of Nature) for procuring their own Defence and Safety. And in this respect likewise, the State we are treating of has obtain’d the Name of Natural Liberty; in as much as, antecedently to all Human Pact and Deed, every Man is conceiv’d to be perfectly in his own Power and Disposal, and not to be controll’d by the Pleasure or Authority of any other.” Pufendorf, *Law of Nature and Nations*, 2.2.3. As he concluded in the shorter version of this work, translated into English as *The Whole Duty of Man*, “whosoever lives in a State of Natural Liberty, depends not on any other for the direction of his doings; but is vested with a Right to do according to his own Judgment and Will any thing he shall think good, and which is consonant to sound Reason.” Samuel Pufendorf, *The Whole Duty of Man According to the Law of Nature*, trans. Andrew Tooke (London, 1698; orig. pub. 1691), 2.1.8.

He did observe that “in succeeding Times, when Wars grew more frequent in the World,” the number of slaves increased and their treatment became “more hard and grievous.” But he viewed the power of a victor over his captive as no more than an extension of the right to kill an enemy in war; and in contrast to Hobbes, he held that a captive only became a slave when he contracted to serve his captor forever, in exchange for “the Security of his Life.” The early English translations of *The Law of Nature and Nations*—and its summary version, which appeared in Latin in 1673, and in English in 1691, as *The Whole Duty of Man*—tended to record a contrast between “slaves,” who had agreed to their status after a war, and “servants,” who had done so in peace. But Pufendorf, who used the term *servi* in both cases, did not stress this distinction. Unlike Hobbes in *On the Citizen* (which was the work of Hobbes that Pufendorf, like many seventeenth-century readers on the Continent, saw as authoritative), he never held that any type of *servus* was free. What he said instead was that, because *servi* in war and in peace had placed themselves in the power of another person forever in order to secure their mutual benefit, both were involved in varieties of the same condition: both had consented to slavery.²²

In the final decades of the seventeenth century, the major theorist of natural rights was John Locke (1632-1704). Locke aimed to refute, not Aristotle (who left little imprint

²² Pufendorf, *Law of Nature and Nations*, 6.3.4; Pufendorf, *Law of Nature and Nations*, 6.3.5; and Pufendorf, *Law of Nature and Nations*, 6.3.6. As Pufendorf wrote in summary, on the origins of slavery, “The primitive Institution, therefore, of Servitude was not founded on War, but on voluntary Consent; tho’ the Chance of War supplied Occasion, not only to the increasing the Number of Slaves, but to the rendring their Condition more hard and grievous.” Pufendorf, *Law of Nature and Nations*, 6.3.5. On consent as the sole legitimate source of slavery, even after slavery often came to originate in captivity in war, Pufendorf argued, “For that kind of Hostile Privilege which the Victor reserves to himself over his Prisoner, is a different thing from his proper Sovereignty: since, by means of the former, the Captive may, at any time, be deprived of his Life, under Pretence of the State of War,” whereas “the highest Degree of Sovereign Rule or Dominion, doth not directly include a Right over the Life of the Subject, except on a criminal Account”—and since, most importantly, “*Dominion*,” even in the case of slavery, was properly “the Right of governing Another’s Person, when establish’d with the free Consent of the Subject.” Pufendorf, *Law of Nature and Nations*, 6.3.6-7. Finally, although Pufendorf only quoted from *On the Citizen*, he did possess the three versions of Hobbes’s political thought discussed above. See *La Biblioteca di Samuel Pufendorf: Catalogo dell’asta di Berlin del Settembre 1697*, ed. Fiammetta Palladini (Wiesbaden, 1999), nos. 819-822.

on his thought), but Sir Robert Filmer, whose *Patriarcha* (1680) had argued that all men were born subject to fathers and to rulers, whose absolute power was in essence the same. In the *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), Locke maintained by contrast that all men in a state of nature were born free and equal with respect to each other, and that they held a right to preserve themselves, as well as all of mankind, when the two did not conflict. To this extent, Locke followed Grotius and Pufendorf, whose *The Law of Nature and Nations* he once recommended as the best book on the nature and origins of political society, just ahead of *The Rights of War and Peace*.²³ But after this point, Locke departed dramatically from the natural rights tradition as he had found it. For Grotius and Pufendorf had agreed that a person, and indeed a whole nation, might consent to slavery as a means to survive, since both thought that slavery in such cases ought not to entail the power of life or death, except for capital crimes. But Locke argued that the true meaning of slavery, in all cases, was an authority of a master over his subject so absolute as to include an unlimited power of life or death. It was in the context of this original view of what slavery was that Locke so often repeated that Filmer—an advocate for the absolute, arbitrary power of kings, who regardless never believed that he had been an advocate for slavery—was exactly that: “*an Advocate for Slavery*.” And it was in this context, too, that Locke concluded that a person could not consent to slavery. For while treatments of Locke on slavery have emphasized

²³ For Locke on Pufendorf and Grotius, see John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, eds. John W. and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford, U.K., 1989), 239, as well as “M^r Locke’s Extemporè Advice &c.” in Locke, *Thoughts Concerning Education*, 319-327, 322. As Tuck has noted, Locke purchased *The Law of Nature and Nations* in 1681, around the time when he seems to have composed the *Second Treatise*; and this fact, which von Leyden first noticed recorded in a manuscript journal, receives substantial confirmation from the catalogue of his library that Locke wrote in July 1681, in which Pufendorf’s masterpiece is listed. See Tuck, *Rights of War and Peace*, 168; John Locke, *Essays on the Law of Nature*, ed. W. von Leyden (Oxford, U.K., 1954), 39; and John Harrison and Peter Laslett, *The Library of John Locke* (hereafter *LJL*) (Oxford, U.K., 1971; orig. pub. 1965), 2401. Although *The Rights of War and Peace* is not listed in the 1681 catalogue, Locke was certainly familiar with the work long before that time; and both the 1650 and the 1680 Latin editions are listed under *LJL* nos. 1329 and 1329a.

his claim that the right of nature stemmed from the positive law of nature, that a man was “bound to preserve himself,” this was in fact a common premise among writers who said that one *could indeed* consent to slavery (including Grotius, Pufendorf, and Locke’s close friend James Tyrrell). Locke’s more important argument against slavery was that to consent to slavery was in a sense to invite death. Grotius and Pufendorf had offered as proof that persons might sell themselves into slavery the example of the Hebrews in the Old Testament. But Locke maintained that the “Jews, as well as other Nations,” had sold themselves only to “*Drudgery, not to Slavery.*” And the reason he gave was that they had never given up any measure of the authority over whether they lived or died, which alone was at the heart of slavery.²⁴

Unlike Grotius, then, and most of all unlike Pufendorf, Locke held that no person could consent to slavery. And unlike Filmer, or unlike what he took Filmer to have said, Locke argued that no one was born a slave. There was, in Locke’s thought, only one path to slavery: as in Hobbes, it began in war. To an extent that Hobbes had not done, though,

²⁴ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London, 1713; orig. pub. 1690), Preface; Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §6; and Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §24. The edition published in 1713 was the definitive edition of the *Two Treatises*, and incorporated the many changes to the text that Locke had made since its original publication. For a general account of Locke as a critic of Pufendorf, see Tuck, *Rights of War and Peace*, 167-181. For Tyrrell’s view that even men in nature who had “sold or yielded themselves up as absolute perpetual Servants or Slaves to the government of another” nevertheless retained—because the “first Law of Nature is Self-preservation,” as Tyrrell often repeated—as much “a Right as a Son or Child of the Family, to defend his life, or what belongs to him, against the unjust violence or rage of his master,” see James Tyrrell, *Patriarcha non Monarcha: The Patriarch Unmonarch’d* (London, 1681), 103, 115, 103. Locke’s argument against consent to slavery—which brought together the claims that a person must preserve his life, and that slavery consisted precisely of the power of life or death—was put most clearly when he said, “This *Freedom* from absolute, arbitrary Power, is so necessary to, and closely joyned with a Man’s Preservation, that he cannot part with it, but by what forfeits his Preservation and Life together. For a Man, not having the Power of his own Life, *cannot*, by Compact, or his own Consent, *enslave himself* to any one, nor put himself under the absolute, arbitrary Power of another, to take away his Life, when he pleases.” Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §23. For Grotius and Pufendorf on the Hebrews, see Grotius, *Rights of War and Peace*, 1.3.8; and Pufendorf, *Law of Nature and Nations*, 6.3.4. For a nation’s consent to slavery, see as well Pufendorf, *Law of Nature and Nations*, 7.8.6. For discussions of Locke on slavery that interpret the duty to preserve oneself (itself derived from God) as Locke’s primary, and indeed his only, antislavery commitment, see for example Ruth Grant, *John Locke’s Liberalism* (Chicago, 1987), 68-71; and Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations of John Locke’s Political Thought* (Cambridge, U.K., 2002), 141-2 and 198-9.

Locke made a careful, elaborate attempt to explain why a person might be enslaved in war in the terms of his theory of natural rights. Here, as was so often the case in early-modern natural rights theories, the reasons for which all men were naturally free became the reasons for which some men could be made into slaves.

Whenever one man in a state of nature, Locke explained, declared a “sedate settled Design, upon another Man’s Life,” that act violated what was the second part of the law of nature—that as well as oneself, one ought “*to preserve the rest of Mankind.*” The author of that act may not have made an outright attempt to kill his victim: he may only have tried to force him “into his Absolute Power” or, in other words, Locke said, adopting the first-person, to “make me a Slave.” This made no difference to Locke: after all, to be made a slave was to lose the authority over one’s life or death. The consequence of such a crime, Locke went on, was so serious that the offender had, “by his Fault, forfeited his own Life, by some Act that deserves Death”; and so in turn “he, to whom he has forfeited it, may (when he has him in his Power) delay to take it, and make use of him to his own Service, and he does him no Injury by it.” The man who enforced the natural law here made use of the right that it entailed, that one might do what was required to defend oneself as well as the rest of mankind. The particular power he now held—both to take the life of another person, and to delay doing so as long as he wished—Locke termed “*Despotical Power.*” It was precisely the power of a master over a slave, when acquired in accord with natural right; and it was also the same as the power of a conqueror over his captives in a just war. For in fact to try to gain wrongful power over the life of another was to create a miniature “*State of War*” between the aggressor and his intended victim; and Locke concluded that slavery was simply that “*state of War continued.*” Once a despot agreed to protect the life

of his subject, in return for his obedience, this state of war was at an end—and the subject, his life now secure, resumed his status as a free man.²⁵

Like Hobbes, Locke had narrowed down to war the settings in which slavery could emerge. But he had also maintained that only in a just war, waged against those who had forfeited their lives by some violation of the natural law, could anyone at all be enslaved. And even in a just war, Locke, far more than Hobbes, but similar to Grotius, had narrowed the range of persons who could be taken as slaves. The conqueror in such a war acquired a right only over the lives of “those, who have actually assisted, concurr’d, or consented to that unjust force, that is used against him”: he had gained no right over the lives of his allies, Locke said, or of the members of the conquered country who had not resisted him, or of the spouses and children even of those who had.²⁶ Locke was aware that to limit the sources of slavery in war ran “quite contrary to the practice of the World.” He had in this respect restrained, on the basis of natural right, slavery as it was under the law of nations. But in another respect, Locke had come to embrace a view of the character of slavery, as opposed to its sources, which recalled the most brutal versions of the early Roman law. The definition of slavery, in Locke, was a condition so close to death that no person could agree to assume it. Slavery was so foreign to the lawful, consensual forms of political life identified in the *Two Treatises* that it was, he insisted again and again, a form of authority

²⁵ Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §16; Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §6; Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §17; Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §17; Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §23; Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §172; Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §16; and Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §24. For his argument that, once an agreement was reached between a lawful conqueror and a captive “for a limited Power on the one Side, and Obedience on the other, the state of War and Slavery ceases,” see Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §24. For his statement that “*what Power a lawful Conqueror has over the Subdued . . . is purely despotic*,” see Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §178. In his view of the origins of despotic power, Locke thus followed Hobbes, who wrote, “Dominion acquired by Conquest, or Victory in war, is that which some Writers call DESPOTICALL, from *Despotes*, which signifieth a *Lord*; or *Master*; and is the Dominion of the Master over his Servant.” Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 103.

²⁶ Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §179. See, for the limits of slavery in a just war, Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T, chapter sixteen.

more proper to beasts than to men. Aristotle, too, had suggested that an ox might serve as the poor man's slave; and he had defended, as a species of hunting, the acquisition by war of natural slaves who at first refused to submit. And yet even Aristotle had never endorsed a master's power of life or death over his slave. He described natural slavery in fact as a relation so mutually intimate, so essential to the interests and identities of both parties, that the death of the slave would in a sense mark the end of the master, "since," he observed, "if the slave perish, the rule of the master perishes with him." Locke's rejection of natural slavery and his theory of natural rights had led him to whittle down the sources of slavery to their thinnest, finest possible point. But they had also seemed to him in some cases to authorize, not merely as lawful or widely recognized but precisely as *right*, the barest form of domination ever conceived in the Western tradition.²⁷

In recent years, some scholars have begun to wonder what the discourse of slavery in the seventeenth century really was about. They have suggested that the idea of slavery was advanced during this time as veiled attempt to explain, for example, the enslavement of the natives of British North America, the status of British seamen held captive along

²⁷ Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §180; Aristotle, *Politics*, 1278b. On the kinds of authority more proper to beasts than to men, Locke argued that an offender against the law of nature, "having quitted Reason, which God hath given to be the Rule betwixt Man and Man, and the common bond whereby human kind is united into one Fellowship and Society . . . and so revolting from his own Kind to that of Beasts, by making Force, which is theirs, to be his Rule of Right, he renders himself liable to be destroyed by the injur'd Person, and the rest of Mankind, that will join with him in the execution of Justice, as any other wild Beast, or noxious Brute with whom Mankind can have neither Society nor Security." Locke, *Two Treatises* 2T §172. The "execution of Justice" was in this way of course the source of slavery as well as execution, both of which might result from the despotic power exercised over criminals—who ought, Locke elsewhere repeated, to be "treated as Beasts of Prey," or "as any savage ravenous Beast," or "as a *Lyon* or a *Tyger*." Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §16; Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §181; and Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §11. Locke famously adhered to the "strange Doctrine" that anyone in a state of nature might execute a criminal, but he never said whether anyone might enslave a criminal, or whether only the party directly offended might do so. Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2T §13.

the Barbary Coast, and of course the early trade in African slaves to the New World. As we will see, each of these claims may be accurate to some degree. But David Brion Davis also captured an important truth when he wrote that, in early-modern Europe, “it was as if the learned volumes on law and statecraft had been produced in a different world from that which contained the Negro captives awaiting shipment at Elmina Castle, the disease and sickening stench of the slave ships, and the regimented labor of colonial plantations.” This chapter has traced the rise and the character of that “different world.” For indeed the most striking aspect of the theories of slavery discussed here is how abstract they were, the extent to which they lacked a specific object in the real historical world. The discourse of slavery was developed during this period into a self-contained system, with a logic and momentum that were all its own. Grotius had drawn on the scholars of Roman law; Coke copied Britton, who glossed Bracton; Hobbes built on Grotius and Jean Bodin, as well as the long civil-law tradition; Pufendorf reflected on Grotius and Hobbes, as well as Roman law; and for all his famous entanglement in New World slavery, when Locke wrote about slavery, he wrote most of all about Grotius, Hobbes, Pufendorf, Filmer, and Tyrrell. And all of these authors, except perhaps Locke, set themselves against Aristotle. Slavery passed back and forth between their many works in the subtle, clean, almost frictionless manner of an idea that was, in a sense, just an idea.²⁸

²⁸ Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 108. On Indian slavery as “the focus of Locke’s theory of slavery,” see Brad Hinshelwood, “The Carolinian Context of John Locke’s Theory of Slavery,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Aug., 2013), 562-590, 565. On Hobbes’s theory of slavery as “not merely abstract and hypothetical” but “congruent with the contemporary experience of Barbary slavery,” see Deborah Baumgold, “Slavery Discourse Before the Restoration: The Barbary Coast, Justinian’s *Digest*, and Hobbes’s Political Theory,” *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 36 (2010), 412-418, 413. For the broader assertion, which places emphasis on Hobbes and Locke, that early-modern theories of slavery offered an ideological defense of African slavery, see Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule*. The argument that Locke developed his account in order to justify this practice has the longest lineage, and may be traced to his most influential modern editor, in John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, U.K., 1960), note to 2T §24. See also for example Martin Seliger, *John Locke’s Liberal Politics* (London, 1968), 116.

CHAPTER TWO

The Sources of African Slavery, I

It has often been noted that the English arrived late on the coast of West Africa, long after the Portuguese and Spanish, and that they were late as well to enter the trade in African slaves. What has not often been appreciated is that almost a century elapsed between these two beginnings, when the English carried on a steady commerce in Africa but by and large did not trade in slaves. Scholars have tended to treat this period, which lasted roughly from the 1550s to the 1640s, in vague terms, either as unworthy of comment in the history of an English slave trade that had not yet begun or as the point of origin for the trade, which was gradually taking shape, or even fully as the first phase of the trade, indicating what one historian of the sixteenth century has called “the rapid English embrace of African slavery.”²⁹ In truth this interval ought to be understood both as essential to the history of the English African slave trade and as almost stunningly different from the period that would follow.

²⁹ Michael Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen: Human Bondage in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, P.A., 2014), 68 (see also 225). In the course of a complex and detailed study, Guasco also remarks (in what is, as we will see, a more accurate description of the evidence) that “it would be a mistake, however, to make too much of the sixteenth-century English slave trade,” as slave trading “would not become an integral part of English commercial activities in the Atlantic world until the second half of the seventeenth century.” Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 87. In addition to the more focused works discussed throughout this chapter, the major general treatments of the English African slave trade appear in (in addition to Guasco) Elizabeth Donnan, “1441-1600: Introduction” and “The Seventeenth Century: Introduction,” in *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, ed. Elizabeth Donnan, 4 Vols. (Washington, D.C., 1930-1935), Vol. 1, 1-17 and 73-121; Michael Craton, *Sinews of Empire: A Short History of British Slavery* (New York, 1974); Richard Nelson Beam, *The British Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, 1650-1775* (New York, 1975); Herbert S. Klein, *The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Princeton, N.J., 1978); Edward Reynolds, *Stand the Storm: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1985); Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (New York, 1997); Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870* (New York, 1997); David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (New York, 2000); James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History*, rev. ed. (Lincoln, N.E., 2005; orig. pub. 1981); and Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, second ed. (New York, 2010; orig. pub. 1999.)

Its real interest to the scholar is in the contrast it provides, throwing into relief in particular English perceptions of the sources and even morality of African slavery when the slave trade began in earnest toward the middle of the seventeenth century. For the crucial comparison is not between the slave trade of England and those of Portugal and Spain, for example: it is instead between the character of English contact with Africa before and after the slave trade got under way.

What follows here is a detailed study of the first century of the English presence in Africa. Its aim is to arrive at a new understanding of this unfamiliar period in the prehistory of the trade in order that the more familiar period that came later can be seen in a new light.

The first three recorded English voyages to West Africa (see Figure 1) were led by William Hawkins, who traded for “Oliphants teeth” and other goods on the coast of Guinea around 1530, on his way to Brazil. But it was not until the latter half of the sixteenth century that regular contact was established. “The fyrst vyage to Guinea”—as Richard Eden called the account of the journey, published in his *Decades of the Newe Worlde* (1555)—sailed from Portsmouth in 1553, and traded in Benin for no less than eighty tons of pepper, but seems only to have returned with a much smaller amount of pepper, as well as gold and “elephantes teethe.” In the next year, “The second vyage to Guinea” set out from the Thames; and while the chronicler of that journey, Robert Gainsh, did not make clear what other goods it brought back, he did take note that when the ships returned to England they carried aboard them “certeyne blacke slaves.” Gainsh did not say how many slaves these were. The great Elizabethan compiler of travel narratives Richard Hakluyt,

who re-printed the accounts of the first two Guinea voyages in his *Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589), asserted in a marginal note that they were “5. Blacke Moores.” Similarly, in his narrative of the next English voyage to Guinea—which, like almost every other early English account of travel to Africa, first appeared in the Hakluyt collection—the London apprentice William Towerson reported that in 1555 an African man who lived near the Portuguese fort known to the English as “the castell of Mina” told him that Englishmen had taken away five men from that area in the year before. When his ships came to a town just to the west along the coast, though, Towerson (whose ship’s master had piloted the second Guinea voyage and so was in a position to know this fact) remarked that Gainsh’s company had taken four men from there, rather than five.³⁰

³⁰ “A voyage to Brasill, made by the worshipfull M. William Hawkins of Plimmouth,” in Richard Hakluyt, *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (London, 1589), 520-521, 520; “The seconde vyage to Guinea,” in Peter Martyr, *The Decades of the Newe Worlde or West India*, trans. (from Latin) Rycharde Eden (Londini, 1555), 349v-360r, 354r (although the goods carried back to England from the first Guinea voyage were only described in this account of the second voyage, see for the account of the first voyage “The fyrst vyage to Guinea,” in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 345v-348r); “The seconde vyage to Guinea,” in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 359v; Robert Gainsh, “The second voyage to Guinea,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 89-98, 97 (see as well “The first voyage to Guinea, and Benin,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* [1589], 85-87); Gainsh, “The second voyage to Guinea,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 90; and William Towerson, “The first voyage made by M. William Towerson Marchant of London,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 98-112, 110. As J.D. Alsop has shown, Hakluyt’s description of Towerson as a merchant rather than an apprentice “was a retrospective description.” See for Towerson, and for his ship’s master John Rafe (or Ralph), J.D. Alsop, “The Career of William Towerson, Guinea Trader,” *International Journal of Maritime History*, Vol. 4, Iss. 2 (Dec., 1992), 45-82, 49 (as well as 53-54). For Rafe’s position on the second Guinea voyage, see also “The seconde vyage to Guinea,” in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 353v. After Eden’s collection, but before that of Hakluyt, the accounts of the first two Guinea voyages were re-printed as “The first vyage to Guiena,” in *The History of Travayle in the West and East Indies*, eds. Richarde Eden and Richarde Willes (London, 1577), 338v-341v; and “The second viage to Guinea,” in *History of Travayle*, eds. Eden and Willes, 342v-353r. The versions of these accounts printed in the Eden and Willes collection had been abbreviated from their original versions in the Eden collection, with the deletion of two brief and insubstantial passages: see (in Eden) “The fyrst vyage to Guinea,” in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 345v; and “The seconde vyage to Guinea,” in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 360r. The versions of these accounts printed in Hakluyt were copied from the Eden and Willes collection, preserving its abbreviations of the original Eden, and making slight changes in the lengths of paragraphs, italicization, and spelling (for example, “the ryver of Temmes” became “the river of Thames”), as well as omitting some nautical information that had appeared in “The second viage to Guinea,” in *History of Travayle*, eds. Eden and Willes, 343r-v. The most detailed descriptions of sixteenth-century English voyages to West Africa are John William Blake, “The Early English Voyages to West Africa: Introduction,” in *Europeans in West Africa, 1450-1560*, trans. and ed. John William Blake, 2 vols. (London, 1942), Vol. 2, 249-294; Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the Brit-*

Towerson had assured the man near Mina that the Africans Gainsh had taken were well treated in England, where they were only being kept until they could learn the language, at which point they would return home in order to assist the English trade in Africa. Indeed, on Towerson's second voyage, he brought with him back to Guinea at least two of what he now called "our *Negroes*," or "our owne *Negroes*," in contrast to the Negroes they met in Guinea. When his ships stopped at a town named Hanta, where "our Negroes were well knowen," Towerson wrote, "the men of the towne wept for joy." They asked their old acquaintances, one of whom Towerson identified as "*George our Negro*," where Anthony and Binne (two other men whom Gainsh must have taken) had been, and were answered, "that they had bene at London in England, and should be brought home the next voyage." At the next town, Shamma, where Towerson's Africans were received by the people "as if they had bene their naturall brethren," he left them, it seems, for good. The evidence after

ish Empire, 1480-1630 (New York, 1984), 101-115; P.E.H. Hair and J.D. Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea, 1553-1565: The New Evidence of Their Wills* (Lewiston, N.Y., 1992), 5-71; and P.E.H. Hair, "Attitudes to Africans in English Primary Sources on Guinea up to 1650," *History in Africa*, Vol. 26 (1999), 43-68.

Finally, Hakluyt was the first editor to identify Gainsh as author of "The second voyage," which he did in the heading for each page of the account; but in the second edition of the *Principal Navigations* (the second "I" in *Principall* had by this time been dropped from the title) Hakluyt placed the name of John Lok in the same position, and now identified Lok as captain of the voyage, even though Gainsh was still said in a marginal note to have been master of one of the ships. All the same, it was clearly Eden himself who had composed the final versions of the accounts of both the first and the second voyage to Guinea. Eden had of course not been on either voyage himself; but as he explained in an introduction to the two accounts in the *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, he had drawn the narratives from reports of "such credible persons as made diligent inquisition to knowe the truth hereof as much as shalbe requisite." Richard Eden, "The description of the two viages made owt of England into Guinea in Affrike," in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 343r-343v, 343r. Such reports included, according to Eden's account of the second Guinea voyage, "a briefe declaration" written by "an experte pylot" on that voyage. "The seconde vyage to Guinea," in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 349v; see also "The second voyage to Guinea," in Richard Hakluyt, ed., *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 3 vols. (London, 1599-1600), Vol. 2, Pt. 2, 14-23. Hakluyt, or maybe his printer, may perhaps have concluded that this "experte pylot" had been Gainsh—and then Lok. Importantly, as we will see, in his accounts of both voyages, Eden appears to have altered and supplemented any first-hand descriptions he had received. (On this issue, see Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea*, 57-61 [fns. 35-39].) But because Eden's editorial hand was likely far more light in the subjects discussed in this section of the chapter, and for the purposes of convenience in this complex matter, Gainsh is identified in the text above as chronicler of the second Guinea voyage. No author other than Eden has ever been identified for the account of the first Guinea voyage.

this point is fragmentary; but at the least, the sources give no indication that any of the Africans taken in 1554 were kept in England for a significant period of time.³¹ And so even though Gainsh had called these men “slaves,” and Towerson sensed that they belonged to his company enough to be referred to as *theirs*, the history of the English African slave trade does not begin in these events—or rather, it seems to begin, in a way, and then to end.

The ominous note in this respect appeared in Towerson. For his part, Gainsh never stated under what circumstances his men had taken their “certeyne blacke slaves” from the Guinea coast. The silence, in fact, is striking. But in the account of his first voyage, when he arrived in the area where the events had occurred, what Towerson said was that “foure men were taken perforce the last yeere from this place,” where by “perforce” Towerson in all likelihood meant “by force.” And he added that Gainsh had taken “the Captaines sonne, and 3. others from this place with their gold, and all that they had about them.” Towerson appears to have felt uneasy about what Gainsh had done. When the man near Mina came aboard his ship, “assoone as he came,” Towerson recalled, “he demanded, why we had not brought againe their men, which the last yeere we tooke away.” In Towerson’s response, he did not mention the manner in which those men had been taken, and said only that they were “well used” in England and would be back soon “to be a helpe to Englishmen in this

³¹ William Towerson, “The second voyage made by M. William Towerson to the coast of Guinea,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 112-120, 114, 114, 115, 114, 115, and 115. For the assurance Towerson gave to the man near Mina, see Towerson, “First voyage made by M. William Towerson,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 107-108. On the fragmentary sources relating to the fate of Gainsh’s “slaves,” see Hair and Alsop, *English Seamen and Traders in Guinea*, 56 (fn. 32) and 62 (fn. 49). For example, Hair and Alsop observe that none of the wills made out by members of the earliest crews that traveled to Guinea mentioned slaves. It might be noted, in addition, that Towerson remarked offhandedly in the account of his third Guinea voyage, in 1557, that an African named “Binny” came with George to trade him gold—which is perhaps an indication that the man referred to as “Binne” in the exchange cited in the text above had been returned to Africa. For the reference to both George and Binny, see William Towerson, “The third and last voyage of Maister William Towerson,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 120-130, 126.

Countrey.” Towerson did not apologize for the actions of Gainsh’s men, or admit that they had been in the wrong; and yet he did recognize that the African had asked a question that required of him an answer—that is, that one could not make off with people, “perforce” and with “all that they had about them,” and not be expected to explain to those who had known them why one had done so and when these people would be returned.³²

In contrast to the careful moral evasions of Towerson, the position of the Africans with respect to Gainsh’s captives was clear: they felt that they had been wronged. On his first voyage to Guinea, in the town where Gainsh had taken away the captain’s son, Towerson found “the *Negroes* bent against us” as a result of the event: they lured the English ashore with the promise of trade, and then shot at them. Gainsh had even been “the cause that they became friendes with the *Portingals*,” Towerson lamented, “whom before they hated”: and on his next voyage, when he returned the men that Gainsh had taken, at Shamma, Towerson openly did so in order to win back the good will of the natives, whom he assured his company would protect from the Portuguese from now on. The consequences of what Gainsh had done, however, seem only imperfectly to have been kept in mind. Thirteen years later, by the time the voyage of George Fenner landed on the Guinea coast near Cape Verde, in 1567, the natives there (as Fenner’s men would later learn) were anxious to avenge an English ship that had “taken three of their people” three weeks before. As was common in English-African trade, both sides exchanged a few men, called “pledges,” to

³² Towerson, “The first voyage made by M. William Towerson,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 109, 110, and 107. On “perforce,” whose primary definition in the *OED* (in use from the fourteenth century through the nineteenth century; derived from the Anglo-Norman and Middle French *par force*) was “By the application or threat of physical force or violence; forcibly, violently; by force.” *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, U.K., 2000). The secondary definition of the term (in use from the fifteenth century to the present day) was “by constraint of circumstances; of necessity, inevitably, unavoidably; as a matter of course.” *Oxford English Dictionary* (2000). Towerson may have in fact have played upon this ambiguity in the meaning of the word, making reference to an event that he knew had been forcible or violent with a term that left open the less jarring possibility that Gainsh had taken the Africans by mere “constraint of circumstances.”

be kept by the other side in order to ensure honest dealing. The African pledges managed to escape, though, and in the fracas that ensued, four members of Fenner's company were killed and two of his pledges were held onto as prisoners by the Africans. Fenner offered them "any thing that they desired for the raunsome of our men," but they would accept nothing less than the return of their own three captives. Perhaps in despair of ever finding these, Fenner sailed on, after asking a French ship to continue the negotiations.³³

In these fraught little moments, in short, we see the English forced to work within a moral economy very different from the one that would come to define the trade in African slaves—one in which even just a few Africans taken from the coast without consent could bring the most serious harm, in which three African captives could lead to four Englishmen dead and two held prisoner, and in which it was not at all clear that the value of an African life was any less than that of an English one. When the two sides exchanged pledges, the ratios varied: on the second voyage to Guinea, when his company traded at Shamma, Gainsh had provided to the local captain one pledge, even though he received none in return; and on Towerson's first voyage, he had once offered one pledge of his own in return for two Africans. But when he traded at Cape Verde, Fenner found that the people there used an unusual ratio: they "were content," he recalled, "to deliver 3. of their *Negros* for 5.

³³ Towerson, "The first voyage made by M. William Towrson," in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 110; Towerson, "The second voyage made by M. William Towrson to the coast of Guinea," in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 115; and Walter Wren, "The voyage of M. George Fenner to Guinie," in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 142-150, 145 and 145. The "English shippe" that preceded Fenner on the Guinea coast was undoubtedly from the company of Captain John Lovell, who departed from Plymouth in November 1566 in order to acquire slaves in Africa to be sold in the Spanish New World colonies. Lovell worked under the direction of John Hawkins—who will be discussed below, and whom the Spanish ambassador had just asked the English government to ban from the West Indies for two previous interloping voyages similar to the one then undertaken by Lovell. On Lovell, see John W. Blake, *West Africa: Quest for God and Gold, 1454-1578*, rev. ed. (London, 1977; orig. pub. 1937), 170-171; Kenneth R. Andrews, *The Spanish Caribbean: Trade and Plunder 1530-1630* (New Haven, C.T., 1978), 121-122, 128-129; and Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement*, 125.

of our men.”³⁴ And so here on the Guinea coast, in 1566, perhaps long before the thought had entered anyone’s mind that this proportion might be reversed, each Englishman counted for three-fifths of each African.

In these early years of contact, though, the English also had before them in Guinea the example of another, less scrupulous approach to the value of African lives—that of the Portuguese, who had carried on a traffic in slaves from this region since the middle of the fifteenth century. In fact, much of what little the English knew of slavery during this period they had learned from the Portuguese; and to a great extent, their attitudes toward slavery had been defined by means of a contrast with their principal European rivals in Africa. The man near Mina, for example, who demanded of Towerson on his first voyage why he had not brought back Gainsh’s captives, had himself escaped from Mina after he had “bene taken into the Castle by the Portingals.” “The Portingals,” he said, “were bad men,” for they made the natives “slaves, if they could take them, and would put yrons upon their legges.” It was at least in part in order to distinguish such practices from those of the English that Towerson told the man that Gainsh’s captives would be returned—in other words, that those men “which the last yeere we tooke away,” as Towerson put it, in describing the

³⁴ “The seconde vyage to Guinea,” in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 352v; Towerson, “The first voyage made by M. William Towrson,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 110-111; and Wren, “The voyage of M. George Fenner to Guinie,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 144. The pledge provided by Gainsh, as it happened, was a man named Martin Frobisher, who would later lead three famous voyages in search of a Northwest Passage, which would all be chronicled by a man named George Best, whose speculations on the cause of black skin we will examine in detail in the next chapter. Frobisher is not named in the text of the “second vyage”: there, the pledge is identified only as “John Yorke his nevie.” But that Frobisher was the man in question, and was later given from the Africans to the Portuguese, cannot be doubted from “Martin Frobisher’s Report About Guinea, Based Upon His Experience While a Prisoner at Mina in 1555. 27 May 1562,” in *Europeans in West Africa*, ed. Blake, Vol. 2, 358-360.

African's accusation, had not been "taken" in the same sense as the Portuguese had taken him.³⁵

After Gainsh, indeed, the English often represented themselves as reluctant traders in slaves, as against the eager Portuguese. On Fenner's voyage, the Portuguese on one of the Cape Verde Islands offered to trade the English (in what would turn out to be an ambush) "fresh water, victuall, money, or *Negroes* for ware," but only "if it were such as they liked," whereas when Fenner's company later presented to a Portuguese ship in the Azores "5. *Negroes* that wee had, and asked them whether they would buy them," they found the Portuguese "very desirous" to do so.³⁶

It was this Iberian context that produced the sole sixteenth-century English voyages to Africa for the express purpose of acquiring slaves, those led by John Hawkins between 1562 and 1568, whose distinctive feature was the extent to which Hawkins adopted as his own the customs of the Portuguese on the Guinea coast. Hawkins was familiar with the region from his father William, who had pioneered English trade there in the 1530s; but in the account of his first voyage, he stressed as well that it had been in the Spanish Canary Islands that he learned that "*Negroes* were very good marchandise in *Hispaniola*, and that

³⁵ Towerson, "The first voyage made by M. William Towerson," in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 107. Interestingly (although the voyage did not trade in slaves), one of two captains on the 1553 first voyage to Guinea was the Portuguese "*Antony Anus Pinteado*," according to the Eden account; and Portuguese records indicate as well that a man Eden referred to only vaguely as "Francisco a Portugale" was a pilot on the voyage. "The fyrst vyage to Guinea," in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 345r and 346v; and for reference to "Francisco Roiz [Rodriguez], a native of the island of the Açores," see "Windham's Arrival at the Island of Madeira. Simão Gonçalves, Captain of the Island, to King John III. Funchal. 22 September 1553," trans. Blake, in *Europeans in West Africa*, ed. Blake, Vol. 2, 320-324, 321. According to Eden, Pinteado had in fact "fyrst persuaded owre marchauntes to attempte the sayde vyages to Guinea," having come to England after a loss of favor in the court of King John III. "The fyrst vyage to Guinea," in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 348r (on Pinteado, see also 345r-346r and 348r-349v). The Portuguese trade in African slaves was at first concentrated on their transport to the Iberian Peninsula and the Atlantic islands, and then, in the early sixteenth century, shifted in emphasis toward the New World colonies of both Portugal and Spain.

³⁶ Walter Wren, "The voyage of M. George Fenner to Guinie," in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 147 and 150.

store of *Negroes* might easily be had upon the coast of *Guinea*.” This statement would in essence serve as the itinerary for his three voyages, which each moved from Plymouth to the Canaries to Guinea between Cape Verde and Sierra Leone to the Spanish New World colonies. Hawkins took slaves from Africa on a scale—in total, well over a thousand—at the time rivalled only by the Portuguese, as well as interlopers from Spain and France. His company enslaved by open force what few Africans they could, but more often seems to have traded for slaves from the Portuguese: this may have been what he meant, for example, by his report in the account of his first voyage that he had “got into his possession, partly by the sword, and partly by other meanes, to the number of 300. *Negroes*.” Toward the end of his last voyage, moreover, Hawkins allied in war with an African king (as the Portuguese often did) in order to enslave their captives as a reward.³⁷ Even in his lifetime, which ended in 1595, Hawkins began to be seen as a quintessential national hero of the Elizabethan period, who claimed for England a place of its own in the struggle for the Atlantic world; and this reputation endured among historians well into the twentieth century.

³⁷ “The first voyage of the right worshipfull and valiant knight, sir John Hawkins,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 521-522, 521 and 522. This brief account seems to have been composed by Hakluyt from information given him by Hawkins. The narrative of the second voyage was the work of “John Sparke the yonger, who went upon the same voyage, and wrote the same,” and was published as “The voyage made by the worshipful M. John Hawkins Esquire,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 523-543, 543. The account of the third voyage was first published under Hawkins’s name as *A True Declaration of the troublesome voyage of M. John Hawkins to the parties of Guynea and the west Indies* (London, 1569), and reprinted as John Hawkins, “The 3. unfortunate voyage made with the Jesus, the Minion, and foure other shippes, to the partes of Guinea, and the West Indias,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 553-557. Both the Portuguese and Spanish governments would later alledge that Hawkins had simply stolen slaves held by the Portuguese on the Guinea coast; but close examination of the available sources indicates that far more often (with the exception of one notable assault in the Cacheo River) “there took place, between the English and the Portuguese, only peaceful, friendly trading.” P.E.H. Hair, “Protestants as Pirates, Slavers, and Proto-missionaries: Sierra Leone 1568 and 1582,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Jul., 1970), 203-224, 206; see also P.E.H. Hair, “Sierra Leone in the Portuguese Books of Complaint, 1567-1568,” *Sierra Leone Studies*, no. 26 (Jan., 1970), 2-10. On alliances formed between Portuguese and Africans in order to take slaves in war, see for example John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (New York, 1992), 43-125.

ry.³⁸ But in his famous slaving voyages, Hawkins imitated the Iberian powers he aimed to undermine, and was—and this is the most important fact—anomalous in the early history of English contact with Africa.

In the period after Hawkins's final voyage met with disaster at the hands of a Spanish fleet near Vera Cruz at San Juan de Ulúa, in 1567, the English trade in African slaves did not resume. In 1582, when the company of Edward Fenton stopped in Sierra Leone on its way to Brazil, the Portuguese there gave Fenton and his vice-admiral each a single "boy *Negro*" as a gift. Before he departed, too, in order to replace several members of his crew who had died, Fenton negotiated with the Portuguese "to buy some of there slaves," and purchased from them "foure men *Negroes*." Aside from these incidents, the records that survive from the dozen or so voyages to West Africa in the late sixteenth century—all first printed in the second edition of the Hakluyt collection (1599-1600)—give no sign that slaves were traded. Three voyages to Benin between 1588 and 1590, for example, returned with pepper and ivory, as well as horsetails, corral, iron, cloth, palm oil, and copper bracelets—but no slaves; and the same was true of one 1591 voyage into the Senegal and Gambia rivers, which traded for hides and ivory, as well as rice and perhaps some gold. A ten-year royal license was issued in 1588 for trade in the Senegambia region, followed by another for Sierra Leone in 1592; but although the former was renewed for another ten years in 1598, neither one gave rise to more than modest activity.³⁹ In 1607, during a brief

³⁸ For a summary of the history of Hawkins's reputation, see Harry Kelsey, *Sir John Hawkins: Queen Elizabeth's Slave Trader* (New Haven, C.T., 2003), 266-281. For the main early-twentieth-century treatments, see James Alexander Williamson, *Sir John Hawkins: The Time and the Man* (Oxford, U.K., 1927); and James A. Williamson, *Hawkins of Plymouth: A new history of Sir John Hawkins and of the other members of his family prominent in Tudor England* (London, 1949).

³⁹ Luke Ward, "The voyage intended towards China, wherein M. Edward Fenton was appointed Generall," in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 647-672, 650 (and 653); "The Diary of John Walker: 1582-1583," in *An Elizabethan in 1582: The Diary of Richard Madox, Fellow of All Souls*, ed. and trans. Eliza-

stay in Sierra Leone on its way to India, an English crew under the command of William Keeling traded with the natives for ivory, calico, and “two or three thousand Limons.” In that same year, and also bound for the East, a company led by the merchant William Finch came into contact in Sierra Leone with a ruler who “proffered unto us” a number of slaves. In his journal of the voyage, Finch only took note of this offer in a parenthetical aside; and indeed, it is a measure of the lack of English interest in the slave trade at this time that after he had made this note, Finch gave no indication that he had accepted or declined or even responded to the offer in any way at all.⁴⁰

From 1607 to 1618, a regular commerce was carried on in redwood from Sierra Leone by a London merchant, who in 1618 led the establishment of the first English joint-stock company with exclusive rights to African trade. The aim of the company was to promote the discovery of gold inland along the Gambia, and between 1618 and 1620 it spon-

both Story Donno (London, 1976), 295-339 (“Appendix II”), 319; and Ward, “The voyage intended towards China, wherein M. Edward Fenton was appointed Generall,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 655. John Walker (whose diary was first published in the twentieth century and is cited above) and Richard Madox were the two chaplains in Fenton’s company. Walker’s reference to the purchase of “slaves” from the Portuguese complements the account published in the Hakluyt collection by Ward, who also dated this event to October 1, 1582, but did not make it so clear as Walker did that the “four men *Negroes*” whom Fenton bought—according to Ward, in exchange for “carsey, and other things, as pease, biket, &c.”—were “slaves.” For the three voyages to Benin, see James Welsh, “A voyage to Benin beyond the Countrey of *Guinea*,” in Richard Hakluyt, ed., *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 3 vols. (London, 1599-1600), Vol. 2, Pt. 2, 126-129; Anthony Ingram “The voiage set forth by M. John Newton, and M. John Bird marchants of *London* to the kindome and Citie of *Benin* in *Africa*,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), Vol. 2, Pt. 2, 129-130; and James Welsh, “The second voyage to *Benin*, set foorth by Master John Newton, and Master John Bird Marchants of *London* in the yeere 1590,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), Vol. 2, Pt. 2, 130-133. For the 1591 voyage, see “The voyage of Richard Rainolds and Thomas Dassel to the rivers of *Senega* and *Gambra* adjoyning upon *Guinea*,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), Vol. 2, Pt. 2, 188-192. For the royal licenses, see “A Patent granted to certaine Marchants of *Exeter*, and others of the West parts, and of *London*, for a trade to the River of *Senega* and *Gambra* in *Guinea*, 1588,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), Vol. 2, Pt. 2, 123-126; and “A brieft extract of a patent granted to M. Thomas Gregory of *Tanton*, and others, for traffique betweene the river of *Nonnia* and the rivers of *Madrabumba* and *Sierra Leone* on the coast of *Guinea*, in the yeere 1592,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), Vol 2, Pt. 2, 193.

⁴⁰ Keeling’s account was printed in 1625, as William Keeling, “A Journall of the third Voyage to the East India,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 4, capt. 6, 1:188-205, 189. And Finch’s account was printed in the same collection, as William Finch, “Observations of WILLIAM FINCH, Merchant, taken out of his large Journall,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 4, capt. 4, 1:414-440, 414.

sored three ineffectual voyages for that purpose. On the third voyage, that of Richard Jobson (chronicled in Jobson's 1623 *Discovery of the River Gambia*, the first monograph on Africa written by an English author), an African trader offered to sell Jobson three slaves. When Jobson declined, the trader observed that these were "earnestly desired" among the region's "white men," by which the trader almost certainly meant the Portuguese. Jobson answered simply, "They were another kinde of people different from us."⁴¹

When Jobson delivered that response, in early 1621, the English African slave trade had been dormant for more than half a century. During this period, by contrast, the rate at which the Iberian empires transplanted Africans to their New World colonies had steadily increased to the point that, by 1618, when the first English ships entered the Gambia, the combined annual total had reached over twenty thousand. At least since Hawkins, English travelers to Africa had known that people from there were "caried continually to the *West Indies*" by the Iberians, as the chronicler of the 1591 Senegambian voyage had observed. In 1582, Fenton's crew had come across "30 or 40. slaves fettred together" aboard a Portuguese ship: they were "trameled lyke prisoners," one of Fenton's chaplains wrote in his diary, "al naked saving a rag lyke a dysshelwyt to cover ther members." In the several major descriptions of Africa translated around the turn of the century, English readers would have learned as well of African slavery on the sugar plantations of the Portuguese island of Saint Thomas, to the south and east of the Guinea coast, for example, or that from Angola "the Portugals buy and carry to Brasil and other parts yearely, a world of slaves," in the

⁴¹ Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade: Or, a discovery of the River Gambia* (London, 1623), 89. On this period in the English Guinea trade, see also J.W. Blake, "The Farm of the Guinea Trade," in *Essays in British and Irish History in Honour of James Eadie Todd*, eds. H.A. Cronne, T.W. Moody, and D.B. Quinn (London, 1949), 86-106; K.G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London, 1957), 1-46; and the extraordinarily thorough edition of Richard Jobson, *The Discovery of River Gambia (1623)*, eds. David P. Gamble and P.E.H. Hair (London, 1999).

phrase of a well-known 1613 English survey of peoples of the world. Jobson himself was aware that the natives along the Gambia were “carried or solde unto the Spaniard, for him to carry into the West *Indies*, to remaine as slaves.”⁴² In the meantime, as Jobson also understood, the English carried no such slaves to the New World. In fact, by 1631, when the African company established in 1618 was re-organized under a thirty-one-year lease, with a view to advancing the search for gold farther south, into the Gold Coast, in all likelihood no English ships had sailed from Africa with more than a couple of slaves since the final voyage of John Hawkins.⁴³

⁴² “The voyage of *Richard Rainolds* and *Thomas Dassel*,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), Vol. 2, Pt. 2, 192; Ward, “The voyage intended towards China, wherein M. Edward Fenton was appointed Generall,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 653; *An Elizabethan in 1582: The Diary of Richard Madox, Fellow of All Souls*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Story Donno (London, 1976), 191; Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage. Or Relations of the World* (London, 1613), 581; and Jobson, *Golden Trade*, 29. For estimates of the volume of the Spanish and Portuguese African slave trade, see “The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database” at <http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>. (Visited: July 22, 2016.) For remarks on the Iberian trade in African slaves in turn-of-the-century translations of major works on Africa (a genre that will be discussed in greater detail below), see for example Philipppo Pigafetta, *A Report of the Kingdome of Congo* [from “writings and discourses of *Odoardo Lopez*”], trans. (from Italian) Abraham Hartwell (London, 1597), 10 and 62; and John Huighen Van Linschoten, *His Discours of Voyages into The Easte and West Indies*, trans. (from Dutch) W.P. (London, 1598), 198 and 206. See as well John Pory, “A particular description of all the knowne borders, coastes and inlands of Africa, which John Leo hath left undescribed,” in John Leo, *A Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. John Pory (London, 1600), 8-57, 40 and 52; and Pory, “A summarie discourse of the manifold Religions professed in Africa,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory (London, 1600), 377-420, 417.

⁴³ It is true that many scholars have assumed that some English ships traded for slaves in Africa in the period shortly before 1631. See for example A.P. Newton, “The Great Emigration: 1618-1648,” in *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, gen. eds. J. Holland Rose, A.P. Newton, E.A. Benians, 8 vols. (Cambridge, U.K., 1929—), Vol. 1, 136-182, 139 and 155; R. Porter, “The Crispe Family and the African Trade in the Seventeenth Century,” *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1968), 57-77, 61 and 62; and Larry Gragg, “‘To Procure Negroes’: The English Slave Trade to Barbados, 1627-60,” *Slavery & Abolition*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Apr., 1995), 65-84, 67. But this opinion has been the result of significant misunderstanding of the available sources, which in fact give no evidence that slaves were traded (although it is of course not impossible that they were). For these sources, see *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Charles I, 1625-1649*, 23 vols. (London, 1860), Vol. 4, 145 (“1629?”); *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, 1574-1660* (London, 1860), 114 (“April? 1630?”); “Treaty concluded between Great Britain and France at St. Germain-en-Laye, March 19/29, 1632,” in *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and Its Dependencies*, ed. Frances G. Davenport, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1917—), Vol. 1, 315-323; and *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, ed. Elizabeth Donnan, 4 Vols. (Washington, D.C., 1930-1935), Vol. 4, 49. The judgment of P.E.H. Hair seems to have been more accurate when he wrote that “up to the 1630s, or more probably the 1640s (the jury is still out) . . . the English failed to participate in the Atlantic slave trade.” Hair, “Attitudes to Africans,” 46.

In recent years, a number of scholars eager to establish that the early-modern Atlantic world functioned as a single fluid system through which peoples, goods, and concepts circulated have asserted that the English were drawn into the African slave trade by the example of the Iberian empires. “The early English experience with race and slavery was closely bound to that of Spain, Portugal, and the rest of Europe,” James Sweet has written. English travelers to Africa learned about the slave trade from the Spanish and Portuguese who preceded them, and “rationalized the enslavement of Africans in many of the same terms that Iberians did.” It was from the Iberians, as Robin Blackburn has put it, that the English learned “to accept African slavery as a matter of course.” And when the English entered the trade themselves, in an event these scholars trace to the second half of the sixteenth century, they were willing to do so because they had come to embrace “the transatlantic slave trade as part of the Atlantic world they aspired to enter,” in the phrase of April Hatfield.⁴⁴ In fact, however, relations with the Iberian powers in the early Atlantic world were marked in English experience by antagonism and (during the Anglo-Spanish War, from 1585 to 1604) open conflict more than emulation and exchange.⁴⁵ Through at least the

⁴⁴ James H. Sweet, “Spanish and Portuguese Influences on Racial Slavery in British North America, 1492-1619” from *Collective Degradation: Slavery and the Construction of Race*, Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University (Nov. 7-8, 2003), 1-33, 32, 32, and 33 (see also, for a similar argument made with more specific reference to racism than slavery, James H. Sweet, “The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought,” *WMQ*, Vol. 54, No. 1 [Jan., 1997], 143-166); Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (New York, 1997), 220; and April Lee Hatfield, “A ‘Very Wary People in Their Bargaining’ or ‘Very Good Marchandise’: English Traders’ Views of Free and Enslaved Africans, 1550-1650,” *Slavery & Abolition*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Dec., 2004), 1-17, 11 (see also, for a more general presentation of a fluid Atlantic system, April Lee Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* [Philadelphia, P.A., 2004]).

⁴⁵ Historians who received their formation before the rise of Atlantic history in the 1990s tended to emphasize these themes more than is common today. Among many examples, see R. B. Wernham, *The Making of Elizabethan Foreign Policy, 1558-1603* (Berkeley, C.A., 1980); Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement* (1984); Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago, I.L., 1992); Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-c.1800* (New Haven, C.T., 1995); and J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven, C.T., 2006). For the most judicious treatment, see J.H. Elliott, “Learning from

period of Jobson, English observers of Africa were most often struck not by what was similar but by what was different between English and Iberian approaches to slavery.

In the New World, moreover, this contrast was even more sharply defined. The small numbers of Englishmen who sailed to the Spanish American colonies went as pirates and privateers, and there they skirted along the margins of a society that already depended more heavily upon the labor of enslaved persons than would any English colony before the middle of the seventeenth century.⁴⁶ To be sure, some English travelers noted the presence of African slaves here without judgment. It was in this neutral spirit that John Chilton, for example, observed that in 1568 the governor of San Juan de Ulúa had maintained “about 150 *negroes*, who all the yeere long are occupied in carying of stones for building, & other uses, and to helpe to make fast the ships that come in there, with their cables.” The anonymous author of the Drake Manuscript, composed in the early 1590s, similarly did no more than record that there were “negro slaves” who dove for pearls in the Caribbean and dug in the gold and emerald mines on the Spanish Main: he did remark that many of these slaves would survive “only a short time” and “die miserably,” but he drew no conclusions from these facts. Just as the English had on rare occasion exchanged slaves with the Portuguese in West Africa, so also did some Englishmen insert themselves into the system of African slavery in the Spanish colonies. This was what Hawkins had briefly done, as an interloping supplier of slaves to Spanish buyers; and in fact, some members of his final crew who were taken prisoner by the Spanish were put to work, one recalled, “as overseers of

the Enemy: Early Modern Britain and Spain,” in J.H. Elliott, *Spain, Europe & the Wider World, 1500-1800* (Yale, C.T., 2009), 25-51.

⁴⁶ See for example Colin A. Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650* (Cambridge, M.A., 1976); Andrews, *Spanish Caribbean*; and Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640* (Bloomington, I.N., 2003). The description of English travelers to the Spanish Caribbean as “pirates and privateers” is borrowed from Andrews, *Spanish Caribbean*, 134.

the Negroes and Indians that laboured” in the Mexican silver mines. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, too, several English ships in the Caribbean seized large numbers of Africans in order to ransom them back to their Spanish owners.⁴⁷

In instances such as these, Englishmen in the New World at once defied the Spanish and confirmed the status of Africans as slaves. Perhaps more often, however, the English found that their animosity toward the Spanish brought them into sympathy with “the poore Nigrite their slave,” in the phrase of one 1594 sermon delivered in York. Alongside their more familiar complaint about the Black Legend of Spanish cruelty toward the Indians, the English fastened as well upon what they variously called the “crueltie,” “cruel intreaties,” “bad intreatie,” “hard usage,” and “prowde governance” exercised by “the tyrannous Spanyard” over the Africans. These last phrases appeared in an early pamphlet written by Richard Hakluyt himself, who would later insist in his 1584 “Discourse of Western Planting” that the “proude and bluddy governemente of the Spaniarde” in America, “their incredible and more then barbarous and savage endeles cruelties,” had been inflicted upon the “Moores” as much as the “naturall people there.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ “A notable discourse by M. John Chilton,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), Vol. 3, 455-462, 455 (see also 458); *Histoire Naturelle des Indes: The Drake Manuscript in the Pierpont Morgan Library*, trans. Ruth S. Kraemer (New York, 1996), fol. 100r (trans. p. 267), fol. 98v (trans. p. 266) (see also fol. 57r); and “A discourse written by one Miles Phillips Englishman,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), Vol. 3, 469-487, 479. For examples of English ransoming of African slaves to the Spanish, see Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 100. The discussion here of English encounters with Africans in the New World is slightly different in interpretation, but deeply indebted for sources to Michael Guasco, “‘Free from the Tyrannous Spanyard’? Englishmen and Africans in Spain’s Atlantic World,” *Slavery & Abolition*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Mar., 2008), 1-22; and Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 80-120 (“Imaginary Allies”).

⁴⁸ John King, *Lectures upon Jonas* (Oxford, 1597), 149; *Sir Francis Drake Revived* (London, 1628), 7; *The Observations of Sir Richard Hawkins Knight . . . Anno Domini 1593* (London, 1622), 165 and 164; Thomas Gage, *The English-American, His Travail by Sea and Land, or, A New Survey of the West-India’s* (London, 1648), 130; “A Pamphlet by Richard Hakluyt the Younger, 1579-1580: A Discourse of the Commodity of the Taking of the Strait of Magellanus,” in *The Original Writings & Correspondence of the Two Richard Hakluyts*, ed. E.G.R. Taylor, 2 Vols. (London, 1935), Vol. 1, 139-146, 142 and 143; and Richard Hakluyt, *A particuler discourse concerninge the great necessitie and manifolde commodyties that are like to growe to this realme of Englande by the western discoveries lately attempted*, eds. David B. Quinn and Alison M. Quinn (London, 1993; orig. pub. 1584), 43, 60, and 119.

It was the treatment they had received, English authors such as Hakluyt agreed, that had led some African slaves to escape into the mountains of Panama and form communities of their own. In what is to a modern reader one of the more arresting of early English encounters with Africans, the famous privateer Francis Drake allied with these fugitives, known by the Spanish term *cimarrones*, in several damaging campaigns against the Spanish American empire in the 1570s. This may have been, as Michael Guasco has suggested, “a marriage of convenience” rather than genuine attachment: above all, the English valued the *cimarrones* as “the enemy of their enemy,” in Guasco’s phrase. But Drake’s alliances also give evidence of the particular sense that Englishmen had of their place in an early-modern Atlantic world in which they were more easily able to find common cause with the enslaved victims of Spanish oppression than with the Spanish themselves. Already by the late 1570s, it had become clear that, after brutal reprisals from the Spanish, the *cimarrones* would reject any future collaboration with the English. And yet through the disastrous 1595 expedition to Panama in which Drake lost his life (and his fellow commander John Hawkins died too), he would continue to anticipate that his former African confederates would once again come to his aid. It may indeed be a measure of how natural the English found the combination that, well into the seventeenth century, prominent observers of the New World—from Hakluyt to William Stirling to Thomas Gage—would express complete confidence that it could be revived. In one 1624 promotional tract for American colonization, Stirling promised that enslaved Africans in the Spanish colonies, “to procure their libertie hating most what they feelee for the present . . . will joyne with any strong enemy that landing there dare attempt the conquest of that Countrey.” Stirling hoped that “strong enemy” would be the English. And he added, in an aside so brief as to suggest the point required

neither argument nor emphasis, that the Iberian trade which had brought over such persons “from *Angola*, and other parts” was “an unnatural merchandise.”⁴⁹

The reputation of John Hawkins, the most characteristically Iberian of early English traders, reflected this attitude toward the African slave trade. Late in his life and after his death, the basis of Hawkins’s fame was his role in the defense against the Spanish Armada and in privateering assaults on the Spanish New World empire. “In *India* land,” read one tribute to Hawkins in 1595, “he Englands cullours spread,/Where Spanish Powers he bravely vanquished.” Tellingly, Hakluyt had placed even the narratives of Hawkins’s three triangular voyages in the section of the *Principall Navigations* concerned with America, not Africa; and these voyages were not so much as mentioned by such thorough chroniclers of events in Elizabethan England as Richard Grafton and John Stow. When the participation of Hawkins in the slave trade was recalled, moreover, it was condemned. William Camden, for example, wrote in his famous 1615 *Annales*—in a remark which testifies at once to the contrast the English drew between the Spanish slave trade and their own, and to the common knowledge in the early seventeenth century that the English trade had long since come to an end—that Hawkins had sailed to the Gulf of Mexico to exchange “some Negro slaves, of whom the *English* then made ordinary sale, having learn’d it of the *Spaniards*: but I know not,” Camden added, “with what honour they might so doe.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 89 and 90; and William Alexander Stirling, *An Encouragement to Colonies* (London, 1624), 7. For Drake’s alliances with the *cimarrones*, see for example Andrews, *Spanish Caribbean*, 134-171; Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*, 129-134; and Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 80-120. For the continued confidence among English observers in a revival of the *cimarrone* combination, see for example (in addition to Stirling cited above) Hakluyt, *A particuler discourse concerninge the great necessitie and manifolde commodityes*, 119; and Gage, *A New Survey of the West-India’s*, 130 and 139. Gage had traveled in Mexico and Guatemala between 1625 and 1637, but his work would only appear in print in 1648, going through six editions by 1711.

⁵⁰ H[enry] R[oberts], *The Trumpet of Fame* (London, 1595), 3; and William Camden, *The True and Royall History of the Famous Empresse Elizabeth Queene of England France and Ireland &c.* (London, 1625;

The English had not yet entered the African slave trade, but on a more basic level, they had also not yet developed a way to explain how Africans could be made into slaves. They had on occasion seemed to oppose slavery as such, and had more often criticized the practices of the Iberians. One English traveler to Angola wrote that, in 1597, he had seen for himself how the Portuguese made their slaves there stand in a row, and branded them on the pretense “that they that have not the marke is not accounted a man of any account in *Brasil*.” By means of this trick, the traveler concluded, the Portuguese brought “the poore *Moores* to be in a most damnable bondage under the colour of love.” In the sixteenth century, to be sure, seamen such as Gainsh, Hawkins, and Fenton had taken Africans from the coast as their slaves in much the same way as the Portuguese did, with no discernible sense that what they had done was wrong, much less “damnable.” The actions of these men, though, did produce a vague sense of disquiet in other men, such as Towerson and Jobson, whose own dealings in Africa aligned far more closely with the broad English refusal from the slave trade. And whereas Gainsh, Hawkins, and Fenton had taken and received slaves unreflectively, almost without comment on why they had done so, Towerson and Jobson, as well as Camden, had begun to assert that their own *not* doing so was bound up with the distinctive identity of the English as a people. The most memorable statement of this kind was delivered by Jobson, in response to the Gambian trader’s offer to sell him slaves. “I made answer,” Jobson said, “we were a people, who did not deale in any such commodities, neither did wee buy or sell one another, or any that had our owne shapes.”⁵¹

orig. pub., in Latin, 1615), bk. 1, 173. See also Richard Grafton, *Grafton’s Abridgement of the Chronicles of Englande* (London, 1572); and John Stow, *The Annales of England* (London, 1592).

⁵¹ “*The admirable adventures and strange fortunes of Master Antonie Knivet*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 6, capt. 7, 4: 1201-1242, 1233; and Jobson, *Golden Trade*, 89.

The exact sources of this complex conviction are not easy to trace, though certainly, it stands out from the whole laconic archive left behind by early English contacts with Africa. Historians, too, have seen it as an isolated utterance—either a solitary protest against an English slave trade that was already well under way, or a curious bit of cant that would have fooled no one at the time. What I want to suggest is that Jobson’s remark was unusual only in a rather different sense, as an attempt to articulate in the register of a principle the often tacit consensus that the English “did not deale in any such commodities” as slaves. And even in this sense, Jobson was not entirely unique. In late 1617, Thomas Roe, the first English ambassador to the Mogol Empire, had declined an offer of slaves in much the same manner as would Jobson just over three years later. When the Emperor himself had asked Roe if he would purchase from him three prisoners from eastern Africa, “I answered,” Roe recalled, seeming to speak at once for himself and for the nation he represented, “I could not buy men as Slaves, as others did.” In the end, Roe did buy the men, but then at once he “freed the Slaves.”⁵²

The period that ran roughly through Jobson’s voyage down the Gambia did not, in other words, represent the origins of the English African slave trade, a span of time when practices and ideas first took root that would later sharpen and develop when the trade had reached its height. It was a distinct historical period, when the tragedy that was to follow had scarcely been imagined.

⁵² Thomas Roe, “Observations collected out of the Journall of Sir *Thomas Roe*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 4, capt. 16, 1: 535-591, 575. Cited in Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen*, 73.

By the middle decades of the seventeenth century, though, the English trade in African slaves had begun to assume its mature form.⁵³ In the early 1640s settlers on Barbados found that sugarcane could be grown there, and adopted it almost at once as the dominant staple crop on the island. From its founding, in 1627, Barbados had principally produced tobacco—like Virginia, which was the largest English colony on the American mainland at this time—with a labor force that was composed, as in Virginia, principally of English servants. But sugar production demanded labor on a far greater scale than did tobacco, and England was unable to supply as many servants as the planters required. So whereas, before 1640, the English in the New World had purchased what very few African slaves they owned from Dutch ships or from the Spanish colonies, now ships from England, where Barbadian sugar was sold, started to bring slaves from Africa in a triangular trade that was supplemented by voyages sent directly from Barbados. Already in 1645, “Negroes” were “the life of this place,” one Barbadian colonist wrote from that “flourishing Iland.” In these early years, there are no exact figures for the volume of the English slave trade. The best estimate is that, by 1660, English ships had taken around sixty thousand enslaved Africans to the Caribbean in the previous two decades; and by that same year, too, Barbados had a black majority.⁵⁴

⁵³ Whether any English ships carried slaves from Africa in the 1630s is quite unclear. In 1637, the African company formed in 1631 informed the Privy Council that they had sent a ship “to trade upon the coasts of Guinea, to take ‘nigers,’ and carry them to foreign parts.” *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, 1574-1660*, 260 (Nov., 1637). But this is the only evidence of English slaving during the decade, and it is obviously far from decisive, so that one must conclude that the trade, if it existed at all, was not of considerable extent.

⁵⁴ “George Downing to John Winthrop” (Aug. 24, 1645), in *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, ed. Donnan, Vol. 1, 125-126. On the English entry into the African slave trade in the seventeenth century, the most reliable sources are Elizabeth Donnan, “The Seventeenth Century: Introduction,” in *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, ed. Donnan, Vol. 1, 73-121; David Eltis, “The Relative Importance of Slaves and Commodities in the Atlantic Slave Trade of Seventeenth-Century Africa,” *Journal of African History*, Vol. 35, no. 2 (1994), 237-249; Gragg, “To Procure Negroes,” *Slavery & Abolition* (1995), Vol. 16, No. 1 (Apr., 1995), 65-84; David Eltis, “The British Trans-

Even so, in 1660, slaves still represented a small part of the English African trade. In 1663, when Charles II founded a new Company of Royal Adventurers of England trading into Africa after the lease granted in 1631 had run out, the main interest of the Crown was in “discovering the golden mines” believed to lie along the Gambia, according to the Company’s charter, which did not mention a trade in slaves. In truth, it was only around this period that the slave trade took off. The Navigation Act of 1660 had barred colonists from trade with any other than English ships. And so as the sugar revolution continued to transform Barbados, and swept through the newer colony of Jamaica, planters relied for slaves more than ever upon the triangular trade from the metropole. In 1663, the Company of Royal Adventurers promised the colonial governor of the Caribbean islands “a constant supply of Negro-servants”; and in 1665, when the Company was issued a new patent, “negro slaves” were listed among the several goods to be purchased. After the Royal Adventurers collapsed during the Anglo-Dutch war, the Royal African Company was established, in 1672, with an exclusive right to “trade in gold and silver, negroes, &c.” The RAC could never effectively exclude independent merchants, known as separate traders, from the African coast. Even together, they seem to have been chronically unable to meet demand for slaves in the colonies. But this was the first real boom time in the English slave trade, and the figures are staggering. In the last quarter of the seventeenth century, more than a quar-

atlantic Slave Trade before 1714: Annual Estimates of Volume and Direction,” in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, eds. Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman (Gainesville, F.L., 1996), 182-205; Blackburn, *Making of New World Slavery*, 217-276; and John C. Coombs, “The Phases of Conversion: A New Chronology for the Rise of Slavery in Early Virginia,” *WMQ*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (July 2011), 332-360. Estimates of the volume of the trade are derived from “The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database” at <http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>. (Visited: July 22, 2016.) For a sample of the many works devoted to the complex mid-century transition of Barbados to sugar cultivation and slave labor, see Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Williamsburg, V.A., 1972); Hilary McD. Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715* (Knoxville, T.N., 1989); and Russell R. Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (Charlottesville, V.A., 2006).

ter of a million people were carried as slaves in English ships from the African coast. In turn, by 1700 or soon after, Barbados, Jamaica, the Leeward Islands, Carolina, and Virginia were no longer societies in which slaves happened to be owned: they were slave societies.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ “African Company” (from Patent Rolls, 12 Car. II., pt. xxi) in *Select Charters of Trading Companies, A.D. 1530-1707*, ed. Cecil T. Carr (London, 1913), 172-177, 174; “The Company of Royal Adventurers to Francis Lord Willoughby” in *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, ed. Donnan, Vol. 1, 156-157, 156 (see also, for documents that make clear that the Company intended to, and indeed did, supply African slaves to the Caribbean colonies in 1663 and 1664, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, ed. Donnan, Vol. 1, 157-166); “African Company” (from Patent Rolls, 14 Car. II., Pt. xxvi.) in *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, ed. Carr, 177-181, 181; and “African Company” (from Patent Rolls, 24 Car. II., Pt. iii.) in *Select Charters of Trading Companies*, ed. Carr, 186-192, 190. For the organization of the trade during this period, see, in addition to the works cited in the previous footnote, George Frederick Zook, *The Company of Royal Adventurers Trading Into Africa* (Lancaster, P.A., 1919); K.G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London, 1957); and William A. Pettigrew, *Freedom’s Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1672-1752* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2013).

CHAPTER THREE

The English Image of Africa

Before the English slave trade began in earnest, another more gradual shift had taken place. Not only had demand for African slaves suddenly increased in the American colonies, and supply of English servants declined, but in a broad sense the English image of Africa had been transformed. This transformation had started around the turn of the century: its essential elements were present in the new accounts of Africa that Richard Hakluyt included in his 1589 *Principall Navigations* and were reflected as well in the several alterations made to the 1599 second edition of that work. But in part because the materials on Africa below the Senegal River that appeared in the Hakluyt collections were so limited, the shape and significance of the shift they helped to initiate would not have been evident to any other than the most interested observers until the next great English collection of travel writings, the *Pilgrimes* of Samuel Purchas, was published in 1625.⁵⁶

The subject of this chapter is the change in the English perception of Africa during the three quarters of a century that ended around this date. From the middle of the sixteenth century, when regular contact with the western coast was established, the English tended

⁵⁶ The region of Africa that has come to be known as Sub-Saharan was in the period considered in the present study marked not by a desert but by a river, the Senegal, which was said to set the border between the brown- or swarthy-skinned peoples to the north and the black-skinned peoples who lived to the south (see Figure 1). The original source in this respect was the fifteenth-century account of the Venetian trader Alvise Cadamosto (see *The Voyages of Cadamosto and Other Documents on Western Africa in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century*, trans. and ed. G. R. Crone [London, 1937], 28), which was repeated by Richard Eden ("The seconde vyage to Guinea," in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 356r), and became a commonplace among English authors in the decades that followed. The opinion of Cadamosto was roughly aligned with the one given in what was the most influential account of northwestern Africa during this time: that the northernmost black-skinned peoples lived along the Niger River, which fed into the Senegal near the western coast. See John Leo, *A Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. John Pory (London, 1600), 2-3.

to found their opinions of the continent upon the authority of classical texts. These figured the peoples of Africa as exotic and almost inhuman forms of life, as on the one hand those men so inferior as to live in the manner of animals and, on the other hand, those so perfect as most closely to resemble the gods. As English trade in Guinea expanded, however, and reports from other European travelers circulated in England, descriptions of Africa began more to depend upon what recently had been seen there. In this vein Purchas would boast that in his text “the Worlds Rarities, are by a world of Eywitnesses Authors, Related to the World.”⁵⁷ To such eyewitness authors as those whose works were printed in the *Pilgrimes*, what seemed most important about Africa was not how alien it was but how familiar. The peoples there were unmistakably human and had for the most part formed themselves into stable social and political units that anyone acquainted with the nations of Europe readily could comprehend.

Perhaps to an even greater degree than Europe, too, Africa accommodated a range of human customs: the peoples varied in almost every aspect of life that observers thought to record. In addition to the apparent array that had been encountered there, this sense of the variety of Africa owed to the manner in which it had come to be known. The travelers whose accounts were read most often in England were almost all merchants of some kind; and their works either took the form of rutters or ship’s journals, which set down in order a record of the events of each day, or of topographical surveys, which ran through the features particular to each segment of a defined area of the continent. In turn the university-trained scholars and clergymen, like Hakluyt and Purchas, who compiled the works of the travelers or drew upon them for the several descriptions of the world that came out during

⁵⁷ Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 4 vols. (London, 1625), 1 (Frontispiece).

this period were all but overwhelmed by the information they had received in the chaos of the Age of Discovery. Their books were storehouses of detail: they rarely paused to reflect upon the character of the whole of which they had labored to assemble the parts.

In this respect popular sources on Africa differed from those that were relied upon for reports from the other area of English enterprise in the Atlantic world. The accounts of America that were current in early-seventeenth-century England were in general far more tightly structured. Unlike in Africa, Europeans had settled in the New World in significant numbers over the course of the previous century. They had worked to civilize and convert the native peoples, and in the context of this attempt what they wanted above all to know about them was whether they could be instructed in what colonists took to be the tenets of their own cultures. As the English planned and struggled to establish a colony in Virginia, the sources that held their attention thus were those that they believed could help them to decide to what extent the Americans were civil or savage in the common usage of the time. The works of the Spanish missionaries Las Casas and Acosta—which were premised upon a division of barbarians into three kinds, where the first was civil but not Christian and the third was merely savage—were only the most formal efforts to reduce the diversity of the New World through a system of cultural classification. The writings of Léry on Brazil and Strachey on Virginia were lesser members of the same genre.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ The large and sophisticated literature on early European and English perceptions of the American natives will be cited at length when appropriate. Here it need only be observed that the view presented above is most directly indebted to what remain perhaps the most influential studies in the field: Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Anthropology* (Cambridge, U.K., 1982); and Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, C.T., 1993). Although it circulated in London when he returned in 1611, the work of Strachey was not published until the nineteenth century: it is available as William Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania (1612)*, eds. Louis B. Wright and Virginia Freund (London, 1953). Each other author mentioned had a major account excerpted in the *Pilgrimes* of Purchas; and the studies of Las Casas and Acosta had already appeared in English as Bartholomew de las Casas, *The Spanish Colonie*, trans. M. M. S.

Among contemporary studies of Africa, this genre was not well known. To be sure European observers did on occasion remark that certain African peoples were barbarous, wild, or rude; and at times they referred to them as brutish or beastly in a conceit inherited from classical sources. But in each instance these terms were used haphazardly, that is, in the absence of a system in which they might have held meaning. In general the description of Africa was less seriously carried out during this time than that of America. The interest of the European powers here was neither settlement nor conversion (except perhaps in the western central kingdom of Congo) but the more minimal one of trade. What their agents set out to learn was not whether the Africans were civil as such but whether they possessed such civil institutions as would render them effective partners. In the early decades of the seventeenth century, it became clear that many of them did.

Such a shift may at first appear to have worked against the rise of the slave trade in the years that followed inasmuch as historians have often argued that the trade drew upon an understanding of Africa as “beyond the pale of civilization,” in the phrase of Winthrop Jordan, whose 1968 *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* remains the classic statement of this position.⁵⁹

(London, 1583); and Joseph Acosta, *The Naturall and Morall Historie of the East and West Indies*, trans. Edward Grimeston (London, 1604).

⁵⁹ Winthrop Donaldson Jordan, “White Over Black: The Attitudes of the American Colonists Toward the Negro, To 1784” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1960), 19. As Christopher Brown has shown, Jordan’s dissertation contained “in its essentials” the first half of *White Over Black*; and this is true of the dissertation’s famous first chapter, except for several incautious but revealing statements such as the one cited above. See Christopher Leslie Brown, “Forward,” Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, second ed. (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2012; orig. pub. 1968), vii-xvi, xii. “What enabled Europeans to buy Negroes as slaves,” Jordan argued here, “was the blackness and barbarism which placed the Africans beyond the pale of civilization.” For more recent statements of some version of this position, see Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Myth of Africa* (New York, 1977); Anthony J. Barker, *The African Link: British Attitudes to the Negro in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1550-1807* (Totowa, N.J., 1978); Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1995); Alden T. Vaughan, “The Origins Debate: Slavery and Racism in Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” in Alden Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York,

The truth was almost precisely the opposite. For as the English learned more about African peoples, they discovered in their systems of government, punishment, commerce, and war what before they had so conspicuously not possessed: a method to account for the sources of slavery, to explain in perfect detail how free persons were made into slaves. By the middle of the seventeenth century, English traders no longer were concerned that they themselves or even Europeans in general had been the cause of slavery in Africa. The open slave raiding of John Hawkins had fallen out of favor as well. The English had found that the sources of African slavery could be traced back into the continent and that they grew out of the order and complexity of African life.

The effect of these findings on the rise of the English slave trade, a material event of immense scope, is not the kind of inquiry that will admit of a definite answer. In fact the insight that animates the present study is that this event—if indeed the term is sufficient to describe a turn in history whose consequences have been so profound and enduring—was not the effect of one cause but several, which overlapped and interacted with one another. And in this vein perhaps we may speculate that English entry into the trade, in a transition so often explained as a direct response to new conditions of supply and demand, had been prepared by a transition in thought that had been taking shape for decades. At the least we should note that, when the sugar revolution swept through their colonies across the ocean, the English soon began to send persons there as slaves from the western coast of Africa without any discernible trace of guilt about what they were doing.

1995); Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London, 1997), 33-93; Betty Wood, *The Origins of American Slavery: Freedom and Bondage in the English Colonies* (New York, 1997); and David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (New York, 2000).

Perhaps a change in their common perception of Africa had allowed the English to see the enslavement of Africans in a different moral light. The practice no longer seemed to violate their sense of national virtue. It hardly seemed to be a practice which could be attributed to them. All of their former concerns had vanished.

The early English voyages to the western coast of Africa had set out from a nation whose view of the continent was still shaped by classical understanding. According to the ancient geographers, the defining feature of Africa was its climate: it fell for the most part within what Aristotle termed the “Torrid Zone,” the belt of land that ran along the Equator where the heat rendered human life impossible. The interior of Africa, wrote the Roman Julius Solinus, had vast deserts that were “broyled continually wyth unmeasurable heate of the parching sunne burning, hoter then any fire.” Only beasts could thrive in such an environment, the ancient authors believed; and in their descriptions, Africa teemed with a profusion of fearsome animals—from elephants to dragons to hyenas, crocodiles to panthers to lions, rhinoceroses to hippopotamuses to serpents. “*Affrick* swarmeth in such wise with Serpents,” Solinus observed. Since water was so scarce these animals gathered at “the few places where springs are to be found,” according to Aristotle, and mated indiscriminately to produce strange hybrid species. And it was as he reflected upon this distinctive setting, of the confused and desperate mixture of wild beasts, that Aristotle introduced into literate Western culture the proverb that Africa “is always bringing forth something new.”⁶⁰

⁶⁰ *The excellent and pleasant worke of Julius Solinus Polyhistor*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1587), Qiiiiv; *Julius Solinus Polyhistor*, trans. Golding, Siv; and Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck (Cambridge, M.A., 1943), 2.7:245 (see also Aristotle, *History of Animals*, trans. D. M. Balme, 3 vols.

The scattered peoples who did live in Africa south of the populous northern coasts stayed just above the Torrid Zone, at the extreme edge of the habitable world, and shared as perhaps their only common feature a certain strange point of deviance from the normal human form. The central source of opinion in this regard was Pliny, whose first-century *Natural History* was condensed in Solinus and had itself enlarged upon the work of Pomponius Mela—who had in turn drawn upon an earlier Greek tradition that stretched back to Herodotus. In Ethiopia, Pliny explained, there were men called Troglodytes who lived in caves below the ground and gnashed their teeth but could not speak, Cinamolgi whose heads resembled those of dogs, Blemmyi whose mouth and eyes were in their chests, bow-legged Himantopodes who crept rather than strode and slid rather than stepped, and Satyres who were “scarce men,” in the phrase of Mela, “but rather halfe Beastes.”⁶¹ The classical geographers were in other words willing to concede that men could survive in the interior regions of Africa. What they denied was that these were humans fully worthy of the name.

In classical descriptions, the deviance of Africans near the Torrid Zone was not only physical but also fundamentally cultural. They did not only look like beasts: in a sense they lived like beasts as well. Alongside the Himantopodes and Satyres in Ethiopia, Pliny went on, there were also Anthropophagi who fed on human flesh, Garamantes who did not mar-

[Cambridge, M.A., 1991], vol. 3, ch. 7:203). On the sources of this phrase, see Harvey M. Feinberg and Joseph B. Solodow, “Out of Africa,” *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2002), 255-261.

⁶¹ *The Rare and Singuler Worke of Pomponius Mela*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1590), 8. For the major English editions of Pliny current in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, see *A Summarie of the Antiquities, and wonders of the worlde, abstracted out of the sixtene first bookes of the excellent Historiographer Plinie*, trans. (from French) I. A. (London, 1566); and in what would come to be known as the definitive version, *The Historie of the World. Commonly called, The Naturall Historie of C. Plinius Secundus*, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1601). For the Plinian list of the strange forms of men in Ethiopia in these works, see for example *A Summarie of the Antiquities, and wonders of the worlde*, trans. I. A., Biiiv-Biiiiv; and *Historie of the Worlde*, trans. Holland, bk. 5, chs. 1-8: 90-96 and bk. 6, ch. 30: 146-148—in addition to *Rare and Singuler Worke of Pomponius Mela*, 8 and 14-15; and *Julius Solinus Polyhistor*, Tr-Uiir. For earlier Greek descriptions in similar terms, see Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, trans. A. D. Godley, 4 vols. (Cambridge, M.A., 1920-1925), vol. 2, bk. 4, sects. 168-197: 351-364; and *Diodorus of Sicily (The Library of History)*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, 12 vols. (Cambridge, M.A., 1933-1967), vol. 2, bk. 3: 85-133.

ry and held their women in common, Gamphasantes who wore no clothes and engaged in neither commerce nor war, Augylæ who worshipped subterranean devils, and Ptœmphenæ whose ruler was a dog.

The fantastical Plinian litany of central African peoples thus formed in composite a negative image of what human society was imagined to be. “They are entirely savage and display the nature of a wild beast,” wrote the first-century BCE Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, of Ethiopians: they cultivated “none of the practices of civilized life as these are found among the rest of mankind.” According to Solinus, the Ethiopians known as Atlantes in particular were “altogether void of manners meete for men.” They neither dreamed nor assigned proper names to one another; and most tellingly, in a trope repeated in many ancient accounts, the Atlantes cursed “the Sun at his rising, and curse him likewise at his going downe.” “Because they are scorched wyth the heate of his burning beames,” wrote Solinus, “they hate the God of light.” The burning heat of the sun near the Torrid Zone in fact often figured in classical culture as the cause of the primitive character of African life just as, in a scheme developed most thoroughly in the first-century *Geography* of Strabo, the more temperate climate of the Mediterranean world was understood as the condition of its advanced civilizations.⁶² Far below here, at the southern border of the habitable world, even the most basic human customs were spectacularly absent.

⁶² *Diodorus of Sicily*, vol. 2, bk. 3: 105; and *Julius Solinus Polyhistor*, Univ. For its discussion of Africa, see *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones, 8 vols. (New York, 1917-1933), vol. 8, bk. 17. Diodorus was first translated into Latin by Bracciolini in an often-reprinted work of 1449, *Diodori Siculi Historiarum Priscarum*; and it was from this edition that the poet John Skelton composed an English version in the late fifteenth century. Skelton’s Diodorus was first published in the twentieth century as *The Bibliotheca Historica of Diodorus Siculus*, trans. (from Latin) John Skelton, eds. F. M. Salter and H. L. R. Edwards, 2 vols. (London, 1956-1957). In Skelton’s rendering, Diodorus said that Ethiopians were “like bestes unresonable, farre differyng from all maner people so as they have non humanytie ne goodly demeanour among theym . . . so that welnygh they ne aggree with us in any maner.” *Bibliotheca Historica*, trans. Skelton, vol. 1, bk. 3, sect. 8: 230. On the Atlantes, see (in addition to Solinus) Herodotus, *Persian Wars*, vol. 2, 4.184:

The classical image of Africa was also developed in cartography, where above all the Alexandrian Ptolemy in the second century gave form and dimension to the writings of the geographers. Ptolemy divided the continent into three regions—Egypt, Ethiopia, and Libya, where Libya covered the western area south of the northern coast and Ethiopia described both the eastern area south of Egypt and the immense tract of land south of Libya. Ptolemy placed little emphasis upon the Torrid Zone as an absolute limit upon the reach of human life. In fact in his guide to a map of the world, titled the *Geography*, he placed the kingdoms of Azania and Agisymba below the Equator. But Ptolemy was aware that this territory remained for the most part unexplored and that reports of human life here, much less of civilization, were rare. He relied upon the Plinian geographical tradition for many of what he said were the names and locations of African peoples, from the Troglodytes to the Anthropophagi to the Garamantes to the Ichthyophagi (or fish-eaters). And so although Ptolemy was not given to dwell upon the mythic horrors of the Torrid Zone, he in essence reproduced in cartography the perception of Africa that he had found among the works of the geographers.⁶³

By the time that Ptolemy's *Geography* was re-discovered and translated into Latin, in 1406, the maps that seem to have been included in the original work had been lost. Their reconstruction became a central project of the Italian Renaissance, and in 1477 the *Geography* appeared as the first printed atlas. Among its twenty-six maps were four of Africa that would become the model for most European maps of the continent through the middle

357; *Rare and Singuler Worke of Pomponius Mela*, 15; *Geography of Strabo*, vol. 8, 17.2.3: 147; and *Historie of the Worlde*, trans. Holland, 5.8: 96.

⁶³ See J. Lennart Berggren and Alexander Jones, *Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters*, (Princeton, N.J., 2000): the useful material here includes Berggren and Jones, "Introduction," in Berggren and Jones, *Ptolemy's Geography*, 3-54; and Appendices A-H, 145-181.

of the next century. During this time, as the news of Portuguese discoveries filtered back through Europe, maps labelled “Africa Tabula Nova” began to be brought out with complete renderings of the shape of the southern and western coasts as well as coastal nations of which Pliny had been unaware. Even in the most faithful sixteenth-century reproduction of Ptolemy’s Africa (Figure 2), Sebastain Münster remarked that the land to the south of the twentieth parallel below the Equator was “unknown to Ptolemy” rather than absolutely unknown. Nevertheless such popular maps as those of Apian, Ruysch, Fries, and Mercator as well as Münster all came out in editions of the *Geography*, which would continue to be printed into the early seventeenth century. In the distinctive style of the Renaissance these cartographers worked to improve upon the ancient Alexandrian even as they continued to rely upon him as an enduring source of authority.⁶⁴

In the second half of the sixteenth century, as we will see, the maps of Africa done on the model of Ptolemy began to be replaced by ones drawn from more recent authorities. Nevertheless among written works in English the ancient image of Africa would continue to dominate almost until the close of the century. During this time the works of Diodorus, Mela, Pliny, and Solinus were rendered in the vernacular; and the *Histories* of Herodotus and the *Geography* of Strabo were widely read in Latin editions. Even the new surveys of the peoples of the world that appeared in English in this period were indebted to classical learning. The accounts of Africa in William Prat’s *Discription of the Contrey of Aphrique*

⁶⁴ See Ptolemy’s *Cosmographia: A Facsimile of the First Atlas: Bologna, 1477* (Greenwich, C.T., 2007), esp. fols. 12-15. For the most complete guides, see Oscar I. Norwich, *Norwich’s Maps of Africa: An Illustrated and Annotated Carto-Bibliography*, rev. and ed. Jeffrey C. Stone (Norwich, V.T., 1997; orig. pub. 1983); Rodney W. Shirley, *The Mapping of the World: Early Printed World Maps, 1472-1700* (Riverside, C.T., 2001); and Richard L. Betz, *The Mapping of Africa: A Cartobibliography of Printed Maps of the African Continent to 1700* (Utrecht, 2007). Mercator’s Ptolemaic Africa is not listed in these guides but it was printed as “Africae Tabula III” in Gerardum Mercatorem, *Tabulae Geographicae Cl: Ptolemei admentem auctoris restitutae & emendate* (1578). See Henry N. Stevens, *Ptolemy’s Geography: A Brief Account of All the Printed Editions Down to 1730* (London, 1908).

(1554), William Waterman's *Fardle of Facions* (1555), William Cuninghame's *Cosmographical Glasse* (1559), André Thevet's *New Found Worlde* (1568), and Stephen Batman's *Batman uppon Bartholome* (1582) were composed to a great extent as compendia of classical authors and their later compilers, from Orosius and Isidore in Late Antiquity to the medieval Bartholomaeus Anglicus to the Renaissance *Cosmography* of Apian.⁶⁵

Nowhere was this debt to classical authors more evident than in the narrative of the second English voyage to Guinea that was printed in Richard Eden's *Decades of the Newe Worlde* in 1555. Here, near the end of an account of routine navigation and trade that had been gathered from the reports of the ship's master Robert Gainsh, Eden himself inserted what he called a "brefe description of Africa." The people there, he wrote, were "a people of beastly lyvyng, without a god, lawe, religion, or common welth, and so scorched and vexed with the heate of the soonne, that in many places they curse it when it ryseth," as in ancient accounts the Atlantes had done. The heat was so intense that the people seemed to "live as it were in fornaces." They were nomads, Eden continued, who wandered "among many horrible wyldernesses and mountaynes replenisshed with dyvers kyndes of wyld and monstrous beastes and serpentes."

As had Ptolemy, Eden divided the landmass of Africa into Lybia and the two parts of Ethiopia, though he did add that in western Lybia and below eastern Ethiopia there were the recently discovered kingdoms of Guinea and Melinde. He listed the peoples who lived

⁶⁵ See *The Discription of the Contrey of Aphrique*, trans. (from French) Wyllyam Prat (London, 1554); *The Fardle of Facions*, trans. (from French) William Watremann (London, 1555); William Cuninghame, *The Cosmographical Glasse* (London, 1559); Andrew Thevet, *The New Found Worlde*, trans. (from French) anonymous (London, 1568); and Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *Batman uppon Bartholome, His Booke De Proprietatibus Rerum*, trans. John Trevisa and rev. and supp. Stephen Batman (London, 1582). The translations of Prat and Waterman were made from the French edition of Johann Boemus, *Omnium gentium mores, leges et ritus* (1520). Of all the works listed above, the relation to ancient authorities in that of Thevet was most complex: on the hybridic chaos of his writings, which at once derided and constantly repeated classical conventions, see Frank Lestringant, *Mapping the Renaissance World: The Geographical Imagination in the Age of Discovery*, trans. (from French) David Fausett (Cambridge, U.K., 1994).

among these lands, and these were compiled from classical texts as well: the Troglodytes, Blemmyi, Anthropophagi, Satyres, Garamantes, and Ichthyophagi all appeared; and so did more than a dozen peoples named in Ptolemy. The authorities to whom Eden referred were classical scholars from Pliny to Diodorus to Gemma Frisius, who had edited the work of Apian.⁶⁶

One source to which Eden did not refer was Gainsh himself, who in the pages that preceded Eden's description had given the most exact accounts of the shape and terrain of the Guinea coast and of the few towns where his crew had traded goods. At the beginning of the narrative, Eden had praised Gainsh for recording "as he founde and tried all thynges not by conjecture, but by the arte of saylynge," on a voyage that had been "wel observed by art and experience." In his description of Africa, Eden did not attempt to refute or even to supplement what Gainsh had "founde and tried": he simply ignored him. For Eden knew that to produce an account of Africa as such was not to make a record of direct experience so much as summon conjectures from the classical past.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ "The seconde vyage to Guinea," in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 355v (re-printed as Gainsh, "The second voyage to *Guinea*," in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* [1589], 94; and "The second voyage to *Guinea*," in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* [1599-1600], vol. 2, pt. 2, 19 but mistakenly labelled "331"). For a discussion of the complex authorship of this narrative, see fn. 30 in Chapter Two.

⁶⁷ "The seconde vyage to Guinea," in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 349v. Eden's use of classical sources to describe areas of Africa where European travelers had only recently begun to explore parallels the continued reliance among European scholars upon ancient geographers and cartographers to understand the New World through the early stages of exploration, as has been noted for example in John Huxtable Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492-1650* (Cambridge, U.K., 1970); Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, U.K., 1982); Anthony Grafton (with April Shelford and Nancy Siraisi), *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, M.A., 1992); and Sabine MacCormack, *On the Wings of Time: Rome, The Incas, Spain, and Peru* (Princeton, N.J., 2007).

The classical perception of Africa, however, was more complex than has been described here so far; and this complexity was reflected in Renaissance English culture. For the ancient authors had of course divided Africa below the northern coasts into Lybia and Ethiopia; but far more important in their minds had been the division of Ethiopia into its southern and eastern parts. The inhabitants of southern Ethiopia, like those of Lybia, were rumored to be—as Eden would put it, compressing into a phrase the consensus of classical learning—“a people of beastly lyvyng, without a god, lawe, religion, or common welth.” Perhaps the most terrible creatures of the Plinian imagination, the Anthropophagi, were to be found here. The eastern region of Ethiopia, by contrast, and in particular the area south of Egypt, was understood to be the site of an advanced civilization centered on an island in the Nile named Meroë. Münster’s map would record this understanding with the placement of four red castles—at Meroë, Sabath, Dire, and Rapta—that stood out starkly against vast expanses of unsettled land. Already in the early Archaic period, Homer had spoken in *The Odyssey* of “the Ethiopians who dwell sundered in twain, the farthestmost of men, some where Hyperion sets and some where he rises.” Over the next millennium both Greek and Roman writers would work into a statement about culture as well as geography the insight that Ethiopia was not one place but two.⁶⁸

Ethiopia had figured in *The Odyssey* as the destination for an annual banquet of the gods, who feasted there among what Homer said were that country’s “faultless men.” The perfection of the Ethiopians would be taken up in Herodotus, who gave the first detailed

⁶⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. A. T. Murray (Cambridge, M.A., 1966; orig. pub. 1919), 1.22-24. This point is grasped most perceptively in the work of Malvern van Wyk Smith, who has argued that, from classical Greece to imperial Rome, views of Africa were “dialectically established, negotiated and interrogated along lines suggested by the trope of ‘two Ethiopias’: ‘worthy’ and ‘noble’ or ‘other’ and ‘savage,’ with many surprises in between.” Malvern van Wyk Smith, *The First Ethiopians: The Image of Africa and Africans in the Early Mediterranean World* (Johannesburg, S.A., 2009), 62 (see esp. 281-378).

account of their region in classical culture. The *Histories* thus recorded a contrast between the savage peoples of western Lybia—who included the “dog-headed men and the headless that have their eyes in their breasts,” Herodotus wrote, in phrases that would capture the attention of Pliny—and those of Ethiopia in the East, which was for Herodotus as an earthly paradise. The land here, he reported, in a fertile region of the Nile valley, produced “great plenty of gold, and abundance of elephants, and all woodland trees, and ebony”; and the people were “the tallest and fairest and longest-lived of all men.”⁶⁹

Into the next millennium, even as Diodorus and Strabo expanded upon the negative opinion of Herodotus about the inhabitants of western Africa, they elaborated as well upon his high regard for the eastern Ethiopians. “In general,” according to Strabo, “the extremities of the inhabited world must needs be defective and inferior to the temperate part,” but intriguingly the Ethiopians were neither. They had been the first of all men, generated out of the earth by the warmth of the African sun, Diodorus explained. They had been as well the first men who had been taught to honor the gods, who were in turn said to find that the “sacrifices practised among the Ethiopians are those which are the most pleasing to heaven.” The kings of Ethiopia were subject to the laws and customs of the country, but were worshipped by their subjects as though they were divine; and when they died, they were embalmed and buried in gold coffins painted to recall their living features in a practice the Egyptians were believed later to have adopted for their pharaohs. In the ancient world the

⁶⁹ Herodotus, *Persian Wars*, trans. Godley, vol. 2, 4.191: 395 (see more generally vol. 2, 4.147-191: 347-395); Herodotus, *Persian Wars*, trans. Godley, vol. 2, 3.114: 141 (as well as vol. 2, 3.17-25: 25-35).

drama and fascination of Ethiopia thus consisted in the contrast that it contained—between men who lived almost as beasts and those who appeared almost as gods.⁷⁰

It had in fact been the gods, according to Greek historians from Herodotus to Diodorus, who had long protected the eastern Ethiopians from foreign invasion. “For from all time,” Diodorus reported, “they have enjoyed a state of freedom and of peace one with another, and although many and powerful rulers have made war upon them, not one of these has succeeded in his undertaking.” But by the time of Strabo and Pliny in the first century the whole area around Meroë had been laid waste—either by the Romans, as Strabo said, or by the Egyptians in the account of Pliny. “At this day there is neither sticke nor stone to be found” among the cities that were “recorded in times past to have been in those parts,” Pliny wrote. All that remained were the “deserts and a vast wilderness” and the bands of barely human creatures drifting among them that defined Pliny’s conception of Africa.⁷¹

In the centuries after Pliny wrote, however, reports of a great kingdom in Ethiopia never disappeared entirely from Western culture. These were shaped and sustained by the story told in the Old Testament and developed in Josephus about the Queen of Sheba, who travelled from Ethiopia to Jerusalem “with great splendour and show of wealth,” according to Josephus, in order to test the wisdom of King Solomon. In turn, in the New Testament, Phillip was said to have baptized the eunuch of another Ethiopian queen. And in the works

⁷⁰ *Geography of Strabo*, trans. Jones, vol. 8, 17.2.1: 141; and *Diodorus of Sicily*, trans. Oldfather, vol. 2, bk. 3: 91. See for the complete description of the eastern Ethiopians in Diodorus, *Diodorus of Sicily*, trans. Oldfather, vol. 2, bk. 3: 89-113. For accounts of Ethiopian burial rituals, see Herodotus, *Persian Wars*, trans. Godley, vol. 2, 3.24: 33; *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. Jones, vol. 8, 17.2.3: 147; and *Diodorus of Sicily*, trans. Oldfather, vol. 1, bk. 2: 399 and vol. 2, bk. 3: 95 and 109.

⁷¹ *Diodorus of Sicily*, trans. Oldfather, vol. 2, bk. 3: 93 (see Herodotus, *Persian Wars*, trans. Godley, vol. 2, 3.25: 35); and *Historie of the Worlde*, trans. Holland, 6.29: 145. In the two classical geographies most similar to that of Pliny, Mela and Solinus, the advanced culture of eastern Ethiopia received as little attention as it did in Pliny—except for a brief passage in Solinus, who observed (in terms derived almost certainly from Herodotus) that the Macrobian Ethiopians near Meroë were a long-lived people who “execute Justice, love upright dealing, excell in strength, are very comely and beautifull of personage, are decked wyth brasse, and make givies of golde for offenders.” *Julius Solinus Polyhistor*, Tiiir.

of such early church historians as Sokrates and Rufinus, Matthew had gone to Meroë to preach the Gospel. In fact in the fourth century the kingdom of Aksum in the region south and east of Meroë had converted to Christianity; and although this was not widely known in Europe in the centuries that followed, it did become one source of the view that arose in the eighth century and would come to prominence in the late Middle Ages that one of the three Magi who visited the newborn Jesus was a black African. For throughout this period the Church had well preserved the ecumenical belief recorded in the Psalms that “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God.”⁷²

And so around the middle of the twelfth century, when a letter addressed to the emperor of Byzantium from a powerful Christian monarch named Prester John began to circulate widely in Europe, Pope Alexander III himself dispatched a response—to Ethiopia. The letter had identified Prester John only as ruler of the “three Indies,” a vast empire in the Far East whose exact location and extent were not well known. During this period, and in fact until the fifteenth-century revival of Ptolemaic cartography, Ethiopia was commonly believed to be part of India, not Africa, with the Nile and not the Red Sea seen as the border between the two. After the Pope’s message received no answer, the search for Prester John carried on in central Asia and as far east as China. The popular fourteenth-century *Travels* of Sir John Mandeville placed him here, near the medieval kingdoms of Cathay and Tartary, in “a great land” watered by rivers flowing out of Paradise and covered with

⁷² Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 9 vols. (Cambridge, M.A., 1930-1965), vol. 3 (trans. Ralph Marcus), 8.166: 305 (see also *The Holy Bible, Conteyning the Old Testament, and the New* [London, 1611], 1 Kings 10:1-13); and *Holy Bible* (1611), Psalm 68:31. For Phillip, see *Holy Bible, Acts* 8:27-39. For Matthew, see *The Auncient Ecclesiastical Histories of the First Six Hundred Yeares after Christ*, trans. (from Greek) Meredith Hanmer (London, 1607; orig. pub. 1584), 534. For the conversion of Aksum, see Job Ludolphus, *A New History of Ethiopia*, trans. (from Latin) J. P. Gent (London, 1682), 249-254; as well as, for a modern source, S. C. Munro-Hay, *Aksum: An African Civilisation of Late Antiquity* (Edinburgh, 1991), 75-85. For “the sources and early development of the Black Magus/King in Literature,” see Paul H. D. Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art* (Ann Arbor, M.I., 1985), 19-70.

crystal and gold, which held “many good cities and good townes” and “many great Iles and large.” Mandeville’s work was well known in England through the close of the sixteenth century, and his chapters on Prester John were even printed in the long Latin extract from the *Travels* that Hakluyt included in the first edition of his *Principall Navigations*. Hakluyt would leave Mandeville out of the second edition of his collection, however; and already in the period when the *Travels* was composed, belief in the Indian Prester John had begun to wane and the legend had started to shift back to eastern Africa. Here classical accounts of Ethiopia’s faultless men were revived and reconfigured to accommodate new rumors of a spectacular Christian dominion.⁷³

The legend of Prester John, located either in Asia or in Africa, has often been seen by modern scholars as the curious expression of a credulous medieval cast of mind, which vanished from European culture with the rise of the Age of Discovery. But in fact reports of an Ethiopian Prester John remained common all the way through the end of the century and betrayed during this time little doubt as to the real existence of their subject.⁷⁴

⁷³ *The Voyages and Travailes of Sir John Maundevile Knight* (London, 1582), Riiir (see in general chs. 86-99: Riiir-Tiir). For the chapters on Prester John in the extract from Mandeville’s *Travels* which appeared in the first edition of the Hakluyt collection, see in particular “The Voyages and Discoveries of *S. J. Mandevil*,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 24-77, 65-72. It is a mark of the shift in location of Prester John from Asia to Africa that had taken place in the period between Mandeville and Hakluyt that, in the index to the Hakluyt collection, the Asian ruler described in the Mandeville extract was identified as “Presbiter John Emperor in Affrike.” Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), unpaginated index at end of volume (“A Table Alphabetical”).

⁷⁴ See on this subject Michael E. Brooks, “Prester John: A Reexamination and Compendium of the Mythical Figure Who Helped Spark European Expansion” (Ph.D. Diss., The University of Toledo, 2009), esp. 51-120. For the argument that “the influence of this legendary priest-king continued . . . far later than the traditional literature suggests of a decline in the influence of the legend by the first few decades of the sixteenth century,” see Brooks, “Prester John,” 121-155 (on the sixteenth century) and 156-173 (on “the seventeenth century and beyond,” although the evidence here is less firm). Even one of the most careful historians of the subject has asserted that “the gradual demise of the Prester John legend in inner Africa” was “a dominant trend from the early sixteenth century.” Francesc Relaño, *The Shaping of Africa: Cosmographic Discourse and Cartographic Science in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Burlington, V.T., 2001), 66.

The continued presence of Prester John was made most vividly apparent in the maps of Africa that circulated in Europe in the second half of the sixteenth century. Already in Münster's 1540 *Geography*, the "Africa Nova Tabula" had shown the royal seat of Prester John with a five-turret kingdom drawn among the branchings of the Nile just to the south of Meroë (Figure 3). In the decades that followed, as the influence of Ptolemy declined, the ancient city at Meroë disappeared from most maps of Africa; and the new works done by Ortelius and Hondius identified the hub of eastern African civilization as the inland regime of the "*imperitat magnus princeps Presbiter Joes.*" In his 1569 world map and 1595 map of Africa, Mercator marked the empire of Prester John with a figurative image of the sovereign, who was seated on a throne with a crown on his head and sceptered cross in his hand (Figure 4). And as late as 1606, in the first full-sized world atlas printed in England, the Ortelius *Theatre of the Whole World* devoted a folio to what it called "The country of the ABYSSINES, or The Empire of PRESTER JOHN," a region dotted with dozens upon dozens of kingdoms painted in red (Figure 5).⁷⁵

Even the mid-century descriptions of the world which carried into English culture Plinian legends about the peoples of Africa recorded as well the more recent opinion that Prester John reigned in the East. Prat, Waterman, Cuningham, Thevet, and Bateman thus agreed with Pliny that much of Africa "lieth waste," as Waterman said, "voide of enhabitauntes, either to whote for menne to abide, or full of noisome and venemous vermine, and beastes," and that there were throughout Ethiopia no more than a small number of "dyvers

⁷⁵ For maps mentioned above but not cited in the separate document of Figures, see in order; "1570 Abraham Ortelius: Africae Tabula Nova" in Betz, *Mapping of Africa*, 118-125; "1589 Jodocus Hondius: Africae Tabula" in Betz, *Mapping of Africa*, 147-148; "Gerard Mercator: Nova et Aucta Orbis Terrae Descriptio Ad Usus Navigantium emendate accommodata" in Shirley, *Mapping of the World*, 137-142; and "1595 Gerard Mercator II: Africa" in Betz, *Mapping of Africa*, 163-165. In addition to Ortelius's 1606 *Theatre of the Whole World*, the "Presbiter Joannes Imperium" was also featured in the map of Africa in Abraham Ortelius, *Abraham Ortelius His Epitome of the Theater of the Worlde* (London, 1603), A4 (see Figure 6).

peoples of sondry phisonomy and shape, monstrous and of hugly shewe.” Nevertheless the opinion of Africa that was developed in the works of these authors was as complex as the one that had been present in the ancient world; and each one also related at length the tales from Herodotus and Diodorus about the special attributes of the eastern Ethiopians. These were said to have been “the fyrst of all men,” according to Waterman; and they had devised “the first waie of worshipping God.” They had never been “under the bondage of any” but were “ever a free nacion.” The people revered their king “as thoughe there ware in him a Godhead”; and yet “for al that,” Waterman marveled, the king was “governed by the lawe” and “bounde to all thinges after thordre of the contry.”⁷⁶

Waterman and his colleagues presented their accounts of the monstrous peoples of Africa as current information, but they spoke of these Ethiopians for the most part only as the original inhabitants of the region. “At this daye,” Waterman said, the ancient capital at Meroë was ruled by a monarch named Prester John whose kingdom recalled the most distinctive features of the wonderful civilization that it had succeeded. Its central institution was the church with Prester John placed at the top of a hierarchy of archbishops, bishops, and priests as well as churches “much larger, much richer, and more gorgeous then ours.” The political structure overseen by Prester John was similarly elaborate: he had under him sixty-two kings; in his court there were princes, dukes, and earls; and each city in his realm

⁷⁶ *Fardle of Facions*, trans. Watreman, Bviiiir, Ciir, Ciir, Ciir, Ciir, and Ciiv. For the description of eastern Ethiopia most similar to that of Waterman, see the other translation of Boemus’s *Omnium gentium mores, leges et ritus*: Prat’s *Discription of the Contrey of Aphrique*, Dvv-Eiiv. See also Thevet, *New Found Worlde*, 26r as well as 24v, at which the author—in a mistake which indicates the confusion and inexactitude of European knowledge during this period—attributed the features that Diodorus had found in eastern Ethiopians to a people he called Anthropophagi. Finally, it ought to be observed that although both Waterman and Prat repeated the ancient opinion, expressed most influentially by Diodorus, that Ethiopians had been generated by the earth as the first of all men, both also acknowledged the radical departure this “false opinion” of the “aunciente Philosophers” about “the begynnyng of man,” as Waterman said, marked from “the true opinion of the devine, concernyng the begynnyng of man.” *Fardle of Facions*, trans. Watreman, Bivv and Biir (and *Discription of the Contrey of Aphrique*, trans. Prat Ciir-Diiiv).

had its own judges who reported in capital cases to a governor who in turn “supplieth the place of the King” in local affairs, according to Waterman. When Prester John went off to war—as representatives of Christendom had long hoped that he would, against the Muslim states that seemed to surround the Holy Land—he led an army of a million men.⁷⁷

In short, into the late sixteenth century, the English image of Africa was a study in contrast. As in classical Antiquity, English observers held that many African peoples were little advanced above the level of beasts in both physical features and cultural forms. Also as in Antiquity, however, the English believed that Africa was “sundered in twain,” in the phrase of Homer, and accommodated in the East a race of people who could hardly have been more different. Richard Eden had called the inhabitants of Africa “a people of beastly lyvyng, without a god, lawe, religion, or common welth.” But Eden himself also said that, southward along the Nile from Meroë and eastward toward the Red Sea, Africa contained the dominion of “the greate and myghtye Emperour and Chrystian kynge Prester Iohan.” What the people of beastly living lacked was what the empire of Prester John supplied: the possession of a god, law, religion, and commonwealth that “Chrystian kynge” captured in a phrase. The intricate systems of religion and politics that such authors as Eden described within the kingdom of Prester John served in other words as the mirror image of what such authors perceived to be the failure to live up to the most basic standards of human conduct across much of the rest of Africa.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Fardle of Facions*, trans. Watremman, Civv, Cvr, Cvr, and Cvir. For accounts of the empire of Prester John, see *Fardle of Facions*, trans. Watremman, Civv-Cviir; and *Discription of the Contrey of Aphrique*, Eiir-Evr. For briefer acknowledgements that eastern Ethiopia was currently under the dominion of Prester John, see Cuninghame, *Cosmographical Glasse*, 187; Thevet, *New Found Worlde*, 24r; and Bartholomaeus, *Batman uppon Bartholome*, trans. Trevisa and rev. and supp. Batman, 251r.

⁷⁸ Richard Eden, “A breefe description of Affrike,” in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 344v. For reference to “the dominion of the greate Emperoure of Ethiope cauled Prester John” or “the sayde Christian Emperoure Prester John,” see the account of Africa by Eden cited above, in “The seconde vyage

This double-sided aspect of the early English attitudes toward Africa has not been well understood. In the opinion of historians from Winthrop Jordan to Alden and Virginia Mason Vaughan, the English in the sixteenth century viewed the Africans as so “radically defective” and “uniquely deficient” in every measure of civility as to resemble beasts more than men—that is, as Eden’s “people of beastly lyvyng,” which was the phrase that these scholars believed had captured the general tenor of informed opinion.⁷⁹ Not so much as the title of Prester John appeared in the accounts of these authors and neither did the tradition from Herodotus and Diodorus upon which the legend of Prester John had drawn.⁸⁰ And in truth we have established that during this time the English viewed Africa in more nuanced terms—with admiration as well as contempt, as home to both the lowest and the highest forms of human life.

Around the turn of the seventeenth century, however, a dramatic change took place in English views of Africa. This was at bottom a change not in what the English thought of Africa, although it was certainly also that, but rather in how they came to think what it was that they thought—in the sources, that is, rather than the content of their information.

to Guinea,” in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 356r. Eden’s two descriptions of Africa agreed in their views of Prester John but differed in the models upon which they drew: the one was essentially classical whereas the other, as we will see, was taken in large part from the sixteenth-century author known in Europe as Leo Africanus.

⁷⁹ Jordan, *White Over Black*, 20; Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, “Before Othello: Elizabethan Representations of Sub-Saharan Africans,” *WMQ*, vol. 54, no. 1 (Jan., 1997), 19-44, 42. For uses of Eden’s phrase, see Jordan, *White Over Black*, 24 and 28; and Vaughan and Vaughan, “Before Othello,” 25.

⁸⁰ This oversight was apparent in the work of Alden and Virginia Mason Vaughan, which featured a map from a small-scale Ortelius atlas in which the “*Presbiteri Ioannis Imperium*” ran across a central and eastern region described in the text that had accompanied the full-size atlas as being of “mightie” extent (Figure 6). Abraham Ortelius, *Abraham Ortelius His Epitome of the Theater of the Worlde* (London, 1603), A4 and A3v; as well as Vaughan and Vaughan, “Before Othello,” 20 [“Figure 1”].

The early English writings had for the most part been composed as commentaries upon classical texts, which themselves had often been based purely upon conjecture. Even the more recent legend of Prester John had its origins in a twelfth-century letter that modern scholars have found to have been written in Europe, and persisted over time as a trope used to explain a remote region of inner Africa from which travelers' reports would not be readily accessible in England until the 1600s.⁸¹ To be sure the old myths faded gradually. Eden's classical description of Africa would be re-printed in editions of Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* through 1599; and in as late a play as *Othello* Shakespeare still had his African protagonist dazzle Desdemona with tales of "the cannibals, that each other eat; /The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads/Do grow beneath their shoulders," that is, the Blemmyi, in phrases that could well have been drawn from Eden's account first published half a century before.⁸² As we will see, too, the principal turn-of-the-century writings that introduced a new approach to the study of Africa nevertheless repeated the conviction that Prester John reigned over a powerful eastern empire about which there was only the most indirect information. But opinions such as these were now isolated vestiges of an earlier era. Increasingly the English insisted that their perception of Africa was formed from what they themselves had seen there.

The basis for the shift in the English perception of Africa lay in other words in the rise of English contact with Africa in the second half of the sixteenth century. The accounts of Africa contained in the Hakluyt collection were not the work of classical scholars aside

⁸¹ For the most learned inquiries into what nevertheless remains the indeterminate authorship of the original twelfth-century message, see Karl F. Helleiner, "Prester John's Letter: A Mediaeval Utopia," *Phoenix*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Summer, 1959), 47-57; and Slessarev, *Prester John*, 32-54. The early travelers' reports from the kingdom of Prester John and their reception in turn-of-the-century England will be discussed below.

⁸² William Shakespeare, *The First Quarto of Othello*, ed. Scott McMillin (Cambridge, U.K., 2001), 1.3.145-147: 67.

from Eden's brief interpolations. They were composed instead by seamen and merchants and reflected their particular concerns. At the height of the Second British Empire, in the Victorian period, the *Principal Navigations* would be hailed as "the Prose Epic of the modern English nation." But if this was so, it was not an epic of discovery or conquest or even settlement but rather "an epic of commerce," in the phrase of Richard Helgerson.⁸³ Above all its materials on Africa were narratives of navigation and trade. They went in detail over the sea routes to Guinea, the currents along the coast, the terrain inland from the shore, the efforts by the English to form alliances with the French and to avoid the hostile Portuguese, the gifts the natives sometimes demanded as signs of good will, the trade goods they most favored, the commodities they offered in exchange, the weights and measures they used, the struggles for power among members of the English crews, and the strong headwinds on the long northward journeys home.

It was their mundane character that made the accounts in the Hakluyt collection so important, though, as the image of Africa that emerged here little resembled the classical legends of the Torrid Zone. In the record of the first English voyage to Guinea, in 1553, the "smothering heate, with close and cloudie ayre" was said to have "rotted the coates off" the backs of the travelers. And yet as time went on, even as the English continued to fall sick and perish in great numbers in Guinea, they attributed this to the fruit and water they consumed, the moisture of the air, and the sharp alterations in climate on voyages from and to England—rather than the mythic scorching heat of the sun. In fact after their earliest voyages the records suggest that English travelers dwelled very little upon what the classical

⁸³ J. A. Froude, *Short Studies in Great Subjects*, 4 vols. (London, 1891), vol. 1, 446. On the essentially commercial aspect of the voyages contained in the Hakluyt collection, which is described in this context as "an epic of commerce," see Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago, 1992), 149-191, 190. For an informed collection of essays, see *Richard Hakluyt and Travel Writing in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Daniel Carey and Claire Jowitt (Burlington, V.T., 2012).

geographers would have led them to expect was the central fact of African life. Already in 1578, George Best was able to conclude, in an aside in his *True Discourse* on the search for a Northwest Passage that was excerpted in Hakluyt's second edition, that "it may be gathered by experience of our Englishmen" that the climate in Guinea was far more mild than "the old Philosophers" had imagined—and that to this extent, Best continued, the "*Torrida Zona* may bee, and is inhabited."⁸⁴

The African inhabitants of the Torrid Zone were not, moreover, the beastly peoples of ancient accounts. In a long poem written in the style of an epic about a 1562 voyage to Guinea, Robert Baker recalled that the leader in a coastal town had approached his company "as naked as my naile." "By which I doe here gesse," Baker said, "That he from man and manlinesse/was void and clean astray." This poem appeared in the first edition of the Hakluyt collection; but like the extract from Mandeville's fanciful *Travels*, it was left out of the expanded second edition. In the dozens of other works that Hakluyt published here, the natives of Guinea were observed to conceal at least their loins; and their roles in these narratives confirmed their human status. They were "a very warie people in their bargaining," noted Robert Gainsh, who chronicled the second Guinea voyage, in 1554. A few of the natives were so "idle" that they did not cultivate crops or so "wilde" that they did not come to the shore to trade. Others seemed "unreasonable" in their demands. But far more often, English travelers to Africa found that the peoples there conducted themselves with

⁸⁴ "The first voyage to Guinea, and Benin," in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 86; and George Best, "A true Discourse of the three Voyages of discoverie, for the finding of a passage to *Cathaya*, by the North-west," in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), vol. 3, 47-96, 48, 49, and 48 (see also George Best, *A True Discourse of the Late Voyages of Discoverie . . . under the conduct of Martin Frobisher Generall* [London, 1578], 19, 22, and 19-20).

“confident love and good will towards us,” as one trader put it in 1591. They were “gentle and loving” and “courteous” and they proved in general to be effective partners in trade.⁸⁵

In addition to the men whom Gainsh had taken from Shamma to serve as interpreters, some Guinean merchants spoke Portuguese or French; but when they lacked a common tongue, the English on occasion made an effort to learn the languages of the natives. In the narrative of his first voyage, in 1555, William Towerson translated African phrases in lists which read as digests of early English activity in Guinea. “Bezow, bezow,” he wrote, “Is their salutation.” “Manegete afoye” meant “Graines ynough.” And Towerson went on, with the terms for “Hennes ynough,” “Have you ynough,” “Give me a knife,” “Give me bread,” “Holde your peace,” “Ye lye,” “Put foorth, or emptie,” and with the characteristic exchange depicted in these phrases evidently at an end, “Rowe.”⁸⁶

What stands out from such accounts of African life in context is thus how ordinary it appeared to be. In 1599, the year in which the first two volumes of the second edition of

⁸⁵ William Garrard, “The first voyage of Robert Baker to Guinie,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 130-135, 132 (for a useful introduction and modern edition of this work, which also makes clear that Baker rather than Garrard was the author, see *Travails in Guinea: Robert Baker’s ‘Breffe Dyscourse’ (?1568)*, ed. P. E. H. Hair [Liverpool, U.K., 1990]); Gainsh, “The second voyage to Guinea,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 96; Towerson, “The first voyage made by M. William Towrson,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 102; Towerson, “The second voyage made by M. William Towrson,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 114; Towerson, “The second voyage made by M. William Towrson,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 115 (see also 117); “The voyage of Richard Rainolds and Thomas Dassel,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), vol. 2, pt. 2: 191; Ingram “The voiage set forth by M. John Newton, and M. John Bird marchants of London,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), vol. 2, pt. 2: 129; and James Welsh, “A voyage to Benin beyond the Countrey of Guinea,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), vol. 2, pt. 2: 129 (see also Sparke, “The voyage made by the worshipful M. John Hawkins Esquire,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* [1589], 523-543, 525). On perceptions of the natives among early English travelers to Guinea, see for example Emily C. Bartels, “Othello and Africa: Postcolonialism Reconsidered,” *WMQ*, vol. 54, no. 1 (Jan., 1997), 45-64; P. E. H. Hair, “Attitudes to Africans in English Primary Sources on Guinea up to 1650,” *History in Africa*, vol. 26 (1999), 43-64; and April Lee Hatfield, “A ‘Very Wary People in Their Bargaining’ or ‘Very Good Marchandise’: English Traders’ Views of Free and Enslaved Africans, 1550-1650,” *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 25, no. 3 (Dec., 2004), 1-17.

⁸⁶ Towerson, “First voyage made by M. William Towrson,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 102 (also 108). See in addition the African vocabulary (rendered into Latin) contained in the diary of a chaplain aboard the Fenton voyage which was printed in the twentieth century as *An Elizabethan in 1582: The Diary of Richard Madox, Fellow of All Souls*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Story Donno (London, 1976), 177.

Hakluyt came out, George Abbot and John Thorie published the first English descriptions of the world since the classical mid-century surveys of authors such as Waterman. “From beyond the hills *Atlas major*” along the northern coast, Abbot declared, “unto the South of *Africa*, is nothing almost in antiquitie worthie the reading, and those things which are written for the most part are fables.” The area was “in former times supposed by many not to bee much inhabited,” but travelers from Portugal and in recent years from England had found that this was not the case. Thorie listed several of the unnamed creatures in Plinian texts that had no nose or no upper lip or nose and mouth joined weirdly together that were “thought by some men” to live in Africa. “But these,” Thorie concluded with Abbot, “are but fained fables.”⁸⁷ And with this conclusion—that classical authors had told little more than fables about the peoples of Africa—a new era in English perception had begun.

Through the close of the seventeenth century, the English descriptions of the world would continue to remark upon how inadequate ancient accounts of Africa had been. The studies of the continent in such works as those of John Speed, Peter Heylyn, and Robert Morden all started from this critique of their earliest predecessors. “What they knew not, and thought almost impossible to be known” about Africa, Morden said in 1680, “is now common: for the secrets of her deep and remotest shores, are now beaten up and tracted with continual Voyages.” On the basis of such voyages, it had become clear to Heylyn by 1652 that the classical geographers “spoke upon conjecture, or more doubtful hear-say,”

⁸⁷ George Abbot, *A Briefe Description of the Whole Worlde* (London, 1599), Cviir and Ciiiv; and John Thorie, *The Theatre of the Earth* (London, 1599), Bivv. In this transitional period in English attitudes, though, even Abbot could repeat as current information legends from ancient authors he otherwise dismissed. “According to the Proverbe, *Africa semper aliquid apportat novi*,” Abbot wrote in a version of the Latin phrase that Pliny had adapted from Aristotle, “new and strange shapes of beastes are brought forth there . . . where oftentimes contrarie kinds have conjunction the one with the other.” Abbot, *Briefe Description of the Whole Worlde*, Ciiiv.

when they reported upon “such strange people, as hardly did deserve to be counted men,” scattered among the barren lands that lay just above the Torrid Zone.⁸⁸

Scholars in recent years have often asserted that early English authors represented Africa as “a ‘dark continent’ whose clearest feature [was] its difference from England,” as Emily Bartels has written in an essay on the Hakluyt collection. The term “dark continent,” however, was an invention of the nineteenth century; and from the late sixteenth century, difference was not understood to be the clearest feature of Africa among the many English observers learned in ancient texts. What struck them was rather that the natives of Africa were less unusual than one had been led to expect. Travelers to the continent had found no “monstrous people” there, Speed observed in his 1627 world atlas: “they report not (upon their owne experience) of any other people then such as our selves are.”⁸⁹ The Africans at long last had come to be seen as no more and no less than men.

⁸⁸ Robert Morden, *Geography Rectified: Or, A Description of the World* (London, 1680), 318 (re-printed in Robert Morden, *Geography Rectified: Or, A Description of the World*, second ed. [London, 1700], 462); and Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes* (London, 1652), bk. 4, pt. 1: 2 (re-printed in Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Books*, fifth ed. [London, 1677], bk. 4, pt. 1: 2).

⁸⁹ Emily C. Bartels, “Imperialist Beginnings: Richard Hakluyt and the Construction of Africa,” *Criticism*, vol. 34, no. 4 (Fall 1992), 517-538, 525; and John Speed, *A Prospect of the Most Famous Parts of the World* (London, 1627), 5. For similar emphasis upon the difference that early English authors identified between themselves and Africans, see Jordan, *White Over Black*, 24, and Vaughan and Vaughan, “Before Othello,” 21; as well as Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 25-61; and Anu Korhonen, “Washing the Ethiopian white: conceptualising black skin in Renaissance England,” in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, eds. T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe (Cambridge, U.K., 2005), 94-112. For parallel arguments made with respect to French materials, see William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington, I.N., 1980); and Christopher L. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago, I.L., 1985).

The seventeenth-century critique of ancient opinion on Africa was perhaps most clearly expressed in a passage that appeared in a work that was in large part translated from the atlas of the French cartographer Sanson. “But it is time to finish *Affrica*,” the author wrote near the end of his account, “and to say that if we would have believed certain *Authors* among the *Antients*, this *Affrica* had been represented to us with unsupportable *heates*, unsufferable *drought*, fierce and cruel *beasts*, perfidious *Men*, horrible and affrightful *Monsters*, whereas time, which daily discovers things unknown to the *antients*, hath made us see that the greatest *heates* of *Affrica* have some *refreshments*; that the dryest *sands* have some *wells*, some *waters*; that the vastest *solitudes* have some *green fields*, some *fruits*; that the *beasts* are not so dangerous, but that *Men* may defend themselves from their fury; nor the *Men* so *faithless*, but that they have *Commerce* and *Society* among themselves, as also with *Strangers*.” Richard Blome, *A Geographical Description of the Four Parts of the World* (London, 1670), pt. 2, 82.

And as men do, the Africans came in many forms. In the decades that followed the second edition of the Hakluyt collection, the classical two-part scheme that had long given structure to the English image of Africa almost entirely disappeared. What replaced it was not so much a new scheme of a similar kind but rather the view that no scheme at all could capture the range of African life. The central document of this period was the next English collection of travelers' narratives after that of Hakluyt—the *Pilgrimes* of Samuel Purchas, which came out in 1625. Whereas Hakluyt had aimed primarily to record the overseas enterprise of England (an aim announced in the full title of *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation*), the aim of Purchas was far more expansive. He had no less than “a World for the Subject,” he said, in a four-volume text in which he had worked to collect “the rarities and varieties of all” or, as he also put it, the “remarkeable Varieties of Men and humane Affaires.”⁹⁰ Purchas approached Africa in this respect as a miniature of the world. The works he printed ranged across the whole of the continent. As for many observers of the seventeenth century, it was for him a vast field for the remarkable varieties of men.

The attention to variety that defined the English image of Africa during this period was part and parcel of the spread of travelers' accounts from the continent around the turn of the century. It is true that, like their classical sources, earlier observers had assembled

⁹⁰ Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 1: “To the Reader,” unpaginated (after “The Epistle Dedicatorie”); Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 1: “The Epistle Dedicatorie,” unpaginated (after title page); and Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 1: “To the Reader.” Despite the contrast in method and scope between their works, Purchas did acknowledge a profound debt to Hakluyt: he reported that he had found many of the accounts he printed among the unpublished papers within “Master Hakluyts many yeeres Collections” (Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 1: “To the Reader”); and the Latin title he chose for his collection, following Hakluyt's death in 1616, was *Hakluytus Posthumus*.

long lists of African peoples. As had Pliny, for example, Eden and Waterman appeared to revel in what Eden called the “marvelous and very strange” array that there was in Africa of Troglodytes, Blemmyi, and Atlantes as well as light-skinned (or albino) Leucaethiopes, “wylde and wanderynge” Getulians, and slender Ilophagi who leapt between trees, wrote Waterman, “like Cattes or Squirelles.” Ptolemy had also named scores of African nations; and in editions of his *Geography*, cartographers of the sixteenth century such as Münster and Mercator included these in small-print inset captions and indexes which identified the Ptoemphanæ, Pesendaræ, Phorusij, Psilli, and dozens more. But insofar as anything about them was known in Europe, almost all of the peoples of Africa below the northern coast were connected by a common theme, for each diverged in some striking respect from what was understood to be normal for human beings. And to the extent that the eastern empire of Prester John, like the ancient civilization at Meroë, was seen as a model of human perfection, the early English image of Africa was marked by a single stark contrast rather than genuine variety. It was “sundered,” as Homer had said of Ethiopia, not in many parts but “in twain.”⁹¹

During this early period, English observers had taken as the object of their interest Africa as a whole, and had sought in their accounts to bring all the peoples of the continent within one complex but coherent order. By contrast, the ambition of the travelers whose

⁹¹ Eden, “The seconde vyage to Guinea,” in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 356r and 355v; and *Fardle of Facions*, trans. Watreman, Fvir. For inset captions in Münster’s Ptolemaic rendering of Africa that listed dozens of African peoples, see “Aphricæ Tablua IIII,” in Münsteri, *Geographia universalis* (1542), fol. 16 (Figure 2). For Mercator’s index of African peoples (as well as places and cities), see “Africae Index,” in Mercatorem, *Tabulae Geographicae* (1578), unpaginated. As it had been for many classical authors, the two-part division of Ethiopia was for Eden the model for the broad two-part division of Africa; and he noted that, “Although there are many nations of people so named, yet is Ethiopia chiefly divyded into two partes.” Eden, “The seconde vyage to Guinea,” in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 356r.

reports began to circulate widely in England around the turn of the seventeenth century was far more limited. They set out only to relate their own experience; and since they were as a rule not explorers of the kind whose journeys into the interior would captivate the British public in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these authors confined themselves for the most part to descriptions of the pockets of Africa that they had happened to see.⁹²

The African materials contained in the Hakluyt collection were to begin limited in this sense: aside from the fabulous “brefe description of Africa” contributed by Eden, they covered no more than the thin stretch of land along the Guinea coast where the English had met the natives to trade. So was the *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, translated in 1597 from an Italian text that gathered and supplemented the first-hand oral accounts of a Portuguese merchant named Duarte Lopes, who had spent five years in the region along and inland from the west-central coast. Similarly the passages on Africa in the *Voyages* of the Dutchman John Huighen van Linschoten, which was translated in 1598, were concentrated in the seaboard areas, from Guinea to Congo to Mozambique, where the author had passed through on his way to the East Indies.⁹³

The title of what would remain perhaps the most influential study of the continent through the end of the seventeenth century, *A Geographical Historie of Africa*, which was brought into English in 1600, indicated a work of comprehensive scope. Its author was an extraordinary Muslim diplomat from Fez who had been presented to Pope Leo X as the

⁹² On eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British exploration, see for example Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (Madison, W.I., 1964); and Robin Hallett, *The Penetration of Africa: European Exploration in North and West Africa to 1815* (New York, 1965).

⁹³ See “Drawen out of the writings and discourses of *Odoardo Lopes*, a Portingall, by Philipppo Pigafetta,” *A Report of the Kingdome of Congo, a Region of Africa*, trans. (from Italian) Abraham Hartwell (London, 1597); and John Huighen van Linschoten, *Discours of Voyages into ye Easte and West Indies*, trans. (from Dutch) W.P. (London, 1598), bk. 1, chs. 3-4 (5-11) and bk. 2 (198-216).

prisoner of a Spanish pirate and baptized in 1520 as Giovanni Lioni Africani.⁹⁴ The account of Leo Africanus, as he widely came to be called in the period after his study was printed in the 1550 Italian Ramusio collection of *Navigations and Voyages*, had already begun to enter English culture in the second half of the sixteenth century. It became a fixture among geographical works held in Tudor libraries—where as the principal contemporary source on Africa it sat uneasily beside the works of Pliny, Strabo, Ptolemy, and Waterman. It was known as well to Eden and Stephen Bateman, for although neither author had thoroughly digested its findings, both did include in their compendia brief abstracts of Leo’s work in separate sections from their own classical descriptions of Africa.⁹⁵

The contrast Leo presented to the classical vision of Africa was most dramatically captured in the story that Othello told to Desdemona about his early career. The cannibals and headless men he described here may have been drawn from Eden; but as scholars of Shakespeare have established, the figure of Othello himself in this story was modelled on Leo Africanus or at least on the version of his life that John Pory, Leo’s English translator, had added as a note to the reader in his edition. Both were learned travelers of noble birth who had converted from Islam to Christianity in Italy. Both had braved monstrous men, vast caves, idle deserts, and “hills whose heads touch heaven” in Africa, in the phrase of Othello. Leo had often been “in hazard to have been captived” by the “wilde Mores,” Pory

⁹⁴ Still in 1704, in the most important English digest of travel narratives since Purchas’ 1613 *Pilgrimage*, Leo was said to have “given the best light into [*Africk*] of any Writer.” “The Catalogue and Character of most Books of Travels,” in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 4 vols. (London, 1704), vol. 1, lxxvi-c, lxxvi. On the life and work of Leo Africanus, whose name before baptism was al-Hasan al-Wazzan, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (New York, 2006).

⁹⁵ For geography books held in Tudor libraries, see E. G. R. Taylor, *Tudor Geography, 1485-1583* (London, 1930), 193-243 (app. II). See Richard Eden, “A breefe description of Affrike,” in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 344r-345r (see also Richard Eden, “A briefe description of Affrike,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* [1589], 84-85; and Richard Eden, “A briefe description of Afrike,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* [1599-1600], vol. 2, pt. 2, 10-11); and Bartholomaeus, *Batman uppon Bartholome*, trans. Trevisa and rev. and supp. Batman, 250r-251r.

wrote, even before he was taken by pirates to Rome; and Othello had once been sold into slavery by “the insolent foe.” Famously foreign in their adopted cities, both were figured as out of place as well in their native continent—until the English image of Africa was remade more or less in their own image.⁹⁶

By the time the second edition of the *Principal Navigations* appeared, Hakluyt too had learned of Leo Africanus. He promised in an editor’s note that Leo’s “worthy worke” would be appended to his second volume. Hakluyt did not fulfill this promise, but he did oversee the translation of Leo’s work that appeared in the next year and praised it as “the verie best” description of “the countries, peoples, and affaires of Africa” which “ever was written.” Even so, the conception of the continent in the *Geographical Historie* was quite narrow, since Africa as Leo understood it was confined to the northwestern areas through which he had moved throughout his peripatetic career. It extended no farther east than the Nile and ended in the south at the southern shore of the Niger River in the west and, in the east, the territory of a people named the Bugiha who lived on milk and camels’ flesh four hundred and fifty miles below the Mediterranean.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Shakespeare, *First Quarto of Othello*, 1.3.143: 66; Shakespeare, *First Quarto of Othello*, 1.3.139: 66; and John Pory, “To the Reader,” in John Leo, *A Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. John Pory (London, 1600), unpaginated. On the parallels between Othello’s account of his early life and Pory’s version of Leo’s career in Africa, see for example Lois Whitney, “Did Shakespeare Know Leo Africanus?” *PMLA*, vol. 37, no. 3 (Sep., 1922), 470-483; and Emily C. Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor: From Alcazar to Othello* (Philadelphia, P.A., 2008), 138-190.

⁹⁷ Richard Hakluyt, [editor’s note] in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599-1600), vol. 2, pt. 2, 193; and Richard Hakluyt, “An approbation of the historie ensuing, by me Richard Hakluyt,” in John Pory, “A particular description of all the knowne borders, coastes and inlands of Africa, which John Leo hath left undescribed,” in John Leo, *A Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. John Pory (London, 1600), 8-60, 57. In his edition of the *Geographical Historie*, Pory credited Hakluyt as “the onely man that moved me to translate it.” John Pory, “To the Right Honorable sir Robert Cecil Knight,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, unpaginated. As is indicated by this fact, Hakluyt’s own interest in Africa extended beyond the materials in the *Principal Navigations*: he also, for example, oversaw the translations of Lopes and van Linschoten mentioned above as well as the translation of Alvarez that will be mentioned below. See “Works in which Hakluyt’s influence is known or acknowledged,” in *The Hakluyt Handbook*, ed. D.B. Quinn, 2 vols [London, 1974], vol. 2, 528-569, 544-549.

Even within the borders he assigned to it, Leo almost never spoke in general of the peoples of Africa. He divided the continent into four regions—Barbaria, Numidia, Libya, and to the south of these “the land of Negros,” which ran east-and-west along the Niger—and his broadest statements applied separately to the inhabitants of each region. In the first book of his work, Leo reported for example that the people of Numidia lived longer than the Libyans and that the plague was common in Barbary but was unknown among the Negros. In a passage on the virtues and vices of Africans, Leo continued in this vein: he said that the Barbarians were studious and honest but proud and covetous; the Numidians were courteous and hospitable but base and servile; and although the Libyans were happy, they were brutish thieves. The Negros were loyal and convivial—earlier in the first book, Leo had observed that the Negros in areas south of the Niger were rich and industrious. But he also wrote, in phrases that anticipated Eden’s distillation of ancient Mediterranean views, that they lived “a beastly kinde of life, being utterly destitute of the use of reason, of dexteritie of wit, and of all artes.”⁹⁸ In each book of his work that followed the first, Leo examined one region or one area within one region. So distinct were they from one another, he seemed to believe, that to give a general account of Africa was only to assemble a series of particular accounts of its parts.

⁹⁸ Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 2 (and throughout the *Geographical Historie*) and 42. The textual history of the brief passage in Leo’s account on the virtues of the Negros is complex. It was reprinted in the 1556 French translation made by Jean Temporal from the original Italian version that was printed in the Ramusio collection. Here, Temporal said that the Negros “meinent une bonne vie, & sont de fidele nature, faisans volontiers plaisir aux passans, & s’étudient de tout leur pouvoir à se donner tous les plaisirs dequoy ils se peuvent aviser.” “Jean Leon, Africain,” *Description de l’Afrique*, trans. Jean Temporal (Lyon, 1556), 43. But Pory’s translation was mostly done from the flawed 1556 Latin edition of Florianus; and neither work included this passage. The reason for the omission is unknown, but its effect was to render the description of the Negros in the first Book of the Pory edition more derogatory than it would have been, had their virtues been listed here alongside their vices. For the textual history of the work as a whole, see Robert Brown, “Introduction,” in Leo Africanus, *The History and Description of Africa*, trans. John Pory and ed. Robert Brown, 3 vols. (New York, 1896), vol. 1, i-cxi.

This was also the method of Samuel Purchas in his *Pilgrimage*, which was printed in 1613 as the next English description of the world after that of George Abbot. Like Abbot, to whom he dedicated his work, Purchas had spent his career as a Church of England clergyman, and confessed that he had “never travelled 200. miles from *Thaxted* in *Essex*, where I was borne.” But in contrast to the crisp survey that Abbot had produced, Purchas composed his *Pilgrimage* as a review of the reports from more than seven hundred travelers, whose accounts he often copied so closely as to retain their use of the first-person and whom he listed by name in a “Catalogue of the Authors.” Among these authors were several of the merchants whose chronicles of Guinea had appeared in the Hakluyt collection as well as Lopes, van Linschoten, Leo Africanus, and several more of the travelers whose narratives Purchas would later excerpt as separate texts in his *Pilgrimes*.⁹⁹

Purchas began the two books of his *Pilgrimage* that concerned Africa with a short first chapter in which he mainly reviewed the animals of the continent. He wrote here in an aside that he would “neither beleeeve, nor report” the stories of partly human “Monsters which *Pliny* and others tell.” But beyond this assertion, like Leo, Purchas gave almost no thought to what might have been supposed to be the common features of African peoples; and as Leo had also done he took care to avoid speaking of “Africans” as such other than as the inhabitants of the former northern Roman province known by that name. The one hundred and thirty-three folio pages of small-print text that Purchas devoted to Africa were

⁹⁹ Samuel Purchas, “[editor’s note],” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 1, capt. 6, 1:74. For the dedication to Abbot (who had from 1611 been the archbishop of Canterbury, and whom Purchas was promoted to serve as chaplain before the 1614 second edition of his *Pilgrimage* was printed), see Samuel Purchas, “To the Most Reverend Father in God, George, By the Divine Providence, Lord Archbishop of Canterburie,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, unpaginated (after title page). See also “The Catalogue of Authors,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, unpaginated (after table of contents). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from the 1613 first edition of the *Pilgrimage*.

taken up instead with a torrent of detail gathered from a multitude of travel books about the myriad peoples who inhabited the various parts of the continent.¹⁰⁰

Early in the first chapter on Africa in his *Pilgrimage*, Purchas had already started to divide the continent into parts. He noted the four-part scheme that Leo had proposed but observed that Leo “thus excludeth Egypt” from Africa; and Leo himself had inserted into his work a final book on what he said was “that most noble and famous province.” Purchas still insisted that Leo had not covered the whole of the continent, though, and in this regard he followed John Pory. Even as he had brought the *Geographical Historie* before an English-speaking public, Pory had fastened upon its limited scope as a problem. He prefaced his translation with a “general description of all Africa” and “particular description” of the areas that Leo “hath left undescribed.” Pory here surveyed the stretch of the Guinea coast that lay to the south of the land of Negros, the western central kingdom of Congo, and the warring southeastern empires of Monomotapa and Mohenemugi. Purchas then took up the task of Pory, as he set out to complete the portrait of Africa that Leo had begun. The first book on Africa in his *Pilgrimage* was drawn for the most part from Leo as an account of the five northern regions of the continent. But in his second book Purchas suggested that what remained be divided into two more parts—which in total, Purchas observed, “make up seven parts of Africa.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 468. On the ancient “Africans,” see Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 527-533. For the pages that Purchas devoted to Africa, see Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 463-599; and the section on Africa had already swelled to one hundred and sixty pages in the second edition of the work: see Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, second ed. (London, 1614), 555-715.

¹⁰¹ Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 464; Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 296 (on Egypt, see Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 296-328); John Pory, “A generall description of all Africa,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 1-8, 1; John Pory, “A particular description of all the knowne borders, coastes and inlands of Africa, which John Leo hath left undescribed,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 8-57, 8; and Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 464. As if to draw attention to how partial his conception of the continent had been, the map of Africa that Pory in-

After the rejection of ancient fables about the Torrid Zone, this seven-part division of the continent would become the point of departure for English studies of Africa through the close of the seventeenth century.¹⁰² In the process, as with the tales of beastly peoples and semi-divine men, the deep coherence of the classical image was lost. Observers from England had come to believe that Africa was composed not of two parts but of many.

Nowhere was the fragmentation of Africa during this period more clearly rendered than in cartography. In context of the coherence their classical sources had ascribed to the peoples of Africa and surely also as a result of how little of the continent ancient travelers had seen, such early cartographers as Münster and Mercator had not carefully mapped the borders between regions. Their editions of Ptolemy had split the extended area below the strip of land along the northern coast into only three parts, two of which were themselves parts of Ethiopia. The “Africa Tabula Nova” published toward the end of Münster’s 1540 *Geography* was even less complex: in this still largely classical representation, there were no borders between regions; and “AETHIOPIA,” written in large print, stretched vaguely across the interior (see Figure 3).¹⁰³

cluded in his edition of Leo outlined the northwestern territory that Leo had described with a dotted line that encompassed well less than half of the land mass of the continent: see “Africa,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, unpaginated (before title page).

¹⁰² See (though each author would add that the islands that surrounded the continent amounted to an eighth and final part of Africa) Speed, *Most Famous Parts of the World*, 5; Heylyn, *Cosmographie*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 3; and Morden, *Geography Rectified*, 318-319—as well as for example Peter Heylyn, *Microcosmus, or A Little Description of the Great World* (London, 1621), 370; Lewes Roberts, *The Merchants Mappe of Commerce* (London, 1638), 67; and John Ogilby, *Africa* (London, 1670), 8-9.

¹⁰³ See “Africae Tabula IIII” in Gerardum Mercatorem, *Tabulae Geographicae Cl: Ptolemei admentem auctoris restitutæ & emendate* (1578), unpaginated (after fol. O).

In the second half of the sixteenth century, the influence of classical sources slowly declined, as maps of Africa made on the basis of recent travelers' reports began to appear in Europe. Perhaps the first of these was the one printed in the 1554 second edition of the Ramusio collection. This map followed Leo with labels for the four northwestern regions of Africa, but marked the rest of the continent as vaguely as had Münster, simply as Ethiopia. Toward the end of the century, the color editions of maps by Ortelius and Mercator became the first clearly to separate the whole of Africa into regions: Ortelius counted nine; Mercator had eleven. But it was in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, in the large-format separately published maps of the Dutchmen Blaeu and Hondius, that the division of Africa was made by cartographers with a precision that far exceeded that of authors such as Pory and Purchas in print. By the 1617 edition of Blaeu and that of Hondius from 1623 the continent was split into more than two dozen regions, each set off with borders drawn in green, yellow, orange, or purple. The works of Blaeu and Hondius became the models for John Speed's *Prospect of the most Famous Parts of the World*, which appeared in 1627 as the first atlas made by an Englishman. Its first edition was done in black and white and regions were indicated by name. But in 1662 the atlas was released in a color second state (Figure 7) that reproduced almost exactly from its predecessors the patchwork of regions that each imagined Africa to be.¹⁰⁴

In the year before the *Prospect* of Speed appeared, an early Hondius map of Africa was inserted into the fourth edition of the *Pilgrimage* of Purchas (Figure 8). In this black-

¹⁰⁴ The maps mentioned above appear in order in the cartobibliography by Betz as: "1554 Giovanni Battista Ramusio – Giacomo Gastaldi: Prima Tavola," in Betz, *Mapping of Africa*, 95-97; "1570 Abraham Ortelius: Africae Tabula Nova (Fifth State 1595)," in Betz, *Mapping of Africa*, 120-121; "1595 Gerard Mercator II: Africa," in Betz, *Mapping of Africa*, 162-165; "1617 Willem Janszoon (Blaeu): Africae nova descriptio," in Betz, *Mapping of Africa*, 225-228; "1623 Jodocus Hondius Jr.: Africae nova Tabula (Second State 1623)," in Betz, *Mapping of Africa*, 236; and "1626 John Speed: Africae, described, the manners of their Habits, and buildinge," in Betz, *Mapping of Africa*, 241-243.

and-white figure, regions were traced in thin lines that twisted and swirled throughout the continent. As did the cartographers of his generation, Purchas understood that to represent Africa was to arrange it into parts. In the text of his *Pilgrimage*, after he had concluded his circuit of the five parts that Leo had covered, he set out to describe the two that he thought Leo had left out. Here we will follow Purchas closely for the first time as we begin to ask what kind of parts these were, of which Africa was believed to be composed.

Purchas began this section of his book in what might have seemed to his readers a familiar region—in northern Ethiopia, within the empire of a “Christian Prince, called in Europe *Priest* or *Prester John*.”¹⁰⁵ In so doing Purchas turned for information to the first published report on northern Ethiopia written by a European who had traveled there. This was the work of a Portuguese priest named Francisco Alvarez, who served as ambassador to the court of Prester John between 1520 and 1526. His account appeared alongside that of Leo in the Ramusio collection; and this is where Hakluyt had encountered it, for before his death he had made from this edition an English translation, which Purchas excerpted at length in his *Pilgrimes*.¹⁰⁶

The broad aim of his voyage, Alvarez explained here, was to study how closely the practices of the Ethiopians “agree with Christian Religion.” But his specific intent was to meet Prester John; and after he had travelled through the various kingdoms of the empire

¹⁰⁵ Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 548. To be sure, Leo had been well aware that the northeastern region “called by the Latines *Aethiopia*” was inhabited for the most part by Christians under the rule of “an Emperour, which they call *Prete Gianni*.” But his four-part scheme of Africa, he reported, was drawn from African cosmographers; and these held that while the southern border of Africa was the Niger its eastern border was the Nile—so that the status of Egypt within Africa was ambiguous and Ethiopia, as Leo put it, was “not to be called any member or portion of Africa.” Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 3 (on the Nile, see Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 1).

¹⁰⁶ See Purchas, “[marginal note],” in “*The Voyage of Sir FRANCIS ALVAREZ*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 5, 2:1026-1027; as well as C. F. Beckingham, “North and north-east Africa and the Near and Middle East,” in *The Purchas Handbook: Studies of the life, times and writings of Samuel Purchas, 1577-1626*, ed. L. E. Pennington, 2 vols. (London, 1997), vol. 1, 219-240, 223.

for more than six months, when Alvarez was called to the capital, he was amazed. It was an entire moveable city made up of “an infinite number of Pavilions and Tents,” he wrote, which were woven in white velvet and silk and housed more than forty thousand inhabitants. As he was led through the court Alvarez took in the array of porters, guards, nobles, governors, judges, ambassadors, priests, and bishops as well as the lesser kings who paid to the emperor tributes of mules, horses, cotton, and gold. When he was admitted into the tent of the emperor he was led into one crowded torch-lit room and then another and here at last was Prester John. “He seemeth to be young,” Alvarez recalled; but “in his presence and pompe, he seemeth to be a great Lord, as in very deede he is.”¹⁰⁷

Toward the end of the sixteenth century, the important new descriptions of Africa by Lopes and van Linschoten departed briefly from their first-hand accounts of peoples on the western coast to expand upon Alvarez’s assessment of Prester John in the East. He was the “greatest and richest Prince in all *Africa*,” these authors agreed; and they spoke of an annual feast in which kings and nobles gathered from around the empire to pay tribute as a life-sized gold-and-ruby figure of the Virgin was paraded through crowds so dense that many spectators died of suffocation.¹⁰⁸ In their descriptions of the world John Thorie even reported that Prester John was “accounted to be one of the cheefest Monarchs of our time”

¹⁰⁷ “*The Voyage of Sir FRANCIS ALVAREZ, a Portugall Priest, made unto the Court of PRETE IANNI, the Great Christian Emperour of Ethiopia*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 5, 2:1026-1121, 1027, 1079, and 1079.

¹⁰⁸ Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 209 (van Linschoten, *Voyages into The Easte and West Indies*, trans. W. P., 214). The passage in van Linschoten on Prester John was copied almost exactly from that of Lopes. Lopes appears not to have visited northern Ethiopia, though, and what his *Report* did have to say about the region might well have been added by the Italian Pigafetta, working from sources in the Ramusio collection including Alvarez. See Theophile Simar, *Le Congo au XVIe Siècle d’après la Relation de Lopez-Pigafetta* (Brussels, 1919); and Francesc Relaño, “Against Ptolemy: The Significance of the Lopes-Pigafetta Map of Africa,” *Imago Mundi*, Vol. 47 (1995), 49-66.

and George Abbot remarked that he was “reputed to be one of the greatest Emperours of the world.”¹⁰⁹

In the decades after Alvarez returned to Portugal, however, the news began to circulate in Europe that disaster had befallen the empire of Prester John. Alvarez himself had noted that the eastern border of the empire, along the Horn of Africa, was home to several Muslim kingdoms, and that a certain general made annual raids from here during Lent in order to take advantage of the fasting Ethiopians. Then around the middle of the century, Portuguese envoys reported that the ruler whom Alvarez had visited had perished in a civil war and that his former lands had been plunged so deep into chaos by Muslim incursions that, as early as 1541, a sailor known as Don John of Castro lamented—in a narrative that Purchas would print in his *Pilgrimes* just after that of Alvarez—that he had seen “the ruine and losse of this Empire, in our unhappie dayes.” Lopes and van Linschoten were vaguely aware of such reports and so was John Pory.¹¹⁰ But none of these authors appears to have had any authority other than Alvarez upon which to rely for current information. Among English observers of Ethiopia, it was Purchas who first came to terms with “how that State decayed,” in his phrase.¹¹¹

Alvarez remained the author whom Purchas said that he had “chiefly followed” in the long account of northern Ethiopia in his *Pilgrimage*. Like Alvarez, Purchas praised the

¹⁰⁹ Thorie, *Theatre of the Earth*, Bir; and Abbot, *Briefe Description of the Whole Worlde*, Cviir.

¹¹⁰ “A Rutter of Don John of Castro, of the Voyage which the Portugals made from India to Zoez,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 6, 2:1122-1148, 1128. See Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 209-210; van Linschoten, *Voyages into The Easte and West Indies*, trans. W.P., 214; and Pory, “Particular description,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 16.

¹¹¹ Purchas, “[marginal note],” in “A Rutter of Don John of Castro,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 6, 2:1122. Pory, for example, cited Alvarez extensively in his account of “Abassia, or the empire of Prete Ianni” in Pory, “Particular description,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 12-19, and included here a summary of Alvarez from the Ramusio edition as “Certaine answeres of Don Francisco Alvarez . . . in the countrey of PRETE IANNI,” in Pory, “Particular description,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 20-25.

manner in which the people there “copiously and eloquently interpret the Scripture” and found the two principal cities “populous and magnificent,” with towers and temples “and the like tokens of Industrie, Antiquitie, and Maiestie.” But Purchas also scolded Alvarez for applying what he concluded had begun as the title of a medieval monarch in Asia to a modern African ruler whose own people had never called him Prester John, “only *Acegue*, which signifieth Emperour, and Negus, that is, King.” And to an extent that Alvarez had not done, Purchas fixed upon the elements of culture that the Ethiopians did not possess: they made little use of tablecloths, artillery, and wine; and although their land held silver and gold, “they have not Art to take it.” Not even in their major cities had they built walls to guard against Muslim invasion. Purchas came to believe that Alvarez had seen the Ethiopian empire at its height, when its interlocking orders of politics and religion still recalled the classical legends of the civilization at Meroë and the medieval and Renaissance tales of the Christian kingdom of Prester John. Now in their place Purchas saw only what he called “the uncivill customes whereinto wild Maiestie and barbarous Greatnesse . . . have degenerated.”¹¹²

A careful reader of Purchas here might well have been impressed at the drama that a single part of Africa could contain. When Alvarez had been there northern Ethiopia was to a great extent a coherent region: within the immense empire of Prester John the people all spoke what Alvarez called “the *Abissine* Tongue”; and salt was the common currency. During this period seventeen kingdoms paid tribute to the emperor—whose court, as Pory

¹¹² Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 565, 571, 571, 571, 562, and 564; and Purchas, “[marginal note],” in “*The Voyage of Sir FRANCIS ALVAREZ*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 5, 2:1027. After this point, the king of Ethiopia would never again widely be known to English authors as Prester John; and the title had disappeared as well by the time of the maps from Blaeu, Hondius, and Speed, each of whom simply referred to the region by what had become its more common title, Abissina. For a fuller treatment, see John Samuel Harpham, “The Late Career of Prester John” (research note: in progress).

put it, was “alwaies flitting up and downe” the countryside, “sometimes to one place, and sometimes to another.” Since then the empire had fractured, and at present only four kings remained loyal to the successor to the monarch whom Alvarez had known. “All things are brought almost to nothing,” Purchas wrote of the former empire in the third edition of his *Pilgrimage*, in 1617; and as a result northern Ethiopia had become not so much a coherent region as a scene of tumult, which extended from the coast along the Red Sea in the north to what were believed to be the deep inland sources of the Nile in the south.¹¹³

Far to the west of here, the land of Negros, according to Leo Africanus, was another part of Africa which was itself divided into parts. Leo had introduced into Western culture the notion that the peoples who lived along the Niger River were all inhabitants of a single region. But in the section of the *Geographical Historie* in which Leo came to discuss this region in detail, he made clear that what the peoples here had in common was no more important than what drew them apart. Four different languages were spoken among the Negros, he said; and while most were Muslims, there were also Christians as well as heathens of several kinds, who worshipped fire or the sun or who had no religion at all.¹¹⁴

The section on the land of Negros in his *Pilgrimage* came just before the account that Purchas gave of northern Ethiopia. But as the wild majesty and barbarous greatness of

¹¹³ “*The Voyage of Sir FRANCIS ALVAREZ*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 5, 2:1050; “Certaine answeres of Don Francisco Alvarez,” in Pory, “Particular description,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 20; and Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage, or Relations of the World and the Religions Observed in All Ages and Places Discovered*, third ed. (London, 1617), 854. For salt as the common currency in the empire of Prester John, see “*The Voyage of Sir FRANCIS ALVAREZ*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 5, 2:1055.

¹¹⁴ Leo’s account was reproduced in the Purchas collection in slightly abbreviated form as “Observations of Africa, taken out of *John Leo* his nine Bookes, translated by Master Pory,” in Purchas, *Pilgrimes*, bk. 6, capt. 1, 2: 749-851. For the section of the work on the land of Negros, see Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 284-296. On the languages spoken in the land of Negros, see Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 9; and on religions practiced here, see Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 285 (and on the mountaineers around Borno, to be discussed below, who alone among the inhabitants of the region “embrace no religion at all,” see Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 293).

the empire of Prester John had degenerated into uncivil customs, as Purchas put it, along the Niger the course of history had run in a very different direction. When first encountered by Muslims from northern Africa, the peoples in the land of Negros had “lived a brutish and savage life,” Leo wrote, in terms that resembled his description of their contemporary vices, “without any king, governour, common wealth, or knowledge of husbandrie.” Since then, however, many of them had formed complex societies on the basis of precisely those institutions. At present the Negros were subject to four main governors, but were in truth sorted into no fewer than fifteen kingdoms; and only in the course of his tour through these kingdoms had Leo discussed the habits of the peoples in each one of them in depth—the crops they grew, the clothes they wore, the houses they built, and in short the kinds of lives they led.¹¹⁵

On the outskirts of kingdoms such as Gago and Gaoga, Leo explained, the peoples were shepherds and farmers who lived in “forlorne and base cottages” made of chalk and thatch that were gathered together into hamlets and villages. The inhabitants of Gago were “ignorant and rude,” according to Leo; those of Gaoga were “rusticall and savage.” In the mountains of Borno, where no proper names were used and wives and children were held in common, the people lived “after a brutish manner” that most closely recalled that of their earliest ancestors in the land of Negros. In the capital cities of kingdoms such as Nubia, though, there were “exceeding rich and civill people” who were known to “excell all other Negros in witte, civilitie, and industry,” as Leo said of the natives of Melli. The lands here yielded cotton, lemons, and rice; and merchants exchanged these and other goods such as

¹¹⁵ Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 284. On the four main governors in the land of Negros, see Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 5. Writing in 1966, David Brion Davis remarked with evident surprise that “it was known two centuries ago that Negroes lived in settled, agricultural societies.” But this clearly was known to English observers far earlier, by around the turn of the seventeenth century. David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1966), 465.

ivory for horses, spices, and cloth from the other regions of Africa. In the famous trading center of Tombuto (or Timbuktu) there was “great store,” as Leo put it, “of doctors, judges, priests, and other learned men.” And there was a temple here that Leo admired whose walls, like those of monasteries that Alvarez had seen chiselled into the mountainsides in Ethiopia, were built of stone and lime.¹¹⁶

In the first book of the *Geographical Historie* Leo had pioneered the modern division of Africa into regions. But even Leo was thus convinced that the real site of African life was not the region but rather the kingdom, the bounded local communities that spread throughout the continent.¹¹⁷

English observers such as Pory and Purchas had learned from Leo to divide Africa into several principal parts, and they took from him as well this attention to the distinctive features of the many parts of which these parts were composed. Indeed Pory and Purchas agreed that there were at least five parts of the seventh and final region of Africa. Called in geographical terms “*Æthiopia Exterior, or Inferior*” in contrast to “*Æthiopia Superior*” to the north, this was “that Southerly Tract of Africa,” Purchas said, which ran along the coast in a long upside-down arc bordered to the inland side by the southern reaches of the former empire of Prester John. It started, in its northeastern corner, in the fertile Muslim lands of Aian; continued southward along the Red Sea into the wealthy corridor of Zanzibar, where Portuguese ships put in on their way to the East Indies; and extended down to the Cape of Good Hope, where the people were wild and rough, called Caphars after the

¹¹⁶ Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 291, 289, 294, 293, 295, 287, and 288.

¹¹⁷ On the view of Africa developed in the *Geographical Historie*, see Davis, *Trickster Travels*, 125-152. For a perceptive treatment of “what is crucial to this text and its early modern ethnogeographic vision . . . : its insistence on the primacy and contingency of Africa’s discrete communities,” see Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor*, 138-154 (quoted phrase appears on 150).

Arab term for “lawlesse people,” according to Purchas. Northward from the Cape was the gold-rich mining empire of Monomotapa, whose wars against the empire of Mohenemugi were said by Pory to be “the most desperate and doubtfull battailes, that are performed in all those southern parts.”¹¹⁸

Several of the parts of southern Ethiopia were further divided into parts. Aian held two kingdoms, Adel and Adea: the king of Adel was renowned for what Purchas called his “Continuall warres” against the Christian king of Ethiopia; the king of Adea paid tribute to that same king. Zanzibar had the kingdoms of “Melinde, Mombaza, Quiloa, Mosambique, and others.”¹¹⁹ But nowhere was the division of Africa more intricately conceived than in the final part of the final region of the continent, the kingdom of Congo, which sat along and inland from the Atlantic coast and extended from the land of the Caphars in the south almost to the Bight of Biafra in the north. The most important source on Congo through the first half of the seventeenth century was the *Report* of Duarte Lopes—which Purchas printed in excerpt in his *Pilgrimes* just over a quarter century after it had first appeared in English. The structure of Congo was as complex as that of any region, and Lopes devoted much of his study to working it out with precision.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 572; Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 578; and Pory, “Particular description,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 32. Among contemporary English sources, the areas of the seventh region of Africa mentioned in this paragraph received most thorough treatment in Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 186-217; van Linschoten, *Voyages into the Easte and West Indies*, trans. W. P., 7-11 and 210-214; Pory, “Particular description,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 25-36; Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 580 (and in its expanded form: Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* [1626], 754-764); “Collections out of the Voyage and Historie of Friar Ioaõ dos Sanctos his *Æthiopia Orientalis*, & *Varia Historia*, and out of other *Portugals*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 9, ch. 12, 2: 1535-1567, 1535-1558; and Roberts, *Merchants Mappe of Commerce*, 88-92.

¹¹⁹ Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 572 and 572.

¹²⁰ For the excerpt in the *Pilgrimes*, see “*A Report of the Kingdome of Congo, a Region of Affrica: Gathered by Philipppo Pigafetta, out of the Discourses of Master Edward Lopes a Portugall, translated out of Italian into English, by Master Abraham Hartwell, and here abbreviated*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, ch. 4, 2: 986-1026. For the debt they acknowledged to Lopes in their own accounts of Congo, see van

To the south of Congo, Lopes began, was Angola, whose ruler had long been subject to the king of Congo but had rebelled and was “a great Prince, & a rich” and “an ally and not a vassal of the king.” Congo proper was made up of six provinces, each under the rule of its own lord. The province of Bamba on the Angola border was the largest and most populous of these; but there were as well the provinces of Songo, Sundi, Pango, and Batta. The people of Batta in the east were “farre more rude and rusticall” than those in the rest of the kingdom, Lopes reported. To the east of Batta, in the western reaches of the empire of Mohenemugi, there roamed a fierce nomadic people called the Gagas. But back in the center of the kingdom the final province of Congo was Pemba. And here, on a mountain built up with the houses and villages of one hundred thousand inhabitants, looking out over valleys planted with grain and maize and palm trees among the palaces of the nobles, was the royal city of San Salvatore. Unlike the province to which it nevertheless belonged, San Salvatore was under the direct rule of the king. It was thus, by the count that Purchas kept, a seventh part of the sixth part of the seventh part of the continent.¹²¹

The *Pilgrimage* of Samuel Purchas, like the studies that he printed in his *Pilgrimes*, formed one long record of the fullness of Africa. It was twice as large as Europe, he noted; and although there were deserts such as the Sahara and mountains in Sierra Leone and just above the Cape of Good Hope that were, he wrote, “beyond admiration for barrennesse,”

Linschoten, *Voyages into the Easte and West Indies*, trans. W. P., 205; Pory, “Particular description,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 41; and Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 580 (see, for an account of Congo that was in turn drawn from that of Purchas, Heylyn, *Microcosmus* [1621], 386-387).

¹²¹ Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 44, 21, and 103. On “the confines of the kingdome of Congo towards the South,” in which Angola in particular was discussed, see 43-58. For the survey of “the sixe Provinces of the kingdome of Congo,” see 60-106. On the “Royall Cittie of the Kingdome of Congo,” see 107-117.

the continent was elsewhere “both fruitfull and populous.” Recent observers had marveled at how many people lived within these fruitful areas. Their numbers at times seemed almost beyond measure. Pory had written that throughout the countryside in the empire of Prester John there were “verie manie villages, and infinite numbers of people.” Angola was “full of people beyonde all credite,” according to Lopes, for its king could summon an army “to the number of a Million of soules.” Some authors supposed that beyond the reach of their knowledge the peoples of Africa spread without end into the interior. South of the Niger, Leo said, there were “infinite nations unknowen to us”; and among the lakes near Mohenemugi, Purchas listed “other Kingdomes, of which we have little but the names to relate, Gorova, Colta, Anzuga, Moneulo, Baduis.”¹²²

Perhaps no other remarks more clearly indicate how thoroughly the classical view of Africa had by this time been turned on its head. Observers in the tradition of Pliny had long assumed that the areas to which Leo and Purchas here referred, since they lay below the Equator, were all but “voide of enhabitautes,” as William Waterman put it in 1555. And now, on the basis of little more direct information than Waterman had possessed, the best authors in Europe had begun to imagine that inner Africa was not void of inhabitants but full of them.

This principle of plenitude was followed as well in cartography of the period. The maps of Blaeu, Hondius, and Speed were marked with the borders set down between more than two dozen regions. These regions were in turn drawn over with the titles of empires

¹²² Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, third ed. (London, 1617), 704; Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1613), 464 (see also Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* [1617], 704); Pory, “Particular description,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 20; Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 54; Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 285; and Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1613), 574 (see also, for his confession that there were in mountains around Monomotapa the kingdoms of “Matana, Melemba, Quinbebe, Berteca, Bavagul, of which I can give you but the names,” Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 578).

and kingdoms, and dotted with names and in many cases miniature castles for what in total came to well over one hundred cities. The spaces in between were in many places taken up with deserts, mountains, rivers, and lakes. The side edges of these maps were lined with figures of peoples from ten regions of the continent, from Morocco to Senegal to Guinea. The top edge in Speed's maps was lined with models of eight cities. The mid-century productions of Robert Walton (Figure 9) and John Overton, whose renderings of the continent in large part resembled that of Speed, added models of cities on their bottom edges and in addition inserted the portraits of such kings as those of Abissina and Congo.¹²³

The cartographers of this period, as Purchas had done, sometimes placed peoples who existed only in rumor in areas that were not well known. They fixed the Garamantes of Plinian lore in inner Libya, for example; and they reported that the mythical Amazons were "sayd to inhabit," in the phrase of both Speed and Walton, the lowlands between the two southern lakes in which the Nile was believed to begin. And finally in other obscure locales these mapmakers placed animals. After Blaeu and Hondius, Speed had elephants, ostriches, lions, a zebra, a monkey, and even a dragon in an arc that led from the Bight of Biafra northeast into Nubia and west to the Atlantic. Walton had fewer animals, but even he retained an elephant, a lion, a horse, and a camel. In 1733, Jonathan Swift would write acidly of practitioners in this tradition, "So Geographers in *Afric*-Maps/With Savage-Pictures fill their Gaps;/And o'er unhabitable Downs/Place Elephants for want of Towns."¹²⁴

¹²³ References for the maps mentioned here by Hondius, Blaeu, and Speed appear above in fn. 104. For the maps of Walton and Overton, see "1658 Robert Walton: A New, Plaine, & Exact Mapp of Africa," in Betz, *Mapping of Africa*, 302-303; and "1668 John Overton: A New and most Exact map of AFRICA," in Betz, *Mapping of Africa*, 350-351. Both maps were drawn from one by Pieter van den Keere, which was in turn copied from a Hondius map similar to the one that would become the most direct model for Speed: see "1614 Pieter van den Keere, Amsterdam: AFRICAE NOVA DESCR.," in Betz, *Mapping of Africa*, 54-56; and "1606 Jodocus Hondius, Amsterdam: NOVA AFRICÆ TABULA," in Betz, *Mapping of Africa*, 51-53.

¹²⁴ Jonathan Swift, *On Poetry: A Rhapsody* (London, 1733), 12: 176-179.

In a sense of course he was correct. But what Swift seems not to have perceived was that the “Savage-Pictures” in “*Afric-Maps*” served only as details used to complete the image of the continent as a scene of abundance and activity that would have been familiar to any reader of Purchas.

It is thus not only a measure of changes in the practice of cartography, which as a field came over time to acknowledge how little of Africa had been explored, but also in the perception among the English of what there was to be found there, that by the early to mid-nineteenth-century works of Cary, Hall, and Arrowsmith (see Figure 10) the interior had been so hollowed out that one might well have gathered from studying a map, as Conrad’s Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* notably did as a child, that inner Africa was “the biggest—the most blank, so to speak,” of the “blank spaces on the earth.”¹²⁵ Purchas and his colleagues could have said nothing of the kind.

After he had finished the survey of Congo in his *Pilgrimage*, Purchas moved north into Loango where the people were “altogether of the same nature, whereof the people of *Congo* are,” according to Lopes, then touched upon the Anzigues who were, in the phrase of Purchas, “the cruellest Canniballs, which the Sunne looketh on.” And then with his tour of Africa at an end, as Purchas turned to a brief final two chapters on the islands around the continent, he reflected upon what he said had been the “long and tedious Journey over Land, where the steepe and Snowie Mountains, the myrie and unholosome Valleyes, the unpassable Wildernesses, swift Rivers, still Lakes, thicke Woods, and varietie of the Con-

¹²⁵ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Paul B. Armstrong (New York, 2006; orig. pub. 1899), 8. See for example the entries for Cary, Hall, and Arrowsmith in R. V. Tooley, *Collectors’ Guide to Maps of the African Continent and Southern Africa* (London, 1969), 35 (and Plate 24), 48 (and Plate 37), and 15-21.

tinents” had “thus long whiled us.”¹²⁶ As in the landscape, variety had been the rule among the peoples of Africa.

The most elemental features of their lives attested to the variety of their experience. The materials from which they made their houses and clothes differed from place to place, as is evident in the figures on the edges of the maps by Speed and Walton. The languages that were known in Europe to be spoken among the peoples of Africa differed widely too. The Christians in northern Ethiopia spoke Abissin, while Muslims along the eastern coast had developed what one English traveler called “a mish-mash of *Arabick* and *Portuguese*.” The natives of Angola and Congo shared a common vocabulary but struggled to communicate because their accents differed—and neither could understand the Anziques. Among the Negroes could be heard Sungai, Guber, and Borno as well as what Leo said was the mix spoken in Nubia of the “Chaldean, Arabian, & Egyptian toongs.” Moreover the variety of currencies used in Africa resembled the variety of languages. The shells of cockles were used along the Niger, and the shells of a kind of snail called lumaches were used in Congo. The money in Angola was beads of glass, and in Mohelemugi it was red beads of clay. In Zanzibar gold was accepted, as it was in areas of northern Ethiopia, although salt was the more common form of currency here.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 31; and Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 588 and 592.

¹²⁷ Thomas Herbert, *Some Yeares Travels into Divers Parts of Asia and Afrique* (London, 1638; orig. pub. 1634), 27; and Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 9. For the other references see in order for example “*The Voyage of Sir FRANCIS ALVAREZ*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 5, 2: 1050; Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 57 and 37; Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 24 (copied in Roberts, *Merchants Mappe of Commerce*, 85-86) and 56; Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 574; and “*The Voyage of Sir FRANCIS ALVAREZ*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 5, 2: 1043 and 1055. On currency, see also for example Jan S. Hogendorn, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade* (New York, 1986).

Faced with such an array, European observers never attempted to fashion a single, essential image from their impressions of the peoples of Africa. They rarely even paused to express surprise at how unlike one another the Africans seemed to be. Authors such as Purchas poured their tremendous descriptive energy instead into accounts of the customs particular to one people—and then another and another. The great Italian Giovanni Botero was an author in this mold. In his *Relations, of the most Famous Kingdoms and Common-weales thorough the World*, first translated in 1601, after he had drawn upon Leo in order to describe several kingdoms along the Niger, Botero announced that he would say nothing of the others. “For nothing can be spoken to,” he wrote, “but their barrennesse or fertility, their poverty or riches, blessinges and curses, peculier more or lesse to every Nation.”¹²⁸ As Botero proceeded to discuss the other areas of Africa, he made clear that what had been true in the land of Negros was the case on an ever greater scale throughout the continent.

But now that they have been made so clear to us, we should observe in closing that the varieties of African life were patterned after a single model; and in a word that model was Europe. Earlier authors such as Richard Eden had learned from ancient texts to define Africa according to the tenets of European civilization that it lacked. The beliefs, customs, and institutions that made Europe civil were on this account exactly the ones that, beyond the marvelous empire of Prester John, Africa did not possess. So complete was their deficiency in the minds of such observers that the peoples of Africa were often said to be not only different but almost inhuman. The consensus that had held this to be so had begun to unravel in England around the turn of the seventeenth century when the news was received

¹²⁸ Giovanni Botero, *Relations, of the most Famous Kingdoms and Common-weales thorough the World*, trans. Robert Johnson, second ed. (London, 1608; orig. pub. 1601), 174. The passage on the land of Negros in which the quoted sentence appeared had not been printed in the shorter first English edition of the work. Heylyn would repeat this sentence without attribution in Heylyn, *Cosmographie*, 4.2: 57.

that travelers to the western coast had not found there “any other people then such as our selves are,” in the phrase of John Speed. By the early decades of the new century, the negative formula that Eden had endorsed had all but disappeared from informed discourse in England or endured, as in Leo’s work on the land of Negros, only in reference to Africans in the distant past. Scholars have long noted that early English and Iberian authors tended to describe the natives of America in terms of analogies and resemblances to themselves; and by the time of Purchas, a similar habit had taken root among observers of the natives of Africa.¹²⁹

This is not of course to hold that the English believed that African cultures resembled their own in any precise sense. The aspects of difference between them were always clear; and in particular in matters of religion the contrast between the Christians of Europe and the heathens and idolaters of Africa was said to be absolute and, by some observers, perhaps even irredeemable.¹³⁰ What the English recognized in Africa, though, was a part of the world that they thought they could understand, that answered to the same terms and categories that they had developed in order to set out the basic structure of their own part of the world.

Almost none of the Africans spoke English, but they did have systems of communication that the English recognized as languages. They did not use minted coins, but their

¹²⁹ See Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, P.A., 1964); J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492-1650* (Cambridge, U.K., 1970); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580-1640* (Totowa, N.J., 1975); Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Anthropology* (Cambridge, U.K., 1982); Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, C.T., 1993); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2000); and Joyce E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge, M.A., 2001), 7-198.

¹³⁰ On this point, see Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660* (New York, 2007), 294-312.

tokens of exchange were understood to be kinds of money. In the early years of European contact, they seemed hardly to know how to trade goods; but over time they learned, and by 1623 the captain of a voyage up the Gambia, which was said to flow out of the Niger, could report that the peoples there had engaged him in “the auncient and free Commerce, that uniteth nations.” The parallels that authors in Europe were eager to discern between themselves and the Africans are best seen in what were taken to be the forms in Africa of social and political organization. The continent was divided into extended regions, which held empires and kingdoms. The borders between kingdoms were neatly drawn, such that “the difference betweene them,” as Lopes said of Angola and Congo, was “as it commonly is betweene two nations that border one upon another, as for example betweene the *Portingalles* and the *Castilians*.” The nations of Africa were made up of provinces, cities, and villages; and their rules were called emperors, kings, governors, princes, and nobles.¹³¹

It is a telling fact that the survey of Africa written on the Continent to which Pory and Purchas were most indebted was that of Giovanni Botero. For as his title indicated, the premise of Botero’s work was that the kingdoms and commonwealths of Africa could be compared to those that there were throughout the world. They could be incorporated into

¹³¹ Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade: or, A Discovery of the River Gambra* (London, 1623), 161; and Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 57. Other observers of the progress that Africans along the western coast had made in trade with Europeans went so far as to say that they had come to “make triall of all other wares, as curiously as in *Europe* is done,” or that when they purchased foreign goods they now were “found to have as good judgement in them as the sellers themselves.” [Pieter de Marees], “*A description and historicall declaration of the golden Kingdome of Guinea*,” trans. (from Dutch) G. Artus Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 926-970, 939; and Roberts, *Merchants Mappe of Commerce*, 86.

existing conceptions of how people tended to live. They fit within a scheme of human life that European authors supposed to be more or less universal.¹³²

And in particular there was one more feature of African life that such authors found familiar. Across the continent there were peoples whom they had seen or read about who held and traded some persons as slaves.

Startlingly, the classical descriptions produced in the sixteenth century had never mentioned slavery in Africa, either among the beastly peoples in the west and south or in the semi-divine culture that flourished in the east. In a theme that he had taken from Diodorus, Waterman had noted that the powerful civilization at Meroë had never been “under the bondage of any” but was “ever a free nacion.” Into the seventeenth century, observers continued to remark that certain African peoples led lives which were beastly or brutish in some respect: the mountaineers around Borno, who did not use proper names and held wives and children in common, were included in this order; and so were the cannibalistic Gagas and Anzigues around Congo, the lawless Caphars at the Cape of Good Hope, and the herdsmen Fulbies along the Gambia who had become so familiar with their cattle that they took no notice of their flies.¹³³ But for the most part these peoples were not known to practice slavery.

The slaves in Africa circulated almost entirely among the societies that seemed to European authors most complex, most civil, and indeed most similar to their own; and here such authors found it as easy to see that there were slaves as that there were language, cur-

¹³² In turn the work on the Continent whose African materials followed those of Botero most closely during this period was Pierre D’Avity, *The Estates, Empires, & Principallities of the World*, trans. (from French) Edward Grimeston (London, 1615), 1077-1107.

¹³³ The mountaineers around Borno as well as the Giacguas, Anzigues, and Caphars are mentioned above; but for a rare account of “the poore *Fulbies* life, whereunto he is so enured, that in a manner he is become bestiall,” see Jobson, *Golden Trade*, 35.

rency, and kings. They could even see that it was in the working out of such institutions of civil life that some persons were enslaved. And so although scholars have argued that the cultural context in which the English African slave trade began was marked above all by perception of difference and debasement, we have now begun to establish that this was not the case. That, we might pause for a moment to appreciate, is one of the terrible ironies in our collective past.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Sources of African Slavery, II

Around the same time that English observers became aware that certain African peoples held slaves, they learned of certain peoples in America who did not. Michel de Montaigne had made one such people the subject of his essay “Of Caniballes,” which was printed in English in the popular 1603 edition of John Florio. Montaigne reported here on a nation in Brazil whose culture was so simple as could only be described in lists of what they did not have. They had “no kinde of traffike,” he wrote, “no knowledge of Letters, no intelligence of numbers.” There was among them neither riches nor poverty, “no name of magistrate, nor of politike superioritie,” and they had “no use of service.” Montaigne meant by this final item that his subjects lacked servants under contract of the kind who tended his estate in Bordeaux—“contracts” were after all one more item they were said not to possess—but he soon made clear that they also lacked slaves. For as we have seen, the principal source of slavery in the early-modern Atlantic world was understood to be captivity in war. And what made this a nation of cannibals was that they ate their captives.¹³⁴

One early reader of Montaigne was Shakespeare, who read the essay on cannibals in the Florio translation. In *The Tempest*, which was first performed in 1611, Shakespeare

¹³⁴ Michaell de Montaigne, “Of Caniballes,” in Michaell de Montaigne, *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses*, trans. John Florio (London, 1603), 100-107, 102. Montaigne claimed that he had learned all that he related about the cannibals of Brazil from a servant of his who had lived there (see Montaigne, *Essayes*, 100-101); but his negative formula drew upon an old method in European representations of foreign peoples (see Margaret T. Hodgen, “Montaigne and Shakespeare Again,” *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 1 [Nov., 1952], 23-42), and that passages in his description closely resemble passages in recent travelers’ reports from Brazil by André Thevet, Nicolas Barré, and Jean de Léry is shown in Bernard Weinberg, “Montaigne’s Readings for *Des Cannibales*,” in *Renaissance and Other Studies in Honor of William Leon Wiley*, ed. George Bernard Daniel, Jr. (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968), 261-279.

had the old counselor Gonzalo imagine himself as the ruler of a commonwealth upon the Mediterranean island where he has been shipwrecked. He would “(by contraries)/Execute all things,” he declares; and as in the Brazil of Montaigne, there is on the island of Gonzalo no commerce, letters, magistrates, contracts, or “use of service”—as well as labor, agriculture, “Mettall, Corne, or wine.” The report of Montaigne had thus become the model for the utopia of Shakespeare: both were communities defined by the absence of elements of European culture, ones framed in the phrase of Gonzalo “by contraries.”¹³⁵

In the decades after Shakespeare, the themes of Montaigne’s essay would be taken up by actual observers of America. The most important of these was the Dominican missionary Jean Baptiste Du Tertre, whose *General History* of the Lesser Antilles appeared in French in 1654. In his account of the native Caribs, Du Tertre recalled the negative method of Montaigne: they wore no clothes, he noted, contracted no diseases, organized no police, acquired no luxury, and had never been trained in the *sciences humaines*. The Caribs were “all equal,” Du Tertre continued, “without any sort of superiority or of servitude.” They did hold slaves; but there could not have been many of these since, according to Du Tertre, the Caribs ate the men they captured in war and only enslaved the women, whose offspring they also would consume.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, in *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London, 1623), 1-19, 7. See Hodgen, “Montaigne and Shakespeare Again”; and Kenji Go, “Montaigne’s ‘Cannibals’ and ‘The Tempest’ Revisited,” *Studies in Philology*, vol. 109, no. 4 (Summer, 2012), 455-473.

¹³⁶ Jean Baptiste Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale, des isles de S. Christophe, de la Guadeloupe, de la Martinique, et autres dans l’Amerique* (Paris, 1654), 397 (trans. present author). For a general description of the Caribs, see Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale*, 396-400; and for an account of their treatment of captives, see Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale*, 449-453. Du Tertre was an important source for Charles de Rochefort, *Histoire naturelle et morale des iles Antilles de l’Amerique* (1658), which was brought into English in 1666, as well as for the compilation that appeared as Thomas Jefferys, *Natural and Civil History of the French Dominions in North and South America* (London, 1760). Jefferys for example noted that “the Caribbeans” had had no notion of “superiority, or of any servitude, till corrupted by *European* example”; and although he disagreed with Du Tertre that they were cannibals, he did observe that they “seldom troubl[ed] themselves with making prisoners.” Jefferys, *Natural and Civil History*, 179 and 181.

As well as a method of description, the accounts of Montaigne and Du Tertre also shared a common premise. Both authors believed that their subjects existed in the state of nature, the original condition of the species before humans had begun to alter and develop the bare aspect of Creation. The Brazilians of Montaigne and the Caribs of Du Tertre were thus without not only elements of culture but human culture as such. All they had, according to Montaigne, was “that which nature doth plainely imparte unto all creatures, even as she brings them into the world”: they were “as nature made them,” Du Tertre wrote, “that is to say, in a great natural simplicity and *naïfveté*.”¹³⁷ And it was seen as one feature of their simplicity that neither people had formed themselves into a stable hierarchical order and that, in this context, neither one held servants or any substantial number of slaves.

In the eighteenth century, the great theorist of the state of nature was Rousseau. He proposed, in the 1755 *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*, that the original condition of mankind was an earlier and even simpler one than previous authors had imagined. Natural man, according to Rousseau, had no notion of morals, family, or even language—for above all he and his kind were solitary creatures “scattered in the Woods among the Animals.” After a time such creatures had gathered together into little communities, and in some remote areas these had survived down to the present day. Drawing upon Du Tertre, Rousseau said that the Caribs were one such community: “of all existing Peoples,” he wrote, they had “so far deviated least from the state of Nature.” But elsewhere the species had continued to progress. Metallurgy and agriculture were invented and systems of labor were established in order to cultivate the land. Property followed and soon states were formed in attempts by the wealthy to secure their newfound luxury. In the

¹³⁷ Montaigne, “Of Caniballes,” in Montaigne, *Essayes*, trans. Florio, 104; and Du Tertre, *Histoire Generale*, 397 (trans. present author).

process men were divided into rich and poor, ruler and ruled, and master and slave—which was “the last degree of inequality” and for this reason, Rousseau insisted again and again, the relation characteristic of modern life.¹³⁸

For Rousseau, in short, to give an account of how humans became modern was to tell the story of the rise of slavery. And in his sense of slavery as a mark of the ambivalent progress of the species, Rousseau reflected upon a theme that had run as well through the early-modern English accounts of Africa.

Like the natural men of Montaigne and Du Tertre, the peoples of Africa to the west and south of the empire of Prester John were noted in the earliest records for the deficiency of their form of life. They lacked the basic structure of law and commonwealth, according to the sixteenth-century compiler Richard Eden, and had no “other knowlege of god,” he said, “then by the lawe of nature.” These peoples were not known to hold or trade slaves, and in this respect too they resembled the Americans whom Montaigne and Du Tertre had described. In the first quarter of the seventeenth century, however, travelers’ reports began to stream back into England that carried a new view of Africa. The inhabitants of the continent were not portrayed in these works “by contraries,” as Shakespeare’s Gonzalo might have put it, and were understood to have developed a form of life that was varied and unusual but in essential respects civil by the standards of Europe. And it was in these same works that English observers would first have learned that many of the peoples of Africa held slaves and had proved eager to trade them for other goods along the coasts.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Jean Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men,” in *Rousseau: The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, U.K., 1997), 111-222, 144, 156 (see also 196), and 182 (see also for example 173 and 185). The Gourevitch translation is carefully done from the standard Pléiade edition of the *Oeuvres Complètes*.

¹³⁹ Rycharde Eden, “A breefe description of Affrike,” in Peter Martyr, *The Decades of the Newe Worlde or West India*, trans. (from Latin) Rycharde Eden (Londini, 1555), 344r-345r, 344v.

In the previous chapter we traced the gradual emergence of this new view of Africa; and here we will show how slavery was thought to arise in African life. In so doing we will expand upon the irony introduced at the close of the previous chapter that slavery was said to have its sources in the attempts to maintain order in civil societies rather than in the absence of order in primitive ones.

This irony was most vividly presented in the first half of the seventeenth century in the works written and edited by Samuel Purchas. His survey of peoples of the world, titled the *Pilgrimage* and printed in four editions between 1613 and 1626, remained during this time by far the most detailed study of its kind. The main other English effort in the genre, the 1621 *Microcosmus* of Peter Heylyn, was seen even by its author as little more than an abstract of its sources, Purchas chief among them, as numerous unannotated marginal references made clear. In turn the 1625 *Pilgrimes* of Purchas, his vast collection of travelers' reports, was when printed the largest work ever set for an English press. Its two books on Africa brought the studies of such authors as Leo Africanus and Duarte Lopes into broader circulation and those of such authors as Francisco Alvarez and Don John of Castro, chroniclers of the decline of the Ethiopian empire, into English for the first time. In the quarter century after the *Pilgrimes* appeared, no significant new account of the areas south of the Senegal River would be printed in England. As English ships began regularly to sail from Africa with persons held as slaves, the works of Purchas continued as the best sources of information about the kinds of lives that had led these persons to this point.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Heylyn did note of his book that, while "the matter I derive from others, the wordes for the most part are mine owne." Peter Heylyn, *Microcosmus, or A Little Description of the Great World* (Oxford, 1621), Pref-

The works of Purchas contained, as in the previous chapter we began to see, a torrent of information about almost every aspect of African life. They treated in perfect detail among other issues the manner in which Africans greeted visitors, the quality of the bread and wine they made, the animals they kept among them, the poisons they most feared, the vessels they built to navigate the rivers that ran through their lands, the festivals they held, and the lutes they fashioned out of gourds strung with threads of wood or rushes or hairs from the tail of an elephant. Like many of his sources, Purchas took an intimate interest in African religion. Perhaps above all, though, the works he wrote and edited were concerned with the state—the forms of government that had been established across the continent.

It was in the context of the state that Purchas and his contemporaries believed that slavery arose in African life. Even more than the old empire of Prester John or the kingdom of Congo, the region in which these authors had closely observed the structure of the state was the long Guinea littoral that stretched along the western coast from the Senegal River in the northwest to the Bight of Benin in the southeast. And so here is where we will begin our inquiry into what were understood to be the sources of African slavery.

From their early voyages to Guinea, in the sixteenth century, English travelers had studied the forms of government there. They had learned, to begin, that the men who controlled trade in many areas were called captains. These were rulers of the villages that lay along the shore; and they were also called *alcaldes*, meaning representatives, as their main role was to represent the interests of a king who lived in a town farther inland. The early

ace. References in the section of the work on Africa were principally to descriptions of the world by Botero and Abbot as well as that of Purchas. On Heylyn's sources, see Robert Mayhew, "Mapping Science's Imagined Community: Geography as a Republic of Letters, 1600-1800," *The British Journal for the History of Science*, vol. 38, no. 1 (Mar., 2005), 73-92. On the early development of the field in England, see E. G. R. Taylor, *Late Tudor and Early Stuart Geography, 1583-1650* (London, 1934); John Parker, *Books to Build an Empire: A Bibliographical History of English Overseas Interests to 1620* (Amsterdam, 1965); and Lesley B. Cormack, *Charting an Empire: Geography at the English Universities, 1580-1620* (Chicago, 1997).

English travelers whose accounts were published in the Hakluyt collection often dealt with captains as well as small independent traders. It was in part because they seemed to have abducted the son of a captain at Shamma, in 1554, that the company of Robert Gainsh had so offended the natives there. Only rarely during this period were the English led into the interior to meet with kings, whom they found on these occasions seated in “a great hounge haule longe and wyde” or settled within a walled city “as bigge in circuite as London.”¹⁴¹

To initiate a trade in gold with kings deep in the interior was precisely the ambition of Richard Jobson, whose 1623 *Golden Trade; or, A Discovery of the River Gambia* was a record of the attempt. As he rowed up the Gambia, or Gambia, which ran parallel to the Senegal and cut east into the continent, Jobson found very little gold; but he did discover that there was one more layer in the structure of local government that earlier Englishmen in Guinea had not known. There were “petty Kings,” he said, and then there were “great Kings.” Leo Africanus had reported that most of the kings along the Niger, just to the north and east of the Gambia, had recently been brought under the rule of the king of Tombuto and made to pay him tribute. And in a similar fashion, according to Jobson, the six petty kings with whom he had traded “have all reference,” or were in turn subject, to three great kings who lived even farther inland and whom Jobson confessed he had never seen.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ “The fyrst vyage to Guinea,” in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 346v (see in Hakluyt “The first voyage to Guinea, and Benin,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* [1589], 86); and Towerson, “The second voyage made by M. William Towrson to the coast of Guinea,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 118. For trade with captains along the coast of Guinea, see for example Towerson, “The first voyage made by M. William Towrson Marchant of London,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 101-102 and 106-107; Towerson, “The second voyage made by M. William Towrson to the coast of Guinea,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 115-116 and 119; and “The voyage of Richard Rainolds and Thomas Dassel,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1599), vol. 2, pt. 2, 189. For trade with kings, see also for example “The voyage of Richard Rainolds and Thomas Dassel,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1599), vol. 2, pt. 2, 190.

¹⁴² Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade: or, A Discovery of the River Gambia* (London, 1623), 47, 48, and 47. Jobson also made frequent reference to the hierarchy of kings in the extract from his voyage journal that Purchas printed as Richard Jobson, “A True Relation of Master RICHARD JOBSONS Voyage,” in Purchas,

A short extract from the journal that Jobson had kept during his voyage was printed in the *Pilgrimes* of Samuel Purchas, but the most thorough account of Guinea to appear in that collection was translated from the Dutchman Pieter de Marees. The *description and historicall declaration of the golden Kingdome of Guinea* (as Purchas called it) had first been printed in Amsterdam in 1602 and would continue as an important source of English opinion on the area well into the second half of the century. Like his English colleagues, de Marees noted that kings in towns in the interior commanded captains in villages along the shore. Like Jobson, he observed a hierarchy that held even among kings. To an extent that no English author had done, though, de Marees—who wrote during the first period of intense Dutch interest in West African trade—was able to elaborate upon the entire structure of government that obtained within the great inland kingdoms of Guinea.¹⁴³

In the areas along the Gambia where Jobson had traded, the office of the king was passed down in a line from brother to brother and father to son; but in the parts of Guinea that were familiar to de Marees, when one king died “the common people” would “choose another to governe them, and to possesse the Kingdome.” The kingdom he then possessed included a palace, which centered on a court, which was protected by a company of armed guards. Even so, the king did not govern alone. He was aided by a council of advisors and elders; and the highest among these was a manager and treasurer, termed a *viador*, whose

Purchas His Pilgrimes, bk. 7, capt. 1, 2: 921-927. For a useful discussion of Jobson’s expedition, see David P. Gamble and P.E.H. Hair, “Introduction,” in Richard Jobson, *The Discovery of River Gambia (1623)*, eds. David P. Gamble and P.E.H. Hair (London, 1999), 1-72. For the extent of the rule of the king of Tombuto, see John Leo, *A Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. John Pory (London, 1600), 5 and 287-288.

¹⁴³ For the account of de Marees in the Purchas collection (which was an excerpt significantly reduced from the original), see [Pieter de Marees], “*A description and historicall declaration of the golden Kingdome of Guinea*,” trans. (from Dutch) G. Artus Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 926-970. For a useful modern edition made from that original, see Pieter de Marees, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)*, trans. (from Dutch) Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones (Oxford, 1987). For later seventeenth-century studies of Guinea in English that were profoundly indebted to de Marees, or simply plagiarized from his work, see *The Golden Coast, Or A Description of Guinney* (London, 1665); and John Ogilby, *Africa* (London, 1670), 416-463.

wealth seemed to exceed that of the king. Below the council in status there was a larger set of propertied gentlemen, whose houses were raised two or three steps off the ground and had porches that were swept clean every morning.¹⁴⁴

In matters of justice, private disputes were heard before a judge. But when the issue at hand was a violation of the public law of the king, a more elaborate procedure was followed. The king ordered an official known as the *catiff* to notify the common people of the town to gather in the marketplace. Here they met the gentlemen, the council, and the king. The accused was held in the palace of the king, where he was overseen by the executioner; and from here he was notified of the charges against him and allowed to respond through the medium of the *catiff*, as the king and the nobles sat in the marketplace and deliberated before the common people until the case was settled.¹⁴⁵

We might pause for a moment to reflect upon this remarkable scene. In the telling of de Marees, a judicial procedure in a town set back from the coast of West Africa could best be described in terms derived from the courts of Europe. An entire political order had assembled here in a finely graded hierarchy that ran from common people to gentlemen to council to king. De Marees had given these titles in Dutch; and like the English translators of such foreign works as those of Leo and Lopes, the author whom Purchas employed had

¹⁴⁴ [de Marees], “*golden Kingdome of Guinea*,” trans. Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 948-949. For hereditary succession in Jobson, see Jobson, *Golden Trade*, 58-59.

¹⁴⁵ For the procedure described in this paragraph, see [de Marees], “*golden Kingdome of Guinea*,” trans. Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 950-951; and for the full account, see de Marees, *Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, trans. van Dantzig and Jones, 98-104.

rendered them in the lexicon of the English court, as though each one was at root a version of a form set in the nation of the observer.¹⁴⁶

The tendency of de Marees to describe Africa in terms derived from his own nation was present as well among early English travelers to Guinea. The rulers here were known to them as captains and kings; and as would de Marees, these travelers noted that the local people themselves had begun to refer to their officials with the titles that they had learned from the Europeans with whom they had had the most regular contact. For *alcaide*, which was used for the coastal representative of an inland king, was a Portuguese word that had become common among the natives; and so was *viador*, as the treasurer of a kingdom was often called.¹⁴⁷

In the sixteenth century, the English in Guinea were on occasion surprised by how closely what they found here seemed to resemble what they had left behind at home. The walled city into which one traveler was led thus must have been, he said, “as bigge in circuite as London.” The canoes that John Hawkins found in use on the coast at Cape Verde appeared so fast as that they could “make as much way, as a paire of oares in the Thames of London.” And according to one ship’s master, the weather on the ocean near the Cape, which belied the legend of the Torrid Zone, was “as temperate as if we had beene in Eng-

¹⁴⁶ Although it did not appear in the abridgement of the work that was printed in the Purchas collection, de Marees did compose a Dutch vocabulary of words and expressions current in Guinea that is available in de Marees, *Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, trans. van Dantzig and Jones, 246-259.

¹⁴⁷ For reference to an *alcaide*, see “The voyage of Richard Rainolds and Thomas Dassel,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), vol. 2, pt. 2, 189. The title was variously given as *almade*, *Alcade*, and *Algaier*: see Towerson, “The second voyage made by M. William Towrson to the coast of Guinea,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1589), 119; Jobson, “A True Relation of Master RICHARD JOBSONS Voyage,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 1, 2: 922; and [de Marees], “golden Kingdome of Guinea,” trans. Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 927 (also de Marees, *Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, trans. van Dantzig and Jones, 12 [fn. 9]). For use among the natives of “*Viador* (which word they have learned of the *Portugals*),” see [de Marees], “golden Kingdome of Guinea,” trans. Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 949.

land.”¹⁴⁸ The trader Jobson was struck in particular at how easily economic life along the Gambia could be brought within the bounds of the familiar. The tradesmen here were for the most part smiths, potters, and leather workers or *sepateros* in Portuguese. The principal trader in the area urged Jobson to deal fairly with him “because I am as you are,” Jobson remembered the man had told him, “a Merchant, that goes from place to place.” After their business together was done, as Jobson went back down the river, he came upon a gathering on the shore where the natives cooked and danced. “And amongst them likewise they had commerce, one thing for another,” Jobson observed, “so as it had a manner of resemblance to our fayres here in England.”¹⁴⁹

In the most thorough mid-century narrative of travel to the region, *A Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, which was printed in English in 1670, Nicolas Villault de Bellefond continued the search for points of resemblance well beyond the sphere of commerce. Like Jobson, Villault noted that the natives traded their best goods at markets “that resemble our Fairs.” But he said as well that their huts were built “like our thatched houses in *Normandy*”; that some of their men wore long beards “like the *Capuchins* with us”; and that at sunset they had a dance “not much unlike one of our *Filoux* in *France*.” Even when he saw that their customs differed from his own, Villault made an effort to reconcile them.

¹⁴⁸ Towerson, “The second voyage made by M. William Towerson to the coast of Guinea,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 118; “The voyage made by the worshipful M. John Hawkins Esquire,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 526; and James Welsh, “A Voyage to *Benin* beyond the Countrey of *Guinea*,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), vol. 2, pt. 2: 128.

¹⁴⁹ Jobson, *Golden Trade*, 142 and 111. On the local tradesmen, see Jobson, *Golden Trade*, 119-122. Buckor Sano, the local trader who told Jobson that he considered himself a merchant “as you are” later asked that he be “called by the name of the white mens *Alchade*,” or *alcaide*, in recognition of how he had represented the interests of Jobson’s company; and “with a great shot we cryed out,” Jobson recalled, “Alchade Buckor Sano, Alchade Buckor Sano.” Jobson, *Golden Trade*, 97.

For although their clothes “be much different from ours,” he once reflected, “yet they are as curious and as proud of them, as the best of us.”¹⁵⁰

Villault in essence reproduced the account of the political order in Guinea that had appeared in de Marees, whose work he seems to have known well. He told for example of the captains or *alcaldes* who met his company to trade along the shore, of the several kings whose authority extended into the interior, and of the ruler upon which these all depended named *Acanis le grand* who in his opinion “may be called an Emperour.” The account in Villault of the judicial process in Guinea was similar as well to that in de Marees. He said that “amongst these brutish, and barbarous Nations, Justice has its place.” What de Marees had said was that in their criminal trials, although the natives were “wild, very useless and unmannered people in many things, herein they show a great piece of wisdom.” In spite of the deep resemblance that both authors perceived between themselves and the peoples of Guinea, de Marees in particular was appalled at aspects of their behavior. In trade with foreigners they stole and lied and almost never kept their promises. Their men took as many wives as they could and both men and women were often unfaithful. They drank too much palm wine.¹⁵¹ The scene of justice that de Marees had described was exempted from such judgments, though; and crucially it was here that he began to explain the role of slavery in African life.

¹⁵⁰ Nicolas Villault de Bellefond, *A Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous (London, 1670), 173, 25, 140, 218, and 144. The original French edition of the work had been printed in Paris in 1669.

¹⁵¹ Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous, 139 and 261; and de Marees, *Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, trans. van Dantzig and Jones, 99. For de Marees as a source for Villault, see Adam Jones, “Semper Aliquid Veteris: Printed Sources for the History of the Ivory and Gold Coasts, 1500-1750,” *The Journal of African History*, vol. 27, no. 2 (1986), 215-235. A French translation of de Marees had been printed in 1605, and Jones estimates that twenty percent of the material in de Marees was borrowed from that source. Jones, “Printed Sources for the History of the Ivory and Gold Coasts,” 216. For discussions of the political order in Guinea, see Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous,

Slavery after all was present in almost every detail of this scene. The king who sat in judgment lived in a palace that was protected by a company of guards composed in part of slaves; and when he went abroad he was carried on the shoulders of slaves and trailed by other slaves who carried for him water and palm oil and yams. In turn the nobles who gathered around the king sat on stools supplied by slaves beneath shields that slaves held to keep them from the sun. In fact these were nobles to the extent that they were eligible to own slaves, since this was the key privilege of nobility in Guinea as ownership of land was the privilege of nobility in Europe. The official known as the *catiff*, who notified the common people of the trial and served as the medium between the nobles and king and the accused, was himself a slave.¹⁵²

In another respect, too, slavery was the subject of this scene. In cases of murder an offender could agree with the king to “redeeme his life with money,” as de Marees put it; but if he was unable to do so, he was put to death by the executioner, who would hang his severed head from a tree. On rare occasion the killing of a person was met with a different punishment. When a dispute between nobles could not be resolved by a judge, the parties to the disagreement and their close friends and relatives would meet in a duel in which, if one man killed another, he would be neither fined nor executed but delivered as a slave to the widow of his victim. Slavery was also the punishment for several less severe offenses.

20, 225, and 139. For aspects of Guinean behavior that appalled de Marees, which appear in passages only parts of which were printed in the abridgement in Purchas, see de Marees, *Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, trans. van Dantzig and Jones, 105-109, 37-38 (and 238), and 32.

¹⁵² On slaves of the king, see [de Marees], “*golden Kingdome of Guinea*,” trans. Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 949 and 966. On slaves of the nobles, see de Marees, *Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, trans. van Dantzig and Jones, 34 and 229. On eligibility to own and trade slaves as the privilege of nobility in Guinea, see [de Marees], “*golden Kingdome of Guinea*,” trans. Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 958-960. (On parallels between ownership of slaves in Guinea and land in Europe, see for example John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, second ed. [New York, 1998; orig. pub. 1992], 72-97). On the *catiff*, who was simply referred to as a slave of the ruler in the Purchas translation, see de Marees, *Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, trans. van Dantzig and Jones, 101. The origin of this title, which was derived from French, will be noted below.

If a merchant sold false gold to European traders, then he was enslaved; and although de Marees had said only that adulterers were fined, Jobson and Villault would assert that they were made slaves. Even such petty criminals as thieves were enslaved if they were unable to pay the fine assigned to them by a king.¹⁵³

Judicial enslavement or slavery as punishment for crime seemed to observers from Europe most common in Guinea. But reports filtered back into England over the course of the seventeenth century that the practice was in use as well in northern Ethiopia, where it was said that a murderer was given to the nearest relation of his victim, who might “either kill him, or free him, or make him a Slave,” in the phrase of Alvarez.¹⁵⁴ In Guinea, slavery for crime was said in each case to be permanent: if unable to pay the fine assigned to him, wrote de Marees, a thief “ever after, while he liveth, he must be a Slave”; and according to Villault the same was true of an adulterer, who would become a slave “without all hopes of redemption.” Many slaves such as these were held by the kings or nobles in Guinea, but ownership of them could be transferred; and every author who noted that criminals in this region were enslaved was aware that on occasion they then were sold to the Portuguese or

¹⁵³ [de Marees], “*golden Kingdome of Guinea*,” trans. Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 951. In general punishments for crime are discussed at [de Marees], “*golden Kingdome of Guinea*,” trans. Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 950-951. On slavery as punishment for adultery, see also Jobson, *Golden Trade*, 53; and Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous, 264. On slavery as punishment for petty criminals who could not pay their fines, see (as well as de Marees) Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous, 207; and *Golden Coast, Or A Description of Guinney*, 73. The narrative of the second Guinea voyage of John Hawkins had noted that a person could be enslaved simply for theft: see “The voyage made by the worshipful M. John Hawkins Esquire,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 527.

¹⁵⁴ “*The Voyage of Sir FRANCIS ALVAREZ*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 5, 2: 1094. See in addition Ogilby, *Africa*, 648; Job Ludolphus, *A New History of Ethiopia*, trans. (from Latin) J. P. Gent (London, 1682), 237; and Robert Morden, *Geography Rectified: Or, A Description of the World*, second ed. (London, 1688; orig. pub. 1680), 489.

Dutch or eventually the French and English traders along the coast, who would take them from here across the ocean to be sold again into the New World.¹⁵⁵

And once a slave was sold to the Europeans “to be sold into forreign Countries,” Villault concluded, “he is never to appear in his own again.”¹⁵⁶

Judicial enslavement was thus understood to be one source of African slavery and was discussed here first because slavery of this kind inhered in the operations of the state. The central function of the state in Guinea during this period, as Robin Law has observed, was “the maintenance of order, and more especially of a framework of effective judicial authority.”¹⁵⁷ The judicial procedure described by authors such as de Marees was attended by all the members of a community; and in each case the settlement was reached by their rulers, either the king and nobles in an inland town or one of the captains who also served as judges in villages along the coast. During this period, there was also sometimes said to be one more sense in which slavery inhered in African states. Except in rare cases, which will be noted below, slavery in this sense was not known to be a source of persons traded across the Atlantic. But in an account of English perceptions of African slavery, it cannot be ignored that the people in some areas were said to be slaves to their king.

¹⁵⁵ [de Marees], “*golden Kingdome of Guinea*,” trans. Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 950; and Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous, 264 (see as well Jobson, *Golden Trade*, 53). For awareness that criminals who were enslaved in Guinea were often then sold to European traders, see “The voyage made by the worshipful M. John Hawkins Esquire,” in Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 527; [de Marees], “*golden Kingdome of Guinea*,” trans. Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 951 and 960; Jobson, *Golden Trade*, 28-29 and 53; and Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous, 266.

¹⁵⁶ Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous, 266.

¹⁵⁷ Robin Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society* (Oxford, 1991), 89. The centrality of judicial authority to the state in Guinea was indicated by a passage in his *Pilgrimage* in which Purchas described the ascension to the throne of the ruler of an inland kingdom, who receives “a Hatchet into his hand which they use in Executions, and after this all acknowledge subjection.” Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 712.

In Guinea, to begin, observations of this kind had to do with the peculiar manner in which subjects seemed to address their rulers. From the first English voyage to Guinea, in 1553, travelers remarked upon what Richard Eden called “the great reverence they gyve to their kynge.” The nobles in his presence never looked him in the face; and as they left his court they would not turn their backs “but go creepynge backwarde with lyke reverence.” Leo would report that anyone who would speak to the king of Tombuto had first to kneel to the ground and sprinkle dust over his head in a ritual that Jobson too encountered among the petty kingdoms along the Gambia. Observers from Europe often regarded such rituals with respect and even envy. Eden lamented that if the English would give as much reverence “to ovr saviour Chryst, we shuld remove from ovr heades many plages.” When he first met a king Jobson sat down and allowed dust to be scattered all around him and in his lap. But it was also possible to see these as marks of a servile condition, so that according to one late Dutch visitor to Benin the subjects were “all Free-Men, notwithstanding which they are Treated as Slaves by their King.”¹⁵⁸

This had proven to be a remark most often made over the course of the seventeenth century about the subjects of the Christian kings in northern Ethiopia—and here the situation was thought to be more serious. The common source of opinion in this regard was the survey by Giovanni Botero of the kingdoms and commonwealths of the world, which first appeared in English in 1601. The attention of Botero was drawn, as for English observers of Guinea, to the reverence accorded to the ruler whom Botero still knew as Prester John:

¹⁵⁸ “The fyrst vyage to Guinea,” in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 347r; and William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, trans. (from Dutch) anonymous (London, 1705), 430. The original Dutch edition of this latter work was published in 1704. For the report from Leo on the king of Tombuto, see Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 288; for a similar ritual, see Jobson, *Golden Trade*, 48-49. The behavior of the nobles from 1553 was repeated without comment in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 715; and Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes* (London, 1652), bk. 4, pt. 1: 53. For Jobson’s first meeting with a king, see Jobson, *Golden Trade*, 97-98.

at the mere mention of his name, Botero said, his people “bow their bodies, and touch the earth with their hands.” Botero found as well, though, that the ruler in Ethiopia exercised a measure of control over his people that no English observer had ascribed to any king on the western coast. He awarded nobility at his pleasure and would rescind it at the smallest offense. Over time, through tributes and taxes and simple theft, he had so impoverished the country that his famous moveable court was the only town of any distinction that remained in the empire as Muslim armies closed in from the East.¹⁵⁹

Botero gathered from such findings that Prester John had treated his people “more liker slaves then subjects.” And well into the second half of the century, even as observers came to realize that the title of Prester John had been a fiction from the start, descriptions of the world that continued to rely upon the material printed in Botero repeated the refrain that the people of Ethiopia were “treated by [“the Government of these Emperors”] more like slaves then subjects,” in the phrase of Peter Heylyn.¹⁶⁰ As long as phrases of this kind continued to appear, however, they remained in the simile form, for authors from Europe were willing to assert that the emperors of Ethiopia treated their people like slaves or more like slaves than subjects but not that these people were slaves. Prester John had been said to hold slaves of his own, from whom his subjects were always distinguished: his subjects

¹⁵⁹ Giovanni Botero, *The Travellers Breviat, or An historicall description of the most famous kingdomes in the World*, trans. (from Italian) Robert Johnston (London, 1601), 171 (on Prester John, see 169-177). Johnston printed five more expanded editions of the work through 1616 that generally used the title first used in the 1608 second edition *Relations, of the most Famous Kingdoms and Common-weales thorough the World*.

¹⁶⁰ Botero, *Travellers Breviat*, trans. Johnston, 171; and Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 71 (as in Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Books*, fifth ed. [London, 1677], bk. 4, pt. 1: 59). See also for example John Pory, “A particular description of all the knowne borders, coastes and inlands of Africa, which John Leo hath left undescribed,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 8-60, 16; and Richard Blome, *A Geographical Description of the Four Parts of the World* (London, 1670), pt. 2, 58.

were not owned and as a result could not be sold from person to person and place to place in the manner that only slaves could be.¹⁶¹

The broad aim of Botero in his work had been to demonstrate in common humanist fashion the causes of what he called greatness, or *grandezza*, in states. He was concerned that the ruler of Ethiopia had sapped the wealth and degraded the spirit of the people to the point that they could not defend themselves as Botero believed that free subjects would be able to do.¹⁶² Near the end of the seventeenth century, the authority of Botero was replaced by that of the German linguist Job Ludolphus, whose *New History of Ethiopia* appeared in English in 1682. Ludolphus also was concerned about the struggle of Ethiopia against the “Barbarous *Idolaters*” that still surrounded her; but unlike Botero he saw the submission of the people as an aid in their cause, since it seemed to him as a sign of “Concord and Unity” within the realm. He did advise that greater security be given for the private ownership of land. But he concluded that the old refrain that the Ethiopians were treated like slaves had begun in a simple confusion of terms. The Ethiopian language had a single word for *slave* and *servant*, Ludolphus observed: the people had only ever been considered as servants of the king.¹⁶³

Even if slavery of this kind was understood to be no more than a figure of speech, it did share with the first source of slavery noted above one important feature: both figured slavery in the setting of a single state, either in the procedure for the punishment of crime

¹⁶¹ The slaves of Prester John are mentioned for example at Botero, *Travellers Breviat*, trans. Johnston, 173.

¹⁶² See Botero, *Travellers Breviat*, trans. Johnston, 171-174. Also Giovanni Botero, *A Treatise, Concerning the causes of the Magnificencie and greatnes of Cities*, trans. (from Italian) Robert Peterson (London, 1606).

¹⁶³ Ludolphus, *New History of Ethiopia*, trans. Gent, “To the Courteous Reader” (unpaginated) and 203. On the private ownership of land, see Ludolphus, *New History of Ethiopia*, trans. Gent, 204. For the observation that “the word *Gabre*, or *Servant*, has a more diffusive signification among Them than among Us. For it extends not to real Slaves alone, but their Subjects and Domesticks,” see Ludolphus, *New History of Ethiopia*, trans. Gent, 235.

or in the particular relation between people and ruler. In fact until the seventeenth century English observers had taken very little interest in the relations between African states. The Renaissance reception of the classical litany of strange peoples along the Torrid Zone had failed to inspire much reflection about how these peoples interacted with one another. The eastern empire of Prester John, according to Richard Eden, exacted tribute from a number of kings but was bounded on the west by the Nile and on the north by a desert so immense that Eden termed it “the sea of sande.” Even the travelers whose accounts were printed in the Hakluyt collection tended to encounter towns one by one, as their method was to skirt along the Guinea coast two leagues from the shore and only send in a pinnace where they were waved in by natives eager to trade or came across a river mouth in which they could gather fresh water before they would pull up anchors and resume their voyage.¹⁶⁴

Only in the early decades of the seventeenth century, in the works collected in the *Pilgrimes of Purchas*, did the English start to learn that Africa was a complex international system. And it was in this system that the English found a second source of slavery. To be more precise it was in the tears in this system, in the conflicts between states, that the English perceived slavery to arise, because through the end of the century they were aware that most of the Africans sent across the Atlantic as slaves had begun their journey as captives taken in war.

The narratives that Hakluyt gathered had represented Africa as in essence peaceful. The real discovery set down in these reports, in comparison to the legends that they aimed to discredit, was that the continent was the site of regular and profitable commerce. By far the main conflicts that they related were those between the European powers that struggled for the control of trade, and almost the only instance in which Hakluyt’s travelers learned

¹⁶⁴ Eden, “Breefe description of Affrike,” in Martyr, *The Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 344v.

of violence between African states was when an *alcaide* told one crew in 1591 that a truce had been declared in a “great warre” in order to accommodate their visit.¹⁶⁵

The narratives that Purchas gathered were altogether different in character. These works were to a great extent chronicles of war, and Africa as seen through their lens was violent at its core. In Guinea, according to de Marees, the decision to make war was in the hands of the kings; and once one was resolved he would enlist the soldiers who formed his personal guard. He then would summon the armies of the captains who ruled in the towns under his command. Villault would add that while he was in Guinea there was a quarrel so severe that one king had even called upon other kings to aid in his cause. Once these forces all were assembled they would meet in the court of the king from where, de Marees said, if the war was important they would “burne their owne Houses, and all their Townes,” and bring their wives and children into the field. Despite this custom the kings of Guinea were eager to take up arms over petty matters of jealousy and revenge, as well as controversies over succession, so that in sum “warres,” Purchas concluded, “are very rife amongst those Nations.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ “The voyage of *Richard Rainolds* and *Thomas Dassel*,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), vol. 2, pt. 2, 189. Although Hakluyt’s travelers knew little of wars between African states, in the second edition of his collection Hakluyt himself did include brief indirect reports on conflicts that will be mentioned below: see for example “An Advertisement sent to *Philip* the second king of *Spaine* from *Angola* by one *Baltazar Almeida de Sousa*, touching the state of the foresayd countrey, written the 21 of May, 1589,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), vol. 2, pt. 2, 133; and Laurence Madoc, “Another briefe relation concerning the late conquest and the exceeding great riches of the cities and provinces of *Tombuto* and *Gago*, written from *Marocco* the 30 August 1594,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), vol. 2, pt. 2, 192-193.

¹⁶⁶ [de Marees], “golden Kingdome of *Guinea*,” trans. Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 947; and Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 717. The description in Villault of the process by which a king would assemble forces for war was drawn from the one in De Marees, but unlike his main source Villault noted that before the decision to make war a king would consult a group of nobles Villault called “his Courtiers.” Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous, 252 (for a similar event see Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* [1626], 710). For the king who called upon other kings to aid in his cause, see Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous, 257-259 (and 219). For a survey of this period, see Richard J. Reid, *Warfare in African History* (New York, 2012), 46-106. On the conduct of warfare on the Gold Coast, see John K. Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa: 1500-1800* (London, 1999), 55-74.

If among the nations of Guinea war was a common event, across the two regions of Ethiopia it had become the essential condition. The accounts of northern Ethiopia that were printed in the *Pilgrimes* were among the first to describe for an English public the decline of the empire of Prester John. These related how, in the years since Alvarez had sailed for Portugal in 1526, the annual raids during Lent from the Muslim king of Adel had escalated into a series of bloody campaigns in which several ancient kingdoms had been laid waste. At last in 1543, with the support of a company of Portuguese troops, Abissine forces beat back their enemies as far as the Red Sea coast. But already, from the deserts in the southeastern Horn of Africa, a nomadic heathen tribe known as the Gallans had begun to make inroads upon the weakened empire. Their advance had continued through the time of the latest reports that Ludolphus received, for he noted that the Christians of northern Ethiopia were “always at war with these people.”¹⁶⁷

There were parts of southern Ethiopia as well where the wars seemed never to end. The great southeastern inland empires of Monomotapa and Mohenemugi were engaged in what John Pory had called “continuall and bloudie warres” against each other. In addition to masses of their own troops, both sides were often said to have enlisted fierce mercenary forces: the one had called upon the Amazons, who sheared off their left breast so as not to hinder their shot; and the other relied upon the Gagas, who rased their cheeks and turned

¹⁶⁷ Ludolphus, *New History of Ethiopia*, trans. Gent, 86 (in general on the Gallans, see Ludolphus, *New History of Ethiopia*, trans. Gent, 81-87). The best report from the Adelian wars of the sixteenth century appeared in the Purchas collection just after those of Alvarez and Don John of Castro noted in the previous chapter: “A briefe Relation of the Embassage which the Patriarch Don John Bermudez brought from the Emperour of Ethiopia . . . to the . . . King of Portugall,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 7, 2:1149-1174. The works on this subject that Purchas printed were most thoroughly digested in a series of accounts that closely resembled one another: Botero, *Travellers Breviat*, trans. Johnston, 169-177; Pierre D’Avity, *The Estates, Empires, & Principallities of the World*, trans. (from French) Edward Grimeston (London, 1615), 1077-1091; and Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 59-72. None of the authors of these latter three works was more than dimly aware of the Gallans (see for example Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 72), and the same was true of Purchas (see Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* [1626], 752), who as we saw in the previous chapter still relied for the most part upon Alvarez.

back their eyelids to terrible visual effect. When these forces met, wrote Duarte Lopes, the Portuguese authority on Congo, their wars were “sometimes so bloody, that it is hardly discerned who hath gotten the victorie.”¹⁶⁸

The wars in the riverine western central kingdom of Congo, Lopes believed, were more ordered affairs. Like in Angola, its neighbor to the south, the armies in Congo were divided into several regiments each under its own banner and captain. In the field these all were commanded by a single general, who would direct them with the signals from ivory fifes and iron triangles; and in order to indicate that they had understood, the captains and their deputies would respond in kind to produce a “warlicke and harmonious musicke,” in the phrase of Lopes. The southern province of Bamba was “the very keye, and the buckler and the sworde,” Lopes said, in defense of the kingdom against attacks from Angola. But in recent decades the real threat to Congo had come from the east, where the lord of Batta had carried on “continuell warres” against the Gagas until in 1568 these had invaded from Mohenemugi and chased the king onto the Island of Horses in the Zaire River. Only a long campaign with the support of Portuguese arquebusiers had restored him to the throne.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Pory, “Particular description,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 31; and “Drawen out of the writings and discourses of Odoardo Lopes, a Portingall, by Philipppo Pigafetta,” *A Report of the Kingdome of Congo, a Region of Africa*, trans. (from Italian) Abraham Hartwell (London, 1597), 204. On the wars between these two empires, see Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 192-206; van Linschoten, *Voyages into The Easte and West Indies*, trans. W. P., 212-213; Pory, “Particular description,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 30-34; Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 757-761; and Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 75-77. Only with Purchas did writers begin to express doubt as to whether there really were Amazons. “None hath yet written of them from his owne sight,” Purchas observed, and added, “For my part, no Amazonian hath yet conquered my credit.” Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 761.

¹⁶⁹ Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 49, 61, and 102. On the military order in Congo and Angola, see Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 47-54; as well as Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa*, 99-125. On the invasion of the Gagas and on the campaign that expelled them from Congo, see Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 159-164. Lopes remains the sole printed source on this event, and as on many aspects of Congo he was relied upon heavily by sources in English: see for example D’Avity, *The Estates, Empires, & Principallities of the World*, trans. Grimeston, 1095-1107; and Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 78-82.

Around the turn of the century, the areas south of Angola in which the Gagas next were found served as the setting for perhaps the most remarkable English account of Africa from this period. “*The strange adventures of ANDREW BATTELL*,” as Purchas titled the text first published in his *Pilgrimes*, told the story, Purchas said, of “my neere neighbour, dwelling at Leigh in Essex.”¹⁷⁰ Battell had sailed from England in 1589 on a privateer to Brazil, where he was taken by the Portuguese and sent as a prisoner to Angola. For a time he was made to serve a Portuguese official as a trader on the coast; but after he attempted an escape he was, he recalled, “banished for ever to the Warres” in which the Portuguese then were engaged in the mountains around Angola. It was here that Battell met the Gagas and almost at once agreed to join them on a drive for plunder that led far into the interior. Once Battell was captured by a hostile ruler and ran away to rejoin the Gagas, who would come to allow him to lead soldiers into battle. “By this meanes,” he wrote, “I have beene often carried away in their armes, and saved my life.”¹⁷¹ After almost two years, Battell left the Gagas in hope of a return to England and at last, by around 1610, he was home.

In accounts of the battles of the Gagas, Battell fixed upon a regular point of interest among early observers of African wars. His attention was drawn to the precise scale of the conflicts he described. Heylyn noted that as late as 1559 the Abissine emperor could bring sixty thousand troops into the field and that his personal guard numbered twelve thousand

¹⁷⁰ Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 765. The text published in the *Pilgrimes* appears to have been recorded and edited by Purchas and an anonymous transcriber in a complex process that is imperfectly understood. See Jan Vansina, “On Ravenstein’s Edition of Battell’s Adventures in Angola,” *History in Africa*, vol. 34 (2007), 321-347; and Jared Staller, “Rivalry and Reformation Politics: Reflections on Andrew Battell’s Jaga Materials Printed by Samuel Purchas from 1613 to 1625,” *History in Africa*, vol. 43 (2016), 7-28.

¹⁷¹ “*The strange adventures of ANDREW BATTELL of Leigh in Essex*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 3, 2: 970-985, 973 and 976. The modern edition is *The Strange Adventures of Andrew Battell of Leigh*, ed. E. G. Ravenstein (London, 1901). This volume contains useful supplementary material, but it is flawed as an attempt to render the original text: see Vansina, “On Ravenstein’s Edition of Battell’s Adventures in Angola and Loango.”

horsemen. According to Pory, in Monomotapa the guard of the emperor was composed of four hundred mastiffs. And in Congo, Lopes reported, the lord of Batta led a force of seventy thousand men.¹⁷²

When he first came across them, Battell recalled, the Gagas had only five hundred men; but over time their camp swelled to sixteen thousand. When they arrived in a country they intended to conquer, they would build a round fort with twelve gates, one for each of their captains. Here they would rest for as long as two months until one night their general would send out one thousand troops to imbosc themselves about one mile from the fort. In the morning he would present his army as if to begin an assault and, when the army of the enemy marched out to meet it, “then the embosked men arise,” Battell explained, “so that very few escape.” In this manner when he was with them the Gagas overran the kingdoms of Benguela, Mofarigosat, Calango, Shillambansa, and Cafoch.¹⁷³

The cruelty of the Gagas was renowned. In the invasion of Congo, Lopes recalled, they had “spared no mans life”; and when they sacked Benguela, according to Battell, they had brought before their general the heads of more than one hundred lords of the kingdom. In the kingdoms that they took, the people whom they did not kill they enslaved. Of these they absorbed into their camp the young women as wives and made the young men fight in wars with collars around their necks as a mark of slavery until they brought the head of an

¹⁷² Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 68; Pory, “Particular description,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 32; and Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 103.

¹⁷³ “*The strange adventures of ANDREW BATTELL*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 3, 2: 476. On the number of Gagas when he first came across them, see “*The strange adventures of ANDREW BATTELL*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 3, 2: 974; and on the later size of their camp, see “*The strange adventures of ANDREW BATTELL*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 3, 2: 977. The military “stratagems” of the Gagas, as Purchas called them in a marginal note, are described on “*The strange adventures of ANDREW BATTELL*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 3, 2: 976. The conquests of the Gagas are covered on “*The strange adventures of ANDREW BATTELL*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 3, 2: 974-978.

enemy before their general, at which point they were freed and dignified as soldiers. These were the means by which the number of Gagas swelled while Battell was with them since, he noted, they buried their newborn children alive. The Gagas sold the rest of their slaves; and in fact in their first encounter, which took place when Battell was still attached to the Portuguese, the Gagas filled his ship with slaves for seven days.¹⁷⁴

In the first half of the seventeenth century, the Portuguese slave trade from western central Africa was well known. Lopes had said that certain natives of Congo who survived the invasion of the Gagas had been sold by merchants from São Tomé as far as Portugal. At Bamba, he continued, the Portuguese purchased five thousand slaves each year to ship “into divers parts of the worlde.” And at the port of Loando, in Angola, Purchas had heard that the Portuguese bought twenty-eight thousand slaves each year to send to Brazil. It was a figure often repeated in the decades that followed. These slaves had been “bought within the Land,” Purchas explained, “and are captives taken in their warres.”¹⁷⁵

The captives taken in the wars of northern Ethiopia also were often enslaved. In the course of his “continuall war against the Abessine Christians,” Botero reported, the king of Adel did “entreth their territories, burneth their villages, taketh prisoners.” These prisoners

¹⁷⁴ Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 160. The sack of Benguela is on “*The strange adventures of ANDREW BATTELL*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 3, 2: 974. The uses to which the Gagas put their slaves are on “*The strange adventures of ANDREW BATTELL*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 3, 2: 977. And the first encounter of Battell with the Gagas is on “*The strange adventures of ANDREW BATTELL*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 3, 2: 974.

¹⁷⁵ Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 62; and Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 765. On the natives of Congo sold as far as Portugal after the invasion of the Gagas, see Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 161: these people had sold each other under great duress from the Gagas, and we will mention their case below. Repetitions of the figure given in Purchas varied from twenty to thirty thousand: see for example Lewes Roberts, *The Merchants Mappe of Commerce* (London, 1638), 89; Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 78-79; and Blome, *Geographical Description of the Four Parts of the World*, pt. 2, 62. On the significance of the Portuguese slave trade from Congo and Angola, which is understood to have been the central source of the founding generation of Africans in the Americas, see Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660* (New York, 2007).

then became the “innumerable slaves,” in the phrase of Purchas, whom Muslims along the coast were known to send east into Arabia, Bengal, and Sumatra.¹⁷⁶

The slaves in the kingdom of Borno, beyond the western border of Abissina in the land of Negros, were sent north over the desert into Barbary. Merchants would come down from there, according to Leo, and sell horses to the king; and in exchange, when his army returned from conquests to the south, he would satisfy his creditors with captives at a rate of fifteen slaves for one horse. To the west along the Niger, the most powerful kingdom in the region was Tombuto. Like the king of Borno, the ruler here had a guard of three thousand horsemen. Soon after he came to power he had conquered the kingdoms of Gualata, Agadez, Cano, Casena, and Guber. When he took Guber, Leo wrote, the “most part of the inhabitants were carried captive and kept for slaves.” Since then the army of the king had punished any ruler who refused to pay him tribute with attacks in which “so many as they take, they sell unto the merchants of Tombuto.” So many of the persons thus acquired had remained there that when Leo was in Tombuto he observed that the inhabitants kept “great store of men and women-slaves.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Botero, *Travellers Breviat*, trans. Johnston, 175-176; and Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 754. On the origins and destinations of the Abessine slaves traded by Muslims along the coast, see for example, in addition to the passages from Botero and Purchas just cited, Pory, “Particular description,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 26-27; D’Avity, *The Estates, Empires, & Principallities of the World*, trans. Grimeston, 1085; Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 68; and Ludolphus, *New History of Ethiopia*, trans. Gent, 70.

¹⁷⁷ Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 290, 288, and 288. On Borno, see Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 293-294 (also Botero, *Travellers Breviat*, trans. Johnston, 171). See as well James L. A. Webb, Jr., “The Horse and Slave Trade Between the Western Sahara and Senegambia,” *The Journal of African History*, vol. 34, no. 2 (1993), 221-246. On the conquests of Tombuto, see Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, 284-296. As reported in a dispatch printed in the second edition of the Hakluyt collection, the Moroccan army conquered Tombuto in 1589: see as above Madoc, “Another briefe relation,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1599), vol. 2, pt. 2, 192-193. But even Pory, Leo’s English translator, seems not to have been aware of this event. Purchas only noted it in passing (see Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* [1626], 722), and Heylyn believed that after a short time the king of Tombuto had been restored to the throne and was now “in as eminent power, as ever in any times before.” Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 58. This was not in fact the case: see Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa*, 19-40.

Many of the persons enslaved among the kingdoms of Guinea were kept there too: de Marees even remarked that, unlike in Congo or Angola, “you can lade no ships full of Slaves” on the Gold Coast. The sources of slavery here resembled those in central Africa, though, for in addition to punishment for crime slavery was also known to begin in war. In war, said de Marees, “whosoever is taken Prisoner they make him a slave all his life long.” So close was the connection between war and slavery among the peoples whom de Marees met that they used a Portuguese term, *Morian*, to mean “Slave or Captive” and the title of the enslaved official known as the *catiff* was from the French *captif*.¹⁷⁸

In short among the states of Africa slavery was understood to be a status assigned to captives taken in war. In this sense slavery had its origins in conflict, as it arose from the quarrels, raids, battles, assaults, and attacks that at times seemed to tear apart the continent during this period. And yet in another sense slavery was not a feature of conflict, since of course combatants only became captives once a war had reached its end. Seen differently, then, slavery arose not from war but from the delicate process by which states made peace.

Few authors saw the role of slavery in this process more clearly than did de Marees and Villault. They agreed that, although the kings of Guinea began wars for petty reasons, these were “not so cruell as they seeme,” as de Marees said, because they “continueth not long.” The wars in Guinea were “like a wisp of straw,” wrote Villault, “no sooner kindled, but extinguish’d.” During combat the people were as “Devils and not men,” he remarked; but as soon as one side accepted defeat the victor would give quarter and “fall a taking of Prisoners.” The parties to the conflict would then hold a summit at which they would swear

¹⁷⁸ [de Marees], “*golden Kingdome of Guinea*,” trans. Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 960, 948, and 960. De Marees did acknowledge that to the east of the Gold Coast, in the Allada River, the Portuguese bought a “great number of slaves . . . to carry to other places, as to Saint *Thomas*, and to *Brasil*ia” (965). For the origin of *catiff*, see de Marees, *Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, trans. van Dantzig and Jones, 101 (fn. 2).

to do no harm in the future, and as security for this oath they would exchange as hostages the sons of their kings. Commerce at last would resume between them, since as Europeans in Guinea never failed to lament, trade, including the trade in slaves, could only take place during times of relative peace.¹⁷⁹

Enslavement thus figured as an initial act in the attempt to establish peace between states: it set a limit to the violence of war. And the use of this limit would have been clear to observers of Africa in part for the reason that they had before them vivid evidence of the bloodshed that could result when the stronger party in a conflict had no interest in making slaves of its victims.

De Marees for example reported that in 1570 a company of Portuguese troops had been murdered by the forces of a kingdom near Mina in retaliation for an earlier attack: he had seen more than three hundred of their skulls, he said. Purchas too told of a massacre in Zanzibar in 1589 in which a people he called the Imbij, from near the Cape of Good Hope, had sacked Mombaza. Eighty thousand of them had marched on the kingdom “destroying Townes, Cities, and Beasts, together with the Men” who stood in their path. Not satisfied with “the destruction of all men,” according to Purchas, the ruler of the Imbij “shootes his arrowes against the heavens.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ [de Marees], “*golden Kingdome of Guinea*,” trans. Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 948; and Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous, 256 and 255. For the laments of Europeans that war in Guinea had disrupted trade, see for example “Samuel Brun’s Voyages of 1611-20,” in *German Sources for West African History, 1599-1669*, ed. Adam Jones (Wiesbaden, D.E., 1983), 44-96, 67-68; Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous, 136 and 259; Thomas Phillips, “A Journal of a Voyage Made in the Hannibal of London, Ann. 1693, 1694,” in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 6 vols. (London, 1732), vol. 6, 171-239, 199 and 201; and James Barbot, “An Abstract of a Voyage to New Calabar River, or Rio Real, in the year 1699,” in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1732), vol. 5, 455-466, 455.

¹⁸⁰ Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 755 (for an account of this event drawn from that of Purchas, see Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 78). For the event described in de Marees, which did not appear in the abridgement in the *Pilgrimes* of Purchas, see de Marees, *Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, trans. van Dantzig and Jones, 91.

When they invaded Congo, as we have seen, the Gagas had “spared no mans life,” and neither did they relent once the king and his lords had retreated to the Island of Horses. Soon these had run out of food and, after “the most part of them dyed by famine,” the rest sold each other as slaves to merchants who had sailed from São Tomé on ships filled with provisions. They had been “of necessitie constrayned” to do so, Lopes explained. Slavery had been their only alternative to death.¹⁸¹

It was in truth a particular kind of death that they feared, though, for the Gagas ate their victims. Indeed according to Battell they were “the greatest Canibals and Man-eaters that be in the World.” In the kingdoms that they conquered there were cattle in abundance, but they “fed chiefly upon mans flesh.” Once they had held their camp for four months in an area that they had overrun, “drinking, dancing, and banquetting with mans flesh.” Even for Battell, this was “an heavie spectacle to behold.”¹⁸²

The Imbij were cannibals as well. At Mombaza only a small number of the natives had escaped their “devouring mawes,” Purchas wrote: the others they had buried “in their bowels.” Purchas also reported upon a people, the Cumbæ, who were “devourers of mans flesh” and had around 1550 plundered the lands of the native Capi in Sierra Leone. And in the kingdoms of Guinea, even though he seems not to have seen such an event take place,

¹⁸¹ Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 160 and 161.

¹⁸² “*The strange adventures of ANDREW BATTELL*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 3, 2: 974 and 975. The reports from Battell upon the cannibalism of the Gagas were repeated for example in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 772-773; and Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 80. Lopes was of course also aware that the Gagas were “fed with mans flesh.” Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 159 (also 204-205).

de Marees said that after the prisoners in war were made slaves, “such as are slaine, their bodies are drest and eaten as good meate.”¹⁸³

Only in the kingdoms of Guinea as described by de Marees was the distinction so carefully observed between the slain who were eaten and the prisoners who were enslaved: among the other cannibals known to Purchas, prisoners were often consumed as well. The Gagas kept as slaves the young men and women whom they captured, but they would “kill and eat” their older captives, according to Battell; and Lopes had said that the reason their wars with the Amazons were so fierce was that the Amazons feared that “if they be taken they shalbe devoured.” In Sierra Leone the Cumbæ had sold “the meaner” rank of Capi as slaves, but they had consumed all of the “chiefe men” they could find. And on the road to Mombaza the ruler of the Imbij had “carried fire before him,” according to Purchas, as a sign that he would “rost, and eate all such as he shall take.” As on the Island of Horses, the natives who escaped here sold themselves to the Portuguese along the coast. Pursued by an enemy that would not do so for them, they had made slaves of themselves.¹⁸⁴

In cases such as these, slavery and cannibalism worked at cross purposes, since of course captives consumed were ones not enslaved. Indeed a contrast began to take shape in the works of Purchas between peoples who enslaved their captives and those that ate them.

¹⁸³ Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 755 (also Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 78); Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 712; and [de Marees], “golden Kingdome of Guinea,” trans. Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 948. The modern editor of de Marees notes of this remark that “there is no evidence for the practice of cannibalism on the Gold Coast in this period” and speculates that the idea might have come to the author when he observed the boiling of body parts such as heads from slain enemies for use in trophies. De Marees, *Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, trans. van Dantzig and Jones, 90 (fn. 3). Nevertheless, as will be noted below, this remark from de Marees was repeated by future authors: see for example *The Golden Coast, Or A Description of Guinney*, 82; John Ogilby, *Africa* (London, 1670), 482; and Blome, *Geographical Description of the Four Parts of the World*, pt. 2, 50.

¹⁸⁴ “The strange adventures of ANDREW BATTELL,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 3, 2: 977; Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 205; Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 712; and Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 755 (also Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 78).

Purchas had a theory that the Gagas, Cumbæ, and Imbij as well as the Gallans in northern Ethiopia had descended from a common origin. They were nomads who traveled on remote inland corridors. When they came upon the settled kingdoms that they intended to invade, they might have seemed to them more unusual than the Europeans who sailed in from the coasts. In war they were almost perfectly cruel—which was the word that Purchas and his colleagues most often used to describe their methods; and with few exceptions they were not known to hold slaves.¹⁸⁵

The slaves in Africa were for the most part held instead among such kingdoms as cannibals aimed to overthrow. From Guinea to Tombuto, Borno to Abissina, Monomotapa to Congo, the wars these states fought were limited to the extent that they tended to allow their captives to live. They then made use of them in order to strengthen the regimes they were resolved to maintain: slavery thus became a means to fortify the political orders that wars could threaten. Some slaves were placed in the service of kings as guards or laborers or personal attendants; some were employed by nobles or merchants; and others were sold through markets over land and sea in return for money or goods of various kinds.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ For the theory of Purchas about the common origin of the peoples listed above, see Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 722 and 755. Although the details of his theory were not well explained, Purchas does seem to have believed that the other peoples had descended from the Cumbæ—which for example required him to hold that the Gagas had traveled to Angola from Sierra Leone, as Battell said in the *Pilgrimes* (see “*The strange adventures of ANDREW BATTELL*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 3, 2: 974), and had not first lived in Mohenemugi, as Lopes had asserted (see Lopes, *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 159). For descriptions of these peoples as “cruel,” see for example “*A briefe Relation of the Embassage which the Patriarch Don John Bermudez brought from the Emperour of Ethiopia . . . to the . . . King of Portugall*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 7, 2: 1167; Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 773; Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 76; and Ludolphus, *New History of Ethiopia*, 81.

¹⁸⁶ On the uses to which slaves were put, see J. D. Fage, “Slaves and Society in Western Africa, c. 1445-c. 1700,” *The Journal of African History*, vol. 21, no. 3 (1980), 289-310; and Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, 72-97. This topic is also touched upon for example throughout Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (New York, 1990); and Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (New York, 2012). On “The Military Foundations of State and Society,” see also Reid, *Warfare in African History*, 46-78.

Slavery was in other words the status assigned to captives among states that were in essence civil, while as Montaigne understood cannibalism was the response to captives among peoples that were not.

The “cruellest Canibals which the Sunne looketh on,” according to Purchas, were the Anzigues, who lived up the Zaire River to the north and east of Congo. Lopes had said that they not only ate the enemies they took in war but also many of their slaves and even “their owne frendes and subiectes and kinsefolkes.” They were a “savage and beastly people,” he concluded, “saving onely in respect” that when the prices ran high in Congo they would travel down the river to sell their ivory and linens and slaves. It was the one respect in which the Anzigues were not savage—that on occasion they traded rather than ate their slaves.¹⁸⁷

Around the middle of the seventeenth century, as the regular English African slave trade began, authors in England were slow to register the event. Merchants from there had sent ships to Guinea to purchase slaves for Barbados from as early as 1640; and in the next two decades, around sixty thousand persons arrived in the English Caribbean colonies by such means. Nevertheless the most detailed mid-century description of the world, the 1652 *Cosmographie* of Peter Heylyn, was for the most part compiled from the earlier works of Botero and Purchas: it held that among the European powers in Africa only the Portuguese traded for slaves; and the same was the case in editions of the book that came out in 1657

¹⁸⁷ Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 772; Lopes, *Report on the Kingdome of Congo*, trans. Hartwell, 36, 35, and 35. On the Anzigues, see also Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 772; Thomas Herbert, *Some Yeares Travels into Divers Parts of Asia and Afrique* (London, 1638), 10-11; and Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes*, bk. 4, pt. 1: 76.

as well as 1666. In that year the compact *Cosmography* of Robert Fage reported that even though ivory, ebony, sugar, ginger, and ostrich feathers were for sale around the continent, the only good that interested the English in Africa was gold.¹⁸⁸

Already by this date, however, the slave trade had started to become well known. In 1665 a patent issued to the African company had for the first time listed “negro slaves” among the goods to be purchased in Guinea; and although one survey of the region which was printed in that year was titled *The Golden Coast*, its author was aware that the English there also traded for slaves. In the next quarter of a century, ships sponsored for the most part by the Company delivered almost two hundred thousand Africans into Barbados and Jamaica alone. By 1690, when one trader published a protest against the monopoly of the Company over the expanding African trade, he began with an observation that would have surprised no informed English reader. The “Penury or Plenty” of their Caribbean colonies, he wrote, “lies indispensably upon the Trade of *Negro* Servants from Africa.”¹⁸⁹

In the period that preceded this remark, the English had come to reflect upon their trade in slaves. The commerce that before they had condemned when practiced by Iberian powers was now one in which they participated and indeed upon which they relied. And in

¹⁸⁸ The materials on Africa are in Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Bookes* (1652), bk. 4, pt. 1: 1-90; Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Books*, second ed. (London, 1657), bk. 4, pt. 1: 917-1007; and Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie in foure Bookes*, third ed. (London, 1666), bk. 4, pt. 1: 931-1007. Only minor changes were made between these editions, and in fact Heylyn had died in 1662, well before the final edition was printed. The materials on Africa are in Robert Fage, *Cosmography* (London, 1666), 96-111; and on the English gold trade, see Fage, *Cosmography*, 106. For a similar account in which gold also figured as the only good that interested the English in Africa, see Samuel Clarke, *A Geographical Description of all the Countries in the Known World* (London, 1657), 67.

¹⁸⁹ “African Company” (from Patent Rolls, 14 Car. II, Pt. xxvi.) in *Select Charters of Trading Companies, A.D. 1530-1707*, ed. Cecil T. Carr (London, 1913), 177-181, 181; and William Wilkinson, *Systema Africanum: or a Treatise, Discovering the Intrigues and Arbitrary Proceedings of the Guiney Company* (London, 1690), 7. See *The Golden Coast, Or A Description of Guinney*, 62 and 68. For additional works presented in the context of debate about the monopoly of the African company that registered the recent expansion in the slave trade and its importance to the colonies, see *Certain Considerations Relating to the Royal African Company of England* (London, 1680), 5; R.B. [Nathaniel Crouch], *A View of the English Acquisitions in Guinea* (London, 1686), 11; and Edward Littleton, *The Groans of the Plantations* (London, 1689), 7.

this context the English sensed that they ought to produce some account of themselves in which their actions figured as legitimate.

And yet what most strikes the modern reader of this account is how little attention it seemed to English authors to demand. Not so much as a pamphlet appeared during this time that was devoted to a defense of the slave trade and in turn none was put out in order to condemn it. Even the several pamphlets that did appear near the end of the seventeenth century in the controversy over the monopoly of the African company had to do with the organization of the trade rather than its moral character.¹⁹⁰ Reflection upon this issue arose in phrases and passages in works that were more concerned with other matters: it had not yet cohered into a clear common opinion and much less into a debate. It was at this stage made up instead of an interlocking set of imperfectly articulated assumptions. The central one of these was that to become a slave was a common fate in human affairs.

The setting in which the English had come to accept this assumption was not their experience of everyday life, since slavery in England had long since ended, but rather the reception of an ancient notion of slavery that had best been preserved in the legal treatises of the Roman Empire. In what has been described above as the Roman tradition of slavery, all persons were considered to be free by nature but as a product of accident or misfortune some might be made into slaves. These were most often captives in war and criminals and they were placed into the hands of a master or of the state and could be bought and sold in the manner of other goods.

¹⁹⁰ For studies of this controversy, see K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London, 1957); William A. Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1672-1752* (Williamsburg, V.A., 2013); and Abigail Leslie Swingen, *Competing Visions of Empire: Labor, Slavery, and the Origins of the British Atlantic Empire* (New Haven, C.N., 2015).

Slavery had entered Roman law through the law of nations, which was understood to be composed of the customs that were common to all humankind. In the first half of the seventeenth century, as English observers came to believe that the peoples of Africa were more or less similar to those of Europe, they would have known as well that in at least one respect their more accurate model was the law of nations. Whereas the peoples of Europe no longer took slaves, many of the peoples of Africa did so by the same means as the law of nations had prescribed. It was in part for this reason that the English never registered a hint of surprise when they learned of certain persons in Africa who had been reduced to a status that had no parallel in their own present social order.

Slavery in Africa was thus seen to arise from an image of the continent as at once alien and familiar. As the works of Samuel Purchas had shown in the first half of the century, the structure of social and political life there may have been civil by the standard of Europe even if it was this same structure that had produced a form of subjection that none of the nations of Europe now condoned.

The work that did the most to develop this image of the continent in the second half of the century was the grand volume *Africa* published by John Ogilby in 1670. Ogilby had had the work translated almost without alteration from the 1668 production of the Dutchman Olfert Dapper, and Dapper had compiled it from the best accounts printed in Europe as well as Dutch and Portuguese reports that had circulated in manuscript. His section on Guinea was composed in this manner: it started in a survey drawn from Leo of the inland kingdoms along the Niger and included passages on the Gold Coast kingdoms that relied in large part upon de Marees but added to these more original material about what Ogilby called “the great numbers of several Kingdoms” that spread to the west and east along the

coast—from Kasangas and Guinala and Quoia around the mouth of the Gambia to Accra and Allada and Calabar toward the Bight of Benin. As Purchas had asserted was the case across the continent, Ogilby noted that in the region some peoples were nomads who had never established governments, “neither ever scarce heard of any,” while “the rest are all Monarchical,” he wrote, “living under Laws, Order and Princes.”¹⁹¹

As in Purchas, too, the main source of slavery in Guinea according to Ogilby was the wars in which these princes were engaged. The ruler of Guinala carried on “continual Wars” against the peoples of the Bissagos Archipelago from whom, Ogilby said, he took “many Slaves.” At Calabar slaves arrived from the conflicts between eastern inland states in which, in a distinction also described in de Marees, “they eat up whatever Enemies they kill, but their Prisoners they sell for Slaves.” So common was the enslavement of prisoners in Guinea that Ogilby took note when it did not take place. He remarked that the leader of a people known as the Folgians who lived under the monarch of Quoia so feared the spirit of independence in an enemy whose forces he had subdued that he “resolved not to inflict any great Services upon them as Slaves, but live with them as Companions.”¹⁹²

Ogilby reported that often the prisoners who were enslaved in the wars in Guinea were sold along the coast to traders from Europe and then transported into the West Indies: the ones at Guinala were purchased by the Portuguese, he said; and those at Calabar were

¹⁹¹ John Ogilby, *Africa* (London, 1670), 377 and 318. Dapper’s name did not appear upon the title page of this book, which led some scholars in the middle of the twentieth century to refer to it as “Ogilby’s Africa”; but Ogilby surely understated the extent of his reliance upon the Dutchman when he said in his Preface that he had already begun to research and write when he discovered Dapper, “whose large Addition, added to my own Endeavors, hath much Accelerated the *Work*.” Ogilby, *Africa*, “The Preface.” On Dapper’s sources see G. Thilmans, “Le Sénégal dans l’oeuvre d’Olfried Dapper,” *Bulletin de l’Institut fondamental d’Afrique noire*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Jul., 1971), 508-563; P. E. H. Hair, “Barbot, Dapper, Davity: A Critique of Sources on Sierra Leone and Cape Mount,” *History in Africa*, vol. 1 (1974), 25-54; and Jones, “Semper Aliquid Veteris: Printed Sources for the History of the Ivory and Gold Coasts.”

¹⁹² Ogilby, *Africa*, 364, 482 (for this distinction, see also 483 and 462), and 407-408.

acquired by the Dutch. Ogilby had also followed the progress of English commerce in the area but seems not to have known that his nation had entered the trade in slaves. Already by the time that his work appeared, however, the news of this shift had filtered back into England; and as it did, authors there took care to affirm that the persons their countrymen in West Africa sent to America had come to them by the same means as such persons had earlier come to their rivals. “In *Guiny* there are several Petty Kingdoms who make *War* one against the other,” explained Richard Blome, whose 1670 description of the world was an effort to expand upon the atlas of the French cartographer Sanson. “In which *Wars*, those they *kill*, they *eat*; those they *take*, they make *Slaves*; and such,” Blome continued, as he blended new English practices into old European customs, “are those, that the *English*, *Dutch*, and other Nations buy of them.”¹⁹³

That the persons they bought in Guinea had been made slaves in war soon became a common refrain among the agents of the African company who had spent time there. In 1672 John Watts, the son of a surgeon from Kent who had been held hostage by the natives in Calabar for as long as four years, stated in this vein in a brief account of the region that “the Slaves they sell to the English are prisoners taken in war.” That this was the case on occasion had the effect that the traders in slaves would linger on the coast until they came upon a conflict on land that promised to deliver to them their cargo. One such trader was Thomas Phillips, who captained a ship named the *Hannibal* that arrived near Sierra Leone

¹⁹³ Richard Blome, *A Geographical Description of the Four Parts of the World* (London, 1670), pt. 2, 50. The subtitle explained that the work was “*Taken from the Notes & Workes of the Famous Monsieur Sanson, Geographer to the French King, and other Eminent Travellers and Authors.*” On the prisoners at Guinala who were purchased by the Portuguese, see Ogilby, *Africa*, 364; and on those at Calabar who were acquired by the Dutch, see Ogilby, *Africa*, 483 (marginal note). For further reports that the Portuguese bought prisoners to transport to the West Indies, see Ogilby, *Africa*, 363 and 469. Ogilby wrote of the progress of English commerce in Guinea (and of the conflicts in which their attempts to establish settlements there had involved them with the agents of the Dutch in recent decades) in particular in the section of his work that concerned the Gold Coast at Ogilby, *Africa*, 419-433.

in 1693. For six months Phillips skirted east and traded for ivory and gold at English forts from Cape Coast to Cormantine until he reached the kingdom of Whidaw. The natives here were “constantly at wars” with their neighbors in Allada in which “all the plunder is men and women to sell for slaves.” And once Phillips had bought thirteen hundred of these men and women, the *Hannibal* sailed for Barbados.¹⁹⁴

The extent to which the slave trade among the English depended upon the cycle of conflict in Guinea was apparent as well to foreign observers. Jean Barbot was a Huguenot merchant who had twice visited Guinea and, after the Edict of Nantes was revoked, fled to England where he finished a manuscript on the region that was at least in part a record of his experience. Barbot recalled that during times of peace slaves were rare and their price was high: under such conditions, he said, the English slavers at Calabar would sometimes have to wait for ten months in order to fill their vessels. In the aftermath of war, however, the pace of the slave trade so accelerated that on the Gold Coast in 1681 Barbot had seen three hundred prisoners delivered onto an English ship who had been captured in fighting in the interior earlier on that same day.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ [anonymous] *A True Relation of the Inhumane and Unparallel'd Actions, and Barbarous Murders of Negroes or Moors: Committed on Three English-men in Old Calabar in Guinny* (London, 1672), 16; and Thomas Phillips, “A Journal of a Voyage Made in the *Hannibal* of London, Ann. 1693, 1694,” in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 6 vols. (London, 1732), vol. 6, 171-239, 220. The author of the former work said that it was composed “*verbatim*” from the oral account of John Watts (3).

¹⁹⁵ The manuscript described here was composed in French and finished in 1688 but never published. Barbot would never again visit Guinea but did translate his work into English and vastly expanded it upon the basis of recent travel books until the time of his death in 1712. This version of the text became well known when it was printed as John Barbot, “A Description of the Coasts of North and South-Guinea,” in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 6 vols. (London, 1732), vol. 5, 1-420. The version of the text used here is of course the 1688 manuscript, which is available in an excellent English edition as *Barbot on Guinea: The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa, 1678-1712*, eds. P.E.H. Hair, Adam Jones, and Robin Law, 2 vols. (London, 1992). On the rarity of slaves in peacetime, see *Barbot on Guinea*, vol. 2, 440, 518, and 550; on English slavers at Calabar, see *Barbot on Guinea*, vol. 2, 672; on the acceleration of the slave trade in the aftermath of war, see *Barbot on Guinea*, vol. 2, 439 and 518; and on the episode in 1681, see *Barbot on Guinea*, vol. 2, 550 (as well as, for the version Barbot gave in the 1732 edition, 350).

And yet even if it did seem clear to Barbot as well as Ogilby that the main source of slavery in Guinea was war, in the period when these authors wrote, European observers became aware that some persons sold on the coast appeared to have been enslaved through other means—ones never considered to be legitimate in the Roman tradition.

The thread that ran through ideas of slavery in the Roman tradition was the closeness of slavery and death. In the law of nations the term for slave, *servus*, was said to have been derived from the term for spare, *servare*, as slavery was a status reserved for persons who had been spared from death.

In the accounts of Africa written and edited by Purchas, slavery had been reserved for cases of this kind. Such were the cases in which prisoners in war were enslaved, since these might well have been killed in battle and then even eaten by the cannibals who were so prominent in the image of the continent that Purchas had developed. For criminals, too, slavery figured as an alternative to death, as one other punishment known to be in use for grave offenses was execution; and on occasion in West Africa the persons accused of such offenses were made to undergo a trial by ordeal in which they drank a potion mixed with herbs or roots that often proved to be fatal. Even in the few instances in Purchas in which persons sold themselves, as on the Island of Horses in Congo or at Mombaza, this act was seen as the final recourse for those who would otherwise have been slaughtered.¹⁹⁶

In their accounts of Guinea, Barbot and Villault had also reported that some of the slaves in the region had consented to their status; and here again both authors were careful to note that these had done so in order to preserve their lives. In addition to the prisoners in

¹⁹⁶ For the use of trial by ordeal in West Africa, see for example de Marees, *Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, trans. van Dantzig and Jones, 102-103; Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1626), 720; Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous, 263-264; Ogilby, *Africa*, 405-406 (at Quoia) and 497-499 (at Loango); and *Barbot on Guinea*, eds. Hair, Jones, and Law, vol. 2, 503 and 640.

war and criminals who were enslaved, Villault explained, there were “such poor miserable Creatures” as had been unable “to maintain, or keep themselves alive.” They had agreed to enter the service of a master in return for the goods and food they needed to survive, and in turn their children became “Slaves as well as the Parents.” Barbot would add that in times of famine entire peoples could be driven to this fate, for he was on the coast in the spring of 1681 when in a fallow season thousands of the natives had “offered themselves for sale as slaves, in order to save their lives.”¹⁹⁷

This event made clear to Barbot “how all men have a natural love of life.” Indeed it was one more respect in which Africa figured as a model for the law of nations that the choices of the people there confirmed its fundamental insight into the nature of slavery—that slavery had come to be accepted because there was no fate worse than death.

By the final third of the seventeenth century, however, reports had begun to spread that some of the persons whom Europeans purchased in Guinea had been sold into slavery when their lives had not been in peril. De Marees had known that parents might sell their children when they lacked “the means to bring them up or feed them.” Blome agreed that parents could do so “when they are in need,” but he said as well that sometimes they sold their children on occasions no more significant than “when they please them not.” Watts heard that men could sell their wives and servants as well as their children if any of these argued with them more than once. And although Ogilby had reported that the slaves sold at Calabar were prisoners in war, he also stated that the people who lived among the hills to the north of the kingdom were “so barbarously cruel, that the Parents sell their Children,

¹⁹⁷ Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous, 206 and 207; and *Barbot on Guinea*, eds. Hair, Jones, and Law, vol. 1, 76 (also 107 and, in vol. 2, 549). Villault said that sometimes even the children of kings who had not saved some of their wealth soon became “so abject and contemptible” after their fathers had died that they were “forc’d to make themselves Slaves” in order “to avoid dying with hunger.” Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk Called Guinee*, trans. anonymous, 248 (also 267).

the Husband his Wife, and one Brother and Sister the other” for no reason at all that he could discern.¹⁹⁸

Among the kingdoms in Guinea, too, Ogilby found that slavery had grown into the structure of monarchical government. In the manner of certain earlier observers of Prester John, Ogilby believed that a number of the rulers in Guinea treated their subjects as though they were slaves. In Benin, he wrote, the king held “an unlimited Power, and so absolute a a Sovereignty, that all his Subjects, how great soever, be no better than Slaves.” And even though this seemed not to have taken place for Prester John, for some of the rulers on the coast the absolute power they held over their subjects had come to include the authority to sell them to traders from Europe. Thus the natives whom the Portuguese took from Kasangas, according to Ogilby, were “either purchas’d in War, or else under the pretext of some imperious and arbitrary Laws by the Kings and Great Men of the Countrey.” In the inland kingdom of Gago, Blome observed that when subjects committed even a slight offense the king “sells their *Wives* and *Children* to strangers.” Later on at Whidaw, Phillips discovered in a similar vein that when the demand for slaves among foreign ships was not met by the supply of prisoners, the king sold hundreds of his wives “to compleat their number.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ De Marees, *Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, trans. van Dantzig and Jones, 176; Blome, *Geographical Description of the Four Parts of the World*, pt. 2, 46; [anonymous], *True Relation of the Inhumane and Unparalleled Actions, and Barbarous Murders of Negroes or Moors: Committed on Three English-men in Old Calabar in Guinny*, 18; and Ogilby, *Africa*, 483. See also the 1665 survey of the region in which it was reported without further explanation that the natives sold “Slaves and Children, which the Parents will trappan to the Sea side, and sell away for a Crown.” [anonymous], *Golden Coast, Or A Description of Guinney*, 62.

¹⁹⁹ Ogilby, *Africa*, 474 and 363; Blome, *Geographical Description of the Four Parts of the World*, pt. 2, 46; and Phillips, “Journal of a Voyage Made in the Hannibal of London,” in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1732), vol. 6, 219. For other kingdoms in Guinea where the monarch was said to hold absolute and unlimited power over his subjects, see Quioia, Accra, and Allada at Ogilby, *Africa*, 399, 434, and 468. Barbot too had heard that the kings in Guinea “can enslave their subjects,” but he maintained that “they never carry out this extreme measure unless there is some dire need domestically or unless the particular subjects have committed some great misdeed.” *Barbot on Guinea*, eds. Hair, Jones, and Law, vol. 1, 107.

Finally even more unusual reports had surfaced by this time which suggested that some persons whom the English had carried from the coast in Guinea had never been sold to them as slaves. It was a charge that recalled the abuses of the earliest English travelers to the region—from the crew of Robert Gainsh to the larger companies of John Hawkins. When Watts asked the natives at Calabar in 1668 for the reason they had taken him hostage when he had been there only to trade, they said that it was in response to the “unhandsome action” on the part of his countrymen “of carrying a Native away without their leave.” By 1680 English commerce in Guinea had again been disrupted; and according to the author of one pamphlet presented in defense of the African company, the cause was that separate traders had invited “some considerable Natives” to board their ship and “forthwith caryed them away, and sold them at the Plantations for Slaves.” As had the natives at Calabar, the author condemned this as a “perfidious action.” Nevertheless the word was now out in the open that some of the Englishmen in Guinea had broken all of the old customs and begun to enslave anyone whom they could get their hands on.²⁰⁰

Observers of Africa had in short come to realize that they could no longer smoothly assimilate the practice of slavery on the coast in Guinea to the ancient tradition from which it might have seemed to draw support. But the significance of this break was grasped most firmly by authors who were concerned above all with America.

The first English author to produce a thorough account of slavery in the Caribbean was Richard Ligon, whose *True & Exact History of the Island of Barbados* was printed in

²⁰⁰ [anonymous], *True Relation of the Inhumane and Unparallel'd Actions, and Barbarous Murders of Negroes or Moors: Committed on Three English-men in Old Calabar in Guinny*, 6; and *Certain Considerations Relating to the Royal African Company of England*, 8. Barbot also reported that, in the town of Sesto on the Pepper Coast, the people refused to trade with the Dutch because a ship under the Dutch flag had kidnapped thirteen of the locals. According to the Dutchmen to whom Barbot had spoken, though, the crew on this ship had in fact been composed of English privateers. *Barbot on Guinea*, eds. Hair, Jones, and Law, vol. 1, 273-274.

1657, by which date he estimated that the Africans were “more then double the numbers of the Christians that are there.” These Africans had arrived from places along the western coast where “petty Kingdomes” sold to traders from Europe “such as they take in Battle, whom they make slaves.” In 1672, when Blome put out his own description of Barbados, he drew upon this passage in Ligon in order to maintain that the Africans on the island had been purchased from among “the *Prisoners* that are taken” in the wars between the “petty *Kings*” in Guinea. What Blome did not repeat here was that Ligon had known in addition that the sources of slavery in Guinea had started to expand. The kings there would simply “sell their Subjects,” he wrote; and there were “some mean men” who “sell their Servants, their Children, and sometimes their Wives.”²⁰¹

After he had called such men “mean,” however, Ligon did not pause in his account to reflect upon the moral character of their actions; and neither did he pass judgment upon the traders who purchased the persons whom they sold. Among English authors it was left instead to Richard Baxter, whose *Christian Directory* appeared in 1673, to begin to make the expansion of the sources of slavery in Guinea into the basis for an attack upon English participation in the trade. Baxter did allow that “there is a slavery to which some men may be Lawfully put” and went on to rehearse the traditional reasons for which a person might be enslaved. One might be enslaved, he explained, as a punishment for crime or if one was taken in war or if poverty “do make a man consent to sell himself to a life of lesser misery, to escape a greater, or death it self.” But as Baxter turned to consider the case of slavery in

²⁰¹ Richard Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London, 1657), 46; Richard Blome, *A Description of the Island of Jamaica; With the other Isles and Territories in America to which the English are Related* (London, 1672), 91; and Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, 46. Blome acknowledged his considerable debt to Ligon on Blome, *Description of the Island of Jamaica*, 96. Ligon’s account came out in a widely read second edition in 1673, and the passage quoted in the text above was reproduced on Richard Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes* (London, 1673), 46.

the present, he saw that some of the persons whom the English owned had not been made slaves for any one of these reasons. As he drew perhaps upon the reference that Watts had made to such an incident, Baxter said that “to go as Pirats and catch up poor *Negro*’s” who had “never forfeited Life or Liberty” was “one of the worst kinds of Thievery.” And since it was a crime to enslave a person in this manner, Baxter reasoned, then it was a crime to sell and buy them as well.²⁰²

Indeed the main concern of Baxter in this passage was not so much the sources of slavery in Guinea as the treatment of slaves in America. At this point in the *Directory*, he wanted to define the duties of masters to dependants; and he held that, even if the Africans had lawfully been enslaved, they still were owed a measure of respect. Even “if their sins have enslaved them to you,” Baxter advised, “yet Nature made them your equals.” Baxter worried that the “Masters in foraign Plantations who have *Negro*’s and other Slaves” had begun to “equal *Men* and *Beasts*” to the extent that both were bought and used “meerly to the same end.” As the planters came to regard them both solely as sources of profit, they forgot, as Baxter said, that “their chief end in buying and using slaves” should have been so to treat them as “to win them to Christ and save their souls.”²⁰³

The conversion of slaves in America was the end pursued as well by the Reverend Morgan Godwyn, who called himself in the title of his 1680 polemic *The Negro’s & Indians Advocate, Suing for their Admission into the Church*. Like Baxter, Godwyn feared that “our Planters chief Deity” was none other than “*Profit*” and “their God, INTEREST.” In an effort to wring from their slaves as much labor as they could, the planters had neglected to

²⁰² Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory: Or, A Summ of Practical Theologie, and Cases of Conscience* (London, 1673), 558, 558, and 559.

²⁰³ Baxter, *Christian Directory*, 557, 557, 558, and 560. For the chapter of the work on “The Duties of Masters towards their Servants,” see Baxter, *Christian Directory*, 556-560.

baptize and instruct them and in so doing had denied the “Right to *Religion*” that ought to have been guaranteed by the mere possession of a soul, “whether in a Bond, or *Freeman*.” Unlike Baxter, however, Godwyn had traveled to Barbados, where he served in the clergy for a decade; and he had seen that the abuses of the planters touched not only the souls but also the bodies of their slaves. Bare self-interest might have suggested a certain regard for the health of their laborers, so that in this respect alone the planters had violated their most treasured principle. They had starved their slaves and kept them almost naked and tortured them in their houses with special “*Engines, and Devices to execute their Cruelty*.”²⁰⁴

It was in the writings of the London merchant Thomas Tryon that the cruelty of the planters moved toward the center of an attack upon the system of slavery in the Caribbean. Tryon had worked as a tradesman on Barbados for much of the 1660s, and in 1684 he put out a book of essays in which he offered *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies*. After a treatise on tropical herbs and fruits, he assumed the voice of a slave in order to deliver what he called “The Negro’s Complaint of their Hard Servitude, and the Cruelties Practiced upon them.” According to Tryon, the cruelties practiced upon slaves may have begun on the journeys over land to the ports in Guinea and intensified on the ships that traversed the Middle Passage but in the New World they had been perfected: it was a “*superlative Inhumanity*” that had met them here. They might well have expected “another sort of Treatment,” Tryon observed, “from the Christians, who boast themselves the Sons and Favourites of the God of Love.” Instead they were over-worked and whipped

²⁰⁴ Morgan Godwyn, *The Negro’s & Indians Advocate, Suing for their Admission into the Church* (London, 1680), 13, 83, 80, and 81 (on the cruelty of the planters, see also 40-41). Despite the title he chose for his work, Godwyn did not mention the conversion of Indians; and although Godwyn had served in the clergy in Virginia before he moved to Barbados, in 1670, his book only discussed slavery on the island. He returned to these themes in Morgan Godwyn, *A Supplement to the Negro’s & Indians Advocate* (London, 1681). On Godwyn, see also Alden T. Vaughan, “Slaveholders’ ‘Hellish Principles’: A Seventeenth-Century Critique,” in Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York, 1995), 55-81.

and could be killed on a whim. Only in this final act did the planters betray a capacity for mercy, for they had made the lives of their slaves into ones “far worse than Death.”²⁰⁵

And with this phrase the central argument of English authors against the system of slavery in the Caribbean had become clear. In the Roman tradition, slavery had seemed to represent a form of mercy in cases where death might well have been the crueler fate; and in accounts of Africa, slavery was said most often to arise when the victors in battle were not so cruel as to kill and eat their victims. Toward the close of the seventeenth century, a rumor spread through the ports in Guinea where slaves were shipped to America that they were taken there not in order to work but to be fattened and then consumed.²⁰⁶ Already by this time a small number of English authors had come to believe that in a sense this rumor was correct. In the New World, the old balance had been upset: here slavery was the very essence of cruelty; to be condemned to this life was a fate worse than death.

Nevertheless there is perhaps no better measure of the continued influence of the Roman tradition of slavery than that even these authors did not reject it. Their arguments were directed toward abuses in the practice of slavery—on the one hand in the sources of slavery in Guinea and on the other hand in the treatment of slaves in America. Not one of them held that slavery as such was illegitimate or looked forward to imagine a world without slaves. Even Tryon could be reconciled to the system that he so severely condemned.

²⁰⁵ Philotheos Physiologus [Thomas Tryon], *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies* (London, 1684), 77, 85-86, and 81. For “The Negro’s Complaint of their Hard Servitude,” see [Tryon], *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies*, 75-145. See also Philippe Rosenberg, “Thomas Tryon and the Seventeenth-Century Dimensions of Antislavery,” *WMQ*, vol. 61, no. 4 (Oct., 2004), 609-642. On Baxter and Godwyn as well as Tryon, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1966).

²⁰⁶ For word of this rumor, see *Barbot on Guinea*, eds. Hair, Jones, and Law, vol. II, 639 and 774-775; and Bosman, *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, trans. anonymous, 365. Phillips reported in a similar vein that the Africans who were taken there had “a more dreadful apprehension of *Barbadoes* than we can have of hell.” Phillips, “Journal of a Voyage Made in the *Hannibal* of London,” in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1732), vol. 6, 219.

The third and final essay in his book of *Friendly Advice* was framed as a dialogue between a master and his slave in America. At the end of the exchange, after he has again rehearsed the many “Cruelties and Oppressions” that he has suffered, the slave requests only that his master make several improvements to his conditions of labor. And once the master agrees to do so, the slave announces that in return he will encourage his fellows to be “obedient, humble, just and respective to all their Masters.” “Good Night, my good dear Master!” the slave exclaims as the dialogue ends.²⁰⁷

Near the end of the seventeenth century, the work that most dramatically captured both the power and the limits of the English antislavery argument was the prose narrative *Oroonoko*, by Aphra Behn, which was printed in 1688. For although this work later gained fame as the first account of a slave revolt in modern literature, it is not, as readers from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century often said, an “emancipation novel.”²⁰⁸

The book begins in the native country of its titular character, on the Gold Coast at Coramantien, where according to Behn the English find “the most advantageous Trading” for slaves. “For that Nation,” she explains, “is very war-like and brave,” and since they are

²⁰⁷ [Tryon], “A Discourse in way of *Dialogue*, Between an *Ethiopian* or *Negro-Slave* and a Christian, that was his *Master* in *America*,” in [Tryon], *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies*, 146-222, 212 and 222 (the improvements requested by the slave are on 217-219).

²⁰⁸ Ernest A. Baker, *The Novels of Mrs Aphra Behn* (London, 1905), xxiii. Readers of *Oroonoko* have come to be far more careful in recent decades: for informed contextual treatments, see for example Katharine M. Rogers, “Fact and Fiction in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*,” *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 20 (1988), 1-15; Joanna Lipking, “Confusing matters: searching the backgrounds of *Oroonoko*,” in *Aphra Behn Studies*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge, U.K., 1996), 259-281; Joanna Lipking, “‘Others’, slaves, and colonists in *Oroonoko*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, eds. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge, U.K., 2004), 166-187; and Rebekah Mitsein, “Trans-Saharan Worlds and World Views in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 30, no. 3 (Spring 2018), 339-368. One subject addressed in studies of this kind is whether *Oroonoko* is a work of history or fiction: it seems to have been a mix of both genres, which in the seventeenth century were not quite distinct. What is clear is that Behn intended for it to be read as a record of real events: she had in all likelihood lived in Surinam in the 1660s, which is the setting for the second half of the book, to which she gave the subtitle *A True History*. It also seems clear that the book was often read as truthful at the time. One reader who read it in this way was the very author who first adapted it for the stage: see Thomas Southerne, *Oroonoko: A Tragedy* (London, 1696), “The Epistle Dedicatory.”

“always in Hostility with one neighbouring Prince or other, they had the fortune to take a great many Captives; for all they took in Battel, were sold as Slaves.” These slaves are sold by the general of the army, and Oroonoko has recently ascended to that rank—so that, by the time one English trader arrives on the coast, Behn is able to observe that this person is “very well known to *Oroonoko*, with whom he had traffick’d for Slaves.”²⁰⁹

Already by this time, though, the familiar routine of the slave trade in Coramantien has been disrupted. Oroonoko had in secret wed the daughter of the dead former general, a young woman named Imoinda, who was soon summoned to join the harem of the king. She struggled here to resist his advances; and after the king discovered that Oroonoko had snuck into the royal palace to consummate his marriage, he ordered that both Imoinda and a woman who had come to her aid be “sold off, as Slaves, to another Country, either *Christian* or *Heathen*; ’twas no matter where.” When the news of this event reached Oroonoko, he was back in the field of battle; and it is when he returns that he meets the English trader in order to sell his captives. He boards the ship of the trader in order to negotiate the sale, but is himself seized and bound in the hold. “Betray’d to Slavery” in an instant, Oroonoko falls into despair: as the ship heads west from the shore, he regrets that he has been bound too tight to “quit himself of a Life that wou’d by no means endure Slavery.”²¹⁰

The ship next reaches land at the English colony of Surinam on the northern coast of South America. Oroonoko is purchased by a gentleman who comes to love him “as his dearest Brother.” He is rarely made to work and when he finds that by chance Imoinda had been sent to Surinam as well the two lovers settle into a cottage and conceive a child. Still Oroonoko finds that he cannot abide his condition and resolves to lead a revolt. He gathers

²⁰⁹ Mrs. A. [Aphra] Behn, *Oroonoko: or, the Royal Slave* (London, 1688), 14 and 86.

²¹⁰ Behn, *Oroonoko*, 69, 90, and 91.

together a number of male slaves in order to exhort them to the act. He reviews the tedium and drudgery of slavery and then he comes to what seems to be the core of his case. “*And why*, said he,” as Behn breaks into direct discourse,

Shou’d we be Slaves to an unknown People? Have they Vanquish’d us Nobly in Fight? Have they Won us in Honourable Battel? And are we, by the chance of War, become their Slaves? This wou’d not anger a Noble Heart, this wou’d not animate a Souldiers Soul; no, but we are Bought and Sold like Apes, or Monkeys, to be the Sport of Women, Fools and Cowards; and the Support of Rogues, Runagades, that have abandon’d their own Countries . . .

“*Will you, I say*,” Oroonoko concludes, “*suffer the Lash from such Hands?*” His fellows reply, “with one accord, *No, no, no*,” and by that night the revolt has begun.²¹¹

For a call to arms, it is a careful address. Oroonoko does not dwell upon the cruelty of slavery and neither does he complain that slaves have been denied access to the truths of Christian religion. He makes no mention of the manner in which Imoinda was sold off by the king or he himself was betrayed to slavery. Over the course of his address Oroonoko in fact expresses no concern at all about the sources of slavery in Guinea—which is no doubt due in part to the fact that, as he learned soon after he arrived in Surinam, when he was a general he had enslaved most of the Africans there as captives in war. This is the route to slavery that Oroonoko now accepts and almost even invites as one that “wou’d not anger a Noble Heart.” Unlike any figure we have seen so far, he sees slavery as at root a matter of nobility or honor. What grates on him is the sense that the transatlantic trade has given rise to a situation in which slavery is the most acute form of dishonor. And he draws from this the conclusion toward which Tryon had pointed but never reached: in the New World,

²¹¹ Behn, *Oroonoko*, 187-188 and 189.

according to Oroonoko, even if one “Dy’d in the attempt it wou’d be more brave” to take up arms in rebellion “than to live in perpetual Slavery.”²¹²

As it happens, Oroonoko does die in the attempt. It is not long before the militia of the colony tracks down the rebels under the command of Oroonoko to offer that they will be pardoned if they surrender. Almost every one of them surrenders at once and Oroonoko and Imoinda are taken prisoner. Once they realize that they cannot escape, Oroonoko kills his wife to save her from further outrages before at last he is tortured and executed.

When his fellow rebels had abandoned him, Oroonoko said that he was ashamed that he had attempted “to make those Free, who were by Nature *Slaves*.” It was an offhand reference to the Aristotelian theory of slavery from a figure who has been shaped far more by the legacy of Rome. Oroonoko “had heard of, and admir’d the *Romans*,” according to Behn, even as a young man in Coramantien; and he is entertained in Surinam with stories of “the Lives of the Romans.” The slave name that he receives here is Caesar.²¹³ In a sense by the end of the narrative Oroonoko is out of time as well as out of place. The tradition of slavery that he had practiced has begun to break down and he has rebelled against the one that has begun to replace it. He is the complex product of a transitional moment.

If Oroonoko was one of the complex figures produced by English culture near the end of the seventeenth century, then another was one who also took part in a revolt against

²¹² Behn, *Oroonoko*, 193. Oroonoko learns from the African slaves in Surinam that “he was that Prince who had, at several times, sold most of ’em to these Parts” at Behn, *Oroonoko*, 110; and he remarks, just after he has finished his address quoted in the text above, “*That Honour was the First Principle in Nature, that was to be Obey’d*” at Behn, *Oroonoko*, 190. Oroonoko’s consistent disinterest in Christianity is a source of some consternation to Behn’s narrator, who aims to bring Imoinda and him “to the knowledge of the true God” in Surinam. “He wou’d never be reconcil’d to our Notions of the Trinity, of which he ever made a Jest,” she laments. Behn, *Oroonoko*, 142.

²¹³ Behn, *Oroonoko*, 203, 19, and 141.

what he understood to be a form of slavery in 1688; and that was the political philosopher John Locke.

For it must be said that Locke was aware of the currents of thought and perception that we have worked here to reconstruct. Locke was perhaps the greatest reader of books of geography and travel in his time; and at the time of his death, in 1704, his library held all but a few of the books on Africa that have so far been discussed. He owned the collections of Hakluyt and Purchas and the descriptions of the world by Abbot, Purchas, Heylyn, and Morden. He had the account of Guinea by Villault, the history of Ethiopia by Ludolphus, and the survey of the continent by Ogilby. He had the polemic on the conversion of slaves by Morgan Godwyn, whom he had taught at Oxford—and he owned a copy of *Oroonoko*. For information about the English Caribbean, Locke might have consulted his editions of the history of Barbados by Richard Ligon and the 1671 survey of America by Ogilby. But of course his own personal involvement in the area is well known, since for six years until 1675 he had served as Secretary to the Lords Proprietors of the colony of Carolina, which was founded in 1670 by settlers from Barbados and developed almost at once into a slave society founded upon the cultivation of rice in the marshes along the coast.²¹⁴

In this context it is curious that scholars have so often maintained that Locke could not have had the African slave trade in mind as he composed his own theory of slavery. In

²¹⁴ For the full catalogue of Locke's final library, see John Harrison and Peter Laslett, eds., *The Library of John Locke* (Oxford, 1971; orig. pub. 1965). The books of geography and travel contained herein are treated in detail in John Samuel Harpham, "Locke and the Churchill Catalogue Revisited," *Locke Studies*, vol. 17 (2018), 233-241. The argument of this article is that Locke was intimately involved in the production of the 1704 *Collection of Voyages and Travels*, published by Awnsham and John Churchill, whose expanded 1732 edition first printed the accounts of Thomas Phillips and Jean Barbot cited above. The literature on Locke's involvement with Carolina is vast but much of the evidence is in David Armitage, "John Locke, Carolina, and the 'Two Treatises of Government,'" *Political Theory*, vol. 32, no. 5 (Oct., 2004), 602-627; James Farr, "Locke, 'Some Americans', and the Discourse on 'Carolina'," *Locke Studies*, vol. 9 (2009), 19-94; and Brad Hinshelwood, "The Carolinian Context of John Locke's Theory of Slavery," *Political Theory*, vol. 41, no. 4 (Aug., 2013), 562-590. It might also be noted that from 1672 to 1675 Locke owned stock in the Royal African Company.

the *Two Treatises of Government*, which was printed in 1690, Locke presented a theory of the sources of slavery that was framed by close attention to the early-modern reception of Roman law. He said that slavery ought to arise as a substitute for death for criminals and captives in war. And even though in the most important chapters on slavery in this work Locke made no mention of its practice in the present, there are subtle clues elsewhere that indicate that he believed that his theory could in essential respects describe the conduct of the English in the Atlantic world.²¹⁵

The first of these clues is to be found in the *Fundamental Constitutions* that Locke helped to draft for Carolina in 1669 and to revise in 1682. The major article on slavery in that document granted to every freeman in the colony “absolute power and authority over his negro slaves.” In its manuscript form this article had been even more clear to establish that a master possessed “absolute arbitrary Power over the Lives, Liberties and Persons of his Slaves.” It is an arresting provision, because the power of life and death that here was granted to masters in Carolina was not allowed to the masters of slaves in any of the other English colonies in America. From Barbados to Jamaica to Virginia, the slave codes of the seventeenth century all made it a crime for any person willfully to kill a slave. As we have seen, the most distinctive feature of Locke’s theory was that he held that a slave was under the “absolute, arbitrary Power of another, to take away his Life, when he pleases.” When he wrote this passage in the *Second Treatise*, the sole source from which Locke could have

²¹⁵ For the most sophisticated attempts to detach Locke’s theory of slavery from the practice of the African slave trade, see James Farr, “‘So Vile and Miserable an Estate’: The Problem of Slavery in Locke’s Political Thought,” *Political Theory*, vol. 14, no. 2 (May, 1986), 263-289; and James Farr, “Locke, Natural Law, and New World Slavery,” *Political Theory*, vol. 36, no. 4 (Aug., 2008), 495-522.

drawn this view of the awesome power that slavery involved was his own effort to assign that same power to the masters of “negro slaves” across the ocean.²¹⁶

The second clue that ties Locke closer to slavery in the present comes not from one of his own works but rather from the work of his friend James Tyrrell—whose *Patriarcha non Monarcha*, which came out in 1681, was so well known to Locke as to have given rise to a suspicion that Locke drafted a section of the book. Tyrrell here put forward a natural rights theory that was fundamentally Lockean in character, and his account of the sources of slavery would have been familiar to Locke too. Tyrrell held that “the worst of Slaves” was a captive in war; and although Locke had never considered whether a slave might flee from or resist a master, Tyrrell insisted that one of these might do so if not provided with the minimal “Comforts of Life. And if he cannot enjoy these,” Tyrrell went on, “I believe there is no sober Planter in *Barbadoes* (who are most of them Assignees of Slaves taken in War) but will grant such a Slave may lawfully run away if he can.”²¹⁷ The content of this passage may not have been unusual, for Tyrrell aimed only to confirm what he took to be the common opinion that a slave who was not well treated might run away from a master.

²¹⁶ “The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina,” *Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, ed. Thomas Cooper (Columbia, S.C., 1836), vol. 1, 55; “Copy of the Modell of Government Prepared for the Province of Carolina &c,” Ford Collection, New York Public Library (unfoliated), Art. 73; and John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London, 1713; orig. pub. 1690), 2T §23. Armitage has suggested that Locke wrote the chapters that contain this passage in the same period in 1682 when he also helped to revise the *Fundamental Constitutions*: see Armitage, “John Locke, Carolina, and the ‘Two Treatises of Government,’” 610-619. For the slave codes in the English colonies, see Edward B. Rugemer, “The Development of Mastery and Race in the Comprehensive Slave Codes of the Greater Caribbean during the Seventeenth Century,” *WMQ*, vol. 70, no. 3 (Jul., 2013), 429-458; and John Samuel Harpham, “Two concepts of a slave in the South Carolina law of slavery,” *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 39, iss. 1 (2018), 101-122.

²¹⁷ James Tyrrell, *Patriarcha non Monarcha* (London, 1681), 105. On the subject of whether Locke drafted a section of this book, see Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origins and Development* (Cambridge, U.K., 1979), 169-170 (fn. 35); and Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford, 1999), 169-170 (fn. 8). For the opposite but related opinion that Locke’s reading of Tyrrell had an influence on his views in the *Two Treatises*, see David Wootton, “Introduction,” in John Locke, *Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton (Indianapolis, I.N., 1993), 7-122, 58-61.

It was his method that was worthy of note. In the course of a sentence he had shifted from a treatment of the idea of slavery to the system in Barbados that seemed to be an instance of that idea. And in the course of a parenthetical aside he had fit the trade that supplied that system roughly into the consensus of his time about the lawful sources of slavery.

It was this consensus that Locke would accept and work to explain in the *Second Treatise*. And yet as we have also seen, Locke rejected the broad provisions of the Roman tradition as he had found it. He argued that the lawful sources of slavery were far narrower than earlier authors had assumed: no person could consent to slavery, he said; none could be enslaved who had not taken part in an act of aggression that was unjust; and none could be enslaved other than the actual aggressors themselves. The children of slaves could not be made to inherit the condition of their parents, Locke continued; and he seems hardly to have imagined that slaves might be sold from one master to another.²¹⁸ This effort to limit the sources of slavery formed the basis for the revolutionary claims of the *Two Treatises* in the context of English politics. In turn when laid aside the English African slave trade, the contrast was so great as to make the theory of Locke the most complete indictment of that practice to appear in print in the seventeenth century.²¹⁹

By the time the *Two Treatises* came out, as Locke would have known, the careful limits that he had placed upon the sources of slavery had all been set aside at one point or

²¹⁸ In the *Second Treatise*, Locke wrote of slavery solely as the intimate relation between the aggressor in an unjust war and that person's intended victim, who acquired absolute and arbitrary power over the individual who had wrongly attempted to acquire that same power over them. Only in an aside in the *First Treatise* on the nature of monarchical authority did Locke acknowledge without reflection that "A Planter in the *West Indies*" might have within his household "Sons of his own, Friends, or Companions, Soldiers under Pay, or Slaves bought with Money." Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 1T §130 and 131.

²¹⁹ For the argument that Locke held a deep animosity to slavery that does touch upon his views in the *Two Treatises* but centers on his efforts to curtail the use of African slaves in Virginia when he was a member of the Board of Trade from 1696 to 1700, see Holly Brewer, "Slavery, Sovereignty, and 'Inheritable Blood': Reconsidering John Locke and the Origins of American Slavery," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 122, iss. 4 (Oct., 2017), 1038-1078.

another in Guinea. Each one of the strictures set down by earlier theorists of natural rights had been discarded, and some persons had been made slaves by means that even the more permissive customs of the law of nations would not have authorized. To be certain it still appeared to be the case that most of the persons sold to the English had been enslaved in war or as a punishment for crime. But it had become clear as well that the English never declined to purchase the slaves whom they were offered upon legal or moral grounds. The example of Richard Jobson, who had rowed up the Gambia River in 1621, had long since been forgotten. We cannot help but ask, then, whether the ideas that were current in their culture about how slavery ought to arise shaped the actions of the English in Africa at all or whether, from the middle of the seventeenth century, they went there prepared to buy all of the persons they could find.

In fact, around the turn of the seventeenth century, a similar question had weighed upon the minds of some Portuguese observers of the actions of their countrymen along the western coast of Africa. The Iberian nations had by this time come more clearly to reflect upon their role in slavery across the Atlantic world than would the English for quite some time. And since the manner in which the Portuguese most often acquired slaves in Africa resembled the way in which the English would carry on the trade later in the century, their more sensitive authors may shed a certain light upon what were still more inchoate English beliefs.²²⁰

²²⁰ See for example "Brother Luis Brandaon to Father Sandoval," in *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, ed. Elizabeth Donnan, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1930-1935), vol. 1, 123-124; Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 165-196; André Alvares d'Almada, *Brief Treatise on the Rivers of Guinea*, trans. and ed. P. E. H. Hair, 2 vols. (Liverpool, 1984); and the reports drawn together in *Jesuit documents on the Guinea of Cape Verde and the Cape Verde Islands, 1585-1617*, trans. and ed. P. E. H. Hair (Liverpool, 1989).

One such author was Baltasar Barreira, who arrived in Sierra Leone to serve in the small Jesuit mission there in 1605. In the next year, in response to concerns that had been raised that some of the persons whom Portuguese traders loaded onto their ships bound for the New World had been kidnapped into slavery, Barreira wrote to his superiors in Rome. “What can in general be said about the blacks that are bought and sold in this part of Guinea,” his report began, “is that no examination into the legality of their captivity is made.” The traders took “all of the blacks that are brought to them” and in so doing accepted “their sale as sufficient proof of the legitimacy of their captive state.” For they could never have traced so many of the persons whom they were given on the shore back into the continent through old overland trade networks to the initial points at which they had been enslaved. In addition to the delays that such attempts would have caused, they would have been met with hostility from the natives and one might never be able to discern who was telling the truth.²²¹

“This is what can be said generally on the subject,” Barreira wrote: the natives with whom the Portuguese sailed from Guinea had been enslaved in circumstances that would have to remain “a matter of doubt”; and on the basis of the principle that, “‘when in doubt, leave things as they are’,” Barreira concluded, “it seems that nothing should be changed.” Of course nothing was changed in response to concerns of the kind that had prompted the report of Barreira—either in the actions of the Portuguese in his era or among the English in the decades that followed. By inaction, they acted.

According to Barreira there was one more point to be made on behalf of the traders in slaves. The cause of their doubt was that “it cannot be denied,” as he noted, “that there

²²¹ Baltasar Barreira, “Concerning the slaves that come from the parts of Guinea which are called Cape Verde,” in *Jesuit documents on the Guinea of Cape Verde and the Cape Verde Islands*, trans. and ed. P. E. H. Hair, doc. 16 (unpaginated).

exist in this Guinea reasons for genuine and legal captivity” such as those of war and crime. The Europeans there may not have been inclined to inquire too deeply into the past of each person who was sold to them as a slave, but they did appear to care that perhaps each one of them might legitimately have been reduced to that status. To trade in slaves was not to be a criminal or pirate. It was to work in conditions that were uncertain in which there was at least a chance that one’s conscience could be clean. Here at last was the role of ideas in the origins of the African slave trade for the English as for the Portuguese: to suggest that this event was possible from a moral point of view, that there were reasons to be offered in its defense, that the troubling questions about its conduct could be put off for a little while longer.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Causes of Complexion

According to a durable tradition of scholarship, the starkest contrast that the English drew between themselves and the peoples of Africa had to do with the color of their skin. From the early years of contact, the English may have known of Africans whom they understood to be more or less civil rather than savage and even Christian rather than heathen. But they had heard of almost no Africans who lived south of the Senegal River whose skin was not black rather than white.²²² The blackness of the Africans, scholars have long maintained, arrested the attention of the English almost at once; and soon they had decided that it held deep meaning as a sign from God that here was an evil and inferior order of humankind. In turn it was this sense of difference rooted in color that prepared the English to accept that the peoples of Africa were suited to a certain form of subjection which no English person could deserve. And after the end of slavery in America, the original and almost instinctual aversion of white for black remained, which was added proof in the minds of some scholars that it had been there from the beginning.

The title of this chapter is taken from the title of ch.1, pt. 2, in Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968), 11-20.

²²² From at least the time of Pliny, who reported upon the light-skinned Leucæthiopes, foreign observers had been dimly aware of albinism among the peoples of Africa. They never doubted, however, that it marked a strange departure from the norm; and in the seventeenth century, English observers learned that it was seen as such by the Africans. Andrew Battell found that to the north of Congo, in Loango, there were sometimes born “white children,” he said, “which is very rare among them, for their Parents are *Negroes*.” These children were called *Dondos* and placed into the service of the king as his witches. “If they goe to the Market,” Battell remarked, “they may take what they list, for all men stand in awe of them.” “*The strange adventures of ANDREW BATTELL*,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 3, 2: 980. Ludolphus too found that there were “some *Whites* among the *Ethiopians*” in the former empire of Prester John and said that these were avoided in the same manner “as if they had the Leprosie.” Job Ludolphus, *A New History of Ethiopia*, trans. (from Latin) J. P. Gent (London, 1682), 72.

The present, however, can be an imperfect guide to the past; and this has proven to be the case in the study of skin color. In fact a great deal remains to be known about what the English thought of the blackness of the Africans in the period before 1700. The major historical accounts of racial attitudes have concentrated upon the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the concept of race may correctly be said to have emerged. To the extent that such works have taken note of the previous era, they have most often done so in order to find “the point of origin for traditions which are still with us,” in the phrase of Winthrop Jordan, whose 1968 *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* helped to create the field named in its subtitle and to establish its central period of interest as in large part an examination of the revolutionary era and the early republic.²²³ Indeed if we return to the earlier sources without a sense of what they must have said, in the light of later traditions or events, then we will find that what they did say was different from what we might have assumed.

We will find to begin that the blackness of the Africans was not often figured as an urgent concern. The observers of Africa whose accounts were current in England dwelled

²²³ Winthrop Donaldson Jordan, “White Over Black: The Attitudes of the American Colonists Toward the Negro, To 1784” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1960), 34. For studies of British racial attitudes that focus in similar fashion upon the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Wylie Sypher, *Guinea’s Captive Kings: British Anti-Slavery Literature of the XVIIIth Century* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1942); Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (Madison, W.I., 1964); Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Myth of Africa* (New York, 1977); Anthony J. Barker, *The African Link: British Attitudes to the Negro in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1550-1807* (Totowa, N.J., 1978); P. J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (London, 1982), 227-257; Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore, M.D., 1996); Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia, P.A., 2000); David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the 18th Century* (London, 2002); George Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The Emerge of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Culture* (New York, 2008); Andrew S. Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science & Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore, M.D., 2011); Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton, N.J., 2011); and Catherine Molineux, *Faces of Perfect Ebony: Encountering Atlantic Slavery in Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, M.A., 2012). For broad surveys that have drawn attention to the points of difference between this period and the previous era, see George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, N.J., 2002); and Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge, U.K., 2006). For a recent survey of American attitudes, see Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York, 2016).

at length upon such natural features as the uneven shape of the coast, the cliffs that rose at points along the shore, the periodic inundations of the inland rivers, the quality of the soil, and the length of the seasons. When such observers turned their attention to the peoples of the continent, they described the manner in which their women gave birth, the reasons for which in many areas they circumcised their children, the fruits and vegetables they grew, the pipes they sometimes smoked, and the rituals they performed before they buried their dead. As we have seen, such observers were interested too in the forms of government that had been established by the peoples of Africa as well as their methods for the punishment of crime, conduct in war, and customs for the exchange of goods.

Insofar as observers from this period were concerned with the bodies of the peoples of Africa, they studied the texture of their hair, how far they were able to see, the size and shape of their breasts and penises, how short or tall they were, and the diseases that tended to afflict them. The most sustained treatments of the skin color of the Africans appeared in a pair of mid-century essays. Elsewhere the subject was touched upon in single items within lists, clauses within sentences, sentences within paragraphs, paragraphs within chapters, and chapters within vast and sprawling accounts. It appeared here as one of many aspects of Africa that the English aimed to understand.

When English observers did remark upon the black skin of the Africans, they most often attempted to explain how it had come about. Some proposed that it was an effect of the heat of the sun over the Torrid Zone, and a small number asserted that it had its origins in an event described in the Bible that had come to be known as the Curse of Ham. Both of these ideas for the most part withered under scrutiny, however; and over the course of the seventeenth century, perhaps the more common view of black skin was that it was simply

a mystery whose cause no person had been able to find out.

In general a sense of indecision hung over inquiries of this kind. By the end of the century, the English had long since agreed that white was the natural or original skin color of the human species and that blackness was innate and permanent among certain African peoples. But the efforts of the English to account for these facts had led them to no certain conclusions about what in social or political terms they meant. English authors had not yet fastened upon color as the basis for an hierarchical order of the types of humankind. That the skin color of a person might be given as the reason for their status as a slave was as yet far from clear.

So far it has been possible to describe the intellectual origins of American slavery almost without reference to skin color, and now we will see why that was so.

The English may not have been certain that they knew the cause of black skin, but they never doubted that the skin of the peoples whom they encountered along the western coast of Africa was black. It was not merely dark, they insisted, but black and was indeed “very blacke,” “exceedingly blacke,” and “perfectly blacke.” The Moors of northern Africa were dark, but these people were darker; and from their earliest accounts, English authors repeated an old rumor that the Senegal River set the border between the tawny or swarthy Moors who lived to the north and in turn the black Moors who lived to the south. Into the early decades of the seventeenth century, the peoples who lived to the south of the Senegal thus were sometimes called “blacke Moores,” “Blacke-Mores,” and “Blackamores.” Their skin was blacker than any the English had seen elsewhere. They were “the blackest nation

of the world,” in the phrase of one author.²²⁴

So unusual was the color of these peoples that in some cases an author needed only to name it in order to set them apart from the rest of humankind. In the 1623 report on his voyage up the Gambia River, Richard Jobson on occasion referred to the black skin of the men whom he met there; but several times he went so far as to say that they were “Black-men,” “Blackmen,” and “Blackes.” These seem to have been the first uses in print English of Black as the word for a group of persons rather than the skin color of such persons, that is, as a proper noun rather than an adjective. In the final decades of the century, as English travelers abroad began more often to call themselves Whites as opposed to Englishmen or Christians or persons who had white skin, so did a number of accounts appear in English that used the same term as Jobson had for the peoples of western Africa.²²⁵

From the sixteenth century, though, the more common term for these peoples had been Negros or Negroes. This was the plural form of the word in the Iberian languages for black, and English observers were aware that the skin of the Negroes was that same color. Nevertheless it is a measure of the confusion of the era that English authors were unable to

²²⁴ Rycharde Eden, “A breefe description of Affrike,” in Peter Martyr, *The Decades of the Newe Worlde or West India*, trans. (from Latin) Rycharde Eden (Londini, 1555), 344r-345r, 344r; George Abbot, *A Brieffe Description of the Whole Worlde* (London, 1599), Cviir; Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade: or, A Discovery of the River Gambra* (London, 1623), 37; Thomas Blundeville, *M. Blundeville His Exercises* (London, 1594), 262v; “Drawen out of the writings and discourses of Odoardo Lopes, a Portingall, by Philippo Pigafetta,” *A Report of the Kingdome of Congo, a Region of Africa*, trans. (from Italian) Abraham Hartwell (London, 1597), 10; Lewes Roberts, *The Merchants Mappe of Commerce* (London, 1638), 81; and Benjamin Jonson, *The Queenes Masques. The first, OF BLACKNESSE*, in *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* (London, 1616), 893-901, 893.

²²⁵ Jobson, *Golden Trade*, 83, 9, and 36. For later accounts that referred to the peoples of western Africa as “Blacks,” see for example John Ogilby, *Africa* (London, 1670), 315; Robert Morden, *Geography Rectified: Or, A Description of the World* (London, 1680), 337; Jacques-Joseph Le Maire, *The Voyages of Sieur Le Maire, to the Canary-Islands, Cape-Verde, Senegal, and Gambia*, trans. (from French) anon. (London, 1696); and Jerom Merolla da Sorrento, “A Voyage to Congo,” trans. (from Italian) anon., in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 4 vols. (London, 1704), vol. 1, 651-751, 662. It should be observed that most of the accounts from this period that referred to the peoples of western Africa as Blacks—and each of those listed above—were either translated from other languages or compiled from works in other languages that had referred to these peoples with some version of the word Negro. English authors from this era were unable to agree upon the origin of that term, though, and this will be touched upon in the next paragraph.

agree upon the origin of the term. Some held that the Negroes were so called because they lived in the basin of the Niger River, which had long appeared black to observers from the shore and whose name perhaps as a result was the Latin word for black. In fact so similar did the word Niger seem to Negro that early English accounts at times used them in place of one another: the river thus became the “ryver Negro” and the peoples who lived along it were the “Nigers.” Other authors maintained that the Negroes were named for the color of the soil in the region or the sediment that the river cast upon its shores. And others said that they were named for the color of their skin. The compilers of the seventeenth century tended to list these as possible origins of the name and not decide between them.²²⁶

The learned English authors of the sixteenth century had also known the peoples of western Africa by one more name and that was Ethiopians or Æthiopians. This name was derived from the works of the classical geographers, who had labelled as Ethiopia both the eastern area below Egypt and the vast western tract of land south of Libya. In the singular form, a person from this region was an Æthiope, which in ancient Greek meant burnt-face. Indeed the geographers of Greece and Rome believed that the natives of Ethiopia had been burned black by the sun. And in the Renaissance, when English authors started their own

²²⁶ For the “ryver Negro,” see for example Eden, “Breefe description of Affrike,” in Martyr, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 344r; and Abraham Ortelius *His Epitome of the Theater of the Worlde* (London, 1603), 107v. (The river is also given as the “Blacke River” in as late a map as the “New and accurate Mappe of the World” in Roberts, *Merchants Mappe of Commerce*, before page 1.) For the peoples who lived along the river as “Nigers” or in the singular form as a “Niger,” see for example Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, 1584), 153; and Robert Stafforde, *A Geographical and Anthological Description of all the Empires and Kingdomes, both of Continent and Islands in this terrestriall Globe* (London, 1607), 40. Leo had introduced the name of the Niger into early-modern European culture when he said that “the lande of Negros hath a mightie river, which taking his name of the region, is called Niger”; but he had not in turn made clear the reason why the region was called by its name. John Leo, *A Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. John Pory (London, 1600), 2. For speculations upon the origin of the name “Negro,” see for example Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 537; Peter Heylyn, *Microcosmus, or A Little Description of the Great World* (London, 1621), 379; Roberts, *Merchants Mappe of Commerce*, 81; Ogilby, *Africa*, 315; and Morden, *Geography Rectified*, 337. See in particular that of Ogilby.

inquiry into the cause of black skin, this was the belief from which they began.²²⁷

The classical belief about the cause of black skin had in the ancient world been set within a broad theory about the effect of the climate upon human life. This theory was first developed in the medical writings of Hippocrates, who suggested that the body be seen as a complex of inner elements or humors, which adjusted in response to external conditions. At the southern border of the habitable world, as Aristotle would explain in his *Problems*, the intense heat drew out the humors. The peoples here were as a result cold and dry, and their skin was shaded only by the black bile or earthly humor that remained. This had left them with a number of virtues: classical authors from Aristotle to Strabo to Ptolemy noted that the peoples of Ethiopia were subtle, sober, and wise. But they were also said to suffer from their climate, which made them feeble, jealous, and cruel. As it passed low over their part of the world, the sun wasted their fields and forced them to wander, poor and naked, over the land. Over time the Ethiopians had come so to despise the sun that, in a common trope in ancient accounts, they would “revile it when they behold it rising,” Strabo wrote, “on the ground that it burns them and carries on war with them.”²²⁸

The classical theory of the humors, and the image of the Ethiopians that it seemed

²²⁷ A number of the classically informed mid-century English surveys of the peoples of Africa, which were introduced above in Chapter Three, drew attention to the etymology of *Æthiope*. They tied the word more directly to the heat of the sun in Ethiopia than the skin color of the Ethiopians, although as we have already begun to see, the one was often taken to be an effect of the other in the classical discourse that these works in large part followed. In the *Description of the Contrey of Aphrique*, for example, William Prat noted that the name for the peoples of Ethiopia was formed from the Greek “*Atho* whiche signifieth burne, and *Oph* which signifieth take hede & that because of the approchyng & nyghe to the soone” in that region. *The Description of the Contrey of Aphrique*, trans. (from French) Wyllyam Prat (London, 1554), Cvir: see also *The Fardle of Facions*, trans. (from French) William Watreman (London, 1555), Ciir.

²²⁸ *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones, 8 vols. (New York, 1917-1933), vol. 8, bk. 17, ch. 2, sect. 3: 147. See also Hippocrates, “Airs, Waters, Places,” in *Hippocratic Writings*, ed. G. E. R. Lloyd and trans. J. Chadwick and W. N. Mann (London, 1983), 148-169; Aristotle, *Problems*, trans. Robert Mayhew, 2 vols. (Cambridge, M.A., 2011), vol. 1, bk. 14: 439-449; and Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, trans. F. E. Robbins (Cambridge, M.A., 1940), bk. 2, ch. 2: 121-127; as well as Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham, 10 vols. (Cambridge, M.A., 1942), vol. 1, bk. 2, sect. 130: 321-323 and vol. 2, bk. 5, sect. 8: 249-253.

to demand, were revived in the Renaissance by authors on the Continent. From around the middle of the sixteenth century, scholars from Bodin to Huarte to Charron elaborated upon the works of their predecessors in order to develop a more exact account of the character of each nation than any ancient author could have imagined. These scholars still spoke in general about the traits that were to be expected from the peoples in the southern, middle, and northern parts of the world; but they also went on at length about the specific dispositions that corresponded to the climates in for example France, Spain, and England. As the inhabitants of a nation near the northern border of the habitable world, the English figured in humoral discourse as almost the inverse of the Ethiopians: they were strong in body but dull in wit and, like the Ethiopians, altogether marginal in comparison to the peoples from more temperate areas. Perhaps as a result of their position within it, as Mary Floyd-Wilson has shown the theory of the humors met an uncertain reception among the English. All of the recent works in which it had been developed were available in English or in Latin, but no English author used it as the basis for an account of the peoples of Ethiopia.²²⁹

What English authors in the sixteenth century did receive from humoral discourse was perhaps its most simple insight into the peoples of Ethiopia, that is, that their skin was made black by the sun. In his 1559 *Cosmographical Glasse* William Cuningham presented lessons in the form of a dialogue between student and teacher. “What will you conjecture,” the teacher asks, “of those people that are blacke, face, body & all externe partes of them, doeth it not come of the heate of the Sonne?” “It must nedes to be,” the student responds,

²²⁹ For attempts by Continental authors in the Renaissance to elaborate upon the classical theory of the humors, see for example John Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. (from French) Beatrice Reynolds (New York, 1945), 85-152; Juan Huarte, *The Examination of Mens Wits*, trans. (from Italian) R. C. [Richard Carew] (London, 1594); and Pierre Charron, *Of Wisdome*, trans. (from French) Samson Lennard (London, 1608), 163-168. On the theory of the humors, or what the author calls “regionally framed humoralism,” and its reception in England, see Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (New York, 2003).

“& we call them Æthiopians.” In similar fashion the section on Ethiopia in the 1582 survey of the peoples of the world by Stephen Bateman began with a note that the region “hadde first that name of coulour of men. For the Sunne is nigh, and roasteth and toasteth them.” In turn, Bateman continued, the color of the Ethiopians gave evidence of “the strength of the starre” overhead in their land.²³⁰

By the end of the century, as we have seen in Chapter Three, the classical image of Africa had for the most part come to seem out of date. English authors now rarely referred to the peoples of western Africa as Ethiopians. And yet at the same time as it became more and more detached from its original context in the theory of the humors, the belief that the sun was the cause of black skin turned into a popular refrain in English works. The *Briefe Description of the Whole Worlde* that George Abbot published in 1599 was the first study of its kind openly to dismiss what it called the “fables” that ancient authors had told about the Torrid Zone. But even Abbot accepted that it was due to the heat that the peoples who lived there were “not only blackish like the Moores,” he said, “but are exceedingly black.” The category of the Moor was flexible during this period, for sometimes the persons who were included in it were said themselves to be black. The poet John Davies was one who considered them to be so: in the same year that the study of Abbot appeared, he observed that it was the “Worlds Sunne” that “Makes the *More* blacke, & th’*European* white.”²³¹

Through the end of the seventeenth century, authors in England would continue to

²³⁰ William Cuninghame, *The Cosmographical Glasse* (London, 1559), 66-67; and Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *Batman uppon Bartholome, His Booke De Proprietatibus Rerum*, trans. John Trevisa and rev. and supp. Stephen Batman (London, 1582), 223v-224r.

²³¹ George Abbot, *A Briefe Description of the Whole Worlde* (London, 1599), Cviir; and John Davies, *Nosce Teipsum* (London, 1599), 40. On the flexible category of the Moor in English perception, see Emily C. Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor from Alcazar to Othello* (Philadelphia, 2008). For a survey of references to the refrain that the sun was the cause of black skin in the verse from this period, see Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1995), 92-107.

consider as a popular one the opinion that the climate was the cause of black skin. As late as 1625 the geographer Nathanael Carpenter noted that in the region he termed “the Land of *Blackmores*,” where the people were “all coleblacke,” it was “the excesse of heat, which is taken to be the chiefe cause of this blacknes.” Nevertheless throughout this time almost no account of English travel to Africa accepted that this was the case. Perhaps the one that came the closest was the 1555 report of Richard Eden upon the second English voyage to the western coast. To be sure Eden did not make a direct attempt thus to explain the color of the peoples who lived there. He even was aware that, although they had been “in oulde tyme cauled Ethiopes,” they were now known as Moors or Negroes. But Eden drew upon his learning in ancient texts when he said, after the classical geographers, that the peoples in this area were “so scorched and vexed with the heate of the soonne, that in many places they curse it when it ryseth.”²³²

As authors such as Eden were well aware, the classical effort to account for black skin was rooted in the belief that the heat of the sun rendered human life almost impossible in much of Africa. Several early English accounts reported in this vein that to the south of the northern coast the continent “must nedes be of heate almost importable” or was, in the phrase of Cuningham, for the most part “not inhabited” because of “th’extreme heat.” Well into the second half of the sixteenth century English authors could be found to repeat from their classical sources that here Africa lay within the “*Torrida Zona*” or “burning zone” or “Torrid or burnt Zone.”²³³

²³² Nathanael Carpenter, *Geography Delineated Forth in Two Bookes* (Oxford, 1625), bk. 2: 48; and “The seconde vyage to Guinea,” in Peter Martyr, *The Decades of the Newe Worlde or West India*, trans. (from Latin) Rycharde Eden (Londini, 1555), 349v-360r, 355v.

²³³ *Fardle of Facions*, trans. Watreman, Ciir; Cuningham, *Cosmographical Glasse*, 185 (for a similar opinion see also an author from this period who was as oriented toward the modern view of Africa as John Pory

This was the image of Africa that the 1578 *True Discourse* of George Best set out to explode. In an essay that was inserted into his description of the search for a Northwest Passage, Best aimed, he said, “to prove al partes of the world habitable” and in particular the western coast of Africa. For in spite of the warnings of “the old Philosophers,” Guinea and Benin were in fact some of the “most frutefull and delectable” lands ever discovered. Travelers from Portugal, France, and in recent decades England had settled down there to live and built castles and towns among fields that abounded with grains, herbs, wood, and cattle. Since the air cooled during the long nights near the Equator, the heat was not nearly so extreme as classical geographers had supposed. And in order to support his claim in this regard, Best turned to address what might well have been interpreted as a striking piece of evidence for the heat in Africa, which was the “cole blacke” skin of many of the natives. This must have come, Best insisted, from some other cause than the infamous “parching heate of the Sun.”²³⁴

Although Best only aimed to prove that the African climate was far more mild than “the old Philosophers” had assumed, his argument in other words did not end at this point. Not only had classical authors mistaken the prospects for human life in the middle region of the Earth; the entire attempt to ascribe black skin to heat had been an error. None of the geographers of Greece or Rome had ever imagined that a change in climate might alter the color of a person. As in the Old Testament, they seem to have supposed both that a person might be black “because the Sunne hath looked upon” them and that for “the Ethiopian” to

in John Pory, “A generall description of all Africa,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. Pory, 1-8, 2); and George Best, *A True Discourse of the Late Voyages of Discoverie . . . under the conduct of Martin Frobisher Generall* (London, 1578), 19, 19, and 20.

²³⁴ Best, *True Discourse of the Late Voyages of Discoverie*, 19, 22, 20, 28, and 28.

“change his skinne” was a figure for the impossible.²³⁵ But Best reasoned that the classical account required that color respond to climate in just this manner.

As it happened such a shift would soon be fashioned for the stage in Ben Jonson’s *Masque of Blackness*, which was performed in 1605. In its first scene the masque presents the character of Niger, who represents the river in human form and appears in the “colour of an *Æthiope*.” Niger is surrounded by twelve of his daughters, who are the same color as their father, for the sun, Niger notes, has “shone/On their scorch’d cheeks.” The daughters of Niger so dislike their complexion that each morning as the sun rises they have “charged his burning throne/With volleys of revilings.” And in the main action of the masque, Niger travels with his daughters to Britain, where they hope that the more temperate climate will turn their skin pale. They are pleased to hear that the sun here is one “Whose beams shine day, and night, and are of force/To blanch an *Æthiope*, and revive a *Cor’s*” or corpse. The promise that their wish will be fulfilled marks the end to the masque; and by the time that the action starts in its sequel, the 1608 *Masque of Beauty*, the daughters of Niger have been “washed white.”²³⁶

Even the turn of phrase that Jonson had used in *The Masque of Blackness* in order to describe this event, though, played upon its unlikelihood. To “blanch an *Æthiope*” was to work as much a marvel as to “revive a *Cor’s*.” This phrase gestured as well toward the popular proverb on the early-modern English stage, which was present in several forms of

²³⁵ *The Holy Bible, Conteyning the Old Testament, and the New* (London, 1611), *The Song of Solomon*, ch. 1, ver. 6; and *Jeremiah*, ch. 13, ver. 23.

²³⁶ Benjamin Jonson, *The Queenes Masques. The first, OF BLACKNESSE*, in *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* (London, 1616), 893-901, 894, 897, 897, 897, 898; and Benjamin Jonson, *The Second Masque. Which was of BEAUTIE*, in *Workes of Benjamin Jonson*, 901-910, 903.

shorthand, that “You labor in vain (to wash an Ethiop white).”²³⁷ Indeed the first natives of Guinea had arrived in England in 1554 aboard ships under the command of Robert Gainsh; and by the turn of the century, the records suggest that perhaps hundreds of persons from western Africa were present in England. None of them had, in the usage of the *Masque of Blackness*, “blanched.” Best himself reported that he had been struck to observe the child of an African man who had been brought into England and a “faire Englishe woman” who was born “as blacke as the Father was.”²³⁸

In turn white skin, Best continued, had proven as impossible to change as skin that was black. He had heard that there were many Englishmen who, even “though they be of valiant courage,” refused to travel to the Torrid Zone for fear that they would be “parched and broyled to death” or, if they survived, that they would be “burned as black as a cole.” Such an event would in fact stand behind the action in the *Masque of Blackness*. For here Niger recalls that his daughters had been “as fayre/As other Dames” until, in a myth drawn from Ovid, the son of Apollo lost control of the chariot of the sun and “his heedless flames were hurled” down upon them. At this moment, as the standard turn-of-the-century trans-

²³⁷ For the use of this proverb, see for example Geoffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes* (Leyden, 1586), 57; John Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. John Russell Brown (Cambridge, M.A., 1960; orig. pub. 1612), 261-262; and John Fletcher (and Nathan Field and Philip Massinger), *The Knight of Malta*, in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, gen. ed. Fredson Bowers, 10 vols. (Cambridge, U.K., 1992; orig. pub. 1647), vol. 8, 345-482, 370. See also Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, M.I., 1950), E186: 190; and Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 107-116.

²³⁸ Best, *True Discourse of the Late Voyages of Discoverie*, 29. For records of the presence of persons from western Africa in England around the turn of the seventeenth century, see for example Imtiaz H. Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (Burlington, V.T., 2008); and Miranda Kaufmann, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story* (London, 2017). Only the geographer Carpenter appears to have been led by the belief that heat was the cause of blackness to maintain that in turn black persons in England would, in the manner of trees and plants that were transplanted into a new soil, “by little and little degenerate & change their first disposition. As if a *Blackmore* marry and beget children here with us in *England*, experience will plainly declare the children to be more inclining to whiteness then the fathers and the grand children more then them,” which was a shift that Carpenter ascribed to the climate rather than to the effect of interracial marriage. Carpenter, *Geography Delineated*, bk. 2: 48-49.

lation of Ovid had said, the Ethiopians, “(By reason that their bloud was drawne forth to the outward part,/And there bescortched) did become ay after blacke and swart.”²³⁹ In the decades that followed, though, even as English travelers often remarked that the sun over Africa would darken or tan the skin, they almost never said that it would blacken it. White skin would not turn black just as black skin would not turn white.

Best believed that he knew why this was so—the causes of complexion cut deeper than the climate. The source of black skin among the peoples of Africa was to be found in “some naturall infection of the first inhabitants of that Countrey.” And in turn the source of this infection was to be found, according to Best, in a story related in *Genesis*. During the Flood the only men left alive were Noah and his sons Japhet, Sem, and Cham, who would possess the Earth once the waters receded. Noah had ordered his sons to abstain from sex with their wives while aboard the Ark; but Cham disobeyed his father in the hope that his child might be the first one born after the Flood and might as a result inherit the Earth for himself. For this “wicked and detestable fact,” Best wrote, God had the wife of Cham bear a son Chus, “who not only it selfe, but all his posteritie after him, should be so blacke and lothsome, that it might remaine a spectacle of disobedience to all the World.”²⁴⁰ The black peoples of Africa were descended from Chus: the color of their skin marked the curse that God had placed upon their forefather.

Best’s account here drew on the geographical survey *Cosmographia* (1563), by the Frenchman Guillaume Postel; but it differed in several respects from the one that appeared both versions of *Genesis* current in early-modern England. In the Geneva and King James

²³⁹ Best, *True Discourse of the Late Voyages of Discoverie*, 18; Jonson, *The Queenes Masques. The first, OF BLACKNESSE*, in *Workes of Benjamin Jonson*, 896; and *The xv. Bookes of P. Ovidius Naso, Entitled, Metamorphosis*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1587; orig. pub. 1567), 20v.

²⁴⁰ Best, *True Discourse of the Late Voyages of Discoverie*, 30 and 31.

Bibles, to begin, the crime that provoked what had come to be known as the Curse of Ham was not, as in Best, the attempt to father a child on the Ark. It was instead that once Noah had begun to grow wine after the Flood, Ham “saw the nakednesse” of his drunken father in his tent, and “told his two brethren without.” Shem and Japhet averted their eyes as they entered Noah’s tent to cover him with a garment. But once Noah awoke, “he knew what his yonger son had done unto him”; and then he—not God, as Best had said—announced a curse. He did not curse Cush, though: he cursed Canaan, another son of Ham. And most crucially, he did not curse him with blackness. “Cursed be Canaan,” Noah said, according to the King James Bible: “a servant of servants shall hee be unto his brethren.” The marginal note to this line in the Geneva Bible added, “That is, a most vile slave.”²⁴¹

Best had in other words introduced into English culture, as a source for blackness, a curse that was in the Bible a source for slavery. In recent years, historians have seen this as a fateful step down the path of racial slavery. They have argued that, in the era that followed, as England entered the Atlantic slave trade in earnest, the Curse was used to bind blackness and slavery together, in a link made even stronger by the growing opinion during this time (present in Best, but not in the Old Testament) that Africans were descended from the sons of Ham. “The notion that Noah’s curse justified enslaving black Africans,” Robin Blackburn writes, “was probably more widely diffused in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than ever before.” The Curse was employed in this period, according to David Whitford, “by a wide variety of authors seeking to exploit the text as a support for the perpetual slavery of Africans.” And even though he argued that their earlier history had been more complex, Benjamin Braude concluded that, around 1625, “a change took place

²⁴¹ *The Holy Bible*, Genesis 9:22, 9:24, 9:25; and *The Bible: Translated According to the Ebrew and Greeke* (London, 1599), Genesis 9:25f. For the influence of Postel on Best, see David Whitford, *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and the Justifications for Slavery* (Burlington, V.T., 2009), 118-120.

in English attitudes toward the Curse of Ham. Slavery had started to make it credible” as an explanation for blackness. These scholars thus find in the early-modern period the first germ of the late-antebellum American proslavery argument, in which the Curse assumed a central role as the biblical evidence that slavery was the essential and specific fate of black Africans.²⁴²

It is a striking fact, then, that, even as Best identified the Curse as the cause of the black skin of Africans, he never once mentioned slavery. Indeed, through the close of the seventeenth century, the several English travelers to Africa who took up the Curse did so most often as a reason for blackness—and never as a reason for slavery. In 1600 (the same year that Best’s *True Discourse* was printed in excerpt in the second edition of Hakluyt’s collection), John Pory’s translation of Leo Africanus’s *Geographical Historie of Africa* noted that “all the Negros or blacke Moores” were descended “from *Chus*, the sonne of *Cham*, who was the sonne of *Noë*.” Leo did not mention the Curse, but Pory would add in his preface that “the greatest part” of the five “principall nations” of Africa (only one of which was composed of “Negros or blacke Moores”) was “thought to be descended from *Cham* the cursed son of *Noah*”—although even Pory drew no conclusions from this fact.

²⁴² Robin Blackburn, “The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery,” *WMQ*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Jan., 1997), 65-102, 96 (see also Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* [New York, 1997], 64-76); David Whitford, “A Calvinist Heritage to the ‘Curse of Ham’: Assessing the Accuracy of a Claim about Racial Subordination,” *Church History and Religious Culture*, Vol. 90, No. 1 (2010), 25-45, 27; and Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *WMQ*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Jan., 1997), 103-142, 138. For positions identical to those of Blackburn and Whitford cited here, which are (as in Braude) set within broad historical accounts that are more careful, see Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race*, 10 and 85; Sujata Iyengar, *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, P.A., 2005), 10; Susan Dwyer Amussen, *Caribbean Exchanges: Slavery and the Transformation of English Society, 1640-1700* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2007), 22; and David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York, 2009), 3. For reference, see Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York, 2002); Benjamin Braude, “Ham and Noah: Sexuality, Servitudinism, and Ethnicity,” from *Collective Degradation: Slavery and the Construction of Race*, Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University (Nov. 7-8, 2003); and Whitford, *Curse of Ham*, esp. 105-176.

Fifteen years later, in the narrative of his journey to the Middle East, Sandys recalled that on the way from Cairo to Jerusalem Muslim merchants sold “*Negros*” as slaves. Like Best and Pory, he noted that these were “descended of *Chus*, the Sonne of cursed *Cham*.” Like Best, too, if not Pory, Sandys proposed this in order to explain, not their slavery, but their color, which was due neither to the “heat of the Climate: Nor of the Soyle”—as the Dutch traveler Van Linschoten had suggested, in a description of West Africa brought into English in 1598—but rather to the “Curse of *Noe*.” This passage was reprinted in the excerpt from Sandys that was included in the 1625 Purchas collection; that excerpt was followed by one from Jobson’s account of his voyage of the Gambia River. In the original edition of that work (though not in Purchas), Jobson wrote, “Undoubtedly these people originally sprung from the race of *Canaan*, the sonne of *Ham*, who discovered his father *Noahs* secrets.” When Jobson did so, however, he had neither slavery nor even color in mind: the legacy of the Curse was that the men were “furnisht” with “members” of such size as was “burthensome unto them,” since they could not have sex during their wives’s pregnancy. Two years after the Purchas collection appeared, Thomas Herbert set out for Asia. On the way, he stayed on the coasts of Africa; and in the four editions of his *Travels*, published between 1634 and 1677, he came with increasing clarity to assert both that the “raging Sun has already scorcht their cole-black carcasses” in Guinea, and that, on the Cape of Good Hope, the natives, “being propagated from *Cham*,” had seemed to “inherit his malediction” in their short stature, thin faces, and indeed complexion, which Herbert described as “olevaster, or that sort of black we see the *Americans* that live under the Equator.”²⁴³

²⁴³ Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, 6; Pory, “Generall description of all Africa,” in Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa*, 6; Sandys, “Relations of Africa,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 912-913 (the relevant passage is slightly abbreviated from George Sandys, *Sandys Travailes* [London, 1652; orig. pub. 1615 as *A Relation of a Journey begun An. Dom. 1610*], 106-107); Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade: or,*

This was, in short, a jagged and uncertain line of thought. The effect of Best had been to make the Curse available as one possible cause for black skin. But the Curse also remained available as one possible cause for large penises, misshapen faces, skin the color of “olevaster”—and even, as in Pory, a cause for nothing at all. Neither did the biblical meaning of the Curse of Ham disappear during this time. In his *Institutes of the Lawes of England* (1628), just after he had explained that slavery began in war, Edward Coke noted briefly (citing *Genesis*, as well as an obscure thirteenth-century law book) that “bondage or servitude was first inflicted” on Canaan for Ham’s “dishonouring of parents.” Near the end of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), before he leads Adam and Eve out of Eden, the archangel Michael describes the Curse in similar terms. In the vision he sets out for the future course of human life, tyranny becomes the common form of political rule, and whole nations decline into servitude. “Witness th’ irrevent Son/Of him who built the Ark,” says Michael, “who for the shame/Don to his Father, heard this heavie curse,/Servant of Servants, on his vitious Race.”²⁴⁴ Neither Coke nor Milton made any effort thus to account for

A Discovery of the River Gambia (London, 1623), 52-53 (see also Richard Jobson, “A true Relation of Master Richard Jobson’s Voyage,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 1, 2:921-926); and Thomas Herbert, *Some Years Travels into Divers Parts of Africa, and Asia the Great* (London, 1677; orig. pub. 1634 as *A Relation of Some Yeares Travaile, Begunne Anno 1626*), 7, 16. The second edition of Herbert’s *Travels* (1638), for example, had said, with less precision than in 1677, that Ethiopia was “owned by an accursed Progeny of *Cham*,” who lived without religion or government. Only after a paragraph during which he enlarged upon these themes did Herbert proceed to a more detailed rendering of the natives of that nation—which began, “Their colour is ugly black.” (Thomas Herbert, *Some Yeares Travels into Divers Parts of Asia and Afrique* [London, 1638], 16.) In 1704, the first edition of the Churchill *Collection* translated from Italian a report on a voyage to Congo, written by a Capuchin missionary, who observed that the blackness of Ethiopians did not “proceed from the Temper of the Climate,” but was instead the result of their common descent from “*Chush*, the Son of *Ham*, curs’d by *Noah* for his unbecoming Curiosity in looking upon his Father’s Nakedness.” Jerom Merolla da Sorrento, “A Voyage to Congo,” [trans. anonymous] in Churchill, *Collection* (1704), 651-751, 714. For Van Linschoten’s vague assertion, about the people who lived among the cool hills and along the fresh-water rivers that cut through the region just north of the Cape of Good Hope, “that it is not the heat of the Sunne, but the nature of the Countrey that maketh them blacke,” see John Huighen Van Linschoten, *Discours of Voyages into The Easte and West Indies* (London, 1598), 211.

²⁴⁴ Edward Coke, *The First Part of the Institutes of the Lawes of England* (London, 1628), 2.11.172; and John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London, 1667), 10.991-994. Coke’s medieval source was rendered in English

the early trade in African slaves; and in the decades that followed, even as English travelers learned more and more about African slavery, none used these versions of the Curse to justify the practice. For one role that this protean myth appears never to have assumed during this period was as a means to cement the bond between the blackness of Africans (or their supposed descent from Ham) and their slavery.

Even Winthrop Jordan recognized that the Curse “was utilized almost entirely as an explanation of color rather than as justification for Negro slavery.” But he worried over this fact, given the focus of the passage in *Genesis* on slavery rather than color, as well as what he (wrongly) took to be a later Jewish tradition that saw Ham as dark-skinned. “The matter,” he remarked, of the seventeenth-century fate of Ham’s curse, “is puzzling.”²⁴⁵ We would do well, though, no longer to be puzzled by the detachment from each other of the two main strands in the reception of the Curse. So far from the minds of Englishmen was the thought that blackness might be made into the basis for slavery, that even when the connection appears so painfully obvious to us, it seems never even to have occurred to them.

as Andrew Horne, *The Book Called, The Mirrour of Iustices*, trans. W.H. (London, 1646), 109-110. The quoted passage appeared as well in the revised and expanded edition that appeared as John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London, 1674), 12.101-104. For the argument—which runs far in advance of the evidence—that Milton’s use of the Curse of Ham indicates that he accepted the Aristotelian natural slavery of black Africans, see Steven Jablonski, “Ham’s Vicious Race: Slavery and John Milton,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Winter, 1997), 173-190. For reference to the same version of the Curse used by Coke and Milton, see also for example the important etymological dictionary John Minsheu, *The Guide into the tongues* (London, 1617), No. 8606 (“Nief”). “Nief” was the term for “a *bond woman*,” Minsheu observed; and he added that “*Bondage, Villenage, or servitude*” had begun, according to *Genesis*, when Noah cursed Ham, “who was therefore punished in his sonne *Caanan*, with penaltie of *bondage*.”

²⁴⁵ Jordan, *White Over Black*, 18; and Winthrop P. Jordan, *The White Man’s Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (New York, 1974), 10. (*The White Man’s Burden* was the abridged edition of *White Over Black*, and the second phrase quoted above was only added to the text at this point.) As noted above, Jordan’s reading of the Jewish sources was notoriously misleading: see for example Braude, “Sons of Noah,” 129-130; and Goldenberg, *Curse of Ham*, 144-149. See also, though it does not deal directly with Jordan, David H. Aaron, “Early Rabbinic Exegesis on Noah’s Son Ham and the So-Called ‘Hamitic Myth’,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Winter, 1995), 721-759.

In the first century and a half of English exploration in sub-Saharan Africa, both theories for the black skin of the people who lived there, as a product of the climate and of the Curse, often withered under close scrutiny. As color proved inflexible when black men moved north and white men moved south in the Age of Discovery, the ancient view that color was in essence only a response to the particular features of the climate came to seem incredible. The Curse of Ham, by contrast, has been characterized by Alden Vaughan as a “widely shared,” or “widespread,” “conclusion about the Africans’ pigmentation” during this era. Once the climate was rejected as the cause of blackness, the Curse “then emerges,” according to Mary Floyd-Wilson, “as an explanation of its origins and significance”: “in particular,” Peter Fryer has written, “that was how blacks were supposed to have come by their blackness.” But as we will see, even as a reason for blackness rather than slavery, the Curse was more often denied than affirmed (as Jordan admitted), since in a time when direct access to the text of the Bible expanded dramatically, any reader could learn that *Genesis* had never mentioned black skin. Indeed, the two most careful seventeenth-century treatments of “the Blacknesse of Negroes”—in essays by the physician Thomas Browne, in 1646, and the natural philosopher Robert Boyle, in 1664—were at pains to disprove both hypotheses as “vulgar and common errors,” in the phrase of Browne. “How and when this tincture first began is yet a Riddle,” Browne confessed, with “no lesse of blacknesse in the cause, then blacknesse in the effect itselfe.”²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ Alden T. Vaughan, “The Origins Debate: Slavery and Racism in Seventeenth-Century Virginia,” in Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York, 1995), 136-174, 164, 165; Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race*, 5; Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984), 142; Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (London, 1646), 6.10: 322; Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, 6.10: 327; and Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, 6.10: 323. Browne devoted three interconnected essays to the subject: Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, 6.10-12: 322-338. For Boyle’s essay on “the Cause of the Blackness of those many Nations, which by one common Name we are wont to call *Negroes*,” see Robert Boyle, *Experiments and Considerations Touching Colours* (London, 1664), 151-167, 151 (“Experiment XI”). The essay by Boyle closely followed that of Browne. For

Browne and Boyle were able to offer what they understood to be only the most tentative and improbable theories of their own for the causes of blackness. Browne listed six causes of black skin, from “the inward use of certaine waters” to an unusual mixture of “fugiginous efflorescences and complexionall tinctures” in the body to an ancient mutation in the species. Boyle suggested that it began instead as “some Peculiar and Seminal Impression” of a black object in the mind of a white mother. And John Bulwer, whose treatment of the subject in *Anthropometamorphosis* (1650) followed Browne in every respect, added only that “*Moores*” might at first have become “Negroes,” by painting themselves black. Explanations for the blackness of Africans indeed began to proliferate around the middle of the seventeenth century. Boyle had observed that “the Seat of that Colour” seemed to be in the thin outer layer of what he took to be the two layers of the skin. In the decades that followed, several correspondents of the Royal Society maintained that the seat of blackness lay instead in a third gelatinous layer of the skin, which was lodged between the other two. Others argued that it was to be found in scales within the skin’s deepest layer, and yet others said that the skin of Africans received its color from their black blood. These were of course inquiries not so much into the ultimate causes of blackness so much as the points at which blackness was made manifest in the body. For in fact a sense of uncertainty marked the entire attempt in the second half of the century to find out the reason why some persons were black rather than white. In his 1674 account of a voyage to New England, John Josselyn noted, as “the opinion of many men,” that blackness came either from the Curse

Jordan’s admission that the Curse was, even as a reason for blackness, “probably denied more often than affirmed,” see Jordan, *White Over Black*, 19. Finally, Vaughan did note—in spite of his observations that it was “widely shared,” or “widespread”—that “the pervasiveness of the biblical explanation [of blackness] is uncertain, for it competed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with a variety of other nonsensical explanations of African pigmentation.” But Vaughan did not mention what these “nonsensical explanations” might have been, and continued in the next sentence to discuss the Curse of Ham. Vaughan, “Origins Debate,” 164.

or from the climate. For himself, Josselyn observed only that it was the two tawny layers and one blue layer of the skin of Negroes that “makes them appear black.” “I do not peremptorily affirm this to be the cause,” he said, “but submit to better judgment.”²⁴⁷ As Josselyn had perhaps anticipated, through the end of the seventeenth century no definitive better judgment of that kind would appear.

From the middle of the sixteenth century, however, another approach to the causes of blackness was also available in English culture. Unlike the other two principal accounts, this one never ceased to seem credible through the end of the seventeenth century. It drew support from the most basic convictions that shaped early-modern attempts to explain the diversity of human life. The black skin of Africans was here accepted as a fixed and inherent fact, rather than a response to the climate or to the soil, but not one that could be traced to an ancient curse or the structure of the skin or the complexion of the blood—or even, in the end, to any definite source at all. It was figured instead as one remarkable detail set within the vast canvas of God’s Creation. The mystery of its rationale and mean-

²⁴⁷ Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, 327 and 336; Robert Boyle, *Experiments and Considerations*, 161; and John Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis: Man Transform’d; or, The Artificial Changeling* (London, 1650), 255; Boyle, *Experiments and Considerations*, 163; and John Josselyn, *An Account of Two Voyages to New-England* (London, 1674), 187. For debates about the sources of blackness among Fellows and correspondents of the Royal Society in the second half of the seventeenth century, see Malcolmson, *Studies of Skin Color in the Early Royal Society*, 29-91. For expressions of uncertainty similar to that of Josselyn, see also for example François Bernier, who rejected the climate as the cause of blackness, but who could only propose in its place, “Il en faut donc chercher la cause dans la contexture particuliere de leur corps, ou dans la semence, ou dans le sang qui sont neanmoins de la mesme couleur que par tout ailleurs,” in [François Bernier], “Nouvelle Division de la Terre,” in *Journal des Sçavans*, no. 12 (24 Apr., 1684), 133-140, 135. Similarly, John Ovington argued that “something must be added besides the Sun’s Heat” in order to explain the black complexion of the Negroes; but for his part, Ovington could only observe that one author had held that their blood was black, while another had said that the middle layer of their skin was so, before Ovington abruptly changed the subject. John Ovington, *A Voyage to Suratt, in the Year 1689* (London, 1696), 492. In his 1673 description of the Gold Coast, which was reviewed the next year in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society, the German chaplain Wilhelm Johann Müller had surveyed the various opinions on the sources of black skin. “From all this,” he had written, “nothing certain can be concluded.” “Wilhelm Johann Müller’s Description of The Fetu Country, 1662-1669,” trans. Adam Jones, in *German Sources for West African History, 1599-1669*, ed. Adam Jones (Wiesbaden, 1983), 134-259, 152. For the review of the work, see [anon.], “Die AFRICANISCHE Landschaft FETU beschrieben durch Wilhelm Johan Muller,” in *Philosophical Transactions* (London), Vol. 9, No. 108 (Nov. 23, 1674), 182-187.

ing was nothing less than the mystery of His plan for the Earth.

The first statement of this view appeared in one of the first English works on America, the translations from Spanish and Italian reports that were printed in 1555 as Richard Eden's *Decades of the Newe Worlde*. In a short section late in the work, on "the colour of the Indians," Eden observed that, although in Africa the men were black below what he called "the burnte line," the men who lived under the same line in the West Indies were the color of chestnuts or olives. Best would notice this difference, too (as would both Browne and Boyle); and, like Best, Eden concluded from it that the variety of skin colors in general "proceedeth of man, and not of the earth," or of the heat of the sun. He meant by this that certain colors inhered in certain men, but that the color scheme of mankind as a whole was the work of God. He admitted, though—and here Eden differed from Best—that we

Knowe not the cause why god hath so ordeyned it otherwise than to consyder that his divine majestie hath donne this as infinite other to declare his omnipotencie and wisdom in such diversities of colours as appere not only in the nature of man, but the lyke also in beastes, byrdes, and floures, where dyvers and contrary colours are seene in one lyttle fether, or the leaves growynge owt of one lyttle stalke.

The colors of men resembled the colors of every sort of thing in the natural world, as traces of the infinite and unknowable mind of the Creator. The most common complexions of men were white, yellow, and black, according to Eden; but these were only as points on a fully realized spectrum, for white graded subtly into yellow through the tawny hue of the Indians, and yellow turned to black through red and brown and ash and murrey. The principal colors of men, in turn, each contained a range of shades, "as sum men are whyte after dyvers sortes of whytenesse," Eden explained, "yelowe after dyvers maners of yelowe: and blacke after dyvers sortes of blackenesse." Black skin would strike Best as a "specta-

cle of disobedience,” an arresting departure from an ideal, which called to mind the sin of Ham. But Eden found in blackness only one of the many colors of men, and he perceived in this diversity a wonder simply “to be marveyled at,” or “one of the marveyulous thynges that god useth in the composition of man,” which led one to reflect instead on the manifest and yet impenetrable wisdom of the divine.²⁴⁸

It was in this spirit, too, that Gainsh—whose account of the 1554 voyage to Guinea was first printed at the end of Eden’s volume—addressed the sources of color. For even though he had remarked that the Africans were scorched by the heat of the sun, Gainsh was aware as well of the dilemma posed to the ancient theory of color by the complexion of the Indians. When he brought up the subject, late in his report, he referred the reader to Eden’s *Decades*. In the previous paragraph, he had reported that his men had brought with them back to England “certeyne black slaves”—the first, as it happened, ever taken from Africa to England. Now, Gainsh said that the “varietie” of skin colors among men was as much a “secreate woorke of nature” as the shifting winds over the seas.²⁴⁹ Blackness “commeth of nature it selfe, who worketh it by some secreat reason,” agreed Abraham Hartwell, in his 1597 translation of Odoardo Lopez’s Portuguese *Report of the Kingdome of Congo*. Earlier in the narrative, Lopez had dismissed the opinion of “the auncient writers” that the heat of the sun was the cause of “blacke colour in men,” on the basis that the children

²⁴⁸ Richard Eden, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, 310v, 311r, 311r, 311r, and 310v; Best, *True Discourse*, 31; and Eden, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, 310v and 310v. The section “Of the colour of the Indians” was reprinted in Eden and Willes, *History of Travayle*, 4r-4v. Eden closed this section by noting that the discovery of the color of the Indians “may give further occasion to phylosophers to search the secretes of nature and complexions of men with the novelties of the newe worlde.” Eden, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, 311r. His sense of wonder at the marvellous range of colors in men captures what Stephen Greenblatt has taken to be the characteristic mode of response in the European encounter with the New World during the Renaissance, in Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago, I.L., 1991).

²⁴⁹ Eden, “The seconde vyage to Guinea,” in Eden, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, 359v. The phrases quoted here appeared in the reprints of Eden’s narrative in Eden and Willes, *History of Travayle*, 352v; Hakluyt, *Principall Navigations* (1589), 97; and Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 2.2.23.

fathered by the Portuguese in Congo were more or less white. Lopez had decided, after Herodotus, that blackness came instead from “the nature of the seede” of African men. But now Lopez was living in the West Indies, his ship having been blown off course on the route home to Lisbon. Like Eden and Gainsh, he was puzzled that the natives here were not black, since they lived in the same climate and at the same latitude as those of Congo. And like Eden and Gainsh, Lopez concluded from this unusual fact that the cause of skin color in general could only be some kind of secret, “which never yet to this day,” he observed, “eyther by auncient *Philosopher*, or new writer, hath beene fully set downe or understoode.”²⁵⁰

The views of Eden, Gainsh, and Lopez on the sources of black skin would be echoed, in the seventeenth century, in the works of the clergyman and historian Peter Heylyn. In *Microcosmus*, his 1621 “little description of the great world,” when Heylyn addressed the complexion of the natives of Africa, he noted the ancient opinion that the Ethiopians had been burned black, but promised to deliver the “true cause” of their color when he came to discuss America. Here, Heylyn began with the familiar puzzle that the people were “of a reasonable faire complexion,” though they lived at the same distance from the Equator as Ethiopia, as well as Lybia and Numidia. This led him of course to reject the heat of the sun as the “operative cause of blacknesse,” and once he had also set aside the theory that the color of Africans derived from the blackness of their “generative seed,” Heylyn decided, in a sentence, that “wee must wholly ascribe it to Gods peculiar will and ordinance.”

²⁵⁰ Philipppo Pigasetta, *A Report of the Kingdome of Congo* [from “writings and discourses of *Odoardo Lopez*”], trans. (from Italian) Abraham Hartwell (London, 1597), 173, 18, 18, 19, 173. For an inquiry into the cause of black skin in Africans, considered in the context of the light skin of the Americans, see as well that of the author of *Batman uppon Bartholome* (1582), who asked, “What then is the efficient cause of this colour? It can be no otherwise, but either the drinesse of heaven, or of the earth, or perchaunce a certaine unknowne propertie of the soyle, or a certaine reason hidden properlie in Nature unknowne unto man, or altogether unperceived. But these things,” he concluded, “I leave to be considered of the searchers out of the nature of things.” Batman, *Batman uppon Bartholome*, trans. Trevisa, 251.

Microcosmus would appear in eight editions, through 1639; and when he revised and expanded the work into *Cosmographie*, in 1652, Heylyn in essence retained his earlier position. He added that “some will have this *Blackness* laid as a curse on *Cham*,” and described Best’s version of the legend; but although Jordan and, more recently, Floyd-Wilson have suggested that this mention of the Curse “attests to its growing popularity during the seventeenth century,” all that Heylyn said was that the theory of Best was “a fancie as ridiculous” as that of Lopez was “false.” “So that we must refer it wholly to Gods secret pleasure,” Heylyn concluded of the blackness of Africans, in 1652 as he had in 1621. (He did, finally, add that, “possibly enough,” the Curse “hath an influence” on black skin; but in an admission of ignorance absent from Best, he noted that this would have to have been “for some cause unknown to us.”)²⁵¹

Heylyn had thus drawn from Eden, Gainsh, and Lopez the sequence of logic that led from the fair skin of Indians, to the black skin of Africans, to a rejection of climate as the

²⁵¹ Peter Heylyn, *Microcosmus, or A Little Description of the Great World* (London, 1621), 382, 403, 403, 403, 403; Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie* (London, 1652), 4.2: 100; Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race*, 10 (see also Jordan, *White Over Black*, 18-19, as well as Fryer, *Staying Power*, 143: Heylyn was the only writer Floyd-Wilson cited in support of the assertion quoted above); Heylyn, *Cosmographie*, 4.2:100, 4.2:100, 4.2:100, 4.2:100, 4.2:100. It should be noted that among some seventeenth-century authors Heylyn was understood to have endorsed rather than dismissed the Curse. Heylyn seems, for example, to have been “the late most learned Critick” who, according to Robert Boyle, “would have the Blackness of *Negroes* an effect of *Noah*’s Curse ratify’d by God’s, upon *Cham*.” Boyle, *Experiments and Considerations*, 159. See also a letter from an anonymous reader that was printed in *The Athenian Mercury* between May 1695 and the last date of its publication, in 1697. (The exact date is uncertain, but Catherine Molineux has stated incorrectly that the letter appeared in the edition of November 23, 1695: there was no edition on that date, and the adjacent editions do not contain the letter either. See *The Athenian Mercury*, Vol. 19 [London, 1695].) In response to a note from the editors of the journal, printed on April 30, 1695, which asserted that blackness and whiteness were “not natural to any people whatever, ‘tis the effect of the Climate,” the letter-writer reported, “*I rather incline to the opinion of Dr. Heylin, who ascribes the Blackness of the Negroes to the curse upon the posterity of Cham.*” *The Athenian Oracle: Being an Entire Collection of All the Valuable Questions and Answers in the Old Athenian Mercuries*, 3 vols. (London, 1704), Vol. 3, 380. For the editors’ note, see *The Athenian Mercury*, Vol. 17, No. 9 (London, Apr. 30, 1695). See Catherine Molineux, *Faces of Perfect Ebony: Encountering Atlantic Slavery in Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, M.A., 2012), 295 (fn.38). Finally, Heylyn derived his reflections upon the cause of black skin (and even the exact terms he used) from those of George Abbot, who had also argued, in a comparison with the Americans who were “of a reasonable faire complexion,” that the blackness of Africans was “to be ascribed onely unto Gods peculiar will, and not,” Abbot continued, “to that which some foolishly have imagined, that the generative seede” of the Africans was black, whereas that of the Americans was white—“for that is untrue,” Abbot noted. Abbot, *Briefe Description*, 135.

cause of color, to an implacable order fashioned by God or nature. Insofar as he called the “ordinance” of God in this matter a “secret,” whose reasons were “unknown,” Heylyn had even adapted the terms used by his predecessors. But it was to be Samuel Purchas himself who supplied not only the logic and the terms, but also the Christian social vision, which lay behind the conviction that God alone was the source of black skin. In his *Pilgrimage* (1613; its fourth and final edition appeared in 1626), a survey of the peoples and religions of the world, at the end of the chapter on “the Land of *Negros*,” Purchas admitted that, “If any would looke that wee should here in our discourse of the Negro’s assigne some cause of that their black colour: I answere, that I cannot well answere this question.” The many reasons for blackness that had been proposed all seemed inadequate to Purchas. He listed, and dismissed, every theory that had been advanced in the travel books that he had mastered: the ancient account from the heat of the sun, the opinion from Van Linschoten that drew upon (in the phrase of Purchas) “some hidden qualitie of the soile,” the story of the Curse as related by Best, and the myth of black sperm proposed by Herodotus and Lopez. Some travelers, Purchas continued, “ascend above the Moone,” to find the cause of blackness in a constellation in the stars. “And there I will leave them,” he said:

Yea, I will send them further to Him that hath reserved many secrets of Nature to Himselfe, and hath willed us to content our selves with things revealed. As for *secret things*, both in Heaven and Earth, *they belong to the LORD our GOD, whose holy Name be blessed for ever*, for that he hath reveiled to us things most necessarie, both for bodie and soule, in the things of this life, and that which is to come. His incomprehensible *Unitie*, which the Angels with covered faces in their *Holy, Holy, Holy-Hymnes* resound and *Laude* in *Trinitie*, hath pleased in this varietie to diversifie his works, all serving one humane nature, infinitely multiplied in persons, exceedingly varied in accidents, that we also might serve that *One-most GOD*: that the tawnie Moore, blacke Negro, duskie Libyan, ash-coloured Indian, olive-coloured American, should, with the whiter Europæan become *one sheepe-fold*, under *one Great Sheeheard*, till *this mortalitie being swallowed up of life*,

we may all *be one* . . .²⁵²

The deepest fact of humankind was unity, not difference. Whereas Eden had drawn attention to the common source of beasts, birds, and flowers of diverse colors, Purchas dilated on the human. Their purpose in doing so was the same. Both laid stress on the infinite variety of the Creation: for according to Purchas, even men alone were “infinitely multiplied in persons, exceedingly varied in accidents,” and the colors of their skins ran all the way from tawny to black to dusky to ash to olive to white, or at least “whiter.” It was precisely the endless array of kinds that made clear the singularity of their source. God must have made such a marvel, Eden explained, in order “to declare his omnipotencie and wisdom.” In the unusual construction of the third sentence quoted from Purchas, the “incomprehensible *Unitie*” of God was itself what “hath pleased in this varietie to diversifie his works.” For, in turn, the sheer variety of works that God gathered together back into Himself only testified to the power of His unity: the sweep of the sheep-fold proved the greatness of the shepherd. Only God could contain such plenitude.

The black color of peoples in the Land of Negroes had thus brought Purchas to reflect upon the unity of God’s works. And in so doing, Purchas laid bare perhaps *the* fundamental theme in the search for the source of blackness in Renaissance and early-modern England: the attempt to find a cause for human difference within the structure of the single act of Creation revealed in *Genesis*.²⁵³

²⁵² Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage. Or Relations of the World* (London, 1613), 537, 545, 545 546, and 546. The block quote is taken from the third edition of the work, in which several spelling mistakes in the original edition were corrected (see Braude, “Sons of Noah,” 135-137); Samuel Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage, Or Relations of the World* (London, 1617), 822.

²⁵³ For an excellent discussion of this theme, see the chapter on “Race and Religious Orthodoxy in the Early Modern Era,” in Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge, U.K., 2006), 54-78.

The theory that the Africans had over time been scorched by the heat of the sun, in spite of its origins in heathen antiquity, fit well within the belief that all peoples were descended from Adam and Eve, who were white. Indeed, decades after any English traveler had even suggested that the sun was the cause of black skin, this view was taken up again in the great seventeenth-century summaries of human history by Raleigh, Stillingfleet, and Hale, as well as in the histories of the earth by Burnet and Robinson. The common aim of these authors was to trace the present multiplicity of human life back to the singular couple commanded by God to be fruitful, and multiply; and in the context of this effort, each found congenial the doctrine that the fantastic range of human colors had only to be explained as a gradual effect of the natural variety of climates in the different regions of the Earth. It was because he understood it from this point of view that Hale, for example, was so untroubled by the “strange variety” among men in “Colour, Figure, Stature, Complexion, Humor”—from the black Ethiopian to the tawny Moor to the swarthy Spaniard to the fair Northerner, he noted—since he saw this all as “arising from the difference of the Climate.” “It may be urged, by way of Argument,” Robinson warned, “that if Blackness be natural to the *Æthiopian*, and Whiteness to the *European*, they do not derive their Original from one single Person.” In place of that unsettling suggestion, Robinson concluded, “it seems probable that the different Soyls, or various Modifications of Matter in several parts of the World, produced Men of different Colours and Complexions.” Burnet and to some extent Stillingfleet even returned to the kind of claim that had been gently dismissed decades before in the *Masque of Blackness*, and held, as Burnet put it, that although “we see the *Blacks* do not quit their Complexion immediately, by removing into another Climate,” yet, “their Posterity changeth by little and little, and after some Generations they become

altogether like the People of the Country where they are.”²⁵⁴

The almost desperate mid-century efforts of Browne, Bulwer, and Boyle, in response to what they believed to be the failure of the climate theory, were impelled by this same imperative, to show that black skin could have developed out of white. For in their speculations that blackness had resulted from the use of certain waters, or the imagination of a white mother, or the painting of a Moore’s body, each aimed at root to “declare how and when the seede of Adam did first receive this tincture,” according to Browne—or to preserve at least “a Possibility,” as Boyle put it, “that a Race of *Negroes* might be begun, though none of the Sons of *Adam* for many Precedent Generations were of that Complexion.” Eden and Purchas, finally, interpreted the many colors of men rather as a sign of the

²⁵⁴ Matthew Hale, *The Primitive Origination of Mankind* (London, 1677), 200; Thomas Robinson, *The Anatomy of the Earth* (London, 1694), 3-4; and Thomas Burnet, *A Sacred Theory of the Earth* (London, 1759; orig. pub. 1690), 238. See Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World* (London, 1614), 111-112; and Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae, or A Rational Account of the Grounds of Christian Faith* (London, 1662), 577-578. The view endorsed by Burnet had appeared as well, anonymously, in the minutes of the Royal Society for April 5, 1682, “that Europeans, by continuing to inhabit in Africa, have been found to turn black, and that Blacks in England, after a few generations, become white.” Thomas Birch, *History of the Royal Society for Improving of Natural Knowledge*, 4 vols. (London, 1756-1757), Vol. 4, 141. It would be expressed, too, in the letter mentioned above that was sent from the editors of the *Athenian Mercury* on April 30, 1695. In response to a note from a reader that asked, “*If Blackness be natural to the Ethiopian, and whiteness to the European; how can they derive their Original from one single person?*” the editors responded that both colors were effects of the climate, because, they continued, “English people that go near the *Line* shall in two or three Generations, tho’ they marry only with *English*, become Tawny and Black.” *The Athenian Mercury*, Vol. 17, No. 9 (London, Apr. 30, 1695). This opinion was denied in the undated letter written in response (also mentioned above), which sided with what it took to be Heylyn’s position. Among Europeans who had moved into “the Torrid Zone,” “yet hath not that Alteration or change of Climate wrought upon those Inhabitants any such effects,” the letter noted; and “if accidentally some small change be in such persons as are daily exposed to the Sun, as we see in our own Climate, yet shall not that be conveyed to their Children.” *The Athenian Oracle*, Vol. 3, 380. In his *Brief Instructions for Making Observations in All Parts of the World*, finally, John Woodward also expressed interest in the changes in color that might be caused by alterations in climate. Although he did not suggest that white men might thus be turned black per se, or vice versa, he did ask travelers to report “whether *white people* removing into *hot Countries* become by degrees *browner*, &c. and *Blacks* removing into *cold Countries*, paler.” [Woodward], *Brief Instructions*, 9. Finally, for an earlier usage of the climate theory in support of the unity of Creation, see the argument in Golding’s 1587 translation of *The Trewnesse of the Christian Religion* that “the diversitie, yea and contraritie in worldly things” was not proof of there being “divers Gods.” In order to realize that unity could produce diversity, one had only to consider the sun, since as Golding wrote (in a phrase partially quoted above), “Hee maketh some folkes whyte, some blacke, some read, and some Tawny; and yet is hee but one selfesame Sunne.” Mornay, *A Woorke Concerning the Trewnesse of the Christian Religion*, trans. Golding, 21.

unknowable intention of God. In so doing, they might have seemed to imply that God had created each shade of man separately. (Such a prospect would be raised most powerfully in the early-modern period by the French heretic Isaac La Peyrère, whose *Men Before Adam* [1656] contended that the Old Testament described only the history of the Jews and not, for example, of the “*Caldeans, Egyptians, Scythians, and Chinensians*,” much less the Mexicans [Peyrère of course thus implied, but did not emphasize or even mention, the separate origins of the Africans]: the works of Stillingfleet and Hale were two of the dozens written in refutation.) And in order to allay this concern, neither author made at all clear how or when God had produced the various kinds of men—who were “all borne of Adam and Eve,” Eden insisted, as servants of “one humane nature,” in the phrase of Purchas.²⁵⁵

It was perhaps in response to this same concern that by 1652 Heylyn, who also attributed the color of Africans to the will or pleasure of God, had begun at least to consider the Curse of Ham as the source of black skin. Indeed, for Best (as well as for Sandys), the

²⁵⁵ Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, 328 (see also Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis*, 254); Boyle, *Experiments and Considerations*, 166; [Isaac La Peyrère], *Men Before Adam* (London, 1656; trans. from the Latin, pub. 1655), 22 (see Richard H. Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1596-1676): His Life, Work and Influence* [New York, 1987]); Eden, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, 311r; and Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, 546. On subjects discussed in this paragraph and the preceding paragraph, see for example Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, P.A., 1964), 207-294; Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time: The History of the Earth & The History of Nations from Hooke to Vico*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (from Italian) (Chicago, I.L., 1984); Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (New York, 2006); David N. Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore, M.D., 2008); Rhodri Lewis, *William Petty on the Order of Nature: An Unpublished Manuscript Treatise* (Tempe, A.Z., 2012); Nicholas Popper, *Walter Raleigh's History of the World and the Historical Culture of the Late Renaissance* (Chicago, I.L., 2012); and Justin E. Smith, *Nature, Human Nature, & Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J., 2015). Despite Peyrère's manifest lack of interest in the separate origins of Africans, a number of scholars have claimed, in the phrase of William Cohen, that “La Peyrère saw the differences between whites and blacks as so fundamental that he could not think of them as descended from the same original pair of humans.” William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington, I.N., 1980), 12. See also Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984), 144; and Iyengar, *Shades of Difference*, 222-223 (quoting Fryer, *Staying Power*, 144). Though he did not mention Peyrère, James Walvin similarly asserted that, in the period before 1700, “the attempt to deal with African blackness” rendered “the biblical account of the origins of man . . . unacceptable in the light of his biological diversity.” James Walvin, *Black and White: The Negro and English Society, 1555-1945* (London, 1973), 21.

Curse placed the origins of blackness within the setting of the single family left alive after the Flood. The crime of Ham had been to disobey the command of his father, in order that his children might rule those of his brothers; and the curse that God put on Ham's son and his descendants was meant to remind children to obey their parents. The myth of the Curse in other words drew attention at once to the radical difference between white and black persons *and* to their closeness at some point in the distant past—indeed, to their common origin in a primordial struggle for power between father and son.

By the end of the seventeenth century, in short, the English encounter with Africa may have strained, but had also at times been interpreted as powerful evidence for, and had in any case not yet begun to rupture, the Christian conviction articulated by Purchas—that mankind “may all *be one*.”

This belief in the one-ness of humankind threatened to render the differences between humans almost trivial by comparison. The shades of skin color indeed were classed in Purchas as no more than “accidents,” which stood in incidental relation to the essence of the human form. It had been form, after all, and not color, which figured as the only basic human fact in Jobson's declaration, in response to an offer from an African trader to purchase black slaves, that “we were a people” who did not “buy or sell one another, or any that had our owne shapes.” Within the context of a culture thus dedicated to the unity of humankind, we may begin in fact to discern a certain interesting indifference to color, even among those English authors who happened to remark upon the blackness of the Africans. It has long been noticed among scholars, for example, that, like the daughters of Niger in the *Masque of Blackness*, the English regarded black as an ugly color; and yet when they turned to black persons, they were often struck by their beauty, in spite of their complex-

ion. They knew from the bride of Solomon in the Old Testament that one might be “blacke, but comely.” Even in the song with which the *Masque* begins, Niger is honored as father of a “beautious race,” even though he is said to be “but blacke in face.” By the middle of the seventeenth century, works on Africa began frequently to insist that the color of some Africans was balanced against their open features, piercing white-and-brown eyes, and strong, well-proportioned limbs. The eponymous character in Behn’s *Oroonoko* (1688), a prince from the Gold Coast of West Africa, was drawn from this tradition, for “bating his Colour,” Behn maintained, “there cou’d be nothing in Nature more beautiful.” Browne and Boyle concluded from such observations that color was irrelevant in judgments of beauty, “which even to our European Eyes,” according to Boyle, “consists not so much in Colour, as Advantageous Stature, a Comely Symmetry of the parts of the Body, and Good Features in the Face”—qualities of shape, in other words, which Boyle believed the Negroes might certainly possess.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ Jobson, *Golden Trade*, 89; *The Holy Bible*, *Song of Solomon* 1:5; Jonson, *Masque of Blackness*, 895; Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko: or, The Royal Slave. A True History* (London, 1688), 21; and Boyle, *Experiments and Considerations*, 160 (see also Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, 332-333). For remarks on the beauty of Africans, depicted in contrast to their color, see for example Henry Neville, *The Isle of Pines* (London, 1668), 6; Ogilby, *Africa*, 318; Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk*, 51 and 109; Job Ludolphus, *A New History of Ethiopia*, trans. J.P. Gent (London, 1682), 71; R[obert] B[urton], *A View of the English Acquisitions in Guinea and the East-Indies* (London, 1686), 6; and Le Maire, *Voyages of Sieur Le Maire*, 91. At an earlier date, see the remark by Leo Africanus that he himself was acquainted with the brother of a king in the Land of Negros who was “blacke in colour, but most beautifull in minde and conditions.” Leo, *Geographical Historie of Africa* (1600), trans. Pory, 289. Similar observations were made as well in several works, which, even though they were not translated, seem to have been well known among English observers of Africa. See for example “Wilhelm Johann Müller’s Description of The Fetu Country, 1662-1669,” trans. Adam Jones, in *German Sources for West African History, 1599-1669*, ed. Adam Jones (Wiesbaden, 1983), 134-259, 153; “Relation du voyage fait sur les Costes d’Afrique,” in Henri Justel, *Recueil de divers voyages faits en Afrique et en l’Amerique* (Paris, 1674), 16; and [Bernier], “Nouvelle Division de la Terre,” in *Journal des Sçavans*, 137. Scholarship on representations of Africans in early English drama, in particular, has emphasized the persistent debasement of black skin as a symbol of evil, as well as a departure from common standards of beauty: see for example Elliot H. Tokson, *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama, 1550-1688* (Boston, M.A., 1982); Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge, L.A., 1987); Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1995); and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Performing Blackness on the English Stage, 1500-1800* (New York, 2005).

Even if color did remain a measure of beauty, though, the case against the Africans was far from clear. They themselves, as both Browne and Boyle noted, preferred black to white as strongly as Englishmen preferred white to black. “Navigators tell us of Black Nations,” Boyle reported, that they even considered the Devil to be white. Indeed, although Jordan suggested that English authors saw the Africans—in their heathenism, uncontrolled sexuality, and above all blackness—as incarnations of the Devil, in fact only Herbert said as much. Far more common among travellers was the recognition that Africans saw whiteness as the symbol of evil. Purchas had first noted, in a passage added to the third edition of his *Pilgrimage*, in 1617, that the Christians of Ethiopia held “their blacke colour in such estimation, that they paint CHRIST, the Angels, and Saints blacke; the Divell, *Judas, Casphas, Pilate*, and wicked persons they paint white.” In turn, Heylyn, in 1621, observed in a short poem that the people in the Land of Negroes “in their native beauty most delight,/ And in contempt doe paint the Divell white.” Heylyn was appalled; he called the Negroes “for the greater part Idolaters.” But in the decades that followed, as more observers of Africa remarked that, both in Ethiopia and along the western coast, the gods were black and the devils were white, the harsh judgment of Heylyn was never repeated. The finding was most often reported without comment, simply as a fact; and it even suggested, to Browne and Boyle, that the Curse could not have been the source of black skin, since blackness did not at all seem like a curse to the Negroes.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Boyle, *Experiments and Considerations*, 160; Purchas, *Pilgrimage* (1617), 854; Heylyn, *Microcosmus* (1621), 379 and 379. For the suggestion of Jordan that Englishmen “already had in hand a mediating term” among the “impinging concepts” they found in Negroes—heathenism, sexuality, and blackness—and that that term was “the *devil*,” see Jordan, *White Over Black*, 24 (see also 41). For Herbert’s view that natives of the region to the North of Congo, “in colour so in condition are little other than Devils incarnate,” see Herbert, *Some Years Travels* (1677). For reports on the white devils or black gods in Africa, see, in addition to Purchas and Heylyn, [Pieter de Marees], “A description and historicall declaration of the golden Kingdome of *Guinea*,” trans. G. Artus Dantise, in Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, bk. 7, capt. 2, 2: 926-970, 943; Andrew Battel, “The strange adventures of Andrew Battel of Leigh in Essex,” in Purchas, *Purchas His Pil-*

“Nor can I imagine,” wrote the English ship captain Thomas Phillips, in the journal of his 1694 voyage to Guinea, why the natives there “should be despis’d for their colour.” This was in May. In July, Phillips’s ship the *Hannibal* would sail for Barbados with seven hundred slaves. Of these, three hundred and twenty would perish on the Middle Passage: most died of dysentery, and some of smallpox, but a dozen jumped overboard and drowned themselves in the Atlantic. Phillips had been warned that they might do this, “for ‘tis their belief,” he explained, “that when they die they return home.” He said he had been advised to cut off the arms or legs of “the most wilful,” since the Africans also believed that if they lost a limb, even their death would not bring their return. But he refused to do so, and it was in order to explain this refusal that Phillips turned, for the only time in his long account, to the cause of black skin. He said that it was the effect of the climate, but that its ultimate source was God, as it was only the effect of “the climate it has pleas’d God to appoint them.” He offered no reason why God might have appointed them such a climate, and in fact he thought there might have been no reason. Aside from their lack of Christianity—“their misfortune more than fault,” Phillips observed—the Africans were “as much the work of God’s hands, and no doubt as dear to him as ourselves.” Even their color was no sign to the contrary. And in a passage that testifies at once to a broad cultural bias for white over black, *and* to the ease with which this bias could be set aside or even turned on

grimes, bk. 7, capt. 3, 2:970-985, 980; Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, 332; Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis*, 255; Samuel Clarke, *A Geographical Description of all the Countries in the Known World* (London, 1657), 53; Boyle, *Experiments and Considerations*, 160; *Golden Coast, Or A Description of Guinney*, 3; Villault, *Relation of the Coasts of Africk* (178); Morgan Godwyn, *The Negro’s & Indians Advocate* (London, 1680), 21; and Ludolphus, *New History of Ethiopia*, 72. In the account of his 1564 journey to the coast of Guinea, John Hawkins had reported in vague but suggestive terms, of a certain people, that, “For their beliefe, I can heare of none that they have,” but that they did “so worshippe the pictures, whereof wee sawe some like unto devils.” Hawkins, “Voyage made by *M. John Hawkins*,” in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations* (1600), Vol. 3, 505. For the observation that blackness did not seem like a curse to the Negroes, as evidence against the claim that the Curse of Ham was the cause of black skin, see Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, 332; and Boyle, *Experiments and Considerations*, 160. Jordan said by contrast that the “extraordinary persistence” of the Curse “was probably sustained by a feeling that blackness could scarcely be anything *but* a curse.” Jordan, *White Over Black*, 19.

its head among early-modern English observers of Africa, Phillips reflected, “I can’t think there is any intrinsic value in one colour more than another, nor that white is better than black, only we think it so because we are so.” The blacks, finally, only did the same, who “in odium of the colour, say, the devil is white, and so paint him.”²⁵⁸

Modern scholars have often argued that, when the English spoke of Africa, they in truth spoke only of themselves. In America, Jordan wrote, the need to define the Africans drew at its core on “the need of transplanted Englishmen to know who it was they were.” This was the thread that “binds this study together,” he explained; and it has bound together as well the more recent studies of James Walvin, Peter Fryer, Kim Hall, Virginia Mason Vaughan, and Catherine Molineux. According to such scholars, Englishmen in the Renaissance and early-modern period figured Africans as their own perfect opposites: they were not simply different, then, but different in this precise sense. They were savage rather than civil, heathen rather than Christian, ugly rather than beautiful, sensual rather than chaste, and almost beasts rather than men. In the famous first chapter of *White Over Black*, Jordan stressed that, in the Elizabethan period, Englishmen had “discovered” in Africans traits of disorder and disobedience at a time when they themselves worried over “the apparent disintegration of social and moral controls at home.” Nowhere was the contrast more sharply drawn, though, than in color, for whereas the English saw Africans as black, they thought of themselves as white—“being coloured utterly contrary,” as Richard Eden had put it in 1555. The English image of Africa thus has often been represented as a kind of mirror ra-

²⁵⁸ Thomas Phillips, “A Journal of a Voyage Made in the Hannibal of London, Ann. 1693, 1694,” in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 6 vols. (London, 1732), Vol. 6, 171-239, 219.

ther than a portrait, in which, if they had ever mustered the courage to realize it, the English might have glimpsed all the marks of their own deepest fears and anxieties. The Africans painted their Devil white; the Devil, for the English, was black. And this, finally, was what Jordan meant when he said that “in the long run, of course, the Negro’s color attained greatest significance not as a scientific problem but as a social fact”—a fact, in other words, which was fastened upon, charged with meaning, and then put to use in a context that was social above all else.²⁵⁹

I have a different sense of the sources discussed in this chapter. They do not seem to me as answers to certain social questions or responses to certain social needs. They do not seem as inverted projections of the inner essences of certain selves. They do not seem, either, as so many efforts to justify certain treatment of Africans, in particular their status as slaves. At root, and in general, they seem rather as attempts to address what Jordan referred to as a certain scientific problem, but which might more expansively be understood as an intellectual one.

Inquiries into the causes of complexion during this period were tied up with many of the major issues the English thought they needed to understand in order better to know their world. To ask whether the sun was the source of black skin, then, was to ask as well what was the effect of the climate on the body, what were the different zones of the Earth,

²⁵⁹ Jordan, *White Over Black*, xiv, xiv, 42; Eden, *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, 311v; and Jordan, *White Over Black*, 42. See Walvin, *Black and White* (1973); Fryer, *Staying Power* (1984); Hall, *Things of Darkness* (1995); Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Performing Blackness on the English Stage, 1500-1800* (New York, 2005); Anu Korhonen, “Washing the Ethiopian white: conceptualising black skin in Renaissance England,” in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, eds. T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe (Cambridge, U.K., 2005), 94-112; and Molineux, *Faces of Perfect Ebony* (2012). For the argument that “it is the British concept of themselves which has determined their concept of Africa”—although the work deals only in passing with the period before the eighteenth century—see Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Myth of Africa* (New York, 1977), 197. Also William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington, I.N., 1980), for the more general view that “Africa served Europeans as a convenient mirror, or as a screen onto which they projected their own fears about themselves and their world” (33).

what parts of the world would support human life, and, most fundamentally, what was the authority of the ancient philosophers. Later, it would require one to ask, too, whether all the peoples of the world had descended from the single source described in the Old Testament, or whether they had not. To trace blackness to the Curse of Ham, on the other hand, was to offer an account of the earliest ancestors of the various peoples of the world, of the descent of Africans from one or another of Noah's sons, and of the correct interpretation of a crucial passage in *Genesis*. To propose that blackness was the result of maternal impression, moreover, was to maintain that objects imagined by mothers affected their children in the womb. To assert that its origin was body painting was to put forward an opinion about the effect of artifice on human development. To fix on the point where blackness resided in the body was to determine how many layers of skin there were, or whether there were scales in the bottom layer of the skin, or how the color of the blood was communicated to the skin's surface. To reject all of these causes was to offer a different account of all or at least many of these issues. And to conclude that blackness was a secret edict of nature or God, finally, was to make some concession to the limits of human understanding.

We noted before that English observers in this period were not so singularly concerned with the black skin of Africans as they would later become. But now we have seen as well that, when they did take an interest in blackness enough to ask after its cause, their answers drew on a larger and more various set of concerns than has often been supposed. In "a digression of the Ayre," which appeared in the second section of the second part of his massive *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1624), Robert Burton conveyed some sense of this range when he asked, "Whence come this variety of complexions, colours, plants, birds, beasts, mettals, peculiar almost to every place?" For Burton, the variety of complexions—which

included black, dun, and white—surely was a striking fact. But it was striking in the same way that the variety of plants, birds, beasts, and metals were striking—as one of the many aspects of the world that a curious mind would want to explain. “Is it from the Aire,” he wondered, “or from the soyle, or influence of starres, or some other secret cause?”²⁶⁰

Burton would leave these questions unanswered in the narrative, and this, too, was revealing. From the middle of the sixteenth century to the end of the seventeenth century, the discourse on the causes of blackness progressed quite little. The view that it came from the sun was common in the Elizabethan period, then all but disappeared, then reappeared in the middle of the Stuart era in a slightly altered context. The Curse was introduced as a reason for blackness in 1587, but only found support in a work from 1615, although writers would never cease to mention it as a possible (if incorrect) opinion. That black sperm was the cause was discussed in an account brought into English in 1597, that the soil was the source was mentioned in a work translated the next year, and the several solutions proposed by Browne, Boyle, and Bulwer appeared in the middle of the next century—but, by and large, none of these was ever endorsed in print. During this period, perhaps the most durable explanation for blackness was that it simply was a mystery, since every other explanation seemed implausible. No single theme emerged from this thicket of speculations; they did not cohere. The search after the causes of blackness was marked at almost every point by uncertainty and confusion. It was most properly figured, as Burton understood, in the form of a question.

What most strikes the modern reader is how little this state of affairs seems to have disturbed English observers of Africa before 1700. In marginal notes, parenthetical asides,

²⁶⁰ Democritus *Junior* [Robert Burton], *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1624; orig. pub. 1621), Pt. 2, Sect. 2, Memb. 3: 212. The “digression of the Ayre,” which did not appear the original 1621 edition of the work, was added in the second edition cited here.

single lines in long exchanges, sentences in rambling paragraphs, digressions in narratives, passing remarks in chapters on other subjects, and, at most, little essays, authors touched upon the causes of complexion, and then moved on, leaving the issue in a deep sense unresolved, as if no great affairs, no pressing interests, depended upon what they had found. Of course very little did hinge on the sources and meanings of blackness: as we have seen, the trade in African slaves to the New World, for example, drew upon an entirely different intellectual tradition. Blackness had not yet acquired its fatal association with slavery. For this was a time in English history when the color of a person's skin was not thought to determine the content of their character.

EPILOGUE

The Transition to America

Into the eighteenth century, the discourse among English authors in the Atlantic world continued in what has been described here as a fundamentally Roman idiom. In this context to consider the moral character of slavery was to explain its sources and to elaborate upon the sources of slavery was to give an account of the circumstances under which certain free persons had been enslaved. As the English developed and anxiously maintained slave systems in the New World, their arguments were drawn back as before into observations about the slave trade and in the end toward the continent from which their mariners took ever greater numbers of persons with each passing year.

If the broad contours of English discourse in the eighteenth century had thus been set in the century before, it must also be observed that the authors of this period explored in far greater depth the arguments that slavery on the Roman model appeared to require. They fastened upon problems that even Locke had ignored, and eventually some arrived at a positive defense of the slave trade that none of their predecessors had quite imagined. In short during this time English discourse matured into a debate, a more or less rigidly opposed set of positions that might with reason be termed the first proslavery and anti-slavery arguments to appear in print in the history of the English language.

The maturation of English opinion on slavery was apparent already in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Even those earlier authors such as Phillips and Barbot who had never thought to question the enslavement of African captives taken in war had

all the same never defended their treatment in the Caribbean. For the authors of this time, the horror of New World slavery did not undermine the institution as such; and in part for this reason, these authors related with an almost cool unconcern the mutinies and suicides to which their human cargo resorted on the Middle Passage in order to avoid the fate that awaited them on the other side of the ocean. As a product of accident and misfortune in human affairs, slavery was not expected to be much more than barely preferable to death; and the ship captains of this period could comfort themselves with the thought that those who had chosen death over slavery had never made it as far as America in order to form a more accurate opinion of the institution.

Early in the eighteenth century, though, a number of observers of the Caribbean colonies began to assert that in fact to be enslaved there represented a real benefit to the natives of Africa. As he drew upon recent travelers' reports in order to expand upon his manuscript on Guinea in the years prior to his death in 1712, Barbot himself realized that what he had now heard was the severe treatment that slaves received in Guinea "makes it appear, that the fate of such as are bought, and transported from the coast to America, or other parts of the world, by Europeans, is less deplorable, than that of those who end their days in their native country." All possible care was taken to ensure the health of the slaves who labored in the colonies, Barbot maintained; and this was not to mention what he said was "the inestimable advantage they may reap, of becoming christians, and saving their souls."²⁶¹ The English naturalist Hans Sloane, whose account of a voyage to Jamaica was published in 1707, argued in this vein that the Africans on the island were "more easily treated by the *English* here, than by their own Country-People," and as a result "would

²⁶¹ "John Barbot's Description of Guinea," in *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, ed. Elizabeth Donnan (Washington, D.C., 1930), vol. 1, 282-301, 288.

not often willingly change Masters.”²⁶² According to such authors, slavery in Africa may have been legitimate, but it was also a condition from which one might be grateful to be delivered into the ready hands of a master from Europe.

It was in other words possible by now to begin from Roman premises and develop a defense of the specific form that slavery had taken in the Caribbean. But it was possible as well to attack that institution on the basis of those same Roman premises. Indeed an extraordinary attempt to do just that appeared in the form of a letter that was printed in 1709 by an anonymous author who claimed to be a merchant in Jamaica. Addressed to “a Member of Parliament in London” and “touching the African Trade,” this letter railed in the mode of Godwyn and Tryon against the treatment of the Africans on the island, who were exposed to all of the “*Avarice and Iniquity*” that “the *Caprice and Cruelty* of Men, *bounded by no Fences of human Law*, can invent and execute.”²⁶³

Earlier authors had ended their arguments with similar critiques of the cruelty of slavery, but the author here continued in a more original direction. The author noted that the slaves in Jamaica had for the most part been taken in war, and proceeded to question whether this custom itself was just. In an extended discussion of Grotius in which he cited the 1625 Latin edition of Grotius’s masterpiece *The Rights of War and Peace*, the author inquired into whether, since “the end of all just War being Peace, *i.e.* a quiet Enjoyment of Life and Property, what occasion is there to kill a Man I have disarm’d, and from whom I have nothing to fear . . . ?” “If in such case it be inhuman,” the author continued, to take the life of a captive, then “it is almost as bad to take from him the Liberty of a ra-

²⁶² Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica* (London, 1707), lvii.

²⁶³ *A Letter from a Merchant at Jamaica to a Member of Parliament in London, Touching the African Trade* (London, 1709), 11.

tional Creature, and to spare his Life no longer than he blindly submits his Understanding; and all his Facultys both of Mind and Body, to the imperious Dictates of my Will, how unreasonable and extravagant soever.”²⁶⁴

Here, in a pamphlet that has almost been lost to history, was a radical new view that seemed to undermine the right by which victors in war made slaves of their prisoners and in so doing to attack the custom by which the Africans in Jamaica were understood to have been enslaved in the first place. Not only abuses in the practice of slavery, the author appeared to suggest, but slavery as such might well be unjust. That said, the author did not pursue the explosive possibilities that had only just been glimpsed. As he ended his letter, he protested only that, even if one did admit that the planters of Jamaica had “as good a Right in our Slaves as we are willing to imagine, yet they are still Men,” who ought to be managed “with more Justice and Humanity” than they had received so far.²⁶⁵

As the eighteenth century went on, the resources for a root and branch attack on the sources of slavery that this letter had found buried within the Roman tradition were rediscovered by authors more prepared to use them to their fullest extent. And so it was no coincidence that, by the middle of the century in England as well as in France, the most thorough critiques of slavery were those made by authors well trained in the doctrines of the civil law. Montesquieu was the first one of these, for the chapters on civil slavery in his 1748 *Spirit of the Laws* were concerned above all to establish that “the origin of the right of slavery according to the Roman jurists” was illegitimate on the one hand because free persons did not possess the right to sell themselves and on the other

²⁶⁴ *A Letter from a Merchant at Jamaica to a Member of Parliament in London, Touching the African Trade*, 11-12.

²⁶⁵ *A Letter from a Merchant at Jamaica to a Member of Parliament in London, Touching the African Trade*, 13.

hand because, Montesquieu said, in a claim that closely recalled that of the Jamaican planter from 1709, victors in war acquired no right over the lives of prisoners.²⁶⁶

When he set out to discredit the origin of the right of slavery in the first book of his *Social Contract*, in 1762, Rousseau drew upon the arguments that Montesquieu had laid out. And the same was true as well of the jurist William Blackstone in his treatment of “the origins of the right of slavery assigned by Justinian” in the 1765 *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. “War itself is justifiable only on principles of self-preservation,” Blackstone explained; and therefore “it gives no other right over prisoners, but merely to disable them from doing harm to us, by confining their persons: much less can it give a right to kill, torture, abuse, plunder, or even to enslave, an enemy when the war is over.” If war could not create the right of slavery, Blackstone went on, neither could the attempt of a person to sell himself to a master, because “every sale implies a price,” he said, “but what equivalent can be given for life, and liberty?”²⁶⁷ The pamphleteer Arthur Lee had put forward almost precisely the same arguments in a work from the year before that offered *Reflections on Slavery in General*; and these arguments would in turn undergird the case advanced by the plaintiff in *Somerset against Stewart* in 1772.

In short, well into the second half of the eighteenth century, to argue against slavery was to take issue with the Roman tradition; and the most original authors versed in that tradition had come to reject its account of how slavery could rightfully arise. And yet even though Montesquieu and Blackstone had made no concessions in this regard, they both also had been more forgiving when they turned toward the practice of slavery in the

²⁶⁶ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. and ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone (New York, 1989), pt. 3, bk. 15, ch. 2: 247.

²⁶⁷ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (London, 1765), vol. 1, ch. 14: 411.

present. Montesquieu conceded, in the context of his climatic theory of the proper forms of government, that slavery had proved to be an all but necessary spur to labor in warm environments; and Blackstone (like the advocate Alleyne in *Somerset*) reproduced the argument of Montesquieu only in order to explain the reasons for which the laws of England did not recognize that status.

Other English authors from this period also became less ambitious when they turned to discuss the African slave trade. The most common mode of argument among observers who raised objections to the trade was to accept the point that Montesquieu and Blackstone had rejected, that the sources of slavery in Roman law were legitimate, but then to assert that these no longer were sufficient to describe the manner in which persons along the western coast of Africa were being made into slaves.

The character of antislavery argument in the English Atlantic world through the decade of the 1770s was thus far more empirical than theoretical. It aimed not so much to dismantle the old ideas that early-modern natural rights theories had revived in the modern world but rather to prove that these had become outdated as the English slave trade reached its apex. Such early critics of the trade as Anthony Benezet and Granville Sharp became students of the travelers' reports of their era. They scanned the accounts of the sources of African slavery that had appeared during the course of the eighteenth century in the works of Willem Bosman, William Snelgrave, Francis Moore, William Smith, Michel Adanson, and John Atkins and which in turn had most recently been drawn together in the mid-century Astley collection of *Voyages and Travels*.

What the critics of the slave trade fastened upon in these documents above all was the evidence they contained that the sources of slavery in Africa had changed over time.

They related what they had learned of the process by which new states had formed on the Guinea coast whose sole aim was to raid for slaves in the interior. Now slavery was “the cause of War,” as one such author would observe in 1788, “and not War, as is commonly, but falsely asserted, the cause of slavery.”²⁶⁸ Authors such as these had heard as well about the corruption of the judicial process in Guinea, so that persons were sentenced to slavery for crimes that seemed to be less and less severe. They reported that ordinary persons had begun to sell one another under false pretenses. These critics argued, in short, that under the pressure of the increased demands of the trade, the peoples of Africa had turned on each other. Perhaps in the early period of the trade, Europeans had done no more than purchase on the coast those persons who had been enslaved through the usual channels laid down in the Roman tradition; but at this point no observer informed about the current state of affairs could deny that the European trade had twisted and distorted the sources of slavery in Africa.

This claim that the sources of African slavery had been transformed in recent years was perhaps the central one that authors who took up to defend the trade flatly denied. These authors saw continuity rather than change as the rule in Africa and, as had a number of the most important European observers of the seventeenth century, gave almost no thought to the effect that trade with merchants from Europe had had upon the peoples of Africa. The method of travelers who aimed in their accounts to establish that the slave trade was legitimate, from Bosman to Snelgrave to in a later period Mungo Park, was simply to restate in more systematic fashion the sources of African slavery that could have been gleaned from the original reports available in England. In turn authors in England and in the Caribbean colonies, from Thomas Thompson to Samuel Estwick to

²⁶⁸ [William Leigh], *Remarks on the Slave Trade, and the Slavery of the Negroes*. . . . (London, 1788), 4.

Richard Nisbet to the barrister Dunning in the *Somerset* case, wove around such observations detailed and approving glosses on Justinian. They dwelled upon a theme that the authors of the seventeenth century had almost taken for granted, that in the Roman tradition slavery stemmed from an act of mercy, and adapted this insight to eighteenth-century sensibilities in order to maintain, in the phrase of Thompson, that slavery “had its origin from a principle of humanity.”²⁶⁹ The irony of the proslavery argument that took shape in the decade of the 1770s was its attempt to elaborate upon the assumptions of observers who had not thought to question the trade in its early stages at just the time when those assumptions had widely come to be seen as out of date.

The terms of the debate among the English about the African slave trade around this time were well captured in an exchange that Boswell recorded between himself and Johnson from 1777. In a case similar to *Somerset* in which an African had sued for his liberty before a court in Scotland, Johnson took the side of the enslaved man. He hated slavery, he said, because all persons were by nature free. He did not deny “that there are certain relations between man and man which may make slavery necessary and just,” he continued, but before the most basic natural right could be denied, it had to be shown to a certainty that this was done justly. Johnson had heard that persons in Africa were often made slaves “by fraud or violence,” and of course neither the merchant in Guinea nor the buyer in Jamaica, where the defendant in the present case had been sold, had ever inquired into how he had been enslaved. “That the defendant has by any act forfeited the rights of nature we require to be proved,” Johnson concluded; “and if no proof of such forfeiture can be given, we doubt not but the justice of the court will declare him free.” Boswell in turn admitted that Johnson may have been in the right in this particular case, but worried

²⁶⁹ Thomas Thompson, *The African Trade for Negro Slaves* (London, 1772), 21.

that the “general doctrine” that he had put forward may have owed on the one hand to a prejudice against the settlers in the colonies and on the other hand to “imperfect or false information” about the practice of slavery in Africa. Boswell had been educated in the civil law in Scotland: he observed that “to abolish a *status*, which in all ages GOD has sanctioned, and man has continued,” would produce an awful disruption in the laws of property and, what was more, would be cruel to the Africans. There was a portion of the people of that continent, Boswell observed, whom the slave trade “saves from massacre, or intolerable bondage in their own country, and introduces into a much happier state of life; especially now when their passage to the West-Indies and their treatment there is humanely regulated.”²⁷⁰

In short, the arguments that both Boswell and Johnson had available to them were no more than mature versions of those that had been in place in the seventeenth century. But it must be said that a profound shift in attitudes toward slavery was reflected as well in their views. Not until perhaps the final decade of the seventeenth century had authors in England realized the extent to which the colonies in the Caribbean depended upon the labor of enslaved Africans, and even then the English had not quite come to terms with the importance of these colonies to their emergent empire. Not until the middle of the next century did England become by far the principal European power in the African slave trade, which by now had helped to produce slave societies from Barbados to Virginia whose significance in the British Empire no observer could ignore.

By the decade of the 1770s, then, any discussion of slavery had long since had to start from a clear sense of the massive interests that were at stake. Those British authors who contributed to the antislavery argument had to confront the prospect that they might

²⁷⁰ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, abridg. Bergen Evans (New York, 1952), 363.

have sought to undermine the very basis of the Empire. Boswell was amazed at how glib Johnson could be on this account: at Oxford, he had proposed a famous toast to the “next insurrection of the negroes in the West Indies.” And on the other side of the debate, those authors who defended slavery were often well aware that they had not been moved to air their views by the force of ideas alone. They aimed not only to ward off what Boswell called a “wild and dangerous attempt . . . to abolish so very important and necessary a branch of commercial interest” but also, in the colonies, to preserve the structure of their world and indeed their lives. What they said and wrote was shaped by these aims; and of course this was the case in their descriptions of Africa, where to be sure they repeated old stories about the sources of slavery in order to defend their title to those slaves they had, as well as of America, where it must have required some measure of willful ignorance to assert that the treatment of slaves was, in the phrase of Boswell, humanely regulated.

The English authors of this period were thus the first ones to reflect deeply upon the new order that the trade had helped to create on the other side of the Atlantic. In fact so firmly fixed in America did slavery seem among metropolitan observers to be that, in part as a result, when the debates about slavery began in Parliament in 1789, they were concentrated almost entirely on the conduct of the slave trade rather than the status of slave systems in the colonies. These were, of course, a different kind of institution, which seemed to demand a different kind of argument in order to explain.

At root the Roman tradition of slavery, as we have seen, was a method to account for the sources of slavery. It was in this context that it had proved so useful to European partisans of the slave trade in Africa, since here all that one hoped to establish was that those persons who were sold as slaves had been reduced to that condition by legitimate

means, or at least that this could have been the case. But Roman ideas had always been of little help in the effort to say why the children of enslaved persons had to inherit the status of their parents. Justinian had simply noted that, throughout Roman law, persons inherited the status of their parents; and later authors in the same tradition had been able to come up with no more compelling reason than that, if in a sense each master saved the life of each person they enslaved, then each one of that person's children owed their life to that master. These were just a couple of the Roman notions that Locke easily discarded; but in particular in the seventeenth century, when the trade was still the main object of interest in England and so few Africans in the Caribbean survived long enough to have children that the slave population was chronically unable to sustain itself, the weakness of the Roman tradition in this regard was not often noticed.

By the final quarter of the eighteenth century, though, this weakness could no longer be ignored. The slave societies in the colonies had now endured for as long as a century and a half, and some had begun to grow more through natural reproduction than through new arrivals from the trade. From an early point, and perhaps from the beginning, the slavery of Africans in the English colonies had been both permanent and heritable; but at this point, vast numbers of Africans were still held as slaves whose ancestors had been captured several generations before in initial acts of enslavement whose circumstances remained disconcertingly unknown. The colonists in America found it in other words less and less possible with each successive decade to defend slavery by reference to its origins in Africa. They would have to confront it on its own terms, to explain what they had done in America. And this was a challenge that the Roman tradition, at least on its own, could not quite meet.

The new ideas that a defense of American slavery seemed to demand were further suggested by other distinctive features of the institution there. When English traders had encountered the peoples of Africa in their native lands, their views of slavery had been intended to establish the reasons for enslavement of certain specific persons. No traveler to the continent had ever assumed that all of the persons there were or ought to be slaves, and the Roman tradition would not have been well suited to such a claim. The situation in America was very different, however, in the sense that perhaps every one of the natives of Africa had been transported there as a slave whereas all of the colonists from England had gone there as free or at least, in the case of the many servants and convicts who had made the journey as persons who were to some extent unfree, not enslaved. Moreover, while, as we have seen, almost no observer of the nations of Africa had failed in the seventeenth century to remark upon the variety of the continent, one of the most disorienting effects of the Middle Passage on those who were subjected to it was that it aimed to obscure the distinctions between African peoples. In the New World, Africans fought to preserve the traditions of their ancestors: the records of several of the most potent slave rebellions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries attest to the struggle to hold onto the legacy of rich and fully realized cultures. Indeed, especially in the early period of the transatlantic trade, traders and colonists alike produced schematic assessments of the traits peculiar to the people who were shipped from each region along the African coast. As time passed in America, though, the pressure of the slave system and in particular of the domestic trade in slaves was all toward the construction of a single African or African-American identity from out of the former multiplicity of African identities.

In this context, authors in the English colonies gradually realized as the century wore on that what they needed to provide in order to explain the system that they had already established was a theory that would show slavery to be the common, essential, and specific fate of the natives of Africa in America. This would have to be one that far more closely resembled the doctrine of natural slavery from Aristotle than the account of the origins of slavery that had been embedded in Roman law; but it is perhaps a measure of their awareness that their ideas marked a radical break from the past that they almost as a rule never invoked Aristotle himself. For race was a recent invention when, in the final quarter of the eighteenth century, colonial Americans turned a certain conception of it into the basis for a theory of slavery.

To be sure, there were ominous signs of this theory to be found in the defense of the slave trade that authors in the English colonies had put forward during this time. In order to maintain that persons who had been enslaved in Africa were grateful to submit to English masters in the Caribbean, one had to insist upon the brutal treatment that they had received in their native lands. Writers such as Thomas Thompson and Richard Nisbet had done just this, but they had also proved more than willing to suggest that perhaps all of the natives of Africa would prefer to live in America under the steady hand of a master from England. Far more than those who had themselves been to the continent, observers from the colonies argued that warfare and violence were endemic in African life. They lamented the slow progress that Christian religion had made across the continent, and speculated about what it could mean that so many of the peoples there still had never adopted the essential elements of Western culture. Perhaps this signaled, according to such authors as Bernard Romans, whose history of Florida was printed in 1775, that no

African had attained the status of political freedom that was the central achievement of modern civilization. “Can any one say,” Romans asked, “that the favourites of mankind (I mean liberty and property) are any where enjoyed in Africa?”²⁷¹ Less cautious inquirers than Romans were prepared by now to conclude that in fact each African was sunk “in a state of the most abject slavery, a slavery of the worst kind . . . devoted to the governing influence of those irregular propensities, which are the genuine offspring of depraved nature, when unassisted by philosophy or religion.” This was the opinion of Eliphalet Pearson in a debate held at Harvard College in 1773 on “the Legality of enslaving the Africans.”²⁷² There was no need to trouble oneself over this matter, Pearson implied: whether in Africa or in America, the Africans were slaves.

Pearson was nevertheless well aware of the debate current at the time about the circumstances under which the Africans who arrived in America had first been enslaved. His opponent at Harvard, Theodore Parsons, had drawn upon Bosman and Smith in order to advance the familiar argument that the trade from Europe drove the cycle of war and slavery in Africa; and Pearson himself observed that, by means of the trade, the lives of captives in war “are preserved, which would otherwise undoubtedly be sacrificed to the cruelty of the captors.”²⁷³ Indeed, among colonial authors almost through the end of the century, old Roman-style claims about the sources of African slavery continued to be repeated in defense of slavery in America. In this vein, although he relied upon the Old Testament rather than civil law to establish that such practices were legitimate, Bernard

²⁷¹ Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West-Florida* (New York, 1776), 107.

²⁷² [Theodore Parsons and Eliphalet Pearson], *A Forensic Dispute on the Legality of enslaving the AFRICANS* (Boston, 1773), 26.

²⁷³ [Theodore Parsons and Eliphalet Pearson], *A Forensic Dispute on the Legality of enslaving the AFRICANS* (Boston, 1773), 30.

Romans was careful to note that the Africans brought to Florida had been condemned to slavery for crime or debt or had been captured in war. The planter Edward Long, whose popular *History of Jamaica* came out in 1774, made an elaborate show of his respect for the lawful customs of enslavement among the Negroes. And although Alexander Hewatt in his 1779 history of Carolina asserted that the trade by which that colony was supplied with slaves was “a shame and disgrace to human nature,” he did allow that it had not begun as such. In the course of an account of the voyages of John Hawkins, Hewatt explained that Hawkins had only ever brought voluntary servants and war captives with him across the ocean and concluded that if they had followed his example in their conduct of the trade, “European merchants might have some excuse to plead in its vindication.”²⁷⁴ Of course the conduct of the slave trade rather than the character of slavery as an institution remained the crux of debate on the other side of the Atlantic at least through 1789, when the Bill for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was first brought before the Parliament.

In the American colonies, however, even if a number of authors did still recite the old Roman claims about the sources of African slavery, by the 1770s each one seemed to understand that these were no longer at the heart of a debate about slavery in America. The real energy of the authors from this period was poured instead into a newer set of ideas that were only on occasion tied to the familiar obsession of the previous century with the methods of enslavement on the Guinea coast. These authors in short felt a particular need to discourse upon the subject of African inferiority and indeed to establish the incapacity of African peoples for freedom.

²⁷⁴ Alexander Hewatt, *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia* (London, 1779), vol. 2, 92, and vol. 1, 25.

In the course of this effort, American authors near the end of the eighteenth century narrowed and re-framed the image of Africa that had been developed in the works of their predecessors. As against the variety of the continent that had been so apparent to English observers from the seventeenth century, the observers from this period pointed to what they saw as the sameness of the peoples there. They worried over the fact that, over so vast an area as Africa seemed to be, no great civilizations could anywhere be found. None of the peoples there had ever made “any progress in civility or science,” as Edward Long wrote, and they had constructed “no system of morality among them.”²⁷⁵ There was no architecture worthy of the name, and the arts were almost unknown. As American authors from this period turned their attention toward those Africans who had been transported across the ocean to labor in their service, they proved far more eager than their predecessors and even than their colleagues in Britain to guard the borders between black and white. They would concede the ability of none of the extraordinary individuals whom advocates of the antislavery cause brought before them, from the poet Phyllis Wheatley to the author and composer Ignatius Sancho. And in the context of arguments on subjects such as these, some authors came to suspect that the degraded state of the Africans who were held as slaves in the colonies owed at root to some deep fact of their shared nature. It was during this period that the notion that Africans belonged to an intermediate order of beings between the human and the ape gained widespread currency. The Curse of Ham was used to explain the origins of slavery among the Africans more often than ever before. As yet, few observers seemed to believe that the Africans were content with their status as slaves, even if many did suggest that they ought to be; but for the first time, col-

²⁷⁵ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica* (London, 1774), vol. 2, 353.

onists interpreted the fact that Africans were unfree in America as a sign that they were destined always to be so.

In this transitional period, ideas of slavery in America did not quite cohere. Learned treatments of Justinian sat uneasily beside scientific reflections upon the connection between the African and the orang-outang in the Great Chain of Being. Detailed studies of the customs of African warfare peeked out from amid expansive remarks upon the wildness of African peoples. Attempts to compile the methods of enslavement among the ancient Hebrews were interrupted by creative glosses on the Curse of Ham. The Roman tradition remained in respectable circles the only one that could be relied upon to describe the sources of the slave trade, but in order to explain slavery in the colonies another theory was required, one that most clearly recalled the doctrine of natural slavery from Aristotle.

Still in 1794, these two traditions, which for millennia had been seen as directly opposed, could complement one another within a single text. In the *Abridgement* of his *History of the British West Indies*, the Jamaican planter and politician Bryan Edwards argued that both the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the colonies ought to be reformed but not abolished. In the course of a standard description of slavery in Africa, Edwards admitted that there were abuses in the means by which traders from Europe obtained their human cargo but held that these were uncommon and insisted that, at least for those who had already been enslaved, the trade took them “to a situation far more desirable, even in its worst state, than that of the most fortunate slaves in their native country.” Edwards then went on in a more original and revealing vein. “In fine,” he continued, “the propriety or impropriety of the slave trade seems entirely to depend on the determination of this

question, whether some men are not slaves by nature, and whether this is not the case with negroes?” Indeed, it did seem to be the case, Edwards concluded after a discussion of the *Politics*; and this was the ground on which rested not only the trade but also the society that it had helped to establish in the West Indies, which was thus no longer only the product of accident and misfortune in a complex and distant land but in addition a manifestation of what Edwards termed approvingly “the everlasting order of things.”²⁷⁶

The defense of slavery in the English colonies remained in the tangled, hybrid condition in which authors such as Edwards left it until an idiosyncratic planter and politician from Virginia named Thomas Jefferson took up the cause. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which was for the most part composed in 1781 and published in 1787, Jefferson made no reference to the Roman tradition of slavery, even though he knew a great deal about the status of slaves under the Roman Empire. He was uninterested too in the process of enslavement in Africa, and he offered no reflections upon the conduct of the slave trade. In this respect Jefferson was the product of the distinctive Virginian culture in which he had been raised and made his career. During the eighteenth century, the population of enslaved persons in the colony had grown much more through natural reproduction than the importation of slaves from Africa; and near the end of the century, the concern of leaders in Virginia was not with how to defend the transatlantic trade but rather with how their surplus of slaves could be sold farther south through the domestic market in order to reduce the threat that these might have posed to the established order. Indeed, it was in the context of this broad concern that Jefferson had complained, in a deleted clause in the Declaration of Independence, about the King’s use of the negative to

²⁷⁶ Bryan Edwards, *An Abridgement of Mr. Edwards’s Civil and Commercial History of the British West Indies* (London, 1794), vol. 2, 404, 428-429, and 430.

block colonial statutes that aimed to curtail the importation of slaves. And it was in this same context that delegates from Virginia at the Philadelphia Convention offered little resistance to the twenty-year sunset provision in the proposed Constitution that would put an end to the transatlantic slave trade in 1807.

In short, when Jefferson considered the state of slavery in Virginia, he ignored many of the subjects that had preoccupied observers of slavery in the English colonies since the middle of the seventeenth century. He paid no mind to the sources of slavery and never thought he had to explain why the slave trade was legitimate. He approached the institution only as an established fact of American life. His attitude toward slavery had a parallel in remarks by his contemporary in Virginia, the rector William Graham, who responded to critics who charged that the slave trade had amounted to a form of thievery in which the purchaser of stolen goods had been as culpable as the thief. “To this we may answer,” wrote Graham in a lecture from 1794, “that thief and purchaser are both dead. The property is here on our hands, and what shall we do with it?”²⁷⁷ Now this was the question to which Jefferson believed that he did have to reply—and in so doing, he developed the first thoroughly American theory of slavery.

What must first be said about this theory is that Jefferson never thought to argue that slavery as such was legitimate and much less that it was right. In the Declaration, he had drawn upon Locke in order to maintain that men were created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain rights, among them the rights to life and liberty. But whereas of course Locke had said that, precisely on the basis of these rights, some persons who were born free might be made slaves, Jefferson said—and in context this was the really radical

²⁷⁷ William Graham, “An Important Question Answered,” in David W. Robson, “‘An Important Question Answered’: William Graham’s Defense of Slavery in Post-Revolutionary Virginia,” in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Oct., 1980), 644-652, 649-652 (651).

proposition from this passage of the Declaration—that rights were “inalienable,” so that no person could ever lose their liberty. In this argument Jefferson more closely followed the mid-century antislavery critiques of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Blackstone than the earlier writings of Locke. And as Holly Brewer has recently shown, during this period in his life, Jefferson was severe and consistent in his condemnation of slavery. He seemed to have perceived that the Revolutionary struggle against arbitrary power had shone a harsh light on chattel slavery, and he worried in his *Notes* that the institution’s effect in Virginia had been to corrupt the manners of the whites. In that work, as he reflected upon the spirit of the age, he realized that the way was preparing for “a total emancipation,” as he put it, and could only hope “that this is disposed, in the order of events, to be with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation.”²⁷⁸

And yet despite the power of this vision, or perhaps because of it, the fundamental fact of Jefferson’s views on slavery was that he could not imagine America without it. He was the first American author fully to confront what he took to be the impossible problem of emancipation. His most sustained treatment of slavery in the *Notes* came in the course of a section in which he considered the first of a number of plans set before the Virginia legislature “to emancipate all slaves born after passing the act.”²⁷⁹ He considered the bill carefully, and did not oppose it, but he could not bring himself to support it either, and his reasons on this score reveal the dramatic shift in ideas that had taken place over the span of the eighteenth century.

For the real obstacle to emancipation, according to Jefferson, was not the property rights of slave owners or the custom in the law of nations that slaves followed the status

²⁷⁸ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London, 1787), 272-273.

²⁷⁹ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London, 1787), 228.

of their mothers or the conviction that slavery in America provided a better life for the Africans than freedom in their native land or that the ancestors of the Africans held in Virginia as slaves had been lawfully reduced to that status. None of these distinctively Roman concerns appeared in Jefferson's *Notes*. He was not so much interested in the origins of slavery as he was obsessed with, and almost paralyzed by, the prospect of slavery's end. As he considered the proposal to emancipate all slaves in Virginia, he realized at once that this could only be done if the former slaves were "colonized to such place as the circumstances of the time should render most proper," so that they would be able to form themselves into "a free and independent people" to whom the people of Virginia might extend "our alliance and protection." But Jefferson quickly moved on from this provision; and in general it should be noted that, unlike the next generation of Virginian worthies, from St. George Tucker to James Madison, he was not overly invested in the cause of colonization. What he was profoundly concerned to establish was that the Africans in Virginia could not be freed and allowed to remain in the state; and on this subject, both in the *Notes* and in his correspondence, Jefferson poured forth the contents of his peculiar mind.²⁸⁰

"The blacks," as he said, could never be incorporated into Virginia as free, on the one hand due to their well-earned resentment toward the whites who had oppressed them and, on the other hand and more importantly, because they were so different. "The first difference which strikes us is that of colour," Jefferson explained, and he went on: the Africans had less hair on their bodies, a more disagreeable odor, and an odd "pulmonary apparatus." They required less sleep; they seemed to feel but not to reflect; and in their faculties of reason and imagination, according to Jefferson, they were far inferior. "It

²⁸⁰ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London, 1787), 229.

would be unfair to follow them to Africa for this investigation,” Jefferson noted in a characteristic aside; but in America, he found evidence enough that Africans were incapable of painting, sculpture, poetry, and even a certain tender kind of love. He entertained the notion that their deficiency in these matters might be explained by the treatment they had received as slaves, but concluded that it could not. “It is not their condition,” he said, “but nature, which has produced the distinction.”²⁸¹ So great was the distinction between black and white in his mind that he suspected that the Africans had either begun as a different race of men or had become such in the course of time. By either means, the fact of their difference was by now so deep and permanent that they could never be equal: Africans could never enjoy the blessing of freedom in America that was, according to Jefferson, the exclusive privilege of white men.

Here our journey through the intellectual origins of American slavery comes to an end, because in the works of Jefferson slavery was first grounded exclusively in race in a manner that we in the twenty-first century well comprehend. Until this time, slavery and what we call race had for the most part been two separate strains of thought: to believe in the legitimacy of slavery had not required one to subscribe to notions of racial difference; and to perceive the vast differences between persons had not meant that one had to hold that some persons ought to be slaves. Even in Jefferson, slavery and race did not perfectly align, since he enlisted a certain conception of racial difference most directly in order to assert, not that slavery was just, but that emancipation was unthinkable. Nevertheless, in Jefferson, we do see quite clearly the beginnings of a new approach to both subjects, one that so profoundly altered American intellectual history that to this day we have almost

²⁸¹ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London, 1787), 229-240.

been unable to recall or even recognize the foreign context of ideas in which slavery in America began.