Introduction

Slavery is not a phenomenon of history. Forms of coerced labor are intimately intertwined with our daily lives. Tomatoes you bought in the supermarket were picked by (illegal) migrants who earn €12 for eight hours of work in the full sun in southern Italy. The hazelnuts in your Nutella were probably picked by one of the circa 900,000 children between the ages of 6 and 14 that are forced to work in Turkey – these children include Syrian refugees that escaped the war. The clothes you wear were likely produced by victims of modern-day slavery and human-trafficking in South-East Asia. A report from the International Labor Organization from 2017 estimates – conservatively – that around 25 million people are currently in forced labor. Affordable consumption in a system of globalized production is based on unpaid labor.

When thinking about slavery, many people think of enslaved people picking cotton on a plantation in North America and as something of the past. While the trans-Atlantic slave trade ended in the nineteenth century, slavery continues in many forms. Likewise, slavery did not start when Europeans forcefully transported circa 12-13 million enslaved Africans to the Americas and slave labor occurred not only on plantations, but also in cities and in houses. Moreover, enslaved Africans also ended up in Asia, enslaved Asians labored for Europeans too, and North African ships raided European cities to take men as galley slaves and women as concubines in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. It is a myth that coerced labor died

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with the Black Death (ca. 1346-1353) in Medieval Europe; serfdom continued all over continental Europe and was abolished in the Austrian Empire in 1781 and in Russia as late as 1861. As for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, in contrast to popular opinion, the largest share of enslaved Africans was brought not to North America but to Latin America and the Caribbean (see image 5.1). This chapter focuses on slavery and enslaved Africans in Latin America not because it is an exception, but because it is a large window into something that has been a constant in human history. The main argument of this chapter is that inequality has been a perennial feature of societies, while the issue of racism is the product of a specific time and place.

![Image 5.1 Volume and direction of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from all African to all American regions](image)

**Historiography**

Notwithstanding slavery’s consistency over time and in different places, historians have questioned why trans-Atlantic slavery emerged and ended. One of the most influential publications in this historiographical debate is Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery* originally published in 1944. The Williams thesis, as it has become known, is comprised of three main elements:

1. The economic structure of capitalism replaced slavery once British elites accumulated surplus capital through slavery that was required for the industrial revolution;

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2. The abolition of slavery in the British West Indies in 1834 can be explained through the declining economic importance of these colonies at the time because of industrialization;

3. ‘Slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery.’

In other words, capitalism allowed British elites to extract the necessary money to bankroll the Industrial Revolution.** The British colonies in the West Indies produced primarily sugar and tobacco, while cotton was a more important commodity for the emerging industrial economy. This removed economic objections to abolishing slavery in the British West Indies. And thirdly, once the enslaved Africans were no longer socially stratified through slavery, the white population relied on racism to maintain their social position in society.

5. a **Concept Definition**

**Economy**

*Social arrangements or aspects of social relations that concern the provisioning of (im)material needs and wants, in different forms and social scales (households, local, national and world). Economies share several key features, including social actors (e.g., individuals, firms, and states), institutions (i.e., formal and informal rules), as well as technologies and organizational techniques.*

Every element of the Williams thesis has since been scrutinized or criticized.*** Defenders of humanitarian, ethical, and moral motives in the abolition movement argued that Williams was perhaps too Marxist in his economic interpretation.**** Historians of racism, furthermore, have attempted to “move away from mechanistic economic explanations […] to show the evolution of racist thinking from feudalism to capitalism”.***** Others criticized Williams’ reliance of the thesis on only English sources and questioned the profitability of slavery – after all, in order for the European elites to extract surplus to finance industrialization, slavery needed to yield surplus in the first place.****** Notwithstanding a possible decrease in profitability of British

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* Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, 9.
** The concept of capitalism has been introduced in chapter three.
West Indian sugar colonies, examples from the slave-based economies of Cuba and Brazil in the nineteenth century demonstrated that - beyond the British Empire - sugar productions in Cuba and coffee production in Brazil remained very profitable. The consensus among historians, for now, seems to be that although the Williams thesis describes the situation in a British context quite adequately, it cannot be transposed to other empires. For slave-based colonies in Brazil and Cuba in the nineteenth century, historians now use the term ‘Second Slavery’, to describe the processes and mechanisms of industrialization that went hand in hand with slavery.*

**Theories and methods**

Whether or not slavery was profitable for European elites and fueled industrialization - and thus contributed to the Great Divergence between Europe and Asia - it provides us with an opportunity to discuss this history with a focus on Brazil in a global context.

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**5.b Concept Definition**

**The Great Divergence**

*Historians use the term ‘The Great Divergence’ to describe the process where Europe's GDP per capita grew much faster than the GDP per capita of the rest of the world. While before roughly 1800 all places in the world were equally prosperous, and perhaps China was the wealthiest part of the world, Europe - in particular Britain - diverged from the rest of the world after 1800.*

One of the problems of studying slavery in the period before 1800 is that there are very few primary sources made by enslaved people; the bulk of the archival material is created by slaveholders, which creates an inherent bias in the source material.

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**5.1 The Study of History**

**Bias**

*A prejudice against someone or something that leads to unfair attention or representation in research.*

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Slaveholders recorded what they thought was of interest (e.g., name, age, marital status) but they were generally less interested in the ideas or practices of the enslaved people; that is, unless their ideas or practices intervened with the economic interests of the slaveholders. Therefore, these primary sources have an overrepresentation of rebellions and runaways (maroons).

A second problem comes with the interpretation of primary sources about slavery. An example of a source that has survived and that allows historians to say something about colonial societies and the interactions between European slaveholders and enslaved Africans are baptismal records. In these baptismal records it is possible to see who were the father and mother of a new-born. What these records mean is open to interpretation. For example, a historian finds in the baptismal records three instances where one free European fathered a child with the same enslaved woman. Traditionally, historians might interpret this as evidence of a harmonious relationship between the slaveholder and the enslaved; the man seemed to care for the woman as he repeatedly had a child with her. More recently, historians have emphasized that the structural circumstances of slavery make harmonious relationships between slaveholder and enslaved very unlikely. If the enslaved woman did not want to have sex with the man, her position did not give her many options; if she refused or resisted, her owner could rape her as she was his property. Acknowledging that structural systems and practices such as laws, policies, and regulations limited the agency of the enslaved and black population in a society and thus influenced the historical records, shapes the interpretation of these records.

Objects

This chapter focuses on the global connections of Dutch Brazil through objects, people, and ideas. The story of the key primary source for this chapter does not start in Latin America, but instead commences in Germany, in the small town of Siegen. There, a church, the Nikolaikirche, holds a silver baptismal basin. How did this basin end up in this church, and what does it have to do with slavery?

Close inspection of the silver basin reveals the numbers ‘1586’, the letters ‘PHI’, and around the edge are shown a series of camel-like figures. The numbers refer to the year it was likely produced, and the letters refer to Philip II King of Spain (r. 1556–1598) who in 1586 was the sovereign of the Habsburg Empire. The camel-like animals are in fact llamas and the engravings resemble other works of indigenous artists from a Spanish colony: the viceroyalty of Peru. The silver mines of Potosí were located in this viceroyalty, and through mita – a type of unfree labor by the indigenous population – the Spanish Crown extracted the silver required to create the basin. Some of the
freshly-mined silver was transported to Spain, some of it was transported directly to the Ming empire in East Asia, and some was used to create cultural artefacts in situ.*

After its creation in Peru in the sixteenth century, the basin ended up in the hands of Portuguese merchants who dominated the slave trade between West Africa and the Spanish colonies. These Portuguese merchants used it as a means of payment and exchanged it for slaves in São Paulo de Luanda – in what is present-day Angola. Here it ended up in the hands of Dom Garcia II, the King of Kongo (r. 1641-1661).** Dom Garcia II wished to expel the Portuguese from his Kingdom and forged a strategic alliance with the Dutch. By 1630, the Dutch had captured North-eastern Brazil from the Portuguese, but required access to the African slave markets to obtain the labor force for their sugar plantations.*** In the diplomatic gift exchanges Dom Garcia II offered Johan Maurits, the count of Nassau-Siegen and the Governor-General of Dutch Brazil (r. 1637-1644) two-hundred slaves, a necklace, and the silver basin. Johan Maurits' counter-gift was equally valuable, as it was important to maintain good relations with the King of Kongo because he provided the access to this part of the African slave market.**** According to a 1640 report by a Dutch official, enslaved people coming from Kongo were the most sought-after, while those from the Kingdom of Ardra (in present-day Benin) were ‘often angry’ and ran away. Moreover, ‘the negroes from Guinea to Sierra Leone and Cape Verde do

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**** Françozo, ‘Johan Maurits,’ 110.
not work very hard’, but they were ‘neater’ and therefore better suited as household slaves – particularly ‘the womenfolk’.

The diplomatic gift exchanges between Dom Garcia II and Johan Maurits were beneficial for both parties. Without military support from the Kingdom of Kongo the Dutch would be unable to fight the Portuguese for access to the African slave market. Without competition from the Dutch, the Portuguese would be the only buyers (*Monopsony*) of enslaved Africans on this part of the coast, which would be a bad deal for the sellers from the Kingdom of Kongo. The Europeans were militarily inferior and relied on African rulers like Dom Garcia II tolerating European forts and trading posts. Moreover, the Europeans relied on military assistance from African allies to settle intra-European conflicts. Europeans (e.g., the Portuguese or the Dutch) had to pay tribute to African rulers to maintain their position on the coast, and it was not until after the Industrial Revolution that Europeans were able to venture beyond coastal forts and penetrate the African hinterland. African rulers and African slave sellers knew very well who could supply the best goods to exchange for slaves and there was no shortage of Europeans competing with each other. African merchants selling slaves preferred Swedish iron over iron from Liège for example, and could easily differentiate between (and had very strong preference for) European and Indian textiles. As such, the consumption preferences on the African continent dictated which goods the Europeans supplied and who was allowed to buy slaves.**

* Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, The Netherlands (NL-HaNA), one.oldstyle/zero.oldstyle/five.oldstyle/zero.oldstyle/one.oldstyle Archief Oude WIC, inv. nr. four.oldstyle/six.oldstyle, [scans two.oldstyle/four.oldstyle/two.oldstyle-two.oldstyle/four.oldstyle/three.oldstyle].


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**Image 5.3** Johan Maurits posing with a black servant in 1666, by Pieter Nason
After his tenure as Governor-General ended in 1644, Johan Maurits returned to Europe and took the silver basin for a third trip across the Atlantic as part of his collection. Johan Maurits took up residence in the Mauritshuis – the building in The Hague that is currently a museum that hosts *The Girl with the Pearl Earring* and other famous paintings by Vermeer, Rembrandt and others. Not long after his return, Johan Maurits proudly presented the silver basin as part of his collection that further included paintings by Frans Post and half-naked dancing indigenous Brazilians. A few years later, Johan Maurits and his collection of curiosities moved to Kleve in present-day Germany, where there is evidence his collection also included “moors” (Africans). This is not altogether surprising considering he traded, lent, and owned enslaved Africans in Brazil. In 1658, Johan Maurits presented the basin – that now included his coat of arms – to the Nicolaikirche in Siegen and in doing so connected that area of his dynastic rights to Africa and Latin America.

**People**

The human connection between Latin America and the rest of the world is most clearly illustrated through the large-scale decimation of original populations through the arrival of European colonists and the arrival of enslaved people from Africa in Latin America. It is estimated that after the landings of Spanish conquistadors, between 60-90% of the local populations perished in a large scale pandemic, which has become known as ‘The Great Dying’, already discussed in chapter 1. To substitute the lack of labor force, Portuguese and Spanish colonists began importing enslaved people to work in their newly founded colonies. The most important source for estimations of the number of transported enslaved Africans is the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database. This TSTD estimates that between 1500 and 1866, 12.5 million enslaved Africans disembarked a ship. The majority (5.5 million or ca. 44%) ended up in Brazil and 1.6 million (ca. 12%) in Spanish America, meaning that more than half of the enslaved Africans were sold in Latin America. It dwarfs the share of North America (less than 500,000) and Europe (ca. 10,000) and the remaining enslaved Africans disembarked in the Caribbean and other parts of Africa.

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** Françozo, ‘Johan Maurits,’ 115-119.
**** Available at: www.slavevoyages.org Last accessed 15 April 2022.
The unfree labor force in Latin America was not exclusively enslaved people from sub-Saharan Africa. It also included small numbers of enslaved people from the Ottoman Empire and the North African Coast (then called the Barbary Coast), as well as indentured laborers from Europe. * Indentured servitude was a form of unfree labor where the European poor agreed to work on a plantation for a certain number of years (often seven) in exchange for transport across the Atlantic and a plot of land in the Americas after their servitude ended. However, after arrival the employer often found excuses to extend their servitude beyond the initially agreed-upon term. Even though these other unfree laborers and many white European colonists also ended up in Latin America, the largest outside population were the enslaved Africans.

By the time the Europeans purchased enslaved people on the African coast, these people had often already travelled great distances. Often by foot or by barge, they had been brought as slaves to the coast from the hinterland.” Many had been made slaves as a result of warfare, kidnapping, court ruling, or debt. Although the practice of enslavement existed in Africa prior to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the increased demand for slaves by Europeans meant that more Africans were enslaved than before. Europeans were not the only buyers, and high local demand meant that (at least through the second half of the seventeenth century) only a minority of the enslaved were put aboard European ships for export. While enslaved women could quite easily be absorbed in the slave population of groups such as the Akwamu on the African Gold Coast, it was particularly the enslaved male population who – because they were considered less valuable – were sold to the Europeans.”

Once the European ships were full with human cargo, they departed for the long and dangerous trans-Atlantic journey. Notwithstanding the economic incentive to keep the enslaved cargo alive, the journey was especially perilous for the enslaved because of diseases such as dysentery that easily spread below deck, harsh treatment and violence by the crew, despair, hunger strikes, suicide, mutiny, and pirates and privateers. Men and women were generally separated, with men being kept below deck in chains the entire journey, while women had more freedom. This sounds better for the enslaved women than it actually was. What the men endured in physical punishment, the women endured in the crew’s sexual desires through rape. It is telling that the female slave quarter on the ships was commonly referred to as ‘the whore hole.’

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Upon arrival in the Americas and Caribbean, the enslaved were considered able-bodied if they could walk off the ships without support. The women, children, and less-abled were sold at a discount at auction. Purchasers were often careful to separate families and ethnic and linguistic groups in order to limit the possibilities of the enslaved for organizing resistance.

Leaving the auction with their buyer, the enslaved could end up in roughly four different situations. The first two options meant the enslaved stayed in the cities. This type of urban slavery meant they either worked as servants or did physically demanding jobs such as a porter in the harbor. The enslaved in the cities were bought by private individuals as well as by religious institutions and colonial governments. Colonial governments also used some of the enslaved Africans to increase their armies, which – notwithstanding its risks on the battlefield – at least offered the enslaved a path to manumission. The fourth option for the enslaved was to be put to work in the mines or on a plantation. In countries such as Brazil and Cuba, a large part of the plantations were sugar plantations.

Sugar was made from sugar cane that was harvested with slave labor that happened around the clock. During the day, the cane was harvested and transported to a sugar mill (engenho). At the end of the afternoon the mill grinding started, which produced a juice that was boiled in kettles until around ten in the morning. The enslaved labored for 18 to 20 hours a day and the work in the fields and the mills was gendered. The men cut the sugar cane, chopping the tops, taking off the leaves, and cutting the stalks close to the ground. Women bundled the cane together and loaded it on oxcarts for transportation to the mill. As can be seen in the legend of an image from the mid-seventeenth century, the men manned the oxen that powered the rollers and fed the cane to the rollers. Then, the women carried the ground cane away, while other women poured the juice in a wooden pipe connected to the boiling house. The juice was boiled in multiple copper kettles of different size and temperature that were usually manned by men. After the final boil, the sugar syrup was poured into a clay pot to harden, and afterwards emerged inverted in their characteristic sugarloaf shape. This product was then transported to Europe – particularly Amsterdam and Hamburg – to be further processed in sugar refineries before being brought to market.

The forced transportation of a large number of enslaved Africans to the Americas by Europeans introduced new diseases as well as new cultural expressions. While many diseases were endemic in Europe and Africa, there is evidence that suggests that malaria spread mainly from Africa to the Americas aboard European slave

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ships, and the same goes for variants of other diseases such as hepatitis B. Battling these various pathogens required cooperation, the exchange of information, and contributions from Africans, European traders and surgeons, planters, medical doctors and many others. Malaria was only successfully remedied – all across the Atlantic basin – by quinine made from Peruvian bark. Other lasting legacies of slavery in Latin America are found in a variety of cultural expressions that enslaved Africans brought with them to the Americas. Two such legacies in Brazil are Quilombos and Candomblé.

It was not rare for enslaved Africans to try escape the harsh work on plantations. For example, during errands to another plantation or in a city or under the cover of darkness at night, enslaved Africans tried their luck at living away from a plantation. It was also not rare that after a short period of maybe three weeks, a runaway, or so-called maroon, returned to their plantation. This could be because of the difficulties of feeding oneself in the wild, missing one’s family, or a range of

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different reasons, but whatever the reason for returning, the reward was usually
hard physical punishment. The runaways that succeeded in surviving outside the
plantation often formed maroon settlements far away in the hinterland, which
in Brazil were called quilombos or macambos if they were smaller. The European
colonists lived mostly on the coastal areas and along rivers of the Americas, laying
only a paper claim to the areas further inland. In Brazil, the most famous and largest
quilombo was Palmares.

Notwithstanding untiring attempts by both Dutch and Portuguese colonizing
powers, Palmares existed for probably the entire seventeenth century in the
hinterland of the present-day state of Alagoas, not too far from the European
settlements in Recife and Salvador. Consisting of two large mocambos with
many smaller settlements around it and a population between 11,000 and 20,000
Africans made Palmares less a town and more like a ‘neo-African kingdom’ in
Brazil.” Its organization was based on a number of African forms of political
and social organization which it combined with European elements and specific
local adaptations. At the head of the society was a king in the African tradition.
Within Palmares slavery existed, runaways lived in freedom, but enslaved Africans
captured during raids remained in bondage. Traditions from Angola (or the kingdom
of Ndongo) seemed to have been dominant in this society, but there is archaeological
evidence that there was also a large influence from Amerindian societies.”

In Palmares, as well as in European settlements, the enslaved Africans
predominantly practiced a religion that was a fusion between (European) Christian
and African elements. Enslaved Africans brought with them African spiritual
traditions that were as diverse as the areas in Africa where they originated. In the
early nineteenth century, the African and Catholic traditions solidified in a combined,
syncretic, religion called Candomblé.” In this belief system there is all-powerful
God (Oludumáre) served by lesser deities called orixas. The orixas have names and
attributes comparable to West African gods, and can be equated to Catholic saints.
For example, Oxóssi, the male orixá of hunting, was linked to St. George who is
normally depicted on a horse while slaying a dragon.” Unlike Catholicism though,
Candomblé has no central authority, but it is organized through autonomous groups.

The arrival of enslaved Africans and free and indentured Europeans in the
Americas introduced to the Americas new cultural and religious expressions, as
well as new pathogens. Notions about what was feminine or masculine work on a

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***The concept of syncretism will be elaborated in chapter 6.

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plantation was often formed by European traditions, and maroons built their societal structure based on certain African political and societal customs. The repeated exchanges between Europeans, Africans, and indigenous American groups led to new cultural expressions that were unique to Latin America.

Racism

The question, as it arose at the start of this chapter, whether racism led to the enslavement of predominantly Africans versus racism being the result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, has long been discussed within academia, but has more recently found resonance within societal debates on the legacies of colonialism. To many descendants of enslaved Africans living currently in the Americas, the thought of a lack of pan-African solidarity based on a shared sense of ‘race’ within Africa during the period of trans-Atlantic slave trade, is painful to contemplate. Yet, this anachronistic understanding of this history is a reflection of the social reality in which these African-American communities found and continue to find themselves. It was in the ‘New World’, where the concept of “race” first arose and became much more important, as opposed to it having been important for seventeenth- or eighteenth-century African societies. Certain prejudices concerning ‘the other’ have always existed and shaped the expectations and actual relations between different communities. Hierarchies within societies, as well as between societies, were deemed a natural given for much of human history. Several historians have pointed out that as far back as antiquity, ‘ethnic’ stereotypes existed about almost all the different regions within the then known world, and that many of the theories which fed such prejudice came from ideas about the effect of climate on behavioral patterns as well as physical appearances.* In this antiquated Hippocratic environmental determinism, and what some scholars call ‘proto-racist’** reasoning, ancient societies like the Greeks for instance thought of Ethiopians being dark skinned caused by the scorching of the sun.*** This climate theory of human difference was also dominant among medieval Arab scholars, who viewed black Africans as less ‘civilized’ due to their proximity to the Equator, which was thought to make “their temperaments hot and their humors fiery, their color black and their hair woolly”, which was seen to cause a lack of “self-control and steadiness of mind and [they]

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are overcome by fickleness, foolishness and ignorance”.* At the same time, such obvious xenophobic or proto-racist prejudiced beliefs usually did not consider these characteristics to be hereditary, and as such biologically deterministic (one of the key features of racist ideology). Moreover, since the debate about Darwin’s evolutionary theory, we know that evolution does not follow a purposeful and linear progress, but that evolution is random and most importantly neutral. There is no survival of the fittest, only random selection of certain genetic traits which have been able to survive or even become dominant within a particular group of people due to reproductive success. Yet, the idea of some groups of people having developed into more ‘perfect’ versions of humanity is ancient, universal, persistent and difficult to eradicate. Over the course of time, this belief in a more ‘perfect human’ or a ‘higher civilization’ has surfaced whenever it could be used to someone’s advantage.

For example, in the wake of the Inquisition and the Reconquista (i.e. the war between Christian kingdoms and the Umayyad Caliphate over the control of the Iberian peninsula), the concept of ‘purity of blood’ had become a dominant factor in the Iberian peninsula for determining social status and allocating official roles in the governing of the state. This bloodline obsession was mainly concerned with the religious, and to some extent ethnic, ancestry of families.** Having Jewish or ‘Moorish’, i.e. Muslim ancestry, in one’s family ancestry was deemed suspicious in a time of absolute religious intolerance. By some scholars labelled as the ‘invention of racial exclusion laws’***, this prejudice became institutionalized and legalized starting in 1449 through the Sentencia-Estatuto declaration, which forbade converted (to Catholicism) Jews from holding public offices (being Jewish was completely prohibited during this time and punishable by death or exile).**** The Spanish and Portuguese brought their social ordering based on ‘casta’ or ‘limpieza’, meaning lineage and purity of blood, with them to their colonial territories in the Americas. From 1552 Iberian immigrants to the Spanish territories in the New World were even required to produce proof of their bloodlines in order to be eligible for settlement or public office.***** Here, however, the casta, or castes as it became known in English, became more and more associated with the color of one’s complexion as opposed to a religious and/or ‘ethnic’ heritage, as those who were considered not ‘pure-

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blooded Christians’ were either native-American or of African descent. As such, the social classes soon became ‘racial’ classes, and a ‘color-line’ was invented which had previously not been part of ‘ethnic’ stereotyping per se. As in any situation of classification and ordering, the borders were never absolute and remained to some extent fluid and often depended on economic status as well as social perceptions. Nevertheless, a seed had been planted in the minds of European colonizers that social standing depended on someone’s ‘racial’ lineage. Moreover, the ‘Latin-American’ model of plantation slavery, “of lifetime, inheritable servitude” was deemed profitable and the Spanish and Portuguese economic success coveted by other European colonists, which meant that the British and other European settlers, who started settling in the Americas and engaging in the Transatlantic slave trade a century after the Spanish and Portuguese, saw no need to invent a new system or model of slavery.

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Coincidently, the emergence of ‘racial’ thinking coalesced with an artistic revolution which is called ‘the art of describing’ in the seventeenth century. This genre of art in which nature was sought to be depicted as honestly and faithfully as possible, as opposed to the depiction of the world based on a more mythical or spiritual interpretation of reality, was part of a broader scientific and artistic development, which commenced with the Renaissance and was further influenced by the Enlightenment, with its increased appreciation for empiricism. Humankind came to be seen as part of the natural world, and as such should be studied and depicted realistically rather than philosophically. The many voyages of ‘discovery’ in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries not only encouraged scientists to study and analyze the newly encountered flora, fauna and peoples, but also this accumulation of ‘new’ (from a European perspective) knowledge was visually recorded. One such example is the patronage of arts and science by the Governor General of Dutch Brazil, Johan Maurits, who has already been introduced above, see also image 5.3. He commanded, for instance, the Historia Naturalis Brasiliae (1648), the first scientific work on the natural history of Brazil, by naturalist Willem Piso. Additionally, Maurits ordered two painters, Albert Eckhout and Frans Post, to visually record the landscapes and peoples living in Dutch Brazil. This earliest known series of paintings of Brazil (see images 5.5 and 5.6) clearly depicts the ‘exotism’ of ‘the other’ and the desire to find and apply order to the natural world as well as to the human world by labelling and categorizing everything and everyone encountered.**

In some parts of Spanish America, in particular in Mexico, societal anxiety of ‘racial-mixing’ had led to the development of the aforementioned Casta painting genre, which served not only to visually represent ‘reality’ but also to inform society on the supposed inherent characteristics of each ‘racial’ caste. This visual categorizing was, however, not neutral, as Spanish males were always depicted as being most civilized, protective and as ‘possessors of culture’, as opposed to native Americans or Africans, who were mostly depicted as being less civilized. Societies’ obsession with Casta (lineage) becomes even more clear from the general warnings of the believed degeneration caused by ‘racial mixing’, obviously present in most Casta paintings, which in the colonial mind led to “the contraction of debased sentiments, immoral proclivities, and ability to a decivilized state”.*** As such, those visual productions of the perceived reality, in South America, were part of a colonial

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discourse of regulation and control of the social order, objectifying non-Europeans and putting forward justifications for the continued dominance of European control over the ‘New World’.

5.c Concept Definition

Racism

The belief that the human population can be biologically categorized in clear and distinct groups, i.e. ‘races’, which have inherited and essential characteristics that define their behavior and abilities, and that these differences mark a ‘natural’ and inevitable inferiority or superiority.

Seeing cultural or physical differences as being fixed and hereditary, so in other words biological as opposed to contextual and fluid, turned into a deterministic and normative understanding by attributing an integral value to these differences. A turning point was when prejudice and othering became racism. Most scholars agree that racism as a belief or ideology is a modern phenomenon and arose, paradoxically, as a consequence of the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment. Due to the discoveries of previously unknown and undescribed plants and animals, scientists in the seventeenth and eighteenth century embraced empiricism as the foremost way to knowledge production, and in the process challenged the then dominant religious dogmas about the world. This newly embraced scientific method

of observation and experiment led to the modernization of several fields of science such as Anatomy and Botany.

Andreas Vesalius' revolutionary work *Fabric of the Human Body* (1543) introduced new ways of measuring and analyzing the human body, laying the groundwork for understanding humans as biological beings. Carl Linnaeus, often called the ‘father of taxonomy’, led the way with the publication of his work *Systema Naturae* in 1735 for showing the order in nature and the possibility of discovering the natural laws which underpinned such order.

This frantic quest to scientifically understand and analyze humankind as part of nature, ultimately led to the taxonomizing of human ‘types’ as ‘natural kinds’ of which Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775) is perhaps one of the earliest and most striking examples. Whereas the proclivity for classifications was not per se normative, it nonetheless gained a hierarchical and normative outlook due to the association many intellectuals at the time made between sub-Saharan Africans and an enslaved condition." Indeed, when philosophers like Hume, Kant, Voltaire or Rousseau formulated their thoughts on the equality of all human beings, and as such questioned the age-old belief of the naturalness of inequality between humans, they sought a rational and objective explanation for the inequality they witnessed around them, and believed it to be explained by, among others, the biological adaptability of certain human populations.

This paradox of the Enlightenment, where concepts of equality and meritocracy allowed ideas of ‘race-as-biology’ to develop simultaneously, can thus not be separated from the time in which it arose, one in which trans-Atlantic slavery existed. Notwithstanding its unintentional contribution to racial ideas, the Enlightenment also contributed ideas that challenged an existing world order that was based on the God-given right of some to rule over many, and gave rise to such famous slogans of the French Revolution as *liberté, égalité, fraternité* that led history-altering revolutions, including abolition (of slavery) movements in the Americas and in Europe.

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**Ideas**

One of the most famous beaches in the world is the Copacabana in Rio de Janeiro. On both ends of the beach are historical forts: *Forte Duque de Caxias* from 1779 and *Forte de Copacabana* from 1914. The latter is currently a museum and on the outside

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visitors can see a mural that depicts the Battle of Guararapes, which was part of the “War of Divine Liberty”.* An accompanying sign in Portuguese explains the mural to visitors not intimately acquainted with the historical significance of this particular battle: ‘people of diverse origins, different social classes, negros, brancos, and indios came together for a common cause: defending their ground and their families against an invader’; the sign continues to say that these patriotas obtained ‘a victory without precedent’. Perhaps surprisingly, this idyllic story of all different groups coming together to fight a common enemy is not the story of Brazilian independence in 1822, but the story of Portuguese colonizers fighting Dutch colonizers in a global geopolitical struggle in the seventeenth century.

5.d Concept Definition

**Geopolitics**

*Approach to international affairs which focuses on the interplay between geography, power and politics.*

There were European, black, and indigenous soldiers fighting on both sides, and for the majority of the enslaved population the transfer from Dutch to Portuguese rules meant little change in the day-to-day reality of living under an extractive and racist capitalist system. The color of the flag changed, but behind the colonial façade lives and ownership remained largely the same.

The history of Latin America is filled with stories of revolt and warfare that share a similar fate. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Atlantic basin was the central theatre of rebellions and insurgencies. This so-called ‘Age of Revolutions’ marked the start of anticolonial, antislavery, and anti-establishment struggles of which the United States’ independence from Britain in 1776, the Haitian Revolution on Saint Domingue in 1791, and the French Revolution of 1789 are the most well-known examples. Decades before, however, at least three resurrections – by the enslaved populations on St John in 1733, on Jamaica in 1760, and in Berbice (present-day Guyana) in 1763 – were already extremely effective and nearly became the first successful independence and abolitionist movements in Atlantic history. In Berbice, the revolutionaries controlled the colony for little more than a year, but their success tantalized the African-descended people with the prospect of liberation and autonomy. In no-time, songs that celebrated the Berbice uprising appeared in the repertoire of the enslaved population of the neighboring colony of Suriname. Plantation owners, fearing that one revolt might inspire another, tried to limit the circulation of news about successful uprisings, but inevitably stories and rumors circulated among the enslaved all across the Atlantic.

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The extraordinary rich sources for the Berbice uprising of 1763 reveal that, while thousands of enslaved people joined the rebellion, many were not purposeful rebels. Like the maroon society of Palmares, the revolutionaries of Berbice created a socially stratified society that combined African political customs with European and New-World institutions. The leaders knew very well that if they wanted to survive long-term, they would need to participate in the global economy with sugar from the plantations. They forced the enslaved that previously had worked the plantations for the Europeans to now cut the sugar cane for them. Moreover, the leaders’ African traditions and cultural norms required people of their social position to be attended by servants and slaves. The Afro-Berbicians did not have a uniform vision of post-rebellion society.* It seemed that the only durable way out of slavery for most was to rely on subsistence farming and local barter trade, and to bid adieu to the global capitalist economy.

The successful wars for independence in Latin America at the beginning of the nineteenth century did not focus specifically on slavery, although many formerly enslaved people received manumission by fighting in patriot armies. The quest for meritocracy and democracy that had instigated the ‘Atlantic revolutions’ also found resonance amongst the bourgeois classes of Latin America, in particular the Spanish born in the Americas, then referred to as ‘criollo’, who seized this revolutionary moment to gain more independence from the colonial motherland. Similar to the demands of American revolutionaries, these wealthy men of property in Spanish America also sought to obtain governing power over their own local affairs, and demanded the same legal rights as the so-called Peninsulares (Spanish born in Spain). Most of these bourgeois revolutionaries were however less concerned with the rights and wellbeing of the lower classes, including slaves. Even the ‘great liberator’ Simon Bolivar mostly sought to establish an independent Gran-Columbia governed by a creole aristocracy rather than advocate for universal suffrage and a people’s republic. Moreover, his decision to manumit the enslaved was born mostly out of fear of slave revolts like the one in Haiti, dreading that such a revolt would lead to the expulsion of all whites from Latin America. It would take more than half a century before slavery was abolished in all of independent Spanish-speaking America (in Cuba as late as 1886), and even longer in Lusophone Brazil (1888). The newly-established countries that were more dependent on slave-based cash crops to participate in the global economic system were to abolish slavery later than countries where slavery was not a primary source of labor. The Latin American independence movements were primarily bourgeois revolutions, that borrowed heavily from Enlightenment slogans and iconography of white revolutions, such as the French. The clearest example of this is probably the Phrygian cap or liberty cap.

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that still has a prominent place in several Latin American countries’ coat of arms. Going back thousands of years to the Roman Empire, the cap originated as an icon of freemen that was symbolically given to slaves upon manumission. It had been popularized during the French Revolution and came to represent liberty in general.

Ideas about slavery, abolition, political organization, economic systems, revolution, and freedom did not appear in isolation, but in dialogue between different places. As people moved between places they brought with them conceptions about order in the world, they borrowed ideas and images from other places, and they inspired others with their ideals.

**Conclusion**

Affordable consumption in a system of globalized production was only possible through unpaid labor. In order to compete in a global market with their goods, plantation owners used slave labor and environmentally damning production practices. As information about the hard realities of these production practices percolated through society and as the ‘consumer class’ emerged in Europe and North America in the early nineteenth century, buyers started to demand ethically sourced goods. This ‘fair trade’ movement contributed to the abolishment of slavery.
alongside a whole range of factors. This was not a consumer revolution to end capitalism, but a reformation campaign in which abolitionist consumers across the Atlantic World reimagined a global capitalism that would benefit everyone. Just like ideas, objects, and people had spread throughout the Atlantic to support the system of slavery, ideas, objects, and people against slavery spread as well. These ideas and objects came together in a sugar bowl that can be seen in the image above.

Of course, slavery did not end with the abolishment of slavery in the Atlantic in the nineteenth century. Slavery still exists in the world and it is intimately connected to our everyday lives. The continued globalization of the world has made people, ideas, and goods more connected than ever before, and information is more readily available about the conditions on plantations. Fruit produced with slave labor on Latin American plantations can still be found in your local supermarket – either as juice or as fresh fruit. If there is a lesson to be learned from history in this regard, it is that ethical capitalism can contribute to a world where nobody has to live in slavery.

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Guiding Questions

1. What is the Williams Thesis?
2. What is the issue with a lot of primary source material about slavery, and why is that a problem?
3. What did societies of maroons and revolutionary slaves have in common?
4. What are three examples of how Latin America was connected to the rest of the world in the period 1600-1800?
5. Is there ethical consumption in global capitalism, and why?

Guide to Further Reading

- Barcia, M., *The Yellow Demon of Fever: Fighting Disease in the Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2020). As the slave trade brought Europeans, Africans, and Americans into contact, diseases were traded along with human lives. Manuel Barcia examines the battle waged against disease, where traders fought against loss of profits while enslaved Africans fought for survival.

- Bethencourt, F., *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014). Demonstrating that there is not one continuous tradition of racism, Francisco Bethencourt shows that racism preceded any theories of race and must be viewed within the prism and context of social hierarchies and local conditions. He argues that in its various aspects, all racism has been triggered by political projects monopolizing specific economic and social resources.


- Eltis, D., *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). In this book David Eltis argues that the British led the way in ending the slave trade just when it was beginning to be important for the world economy, when there was a great need for labor around the world, and shows that Britain’s control of the slave trade and great reliance on slave labor played a major role in its empire’s rise to world economic dominance.
• Everill, B., *Not Made by Slaves: Ethical Capitalism in the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020). Bronwen Everill illuminates the early years of global consumer society, while placing the politics of antislavery firmly in the history of capitalism. It is also a stark reminder that the struggle to ensure fair trade and labor conditions continues.


• Smallwood, S., *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to the American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). Stephanie Smallwood examines how the people at the center of her story – merchant capitalists, sailors, and slaves – made sense of the bloody process in which they were joined. The result is both a remarkable transatlantic view of the culture of enslavement, and a painful, intimate vision of the bloody, daily business of the slave trade.

• Williams, E., *Capitalism and Slavery – Third Edition* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2021). Arguing that the slave trade was at the heart of Britain’s economic progress, Eric Williams’s landmark 1944 study revealed the connections between capitalism and racism, and has influenced generations of historians ever since.