

Atlantic Trade

Introduction

The brothers Samuel and William Vernon of Newport, Rhode Island owned a single-masted sloop ship named the *Hare*. That's H-A-R-E Hare, like Bugs Bunny. Not the stuff on your head.¹ The ship set sail in the summer of 1754.² The *Hare*'s captain was Caleb Godfrey, also of Rhode Island.³

When she left North America, the *Hare* was stocked with rum. Hundreds of gallons of it. The ship arrived in Sierra Leone on August 18.⁴ Upon arrival, Godfrey traded that rum for other provisions; 357 gallons of rum in exchange for rice, fish, flour, plantains, palm oil, peppers, limes, and a New World crop called manioc which was introduced to Africa by the Portuguese in the 16th century. He also got four gallons of brandy.⁵

While in Sierra Leone, Godfrey purchased slaves. 72 in total. Though, he only reported 65 of them to his bosses, the Vernon brothers. He likely purchased 65 on their behalf and the other 7 with his own funds. Either way, there were 28 men, 25 women, 12 young girls, and 7 boys. We don't know their names. The crew kept records of rum and whiskey, avocados, and limes, but names belong to people, they're tied to family and community. Disregarding names was common on slave ships, it helped turn a person into a commodity.⁶

Then, the *Hare* set sail for Barbados. The journey typically took 43 days, but they caught a cold northeast wind that reduced their journey to only 20 and drenched the ship with rain for over two weeks straight.⁷ Godfrey had the slaves restrained below deck, but it wasn't dry down there. Several captives became sick on the journey, four of them died.⁸

The *Hare* arrived in Bridgetown, Barbados on January 26, 1755. Godfrey and his crew docked there for four weeks, restocked their supplies and conducted maintenance on the ship.⁹ Barbados was a sugar colony of the British empire and between 2000-3000 sailors passed through Bridgetown every year.¹⁰ As a hub within the slave trade, sailors would commonly abandon their positions and join the crews of other ships docked in the city. This was illegal but about 1 in 8 sailors did it anyway. Three members of the *Hare*'s crew left and joined the crew of the *Tryal*, which was a British Naval ship. British law let sailors from merchant ships join military vessels. That's how these guys got away with it.¹¹

¹ Sean M. Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare: A Journey into Captivity from Sierra Leone to South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 14-15.

² Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 50.

³ Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 36-39.

⁴ Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 61.

⁵ Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 108; Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 45.

⁶ Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 1.

⁷ Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 108.

⁸ Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 111-12.

⁹ Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 113-14, 118.

¹⁰ Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 118.

¹¹ Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 117.

While in Barbados, Godfrey was met by Charles Bolton, a correspondent who also worked for the Vernon brothers.¹² Correspondents were a vital part of the transatlantic system. They were employed by ship owners to facilitate communication across the ocean. Ship owners employed correspondents in multiple locations. These guys were the cellphones of their day. To keep the Vernons up to date, Bolton sent them letters carried by other ships traveling between Rhode Island and Barbados. Ships regularly carried goods belonging to their owners and letters for other merchants. Correspondents created a whole network connecting owners and the captains they employed.¹³

Bolton informed Godfrey that his employers wanted him to sail for South Carolina and sell the slaves there.¹⁴ Before leaving, Godfrey left five slaves in Bridgetown where they were put up for auction. Four died within two months. There's no record of what happened to the fifth.¹⁵

The *Hare* arrived in Charles Town South Carolina on March 4th, 1755.¹⁶ Gabriel Manigault, a longtime acquaintance of the Vernon brothers sold the slaves on their behalf over a three-day period. On the first day, he sold twenty-five captives for an average of £230 per person. The following day he held a private sale with select buyers and sold eighteen more slaves for an average £296. The remaining thirteen went to a public auction and sold for an average of £193.¹⁷ This was a financially successful venture.

This single voyage by the *Hare* was, for the most part, unremarkable. And that's why we're talking about it. The transfer of goods across the ocean, sailors ditching crews and joining others, the savage act of buying and selling human beings in a global slave trade, this was utterly normal.

But this process, a few centuries earlier, would have been unimaginable.

The Atlantic Ocean once divided the world, it was literally a chasm filled with water; it was a giant-ass moat. *But* then it wasn't. Christopher Columbus' voyage across the ocean sparked a complex system of trade. The Atlantic became a bridge over which people, plants, animals, commodities, and microbes traveled. It no longer divided the world, it connected it.

This process enriched European empires and financed their expansion across the globe.¹⁸ It also transformed cultures. African, European, and Native American communities were destroyed or reshaped or remade, but none were untouched. By examining this system of exchange, we can place the American colonies in a global context, and we'll see the complex network that existed between the Old World and the New. So, let's dig in.

¹² Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 120.

¹³ Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 26-27, 49.

¹⁴ Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 115.

¹⁵ Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 120.

¹⁶ For those of you who wonder why we spelled "Charlestown" as "Charles Town," it's because, at the time we are discussing, it was spelled as two words. It became "Charlestown" in 1783.

¹⁷ Kelley, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare*, 134.

¹⁸ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 24.

— *Intro Music* —

[Welcome to American History Remix, the podcast about the overlooked and underexplored aspects of American history. We're glad you're here!]

Background

The system of oceanic trade did not spring from nowhere. It developed over time as European empires reached across the Atlantic.

Spain was the foremost empire in the 16th century because of the wealth it found and/or stole in America. The Spanish were able to defeat the Aztec Empire in Central America and the Inca Empire in South America. Hernan Cortez defeated the Aztec emperor Montezuma in 1521 and captured the capitol city of Tenochtitlan, which became Mexico City. Francisco Pizarro defeated the Inca between 1531-33.¹⁹ There is way more to this story, though. If you'd like to know more, check out our website. We recommend some good books.

Ultimately, Spain created a large and wealthy empire. The early years of transatlantic trade were dominated by raw materials, namely gold and silver. Between 1500 and 1650, the Spanish imported 181 tons of gold to Europe. And 16,000 tons of silver too.²⁰

Other European empires, however, eventually entered the Atlantic World to compete with the Spanish. The French first attempted to colonize present day Canada in the 1540s. But, their expeditions failed, and they didn't try again until the 1600s.²¹ The Dutch were Europe's best traders and manufacturers. They arrived along the Hudson River in the 1609.²² The British founded Jamestown, Virginia in 1607, the Puritans arrived in New England in 1620, and Britain captured the Island of Barbados in 1627.²³ If you would like to know more about early colonization, check out our first episode.

Unfortunately, not all land claimed by these empires had gold and silver. Game over, right? Nope. Europeans were interested in, and Native Americans possessed, much more than precious metals.

Food

Let's talk about food. Atlantic trade had a colossal impact on global food production.

Europeans brought Old-World crops to the Americas, such as sugar, rice, indigo, and coffee. Crops like these grew well in the New World, especially in the tropical and semitropical zones.²⁴ In the new environment, these crops escaped the pests and parasites that coevolved in their native

¹⁹ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 52-56.

²⁰ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 63.

²¹ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 92, 99.

²² Taylor, *American Colonies*, 105.

²³ Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 20.

²⁴ Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, 30th anniversary ed. (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 68.

habitats.²⁵ This reflects some things we've talked about in previous episodes. Just as Native Americans had no natural immunity to European disease, Old-World crops had no natural competitors in New-World soil. Soybeans, oranges, and bananas were Old-World crops that grew so well in the New World that the Americas quickly became the main global suppliers of these crops.²⁶

And, the story of disease and agriculture are connected. When nearly 90 percent of the Native population was decimated by disease and war, there were vast quantities of relatively unpopulated land.²⁷ This provided the space to grow crops that were in high demand in Europe.

That brings us to sugar, which was probably the most lucrative Old-World crop for European colonists.²⁸

Europeans loved their sugar well before Columbus sailed across the Atlantic. It was already a valuable commodity for the Spanish and Portuguese who grew it on the Canary and Azores Islands northwest of Africa. However, it is labor-intensive, so the Spanish enslaved the people native to the island to work their sugar plantations. When malnourishment, disease, and hard labor depleted native populations, the Spanish imported slaves from mainland Africa.²⁹

This process repeated in America. Columbus himself brought sugarcane to the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean on his second voyage to America, which lasted from 1493-1496.³⁰ Then, in 1518, the Spanish brought African slaves to Hispaniola to work the plantations. To expand sugar production in America, the Spanish king Charles V ordered the recruitment of sugar masters and mill technicians from the Canary Islands.³¹

The Portuguese also grew sugar in the Americas. By 1526, they began exporting it from their colony of Brazil back to Lisbon. Brazil was the main global sugar supplier for the next century.³²

By the mid-1600s, the Dutch, English, and French founded their own sugar colonies in the Caribbean to compete with the Portuguese and Spanish.

In this production boom, sugar consumption went way up. In England alone, between 1663 and 1775, the per capita consumption of sugar increased by 20 times. If you're a poor, starving peasant, sugar is a great source of calories. And it was used in delicacies for the rich.³³

²⁵ Nathan Nunn and Nancy Qian, "The Columbian Exchange: A History of Disease, Food, and Ideas," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 24, no. 2 (2010): 177-178.

²⁶ Nunn and Qian, "The Columbian Exchange," 167.

²⁷ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 39-40; *Eric Foner, Give Me Liberty!: An American History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 23-24.

²⁸ James A. Rawley, and Stephen D. Behrendt, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 4.

²⁹ Nunn and Qian, "The Columbian Exchange," 178; Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 69.

³⁰ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 67.

³¹ Nunn and Qian, "The Columbian Exchange," 178; Taylor, *American Colonies*, 44.

³² Nunn and Qian, "The Columbian Exchange," 178; Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 69; Joseph L. Locke and Ben Wright, *The American Yawp: A Massively Collaborative Open U.S. History Textbook* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 36-37.

³³ Nunn and Qian, "The Columbian Exchange," 178.

It's hard to overstate the importance of sugar. Not only does it make us all really fat today, it transformed the power of European nations by bringing in so much wealth. It also transformed African communities and destroyed individual lives by fueling the global slave trade. And, as we'll see more in a future episode, a tax on sugar was one of the first acts by the British Crown that angered the American colonies before the Revolution.

We're going to revisit sugar throughout the episode.

As we said, sugar was an Old-World crop brought to America. But New-World crops also flourished in Europe. Crops like cassava, corn, and potatoes successfully integrated into European, Asian, and African diets, especially among the poorer classes.

Cassava, corn, and potatoes produced more calories per hectare than their Old-World counterparts of wheat, barley, and oats. These crops had greater yields on smaller plots, which benefited the poor European peasants who owned or had access to only small plots of land. Five acres of grain could support one family. Five acres of potatoes could support three families.³⁴

The new foods were also a source of other nutrients. Capsicum peppers, indigenous to the Americas, include the most commonly used peppers today like cayenne, bell, and jalapeños. They are rich in vitamins A, B, C, magnesium, and iron.³⁵ Tomatoes are also high in vitamins A and C. Tomatoes were brought to Europe by the Spanish and then introduced in South East Asia.

You might be wondering why I'm talking about vitamins and calories on a history podcast. Who cares, right? Well, the introduction of these crops resulted in a huge population boom.

In 1492, Europe made up about 11 percent of the global population. By 1800, that number doubled to an estimated 20 percent.³⁶

One study estimates that the potato alone accounted for 12 percent of the European population boom. It also explains nearly 50 percent of urbanization.³⁷ You can distinguish European society by pre- and post-potato.

Part of that European growth flowed back across the Atlantic to resettle the Americas as European colonists.³⁸ If we look forward a bit, we see the influence on the population doesn't end there. Potatoes became the main crop of Ireland. But when the potato famine struck Ireland in the 1840s, many Irish fled their home country for the United States. My ancestors included. Actually, they went to Canada. But still.

New-World crops fueled population growth in Africa, too. Cassava, or manioc, for example, could not be cultivated in Europe but thrived in Africa. The Portuguese introduced it there along

³⁴ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 45-46.

³⁵ Nunn and Qian, "The Columbian Exchange," 171; Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 65.

³⁶ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 44.

³⁷ Nunn and Qian, "The Columbian Exchange," 169-70.

³⁸ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 25.

with corn in the sixteenth century. Europeans took advantage of that population increase to bolster the transatlantic slave trade.³⁹ More on that in a bit.

So, in all, agricultural trade was a global and self-perpetuating system.

Food and Culture

But the impact didn't stop there. Before the transatlantic trade, many of the foods we associate with specific cultures didn't exist.

If you think of Italy, you probably think of pasta, right? Well, pasta sauce is made using tomatoes. That's a New World crop. Italy *did not* have pasta sauce until the plant was introduced from America. Columbia has coffee. But the coffee plant is native to Africa. They didn't grow it until Europeans introduced it. Indian food uses curry. Indian curry uses chili peppers from the Americas. Thai food includes pineapples, peanuts, and chili peppers. New World, New World, and New World.

The world was a different place before Atlantic trade.

Many aspects of cultures around the globe that we often think are intrinsic are actually the result of Atlantic trade. That's because cultures are flexible, not fixed. They borrow from one another and evolve over time. Transatlantic trade was paramount to that process.

And, we've only talked about food so far. But the transformation goes much deeper.

Disease

Disease also impacted communities across the globe. We've talked about these illnesses in multiple episodes already. But we're going to keep discussing them, because they're so important to understanding Native American and colonial history.

The transfer of illnesses was mostly one-sided and worked in favor of Europeans because Native Americans had no natural immunity to Old-World diseases. Smallpox and measles, for example, wiped out entire Native villages, helping to clear the way for European invaders. But there are a few notable exceptions to this process.

First, when Europeans tried to colonize sub-Saharan Africa, they died in far greater numbers than in America. Here, the transfer of disease worked against them as they encountered malaria and yellow fever.⁴⁰ In the Caribbean, where Europeans imported large amounts of African slaves, those diseases were the primary killers among the planting class.

³⁹ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 45.

⁴⁰ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 41.

Let's use Barbados as an example. In the mid-1600s, African diseases impacted the island so much that church records show four times as many deaths as marriages.⁴¹ So, Europeans not only brought their own diseases to America, they brought African diseases as well.

Second, there is one example of a disease that transferred from America to Europe. Can you guess which? Syphilis.

For those listeners lucky enough not to know, syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease. Now, it causes sores and a rash. But, when Europeans first encountered it, the disease was much more deadly than it is today. Those infected would have rashes, fevers, and ulcers, would develop pain in their bones, and would often die.⁴²

The spread of syphilis is fascinating. It showed up in Europe at the end of the 1400s, most likely brought by Columbus. Not him personally, but the members of his crew.⁴³

It then spread all over the place, and Europeans weren't sure where it came from. But they all blamed it on others. It was mostly called the French Disease. But, in Poland, they called it the German Disease. In Russia, they called it the Polish Disease. In Japan, they called it the disease of the Portuguese. One chronicler at the time, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés (great name, by the way), was an associate of Columbus and member of the Spanish court. When the initial syphilis outbreak struck Europe, he wrote, "Many times in Italy I laughed, hearing Italians speak of the French disease, and the French call it the disease of Naples; and in truth both would have had the name better, if they called it the disease of the Indies."⁴⁴

Whatever they called it, everyone in the Old World; from Spain to France to Japan, they all agreed that syphilis was new to them and that it was introduced by another group.⁴⁵

When the Spanish asked Native Americans if they knew the disease, they replied that they did, but for them it was less deadly than it was for Europeans.⁴⁶ Archeological evidence also shows that Native Americans suffered from syphilis prior to contact with the Old World.⁴⁷

The path from first contact to global disease was amazingly quick.

Syphilis made its way to Italy by the mid-1490s. Then, Charles VIII of France amassed an army and invaded Naples. His soldiers came from France, Italy, Switzerland, and Germany. Like every army in the history of the world, this army liked to pillage and rape. His invasion was successful at first, but ultimately, he was forced to retreat, and his army disbanded. And all his syphilis infected soldiers took the disease back to their homelands.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 217.

⁴² Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 125.

⁴³ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 123.

⁴⁴ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 124-25, 139.

⁴⁵ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 124.

⁴⁶ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 138.

⁴⁷ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 145.

⁴⁸ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 149-50.

Syphilis was in Central Europe by 1495, it reached England the next year. It reached India in 1498, Russia in 1499, and China in 1505.⁴⁹ Syphilis was a global phenomenon.

We should note, however, that the Columbian theory of syphilis is not without dissension. Some medical historians today argue that syphilis is only one manifestation of a worldwide disease known as treponematosiis.⁵⁰ Another camp argues that syphilis existed in the Old World in a mild form and then mutated into a more deadly disease.⁵¹ There is a shockingly large amount of research on all of this. People have been debating it for generations.

Anyway, it is impossible to prove with absolute certainty. But of all the options, the Columbian theory fits the evidence the best. Even if syphilis is one form of a worldwide disease, European sailors still spread that form across the oceans. And, it seems a very big coincidence that the disease would evolve and spread just as Europeans first traversed the Atlantic.

So, in conclusion, history isn't just names and dates of battles. Sometimes you get to learn about venereal diseases too.

Animals

I don't know how to elegantly change topics now. So we're just going to do it. Now, we're talking about animals. Just as they did with food, various cultures incorporated new animals into their society. With these animals came vast economic and environmental changes, too.

Horses were not native to America; they were brought to the New World by the Spanish. We discussed this a bit a few episodes ago, focusing on the southwestern United States. But, let's look at the situation farther south.

The Spanish founded Buenos Aires in 1535, but the settlement failed and was abandoned in 1542. This may sound familiar to those of you who listened to our episode on colonization. When permanent settlers returned to reestablish Buenos Aires, the region wasn't empty. Instead, they found it overrun with horses. It's hard to say where they came from, but there were massive herds of horses running wild on the grasslands of Argentina. It's possible they descended from the few horses the first settlers had left, but that seems unlikely because they never had too many to begin with. It's also possible the horses drifted down Paraguay or somehow crossed the Andes from Chile, both regions where the Spanish were present.

Wherever they came from, once horses arrived in the plains of Argentina, they thrived. It's possibly the largest explosion of their population in history. Early settlers were shocked to see so many. One observer remarked that it could take a whole day or more for the herds to pass by.⁵²

The same thing happened with cattle. The grasslands of Argentina and Uruguay were a paradise for cows. In the seventeenth century, there were more cattle in America than any other animal,

⁴⁹ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 150-51.

⁵⁰ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 141-42.

⁵¹ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 126.

⁵² Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 84.

humans included. Unlike horses, cattle were also food. They produced so much meat that it was cows that allowed the Spanish to devote so much time to mining for gold.⁵³

Does this process sound familiar? Because it's the same story we've seen before. Microbes, plants, and animals were all able to enter into new environments with few natural predators. Just as smallpox flourished in America, so did horses and cows.

Manufactured Goods

In addition to natural things like plants, animals, and microbes, manufactured goods also traversed the Atlantic. The raw materials circulating the ocean were produced into goods which could be exchanged for more raw materials or slaves, and thus facilitated further trade.

Let's look at the colonies in New England and Barbados as examples.

Barbados, as we've seen, was a sugar colony. But, growing the crop is really just the beginning. In various ways, different empires and colonies participated in sugar production in Barbados.

Sugarcane spoils only a few hours after it is cut. So, it needed to be processed quickly. After it was harvested by slaves, it was promptly transported to a mill where it would be ground and the juices boiled. What remained at the end was called *muscovado*, a golden-brown sugar. This was packed and shipped to Europe to be refined further and eventually sold. A by-product of this process was molasses which, when distilled, becomes rum. But this is where it gets more complex.

Dutch traders learned how to produce sugar from the Portuguese. The largest and best sugar refineries in Europe were in Amsterdam. Meanwhile, Dutch investors financed the English plantations on Barbados, offering slaves and equipment at discounted rates and then transported the sugar to Europe themselves.

Even Puritan New England got in on the game. Because virtually the entire island was devoted to growing sugarcane, Barbados' inhabitants had to import food from their neighboring colonies in the present-day United States. New England also sent cattle to power the mills, lumber to construct plantations, and the materials to make barrels to ship the sugar in.⁵⁴

It was a complex process with a lot of different parties invested.

In North America, trade was vital to the relationship between Natives and colonists. Europeans had an insatiable appetite for furs. In exchange they offered Native Americans firearms and metal goods. The other thing Europeans wanted was land. Colonists acquired land in a variety of

⁵³ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, 85.

⁵⁴ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 208-10.

ways. One method was to encourage Natives to run up large amounts of debt to European traders. To satisfy the debt, colonists would only accept land as payment.⁵⁵

This process was devastating to Native communities, but it wasn't the only way they participated in Atlantic trade. Over time, Natives relied on trade with Europeans for most of their material life. They traded for weapons, clothes, tools, cooking utensils, and alcohol. Yet, they used the goods according to their own culture. One historian notes that these items weren't really European goods. They were Native American goods produced in Europe. Some of the woolen cloth worn by Native Americans was produced in Belgium, for example. European manufacturers learned to cut and dye the cloth to match the taste of the Native American market.⁵⁶

Whether it was firearms, metal tools, and furs traded with Native Americans or sugar in the West Indies, goods, peoples, crops, animals, and disease did not move in isolation from each other. It was a reciprocal process.

Slavery

And that brings us to slavery. Because the slave trade was crucial to this entire system. And it was *horrific*.

Europeans were involved in the West African slave trade prior to arriving in America. Trade between West Africa, Europe, and islands in the eastern Atlantic began decades before Columbus decided to sail west, and slaves were already a valuable commodity. Columbus offered King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, "slaves, as many as they shall order." He followed through with his offer by bringing 500 Native American slaves back with him after his second voyage. Though, nearly 200 of those slaves died on the way and were cast into the sea.⁵⁷

Still, the first slaves to cross the Atlantic were not Africans brought to America, but Native Americans brought to Europe. But as you probably know, the system changed over time. Nevertheless, Columbus' second voyage initiated the transatlantic slave trade.⁵⁸

The slave trade was not limited to a single empire. Everyone participated. In 1518, the Spanish imported the first African slaves to the New World, landing in Hispaniola.⁵⁹ Over the entire history of the Atlantic slave trade, more Africans were enslaved under the Portuguese in Brazil than in any other colony in the Atlantic World.⁶⁰ The Portuguese imported nearly two-fifths of all African slaves brought to the Americas.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Colin G. Calloway, *The World Turned Upside down: Indian Voices from Early America* (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 78-79; Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 49.

⁵⁶ Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, 175.

⁵⁷ Rawley and Behrendt, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 2-3.

⁵⁸ Rawley and Behrendt, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 2-3.

⁵⁹ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 44.

⁶⁰ Locke and Wright, *The American Yawp*, 36-37.

⁶¹ Rawley and Behrendt, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 5-6.

The Dutch also brought slaves to America. They brought eleven slaves to Manhattan Island in 1626 to counteract a shortage in labor. By 1660, New Amsterdam, as the colony was known at the time, had the largest urban slave population on the continent.⁶² Slaves built roads, maintained the city's port, and constructed a wall along the northern edge of the colony. There was a street that ran along that wall which is still known as Wall Street.⁶³

And, as you probably know, the British also participated in the slave trade. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the British imported to the Americas about 60,000 slaves annually.⁶⁴

You might wonder how Europeans acquired so many African slaves. The answer is with the help of Africans. Europeans did not simply capture freemen in Africa and enslave them. Rather they bought them from African slave traders. These merchants took slaves from the interior of Africa and brought them to the coast to sell to Europeans. They were debtors, war captives, and criminals...or children sold into slavery by their impoverished parents.

So, Europeans did not bring the institution of slavery to Africa, they exploited a system already in place. The money they were willing to pay prompted African raiders to march farther inland. They would capture men, women, and children, bind them in tethers around their necks and march them to the coast where they were branded and sold as property.⁶⁵

Historians call the slave's journey across the Atlantic the "Middle Passage." And it was an absolute nightmare. Conditions on slave ships were hellish. Slaves were crammed below deck where it was hot, dark, and disgusting...or wet and disgusting because of storms on the sea. Diseases like dysentery, smallpox, and measles spread like wildfire. They were bound lying down on wooden shelves, exposed to excrement and the dead bodies of their fellow captives.

The mortality rate on the Middle Passage is appalling. About 15 percent of all captives died before they reached America. One ship, which sailed from West Africa to Barbados in 1678, lost at least one slave every day on a journey that took two months. Conditions weren't much better when the captives arrived in America. In the West Indies, one-third of all slaves died within the first three years of captivity.⁶⁶

Slavery was not new to human history. It dates to our oldest written records. But there are several features that distinguish transatlantic slavery from other forms of slavery.

The first is its scope. It dwarfed every other slave system in history. In all, Europeans brought nearly 12 million African slaves to the New World.⁶⁷ This is staggering.

The second is that it was racially based.⁶⁸ Ancient forms of slavery, like those which existed in Rome or Greece, were not founded on any racial theory. They enslaved their enemies, no matter

⁶² Locke and Wright, *The American Yawp*, 36.

⁶³ Locke and Wright, *The American Yawp*, 35.

⁶⁴ Levine, *The British Empire*, 15, 25.

⁶⁵ Taylor, *American Colonies*, 325-26.

⁶⁶ Levine, *The British Empire*, 17; Taylor, *American Colonies*, 327-28.

⁶⁷ Levine, *The British Empire*, 15.

⁶⁸ Levine, *The British Empire*, 15.

their race. In this worldview, a slave was property, not a person. But it was not someone's race which marked them as suitable for enslavement.⁶⁹

As we've noted, Europeans also enslaved Native Americans. In the early years of colonization, there were also white indentured servants who made up much of the laboring class in the British colonies. But, overtime, importing slaves from Africa became the most cost-effective way to provide labor. To white observers, the sheer number of enslaved Africans reinforced the idea that only Africans were suitable for enslavement.

We're still dealing with the consequences of this. Prejudice and ethnocentrism—the belief in one culture's superiority—existed well before slavery. They have existed in every society in human history. The transatlantic slave system, however, took these features to new extremes.

Millions died in the slave trade. The depopulation of western Africa stagnated the economic growth of the region and made it easier for Europeans to colonize the region in the 19th century. And, all wealth and commodities that flooded Europe transformed the economic system. This process was vital to the development of capitalism.⁷⁰ And, the new food sources allowed for a population boom in Europe.

So yeah...slavery was the linchpin of this whole thing. It's fun to look at potatoes and horse explosions or have a good laugh about syphilis, but these cultural, environmental, and economic developments would not have worked without slavery. Or at least their impact would have been much smaller. The raw materials extracted by slave labor were, as historian James Rawley argued, "fundamental to the making of the modern world."⁷¹

Conclusion

If you come away with anything, I hope it's how complex and transformative this system was.

In a prior episode, we discussed the transformation of New England's environment. That episode and this one are really two parts of the same topic. One localized, one global in scope. Next episode, we'll return to the North Atlantic colonies. But, it's important to understand that this was the world the colonies existed in.

The *Hare*, our ship from the beginning of the episode, was one of thousands of ships that traversed the Atlantic World. Crops, animals, disease, slaves, raw goods, and manufactured goods all circulated the Atlantic in an interlocking system of exchange. Africans, Europeans, and Native Americans all contributed to and received from this process. Some positively, some not. For better or for worse, everything you see around you has been touched by transatlantic trade.

Thanks for listening.

⁶⁹ Michele George, "Slave Disguise in Ancient Rome," in *Representing the Body of the Slave*, ed. Thomas Wiedemann and Jane Gardner (London: F. Cass, 2002), 46.

⁷⁰ Michel Beaud, *A History of Capitalism, 1500-2000* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 13-19.

⁷¹ Rawley and Behrendt, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade*, 3.

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