

Black Markets for Black Labor

Pirates, Privateers, and Interlopers in the Early Dispersal of British Slavery

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“The 3d of June [1722], they met with a small New-England Ship, bound home from Barbadoes, which . . . yielded herself a Prey to the Booters: The Pyrates took out of her fourteen Hogsheads of Rum, six Barrels of Sugar, a large Box of English Goods . . . , [and] six Negroes, besides a Sum of Money and Plate, and then let her go on her Voyage.”

~Capt. Charles Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*¹

By the mid-eighteenth century, networks of intercolonial trade would link the many European colonies of the Americas, facilitating a dispersal trade in the enslaved African people arriving from across the Atlantic. But during the early decades of English colonization in the Americas, such regular intercolonial trade circuits lay in the distant future. Instead, in the foundational decades of slavery in English America [ca. 1619-1700], the dispersal of Africans was more

¹ Captain Charles Johnson [Daniel Defoe], *A General History of the Pyrates*, ed. Manuel Schonhorn (Mineola, N.Y., 1999), 314. The current consensus among literary scholars is that Defoe was not actually the author of the *General History*, but this edition (which attributes authorship to Defoe) is still the best scholarly edition in many regards, including its tracing of primary sources the author used to compile the accounts. Most scholars now accept the interpretation of P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens that Defoe did not write the book under the pseudonym of Captain Charles Johnson (Furbank and Owens, *The Canonisation of Daniel Defoe* (New Haven, Conn., 1988) 100-109; see also C. R. Pennell, “Introduction: Brought to Book; Reading about Pirates,” in Pennell, ed., *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Readers* (New York, 2001) 4, 20 n. 3. Either Captain Johnson actually existed or was the pseudonym of some other well-informed author. In any case, the *General History* is a tricky source for historians because, at times, it presents excellent research from newspapers, published trial accounts, and correspondence with seamen, whereas at other times, it presents outright fictions. I have relied upon it below only where it presents information on pirates known to have been real historical figures and where other sources corroborate the general outline of the story. The quotation presented here is from Johnson’s recounting of the career of George Lowther, which is historical.

haphazard, often taking place, not on merchant ships, but rather on the vessels of pirates and privateers. Even where pillaging was not involved, dispersals by merchants often violated trade laws protecting monopolies. As a result, many Africans arriving in the Americas found themselves distributed by illicit traders.

Given that early English forays to the New World aimed more at raiding Spanish America than establishing agricultural settlements, it comes as little surprise that the early English slave trade was entangled with privateering and piracy. Theft offered a way for other European powers to catch up with the Spanish and Portuguese, who were many decades ahead in both colonization and the enslavement of Africans. The English established their first American colonies in the context of privateering campaigns against Spain, and that predatory, parasitical character colored the early English slave trade. The primary hope of English (and Dutch and French) privateers was always to snare a Spanish treasure ship ferrying Peruvian silver to Europe, but the corsairs and buccaneers rarely hesitated to prey upon the Spanish American economy in other ways as opportunities presented themselves. Of these secondary opportunities, slavery and the slave trade were among the most profitable. Because enslaved people sold for high prices relative to the amount of space they required aboard a ship, a vessel full of them carried two or three times the cash value as that same vessel transporting colonial produce or other vendible commodities, excepting only gold or silver. In the labor-starved Americas, exploitable workers were the next best thing to coin.

In the resulting illicit commerce, the captives were twice stolen—enslaved in Africa for sale to Atlantic traders and then seized in American waters by pirates who saw African people as loot. Such appropriation could be perilous and terrifying for those treated as property if

their traders resisted pirates at sea or if marauders attacked settlements to seize them. Once taken, the enslaved could face extended journeys. Pirates and privateers, seeking markets to monetize such prizes, disseminated enslaved people to a range of colonies, often seeking developing markets that were eager enough for commerce to overlook suspicions about arriving traders. As such, illicit dealers introduced some of the first enslaved Africans to many colonies, and in the process helped disseminate the logic of people treated as property across the Americas.²

English pirates and privateers began seizing Africans from the Spanish and Portuguese even before England possessed colonies in which to exploit slaves. Christopher Newport's privateering voyage of 1592 hijacked a Portuguese slaving vessel in the Caribbean, en route to the Spanish Main. As valuable as the stolen laborers were in theory, Newport's crew struggled to profit from the capture since the English privateers were enemies of the only colonial powers (and slave exploiters) in the Americas at the time—the Spanish and Portuguese. A Portuguese merchant from the captured slaver offered to help sell the captives at Spanish Puerto Rico if Newport released him, but once the corsairs let him disembark at San Juan, he simply never returned. Unable to manage a sale, Newport's crew gave up: “Passing along to the Westernmost ende of the sayd Island, about some 9. or 10. leagues from the towne wee landed the Negros, and sunke their ship.” Another English privateer, William King, repeated an almost identical debacle the same year, capturing a Portuguese slaver with 270 captives off Dominica and then releasing the slaves on Puerto Rico after failing to convince the Spanish to buy them.³

² For an overview of the link between privateering and early English settlement in the Americas, see Mark Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740* (forthcoming); Kenneth R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering: English Privateering during the Spanish War, 1585-1603* (Cambridge, 1964); Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas, 1500-1750* (Armonk, N.Y., 1998), chaps. 2, 4; C. M. Senior, *A Nation of Pirates: English Piracy in Its Heyday* (New York, 1976). On relative value of slave cargoes, see James A. McMillin, *The Final Victims: Foreign Slave Trade to North America, 1783-1810* (Columbia, S.C., 2004), 73.

³ Kenneth R. Andrews, *English Privateering Voyages to the West Indies, 1588-1595: Documents Relating to*

A year later, privateer John Burgh found an inventive solution to the problem of fencing stolen slaves in enemy territory. In 1593, Burgh's crew plundered a Spanish pearl fishery off modern-day Venezuela, stealing not only the jewels but also one hundred Africans whom the Spanish exploited as divers and laborers. Burgh's crew kept the pearls for their return to England, but lacking a safe market to sell the kidnapped Africans, Burgh ransomed them back to the Spanish slaveholders instead. On such a remote outpost, the settlers preferred to pay to get their laborers back rather than wait for another shipment of slaves from Africa. Future privateers would follow Burgh's example. The next year, James Langton's privateering crew managed a similar scam at Santa Domingo. After raiding a village and stealing numerous slaves, the corsairs extorted their victims "for the Ransome of their houses from burneing, and to restore them their *Negroes* againe, by whose Labour and Industry they had their great profitt." That English privateers such as King and Burgh snatched Africans from the Spanish even before English plantations created an alternate market for enslaved people underscores their exchange value in the colonial marketplace. The allure of slave stealing would only increase for privateers and pirates in the seventeenth century as venues for exploitable workers blossomed across the Americas.⁴

In the early years, England's fledgling colonies did not immediately embrace enslaved Africans as their main source of labor, but the rampant piracy and privateering of the era nudged them in that direction. Well before English merchants followed Portuguese (and later, Dutch) merchants into the slave trade on the West African coast in significant numbers, brigands of various nationalities sailed into English colonial ports looking to sell African people stolen from, or en route to, Spanish America. Most famously, in 1619, English North America's first

English Voyages to the West Indies from the Defeat of the Armada to the Last Voyage of Sir Francis Drake (Cambridge, 1959), 189, 213-214.

⁴ Ibid., 234, 249.

Africans reached Virginia in this way. Off the Yucatán Coast, Dutch privateers stole roughly two hundred Angolan captives from the Portuguese slave ship *São João Bautista*, which was bound for Campeche. So these stolen migrants, who had survived an especially long transatlantic voyage—from Angola across the Equator and through the entire Caribbean to Mexico—now found themselves forcibly rerouted. The Dutch brigands stopped first clandestinely at (Spanish) Jamaica to refresh the unhealthy survivors of the Atlantic crossing and to sell 24 boys to Spanish colonists who did not mind dealing with the Protestant enemy. Then, after another unknown stop, the corsairs delivered “20. and Odd Negroes” at Point Comfort, Virginia. At this foundational moment in the history of North American slavery, the arrival of African captives had less to do with planters' demand for enslaved laborers than with the privateers' desire for a market in which to vend stolen Africans. That Virginians accepted proffered people rather than actively sought a supply of slaves from the outset may go some way toward explaining the slow development of codified slave law and strict enforcement of a color line in seventeenth-century Virginia. In the 1620s, some of the first Africans in Dutch New Amsterdam also arrived owing to Dutch privateering expeditions against the Spanish and Portuguese. Similar ventures continued over the following decades, with a French privateering ship, *La Garce*, delivering a stolen cargo to New Amsterdam in 1642 and privateers forcing the captured Spanish ship *St. Anthoni* to deliver another 44 slaves ten years later.⁵

⁵ Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton argue for the role of privateers in settling the first generation of Africans—mostly Angolans—in English and Dutch American colonies: see Heywood and Thornton, Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660 (New York, 2007), ix-48. On the first African arrivals in Virginia, see Engel Sluiter, “New Light on the ‘20. and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia, August 1619,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3d Ser., LIV (1997), 395-398; Thornton, “The African Experience of the ‘20. and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia in 1619,” ibid., LV (1998), 421-434. Sluiter and Thornton helped debunk earlier assumptions that the Dutch had shipped these first African Virginians from the Dutch West Indian colonies; for those incorrect assumptions, see Wesley Frank Craven, White, Red, and Black: The Seventeenth-Century Virginian (Charlottesville, Va., 1971), 76-82; Daniel P. Mannix in collaboration with Malcolm Cowley, Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1518-1865 (New York, 1962), 54-55; Johannes Menne Postma, The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815 (New York, 1990), 12. Since many of the two hundred

As slavery caught on as a primary source of labor across English America in the seventeenth century—first in the sugar-producing Caribbean islands, and later on the North American mainland—privateers played a crucial role in supplying African laborers, seizing them both on land and at sea. Barbados was the first English colony to commit fully to enslaved labor and likely received its first Africans via theft from the Spanish or Portuguese. Some of the first settlers in Barbados in 1627 arrived with Africans whom, in the words of one historian, “Captain Henry Powell had obtained . . . at some point between Guiana and Barbados.” Unless these black founders of Barbados were canoe fishermen swept across the Atlantic and into Powell's path by the equatorial currents, piracy or privateering was the likely cause of their ending up enslaved by these English settlers in the Caribbean. Up until 1670, Spain refused to recognize any French, Dutch, or English claims in the Americas as legitimate, so even at times of official peace within Europe, the Americas (and especially the multinational Caribbean) remained a lawless zone. As the saying went, there was “no peace beyond the line,” an imagined line in the Atlantic beyond which European peace treaties did not apply because European powers refused to recognize each other’s claims. Convoys and heavily armed merchant ships were standard, and privateers pillaged in the Caribbean with the blessing of their monarchs. Even after the Treaty of Madrid brought the Americas under the jurisdiction of European peace deals in 1670, pirates and privateers still found plenty of room to operate, and they often stole slaves.⁶

captured Angolans from the São João Bautista are unaccounted for, the privateers likely made an intervening stop between Jamaica and Virginia, but where is unknown. For more on the slow development of slave law and rigid racial hierarchy in seventeenth-century Virginia, see T. H. Breen and Stephen Innes, ‘Myne Owne Ground’: Race and Freedom on Virginia’s Eastern Shore, 1640-1676 (1980; New York, 2005); J. Douglas Deal, Race and Class in Colonial Virginia: Indians, Englishmen, and Africans on the Eastern Shore during the Seventeenth Century (New York, 1993). On privateers delivering Africans to New Netherland, see Joyce D. Goodfriend, “Burghers and Blacks: The Evolution of a Slave Society at New Amsterdam,” New York History, LIX (1978), 128-129. In addition to the cases noted above, a “Captain Ax” was also documented selling three slaves in New Netherland in 1636, and Goodfriend speculates plausibly that this was the Providence privateer Samuel Axe. See also Heywood and Thornton, Central Africans, 36.

⁶ For the first Africans to Barbados, see Hilary Beckles, A History of Barbados: From Amerindian Settlement to Caribbean Single Market (New York, 2006), 20. For discussion of the “Lines of Amity” in the Atlantic beyond

In 1628, English privateer Arthur Guy and his crew aboard the *Fortune* captured a Portuguese slaver bound from Angola to Spanish America. Guy rerouted these stolen West Central Africans, already survivors of the Middle Passage, hundreds of miles north to Virginia. Thereafter, such pillaging of the Spanish American slave trade only increased. Records for the period are spotty, but Spanish sources document at least sixteen cases of English privateers' capturing slavers bound for Spanish America in the 1630s alone. These hijackings redirected about 2,400 Africans—mostly Angolans—to English colonies. Given the nascent state of the slave regime in English territories, such an influx was a major contribution to the African population. Many of these English marauders probably worked from the short-lived Providence Island colony (off the Mosquito Coast of modern Nicaragua), which was founded in 1629 and acquired “many [of its] negroes” from English privateers, according to John Winthrop. Providence leaders ordered one of the first privateering ventures from the settlement to seize enslaved Africans who were experienced in diving for pearls. By 1641, when the Spanish conquered Providence Island, more than half the colony's population of about seven hundred was of African descent.⁷

Foreign privateers also delivered enslaved people to English colonies. Of course, the Dutch brought the first Africans to Virginia. Likewise, a shipwrecked Spaniard stranded in Bermuda in 1639 reported that the few Africans in those islands came from two sources: “Some of them have landed from vessels wrecked here, others have been left here by the Dutch who captured them,” presumably from Portuguese slave traders bound to Spanish America. French privateers might also have delivered stolen slaves to English colonists in smaller numbers. Dutch

which European peace treaties had no force, see Roland D. Hussey, “Spanish Reaction to Foreign Aggression in the Caribbean to about 1680,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, IX (1929), 291; Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1972).

⁷ Heywood and Thornton, *Central Africans*, 40-42. Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Providence Island, 1630-1641: The Other Puritan Colony* (New York, 1993), 106, 170-171.

New Amsterdam officials reported the arrival of French privateer, Guert Tyssen, in 1652, “having with him a Spanish prize.” Tyssen “purchased and trucked provisions and other necessaries, with divers persons, both English and Dutch, in exchange for negroes and other commodities.” As these colonial officials observed, Tyssen and other buccaneers were at the forefront of treating African people as goods for exchange.⁸

Not content with snaring ships at sea, English privateers also raided Spanish settlements to steal, among other things, African people. When Governor Thomas Modyford of Jamaica ordered privateer Henry Morgan to raid Saint Jago de Cuba in 1670, he clearly expected slave snatching as part of the operation. Modyford instructed that any “Women-slaves Prisoners” from the raid “be brought hither, and sold for account of your Fleet and Army,” along with “such of the men also that cannot speak *Spanish*.” (“Men-Slaves” who could speak Spanish were to be put “to the Sword,” a chilling reminder of the dangers to the enslaved of being caught between competing empires.) Modyford also gave Morgan permission, “if Ships present, to carry them [the stolen slaves] for *New-England* or *Virginia*” to sell there. Perhaps some captives taken in Morgan's raid of Saint Jago were among the 109 enslaved people on his Jamaican estate when he died there in 1688.⁹

Morgan's expedition was not unique, for when word of the Treaty of Madrid reached the Caribbean later in 1670, one of the sticking points for the English and Spanish officials there was how to handle stolen slaves. In the treaty, Spain acknowledged England's claim to Jamaica and several other American possessions, bringing the first official peace to the Caribbean, but the

⁸ For Bermuda, Vernon A. Ives, ed., The Rich Papers: Letters from Bermuda, 1615-1646; Eyewitness Accounts Sent by the Early Colonists to Sir Nathaniel Rich (Toronto, 1984), 382; J. Henry Lefroy, ed., The Historye of the Bermudaes or Summer Islands (London, 1882), 84, 144-145. For New Amsterdam, see E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., Documents relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York . . . (Albany, N.Y., 1858), II, 24.

⁹ Joel H. Baer, ed., British Piracy in the Golden Age: History and Interpretation, 1660-1730 (London, 2007), I, 70-71; David Cordingly, Under the Black Flag: The Romance and the Reality of Life among the Pirates (San Diego, Calif., 1997), 16.

negotiators in Europe had left many details vague. So colonial officials from Jamaica ventured to Cartagena to treat with their Spanish counterparts. Prisoners of war of European descent were immediately exchanged, but the English did not put captured Africans in that category. "To pacifie in some measure" the Spanish complaints about slaves stolen in raids, the English agreed

That all *Spanish Negroes*, of the Provinces of *Carthagen*a and *Panama*, which had been taken and could be found in *Jamaica*, and that could prove they were free in their own Country, should be set at liberty : And that all *Negroes* of the said Provinces, which were Slaves should be redeemed by their Masters, if they would come for them, at eighteen or twenty pounds *per head*.

In other words, free people from Spanish America who had been enslaved by the English were entitled to freedom, but the burden of proof was on them to establish that they had been free in Spanish America. Enslaved blacks stolen from Spanish America were, in essence, legitimated as lawful prizes, since the only concession to the Spanish was that former owners had the right to buy them back from the English. Regardless of the terms, that the negotiators addressed kidnapped slaves at all attests to the frequency of slave raiding in the preceding years. The English also consented, under the treaty terms, to suppressing such piracy in the future, another indication that it had been rampant.¹⁰

Such raiding did not cease once the Spanish recognized Northern European claims to New World territories. If anything, the treaty simply contributed to a gradual shift from privateering to more frequent occurrences of outright piracy. In fact, continued English interest in plundering Spanish America was given powerful voice just a few years after the Treaty of Madrid, when England appointed privateer Henry Morgan as lieutenant governor (and acting governor) of Jamaica in 1675. Clearly, pillagers of the Spanish remained in the crown's good graces. Piracy without crown blessing was also on the rise over the ensuing decades, at times reaching an impressive scale. In 1683, a polyglot crew of thirteen Dutch, French, and English

¹⁰ Baer, *British Piracy*, I, 274-275.

ships besieged Veracruz, the primary port city of Spanish Mexico. One of the French captains had a license for privateering from the colonial governor at Petit Goâve, Saint-Domingue, but the other twelve ships' claims to be under his command were dubious, so the line between privateering and piracy was blurry at best. In any case, the crew plundered Veracruz, kidnapped and ransomed Spanish colonial officials, and appropriated enslaved Africans. After dividing the loot, as Jamaica governor Thomas Lynch put it, "away they went, carrying also with them about a thousand Negroes and Mulatos." The pillagers scattered the captured slaves (and formerly free people of color) across the Caribbean and beyond, severing whatever family, cultural, and emotional ties they had managed to establish in Veracruz. Lynch reported that the French carried some to Petit Goâve. Others, the pirates sold illegally at Spanish Cuba. Some captives landed in Jamaica, where Lynch sought their confiscation as pirate booty. Still other captives from the Veracruz raid probably contributed to the early black population of South Carolina. English merchants and imperial officials of the period often accused South Carolina of harboring pirates and offering markets for what they stole, and in 1683, South Carolina reportedly received about two hundred enslaved people—either from the pirate raid on Veracruz or some other raid of Spanish America. Similarly, in 1688, a Virginia court investigated several masters on suspicion of having taken their slaves in illegal raids of Spanish colonies. One of the accused, Edward Davis, denied acquiring his slave in such a raid, "And saith the Negro is his, and that he bought him at Sea from a Vessel belonging to Barbados about Twelve months since, and says he was not on board any Privateer." The unnamed enslaved man in question contradicted this testimony, insisting he "first Lived Amongst the Spanish and was taken away from them by one Edward Davis." Considering the frequency of English privateering raids in the period, the man's testimony is plausible.¹¹

¹¹ For Lynch's account of the Vera Cruz raid, see *ibid.*, 228. On the arrivals in South Carolina, see Peter H. Wood,

By the 1670s and 1680s, English privateers were not only targeting the Spanish and Portuguese. The Dutch had become major players in the transatlantic slave trade, and (especially when Anglo-Dutch relations periodically turned hostile) English privateers went after Dutch slave traders bound for Curaçao. Preying upon Dutch slavers was particularly vital in supplying African workers to England's newly acquired colony of Jamaica. It is little wonder that, when colonist Richard Ligon described the Africans living in Barbados in the 1650s, he made passing reference to the particular skills of those African slaves who had been “bred up amongst the *Portuguese*.” Whether such people had lived among the Portuguese in their outposts in West Central Africa or in Brazil, Africans with knowledge of Portuguese ways ended up residing in Barbados owing to the prevalence of privateering in English America's first decades with slavery.¹²

Of course, the English not only acquired but also lost enslaved Africans through piracy and privateering. As English slavery and the slave trade grew, pirates and foreign privateers targeted English captives, in turn. Contemporaries estimated that French raids of Montserrat, Antigua, and the English half of Saint Christopher in 1666 succeeded in carrying off 15,000 Africans for “their own sugar plantations.” This was undoubtedly an enormous exaggeration, since that figure topped the African population of those islands at the time, but the raid was significant enough to hamper the growth of the English economy in the region. A

Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion (New York, 1974), 44. On South Carolina's general harboring of pirates, see Mark Gillies Hanna, “The Pirate Nest: The Impact of Piracy on Newport, Rhode Island, and Charles Town, South Carolina, 1670-1730” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2006), esp. 114-116; Shirley Carter Hughson, The Carolina Pirates and Colonial Commerce, 1670-1740 (1894; rpt. New York, 1973), esp. 13-21. For the Virginia case, see CO 1/65, fols. 100-101, Public Record Office, Kew, U.K. Other mainland colonies also likely imported slaves from Caribbean pirates; see, for example, Edgar J. McManus, Black Bondage in the North (Syracuse, N.Y., 1973), 19-20.

¹² On the importance of raids on Dutch slavers to Jamaica, see Carl Bridenbaugh and Roberta Bridenbaugh, No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690 (New York, 1972), 259. Richard Ligon, A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (1657; Indianapolis, 2011), 103.

French raid on the British island of Nevis during Queen Anne's War (1702-1713) yielded people among the plunder, six of whom ended up in Louisiana. In 1706, Governor John Johnson of Antigua feared similar raids by the French on his fledgling colony, believing the French would then use the stolen Africans to help fulfill a contract for slave deliveries to Spanish America. Governor Nicholas Laws of Jamaica also complained of incursions. In 1724, he wrote to Spanish officials in Cuba, accusing them of sheltering “a Parcel of Banditti, who pretend to have Commissions from you.” Laws demanded “ample Restitution to Captain *Chamberlain* of all the Negroes . . . lately taken off from the North-Side of this Island, and also of such Sloops and other Effects.”¹³

One group of Africans kidnapped more than once highlights both the scale of Caribbean slave raiding and the dislocation it triggered for the people treated as prizes. In 1687, Captain George Lenham of the English sloop *Ruby* delivered “foure Negroe Men and a Negroe boy” to Kingston. According to naval officers there, Lenham had taken the slaves in a raid “from on Shoare at the Isle of Thera and Providence from Rebels and Piratts.” Presumably, the “Rebells and Piratts” had previously seized these serially displaced people somewhere else. For these Africans and many others, the lawlessness of the early Caribbean made their journey to American plantations a particularly violent, prolonged, and disruptive transition to new lives in the Americas. As valued commodities, enslaved people became coveted prizes in the contest for

¹³ James Pritchard, David Eltis, and David Richardson, “The Significance of the French Slave Trade to the Evolution of the French Atlantic World before 1716,” in Eltis and Richardson, eds., Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database (New Haven, Conn., 2008), 212; Natalie A Zacek, Settler Society in the English Leewards, 1670-1776 (New York, 2010), 42-43; Daniel H. Usner, Jr., Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783 (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1992), 25; Governor John Johnson to Secretary of State Charles Hedges, Jr., Antigua, May 28, 1706, CO 7/1, PRO; Colin A. Palmer, “The Company Trade and the Numerical Distribution of Slaves to Spanish America, 1703-1739,” in Paul E. Lovejoy, ed., Africans in Bondage: Studies in Slavery and the Slave Trade (Madison, Wis., 1986), 27-42; Nicholas Laws to the Alcaldes of Trinidad de Cuba, Jan. 26, 1722, rpt. in Johnson, General History of the Pyrates, 45-46.

wealth and empire in the early Americas.¹⁴

As much as pirates and privateers contributed to enslaved populations in English, Dutch, and French America in the seventeenth century, theft was not the only source of African people for these empires; each increasingly traded for slaves in West Africa, as well. Still, the rise of the northern Europeans' transatlantic slave trades put only a small percentage of Caribbean and North American slave importation on a solid legal footing. Black- and gray-market slave trading in America increased alongside such legal trading for two key reasons. First, each empire established a monopoly company with the exclusive right to the transatlantic slave trade in its territory. Second, each empire forbade its colonists to purchase African people from (or trade most goods with) foreign traders. Colonists seeking slaves and traders seeking profits routinely violated these strictures, so even where piracy and pillaging were not involved, early slave trading often operated outside the law, giving rise to surreptitious intercolonial trading.

Interlopers on the Royal African Company's monopoly on slave deliveries to English America, for example, resorted to additional movements of their captives after the Atlantic crossing to avoid confiscation by company officials or imperial authorities. Africans delivered to Jamaica by the interloper *Hawke* in 1686 traveled overland for the last stage of their clandestine journey. To avoid detection by Royal African Company factors, Captain Thompson disembarked his “somewhat under a hundred” African prisoners on the sparsely populated north side of the island. The merchants in charge of their sale—Josiah Barry and a Mr. Waterhouse—then sorted the healthy Africans from the unhealthy, leaving the ill slaves on nearby plantations. Those fit to march moved south. Barry and Waterhouse hired a local hunter to guide them over the

¹⁴ Naval Office Shipping List for South Carolina (hereafter cited as NOSL), CO 142/13, fol. 34, PRO. “Isle of Thera and Providence” probably refers to the Bahamas, since “Isle of Thera” presumably refers to Eleuthera, a Bahamian port. The Bahamas were haunts of pirates in the period.

mountains to the more populous southern coast of Jamaica, near Kingston, where they planned to sell the people to area plantations. The Royal African Company caught wind of their activities and initiated an investigation, but by the time authorities gathered depositions from various witnesses, Barry and Waterhouse had distributed the Africans throughout the island. In such cases, attempts to circumvent regulated markets led to convoluted voyages in the intra-American slave trade.¹⁵

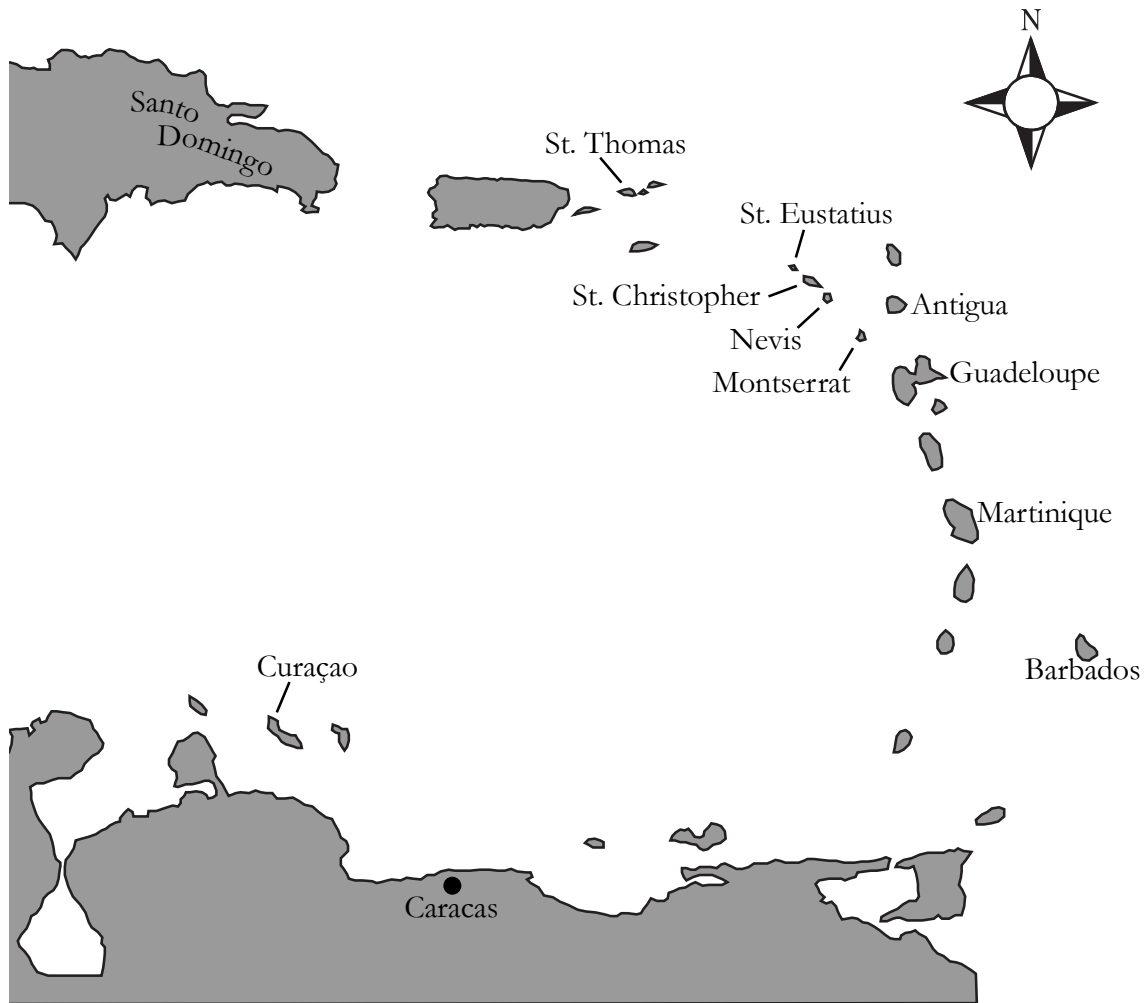
By the last third of the seventeenth century, the Royal African Company supplied enough Africans to satisfy English demand in the most established colonies—notably Barbados—but colonies toward the margins of the English slave trade often felt overlooked and sought to sidestep the company's monopoly. Some English planters and merchants in these fledgling colonies traveled illegally to foreign territory to acquire Africans and transship them home. Planters on the less populous English Leeward Islands—such as Saint Christopher, Nevis, and Montserrat—sought transshipments from neighboring Dutch and Danish islands (Map 2.1).¹⁶ In 1687, the Royal African Company complained to the English Committee for Trade and Plantations that settlers “of Nevis and St. Christophers are setting upp a Trade of bringing

¹⁵ See depositions regarding the interloper Hawke, various dates in late 1686 and early 1687, CO 1/61, fols. 75-88, 1/62, fols. 10-13.

¹⁶ Some scholars have argued for the Dutch slave trade's pivotal role in supplying the English and French Caribbean with slaves during the foundational years of their sugar cultivation in the mid-seventeenth century, but others suggest this Dutch role has been exaggerated, especially regarding the English. English slave traders supplied their own colonies in this period more than previously thought, and most Dutch deliveries targeted more lucrative Spanish American markets. However, studies focused solely on the transatlantic slave trade underestimate the number of captives delivered from Africa to the Dutch Caribbean, who were later smuggled to French or British territory. For the upward revision of English deliveries to their own colonies in the mid-seventeenth century, see Jelmer Vos, David Eltis, and David Richardson, “The Dutch in the Atlantic World: New Perspectives from the Slave Trade with Particular Reference to the African Origins of the Traffic,” in Eltis and Richardson, eds., *Extending the Frontiers*, 237-239; Eltis, “The British Transatlantic Slave Trade before 1714: Annual Estimates of Volume and Direction,” in Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion* (Gainesville, Fla., 1996), 182-205; Larry Gragg, “‘To Procure Negroes’: The English Slave Trade to Barbados, 1627-60,” *Slavery and Abolition*, XVI (1995), 65-84. On the prior understanding that Dutch slave deliveries dominated early British and French slave imports, see Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line*, 33, 66; Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, 59-67; David W. Galenson, *Traders, Planters, and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America* (New York, 1986), 13.

Negroes and other goods in English shipping from a Dutch Island called Statia [Saint Eustatius].” According to the company's agent at Nevis, the colonists hardly disguised their illegal trading: “Some of the chiefs of this Island and St. Christopher's often discourse of the greater convenience of buying Negroes from the Dutch on St. Eustatius than from the Company.”¹⁷ In 1688, Governor Nathaniel Johnson of the English Leeward Islands suggested

¹⁷ Petition of the RAC to the Committee for Trade and Plantations, July 19, 1687, CO 1/62, fol. 130, PRO. The crown also received reports that its finances were hurt by the export of sugar from the English Leeward Islands to Saint Eustatius in this trade, though the goods or slaves that English colonists received in exchange went unmentioned; see “An Account of How His Majesty Is Deprived of Revenues in the Leewards, 19 July 1687,” CO 1/62, fols. 224-225, PRO. See also Elizabeth Donnan, ed., Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America, 4 vols. (Washington D.C., 1930-1935), II, 241-242, 336-337. RAC agent at Nevis quoted in Bridenbaugh, No Peace Beyond the Line, 260.

Map 2.1: Principal colonies of the eastern Caribbean, *ca.* 1700

that the scale of such trading was significant, noting that he faced local opposition to the establishment of a Court of Exchequer in Saint Christopher due to this illegal slave trading interest. Johnson attributed the heel-dragging primarily to Joseph Crisp, a member of the colony's council, who also served as escheator (an overseer of crown-owned lands). According to Johnson, “the Royall Affrican Company represent him [Crisp] . . . as a great trader to the Dutch Islands, by the Sugars sent thither by stealth and Negro Slaves brought in return in the same manner.” Crisp's connections and influence within Saint Christopher likely facilitated his

contraband activities.¹⁸

Governor Johnson also alleged that English interlopers on the Royal African Company's monopoly relied on transshipment of Africans from one colony to another to smuggle slaves into his territory without detection. Expressing concern about Danish efforts to settle islands in his jurisdiction, Johnson insisted, "Whatever Islands are settled by the Danes will, as [Dutch] St. Thomas and St. Eustace are, be free ports of trade." This would, Johnson warned, "much encourage our English Interlopers to trade to Africa having the liberty of such ports as receptacles untill they can have a convenient opportunity of dispersing their Slaves in the Islands of this Government. . . . If they faile in that," the interlopers could join "in with the Danes for a Spanish trade." Some of these illicit merchants might have carried their captive Africans from Dutch or Danish islands to the English Leewards in the same ship that brought them across the Atlantic, but typically they were transshipped in smaller vessels. It was easier for English planters or colonial merchants to venture to the Dutch and Danish "free ports of trade" in small ships. Such purchasers could buy a few people and smuggle them back in small numbers, either avoiding detection by English authorities altogether or passing such Africans off as slaves purchased legally at some earlier date. Although they recognized such illegal trading, imperial officials in smaller English colonies lacked the naval power to enforce trade regulations. When Johnson wrote to the Board of Trade about allegations of settlers smuggling Africans from Dutch colonies into the Leeward Islands, he asked for orders but pointed out that "the attendance of a Man of Warr will be absolutely necessary for execution of them, and will in divers other respects be very usefull to His Maj'ties Service; [and for halting] the violation of the acts of trade and of the Royall Affrican Companies Charter." In the absence of law enforcement, transshipments

¹⁸ Nathaniel Johnson to the Committee for Trade and Plantations, Nevis, June 2, 1688, CO 1/64, fol. 331B, PRO.

from foreign colonies continued.¹⁹

Interlopers on the Royal African Company's monopoly were not alone in such clandestine intercolonial trade. The company's own employees occasionally defrauded the company through illegal transshipments, as well. In 1703, the company charged Captain Daniel Johnson, Jr., of the company's ship *St. Christopher*, with landing a cargo of African people at sparsely inhabited Turks Island in the Bahamas to sell some of them to smaller vessels headed to other English settlements. Johnson's intention was, allegedly, to sell some of the Africans on his own account without informing the company that the people had ever reached the Americas. To aid the investigation, Governor Nathaniel Johnson (now of South Carolina) sent a report to the Board of Trade based on testimony from sailors resident in his colony. He reported that, at Turks Island, the *St. Christopher* transferred captives to one vessel bound for Bermuda and to another bound for South Carolina, though he discovered no proof that Captain Johnson had sold the Africans for his own profit rather than the company's. Given that Turks Island was virtually uninhabited, it is hard to imagine another reason for Captain Johnson to deliver Africans there, unless the *St. Christopher* had been forced to stop for repairs. Colonies such as Bermuda and South Carolina in 1704 were precisely the type of backwaters where slaveholders looked to the black market to obtain workers, since neither colony received direct shipments from Africa at that date.²⁰

These same decades of the late seventeenth century, during which northern Europeans entered the transatlantic slave trade in ever greater numbers and Caribbean privateering declined outside times of declared war, also ushered in the so-called "Golden Age" of Caribbean piracy. A

¹⁹ Ibid., fol. 333.

²⁰ Donnan, ed., Documents, IV, 250-253.

burgeoning slave trade, declining privateering, and growing piracy were not unrelated. The line between piracy and privateering was always blurry, and many a privateer crossed it when European diplomats formally declared peace. Profiting greatly from the capture of foreign merchant ships during wars, many privateers continued their pillaging after peace was declared, losing their state's blessing and becoming pirates. The growth of the transatlantic slave trade contributed to the rise of piracy less directly but no less significantly. Slave trading vessels carried some of the largest crews of any ships plying the Atlantic for the simple reason that they were floating prisons as well as ships of trade. Perhaps as many as one in ten transatlantic voyages faced violent resistance from their African prisoners, and merchants paid for large crews to control them. For the next stage of these ships' voyages, these large crews were unnecessary. Sugar and tobacco shipped from the Americas back to Europe were far less prone to rebellion. From the merchants' perspective, once their sailors had survived the hazards of trade on the African Coast and the Middle Passage, most of them had outlived their usefulness. As a result, many a sailor lost his job in the Caribbean after the Middle Passage, gradually giving rise to a large body of unemployed seamen in Caribbean ports. They often had few prospects and a grudge against merchants. It was a recipe for piracy.²¹

Regardless of where they came from, the Caribbean pirates of the “golden age”—roughly 1670 to 1720—often stole people. The infamous pirate William Kidd delivered Africans to New York in 1699. Likewise, in 1704, a “Vendue Master” in Boston announced the sale by auction of “A Negro Boy named Jack, Alias Emmanuel who was a slave Taken from the

²¹ For the estimate that 10 percent of transatlantic voyages experienced insurrection, see David Richardson, “Shipboard Revolts, African Authority, and the Atlantic Slave Trade,” *WMQ*, 3d Ser., LVIII (2001), 72. On privateers transitioning to piracy, see Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston, 2004), 6-8. With the decline of piracy by the 1720s, merchant ships in general started sailing with smaller crews; see Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (New York, 1987), 74-75. On transatlantic slave ships' legally and illegally discharging sailors upon reaching the Caribbean, see Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York, 2007), 251-253; Emma Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors and Their Captive Cargoes, 1730-1807* (New York, 2006), 202-211.

Portuguese by the Pirate Sen'r Quares and his crew in the Brig. *Anna* and brought into this port.”²² Since the Portuguese mainly delivered Africans to Brazil and Spanish America, the *Anna* probably seized Jack in the Caribbean. In November 1716, *HMS Scarborough*, stationed at Barbados, heard reports of a pirate vessel under a Captain Kennedy using St. Croix as a base for numerous attacks on Caribbean shipping. Among others, Kennedy's crew captured the *Greyhound Galley* of London en route to Jamaica from the Gold Coast. The pirates stole forty presumably Akan captives and some gold from the *Greyhound* before allowing her to continue. Setting out in pursuit, the *Scarborough* surprised and cornered the pirates in a sheltered cove at St. Croix and “cannonaded for several Hours.” Desperate, the pirates “run a-ground” trying to slip past their pursuers out to sea. They then decided to escape in their ship's small boats but struggled with how to manage their African captives in flight. After putting half of the captives in one boat, the pirates “quitted their Ship, and set her on Fire, with 20 Negroes in her, who were all burnt; 19 of the Pyrates made their Escape in a small Sloop, but the Captain and the rest, with 20 Negroes, betook to the Woods, where 'twas probable they might starve, for we never heard what became of them afterwards.” Tragically, enslaved Africans who fell into the hands of pirates were often treated not only as commodities but also as liabilities in the desperate moments when the law intervened.²³

Edward Teach—Blackbeard—also plundered Africans from slave traders. Teach served in several privateers during Queen Anne's War, then initiated his pirate career as a

²² McManus, *Black Bondage in the North*, 20; Donnan, ed., *Documents*, III, 19.

²³ Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 66-67. *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, accessed August 2010 (www.slavevoyages.org), lists a John Evans as captain of a vessel called *Greyhound* that delivered captives from the Gold Coast to Jamaica in late 1716 or early 1717 (Voyage ID no. 78305), and again from an unknown African port to Jamaica in 1718 (Voyage ID no. 76593), lending credibility to this letter. It is certainly interesting to note that, according to the *Voyages* website, the *Greyhound* left Africa in 1716 with 273 captives but delivered only 236 to Kingston. Although losing 37 captives to disease on the Middle Passage was by no means unheard-of, losing them to pirates remains a distinct possibility and meshes quite well with Johnson and Evans's estimate that the pirates stole 40 captives.

lieutenant under Captain Benjamin Hornigold. Teach took charge of his own ship in 1717, when Hornigold's crew captured a French slave-trading vessel near Martinique. The fate of the Africans from that vessel is unknown, but Teach converted the “Guinea-man” into a pirate ship, renaming her *Queen Anne's Revenge*. Blackbeard's *Queen Anne* took her “revenge” on Englishmen as well as their enemies. Over the next year, Blackbeard captured dozens of vessels in various parts of the Caribbean before moving northeast along the coast of North America. Teach and his crew plundered several ships bound for Charleston in 1718, including “a Brigantine with 14 Negroes aboard; all which being done in the Face of the Town, struck a great Terror to the whole Province of *Carolina*.” Shortly thereafter, Teach's crew “Robbed an English Brigantine comeing from Guinea,” bound for Virginia. Like many pirates, Teach carried his contraband to more remote parts, sailing for relatively undeveloped North Carolina, where he hoped to sell the African captives away from prying eyes. His vessel ran aground, however, and Teach “Surrendered himself upon the King's pardon to the Governour of North Carolina,” Charles Eden. The British crown spearheaded a campaign to end piracy at that time, offering pirates clemency from colonial governors if they surrendered and swore to mend their evil ways. Teach—at least nominally—seized that opportunity, but the surrender proved controversial. Virginia's governor, Alexander Spotswood, objected to the terms, accusing Eden of harboring pirates and profiting from their trade.²⁴

The controversy is illustrative of pirates' role in the slave trade of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Not all colonies had equal access to Atlantic trade in

²⁴ Donald G. Shomette notes pirates under Benjamin Hornigold capturing a French slaver near Saint Vincent, but where they took the Africans on board is unclear; see Shomette, *Pirates on the Chesapeake: Being a True History of Pirates, Picaroons, and Raiders on Chesapeake Bay, 1610-1807* (Centreville, Md., 1985), 194. For the vessel off Charleston, see Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 74. For the vessel off Virginia, see Alexander Spotswood to Charles Eden, Nov. 7, 1718, Lee family papers, 1638-1867, section 76, folder 1, MSS 1 L51 fol. 109, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

general or to shipments of enslaved Africans in particular. Those colonies underserved by legal trade often proved willing to deal with pirates. Various colonies found themselves in that position at different stages in their development, and North Carolina certainly struggled to attract slave traders in the first half of the eighteenth century. As former Governor George Burrington would complain in a 1736 report on North Carolina's ports, a lack of overseas trade prevented the delivery of exploitable Africans on any meaningful scale, despite strong demand. "It is a great misfortune to the people of North Carolina," Burrington moaned, "that they buy and sell at the second hand" in virtually all branches of commerce. This was especially problematic in the slave trade because "the planters are obliged to go into Virginia and South Carolina to purchase [slaves] where they pay a Duty on each Negroe, or buy the refuse, distemper'd or refractory Negroes brought into the Country from New England and the Islands, which are Sold at excessive Rates." It was precisely such underdeveloped trade that made colonists in many colonial backwaters willing to deal with and harbor pirates. It was no accident that Blackbeard appealed to the governor of such a colony for his pardon.²⁵

Regardless of Eden's motives in granting the pardon, within months, reports reached Virginia of Teach's continued depredations despite his pledge to reform, spurring Spotswood to take matters into his own hands. According to a complaint filed by North Carolina officials, Spotswood ordered several naval vessels "to Surprize and kill the men [Teach's crew] within the

²⁵ George Burrington to the Commissioners of His Majesty's Customs, July 27, 1736, CO 5/295, fols. 29-35, PRO. Burrington noted the role of New England in supplying slaves because merchants from that region controlled the trade between North Carolina and the West Indies until the mid-eighteenth century. See also Donnan, ed., Documents, IV, 236. Numerous North American colonies were accused of harboring and trading with pirates in the late seventeenth century, but by the time of the English crown's crackdown on piracy in the 1710s and 1720s, it tended to be the more economically marginal colonies that were most willing to trade with pirates; see Hughson, Carolina Pirates, 39, 52-59. David J. Starkey argues that piracy "tended to emerge and thrive at the junctures when disequilibria were evident between demand and supply," which accurately describes the situation of most English colonies (besides Barbados and eventually Jamaica) vis-à-vis the slave trade until the eighteenth century. The discrepancy between supply and demand for slaves persisted for many colonies well into the eighteenth century; see Starkey, "Pirates and Markets," in Pennell, ed., Bandits at Sea, 107.

Country of Carolina, and to Seize the goods [including African people], and to bring them away to Virginia, where he had them condemned as Pyrat's goods.” Blackbeard's crew put up a spirited resistance but were outgunned by the Virginians. Blackbeard himself fell in the fighting, and the Virginia fleet reportedly sailed home in triumph with numerous prisoners to stand trial and “*Black-beard's* Head still hanging at the Bolt-sprit End.” Suggesting a self-interested economic motive for Spotswood's actions, the North Carolina protest alleged that the contraband (both goods and enslaved people) was “not put into the hands of the Kings Officers as it ought to be, but imediately into his own [Spotswood's] hands.” Regardless of the veracity of such allegations—or Spotswood's countercharge that Eden was soft on piracy—the Africans in the case experienced a disorienting, terrifying series of moves in the Americas. Their forced migrations were dictated not only by supply and demand in the various colonies but by piracy, armed skirmishes, and political squabbles.²⁶

Teach's grisly demise was part of a dramatic end to the golden age of piracy, as concerted military efforts to protect Atlantic shipping decimated pirates' numbers by the 1720s. But continued incidents of slave theft on the high seas in these waning years attest to the brigands' interest in profiting from the slave trade. In the year of Teach's death, the pirate crew of Captain Charles Vane also captured a slaver bound for Charleston, with more than ninety captive Africans on board. Vane ordered several of his pirates aboard the slaver to take control of her, but these men simply used the opportunity to escape Vane's crew and claim the same pardon that Blackbeard had disingenuously sought earlier in the year. This subset of Vane's crew sailed the slave ship into a nearby South Carolina harbor, where they “sent an Express to the Governor, to know if [they] might have the Benefit of his Majesty's Pardon, and they would surrender

²⁶ Johnson, General History of the Pyrates, 83; Philip Ludwell, “Animadversion on a Paper Entituled, ‘Virginia Addresses,’ Printed in Philadelphia,” 1719, Lee family papers, section 61, Mss1 L51 fol. 81.

themselves to his Mercy, with the Sloops and Negroes.” The pardon was granted, and the African prisoners returned to the merchants who claimed the right to sell them to area planters.²⁷

Likewise, Captain John Rackam and his crew—which included the famous women pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read—faced trial in 1720 for numerous acts of piracy, including a charge that they “did, Piratically, and feloniously, set upon, board, break, and enter, a certain Merchant Scooner, called *Neptune*” bound from Jamaica to an unknown destination. From the *Neptune*, they allegedly “did Steal . . . her Tackle, Apparel, and Furniture, of the Value of Fifty Pounds of Current Money of Jamaica, and also Ten Negroe Slaves, of the value of Three hundred Pounds of like current Money.” The value of the enslaved people relative to the goods in this case speaks to their attraction for pirates. Finally, in 1724, unnamed pirates stopped the *Princess Galley* as she entered Barbados from Africa, stealing ten captives and several cannon before allowing the ship to continue.²⁸

Some scholars have suggested that pirates avoided stealing and selling enslaved Africans due to a sense of shared working-class interest with the captives of the slave trade, but the evidence, especially from the Caribbean, contradicts that claim. Pirates operating on the West African Coast did sometimes eschew enslaved people as prizes, preferring to steal the rum, textiles, firearms, and metals that Europeans sold to African merchants in exchange for people. The enthusiasm of pirates in the Caribbean for stealing slaves, however, suggests that any reluctance to steal people on the African coast was probably more logistical than moral. Enslaved Africans simply carried more monetary value after they had survived the Atlantic

²⁷ Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 137; Hughson, *Carolina Pirates*, 91-3; Rediker, *Villains of all Nations*, 127-147; Robert C. Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates* (Cambridge, Mass, 1986).

²⁸ Baer, *British Piracy*, III, 21-26; Cordingly, *Under the Black Flag*, 104-105. Other pirates documented stealing slaves include Captain John Quelch on the coast of Brazil in 1704 (Baer, *British Piracy*, II, 267-268); and Walter Kennedy, whose crew split up in 1721 and reportedly set their pirate ship *Rover* adrift. It was later found with nine Africans alone on board (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 210).

crossing. Pirates on the African Coast would need to manage these captives across the ocean for the most advantageous sale, a task they would have preferred to avoid.²⁹

Managing enslaved Africans to market was no minor consideration, as the pirate Francis Spriggs learned in 1725. Spriggs and his crew captured the “Sloop Humber,” a South Sea Company vessel commanded by Captain Dursey, on which the company “had Ship’d 60 Neg’s for the Havana” from Jamaica. Spriggs and his cohort transferred the captive Africans to their own vessel as prizes (along with Dursey as a prisoner, possibly intended for ransom).

Unfortunately for all involved, Spriggs lacked the foresight to anticipate the abundance of provisions required to sustain both pirates and prizes until they reached a safe port. Eventually their plight became so dire that when Spriggs's crew pillaged another vessel, they forced the captured ship to take ten of the hungry African captives. Soon thereafter, Spriggs's band captured “the Brigantine Friendship of Boston,” and after looting it, the pirates sent Captain Dursey aboard with permission to take “as many of the Negroes as he would.” Dursey only “took 28 . . . because the Pyrate would allow him no more than 2 Barrels of Flower for Supporting them to Boston (to w'ch place the Brigantine was bound).” With 29 new passengers and few additional supplies to support them, the *Friendship* cut short its voyage at Charleston, but “bringing in

²⁹ Cordingly counters the notion that pirates did not trade in slaves, stating that the “the typical plunder” was less likely to be gold or silver than “bales of silk and cotton, some barrels of tobacco, an anchor cable, some spare sails, the carpenter's tools, and half a dozen black slaves” (Under the Black Flag, xiv). Peter Earle emphasizes pirates' important role in the slave trade of southeast Africa (Earle, The Pirate Wars [London, 2003], 113-115). Rediker notes that pirates sometimes rejected many types of goods (and enslaved people) if they lacked a way to fence them, but at other times, they would seize and sell slaves (Villains of All Nations, 34, 54, 88, 189 n. 31). For the argument that pirates preferred not to deal in slaves, see Kenneth J. Kinkor, “Black Men under the Black Flag,” in Pennell, ed., Bandits at Sea, esp. 198; Peter Linebaugh and Rediker cast the egalitarianism of pirate crews (“hydrarchy,” in their telling) as a “danger...to the increasingly valuable slave trade,” highlighting piracy’s disruption of African trade while deemphasizing pirates' interest in seizing slaves as loot (Linebaugh and Rediker, The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic (Boston, 2000), 168-169. Charles Johnson likely contributed to the view that pirates opposed the slave trade with his creation of the fictional French pirate Captain Misson, who captured vessels on the coast of Africa but refused to take slaves. Misson gave rousing speeches to his men about the immorality of slavery. Most of Johnson's accounts of pirates were pieced together (and romantically embellished) from newspaper reports, trial transcripts, and correspondence with seamen, but the Misson story was apparently pure invention that the author “gave the illusion of history” (Johnson, General History of the Pyrates, 383-418; for the editor's interpretation that Misson was fictional, see 683).

[only] 25 of the Negroes, the other 3 dying in the passage.” Starving captives serve as another reminder of the particular vulnerability of enslaved people to supply shortages and other dangers at sea. It also explains why wiser pirates than Spriggs were wary of stealing enslaved people if they lacked nearby opportunities to sell them.³⁰

For pirates on the African Coast, stealing people was a problematic business, given the brigands' lack of welcome at European trade forts and their distance from American markets where slaves held most value. The goods Europeans traded to acquire Africans, by contrast, were easily portable and could be fenced to a wider range of customers right there in Africa. None of this should suggest that pirates never cooperated with African people or accepted men of African descent into their crews. Pirates were nothing if not opportunistic. But the evidence from the Caribbean suggests that pirates simply preferred to steal slave cargoes close to their intended ports of sale. The case of Bartholomew Roberts (Black Bart, the most successful of the Golden Age pirates in terms of number of captured ships) illustrates that pirates' minimal theft of slaves in African waters reflected their distance from markets rather than antislavery sentiments. In January 1722, Roberts's fleet entered the harbor at Ouidah, in the Bight of Benin, cornering a dozen slavers nearly ready to embark on the Middle Passage. Rather than flee with this valuable but problematic quarry or free the slaves out of some sense of solidarity, Roberts mimicked the English Caribbean privateers of the sixteenth century: he ransomed the slaves (and ships) back to the merchants. Roberts held no sympathy for the captive Africans. When one of the slave traders—Captain Fletcher of the *Porcupine*—refused to pay the ransom to which the other slave traders had agreed, the pirates covered the deck of the *Porcupine* with tar and set her ablaze—with 80 African people still in the hold, “chained together in pairs. The wretched captives were

³⁰ Directors of the South Sea Company to Rigby and Pratter, Apr. 21, 1725, in South Sea Company Papers and Correspondence, 1711-1846, microfilm, Add. MSS, 25564, 216, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md.; see also Johnson, General History of the Pyrates, 356-357.

‘under the miserable choice of perishing by fire or water: those who jumped over-board were seized by sharks, a voracious fish plenty in this Road, and in their sight, torn limb from limb alive.’”³¹

The rampant thefts of enslaved Africans in American waters raise questions about the scale of this black market for black laborers, but the traffic is difficult to quantify, owing to the illegality of piracy and interloping and also the paucity of reliable port records for the seventeenth century. Anecdotal reports, however, suggest that such activity was considerable. Certainly by the late seventeenth century, piracy and privateering had reached a significant scale. As the governor of Jamaica noted in 1687, when beseeching the crown to station two naval frigates at his island to protect merchant vessels, “The South Seas are now more than ever infested with Pirates and Privatiers.”³²

Furthermore, the growth of the black population in many English colonies before 1700 or 1720 is difficult to explain without giving weight to the importance of plundered slaves. A comparison of the growth of enslaved populations with data on direct deliveries of enslaved people from Africa is striking. In 1672, Governor William Stapleton of the English Leewards reported that in recent years, the monopoly company had delivered no slaves to Nevis, Montserrat, or Antigua, and that each island had received only about three hundred slaves from independent traders who had purchased licenses from the company. Yet these colonies were home to nearly four thousand African people. Likewise, the first known vessel delivering slaves

³¹ Cordingly, *Under the Black Flag*, 212; see also *Voyages*, accessed August 2011, Voyage ID no. 75996. Howell Davis offers another example of a pirate who did steal slaves on the African coast (Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 175). On the multiethnic composition of many pirate crews, see Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, 9; Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-Headed Hydra*, 164-167. On the more fluid race relations that prevailed in the maritime world of the Atlantic compared to land-based society, see W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), esp. chap. 4.

³² Proposal of the duke of Albemarle, governor of Jamaica, Apr. 15, 1687, CO 1/62, fols. 99-100, PRO. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Europeans often referred to the Caribbean as the “South Sea,” although the phrase is more commonly applied to the southern Pacific Ocean.

directly from Africa to South Carolina arrived in 1710, but by then, the colony was home to more than four thousand people of African descent. Documented deliveries from Africa account for only three-quarters of New York's more than two thousand slaves by 1700. Pennsylvania housed approximately two thousand black people by 1720, but no known vessels from Africa had reached the colony except perhaps a 1684 vessel of unknown origin that delivered one hundred fifty enslaved people. New Jersey was also home to more than two thousand Africans by 1720 without having received a single African shipment. Finally, more than fifteen hundred people of African descent resided in New England by 1700, yet known direct African shipments had delivered fewer than three hundred slaves. Legal transshipments of enslaved people from English colonies that received captives directly from Africa in the seventeenth century, most notably Barbados, account for some of this black population growth, but pirates and privateers also played a sizeable role.³³

What were the implications of these black- and gray-market trades—piracy, privateering, interloping—to the development of slavery and the slave trade in English America? Most obviously, these illegal activities diverted thousands of African people from the normal routes of

³³ For population estimates, see Robert V. Wells, The Population of the British Colonies in America before 1776: A Survey of Census Data (Princeton, N.J., 1975), 112, 135, 143; John J. McCusker, Rum and the American Revolution: The Rum Trade and the Balance of Payments of the Thirteen Continental Colonies (New York, 1989), II, 566, 568; Ira Berlin, Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 369. On the discrepancy between slave trade data and population growth in the English Leewards, Carl and Roberta Bridenbaugh note the numbers gap, asking rhetorically, “Who can question that they [the Africans] were procured from nearby Statia in Dutch sloops? How else can this phenomenon be explained?” (No Peace Beyond the Line, 254.) In addition to Dutch interlopers, I would add English interlopers buying slaves at Dutch islands and pirates and privateers as parts of the explanation. On South Carolina, see Voyages, accessed August 2010, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces?yearFrom=1601&yearTo=1701&mjlsptimp=21300>. Wood states unequivocally that the one thousand Africans in South Carolina by 1695 “came from the West Indies” (Black Majority, 131, 143-145). For the 1684 shipment to Pennsylvania, see Gary B. Nash, “Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Philadelphia,” WMQ, XXX (1973), 223-256, esp. 225. For transatlantic deliveries to northern colonies before 1720, see Voyages, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces?yearFrom=1514&yearTo=1720&mjlsptimp=20100.20300.20400.20500.20600.20800.20900>.

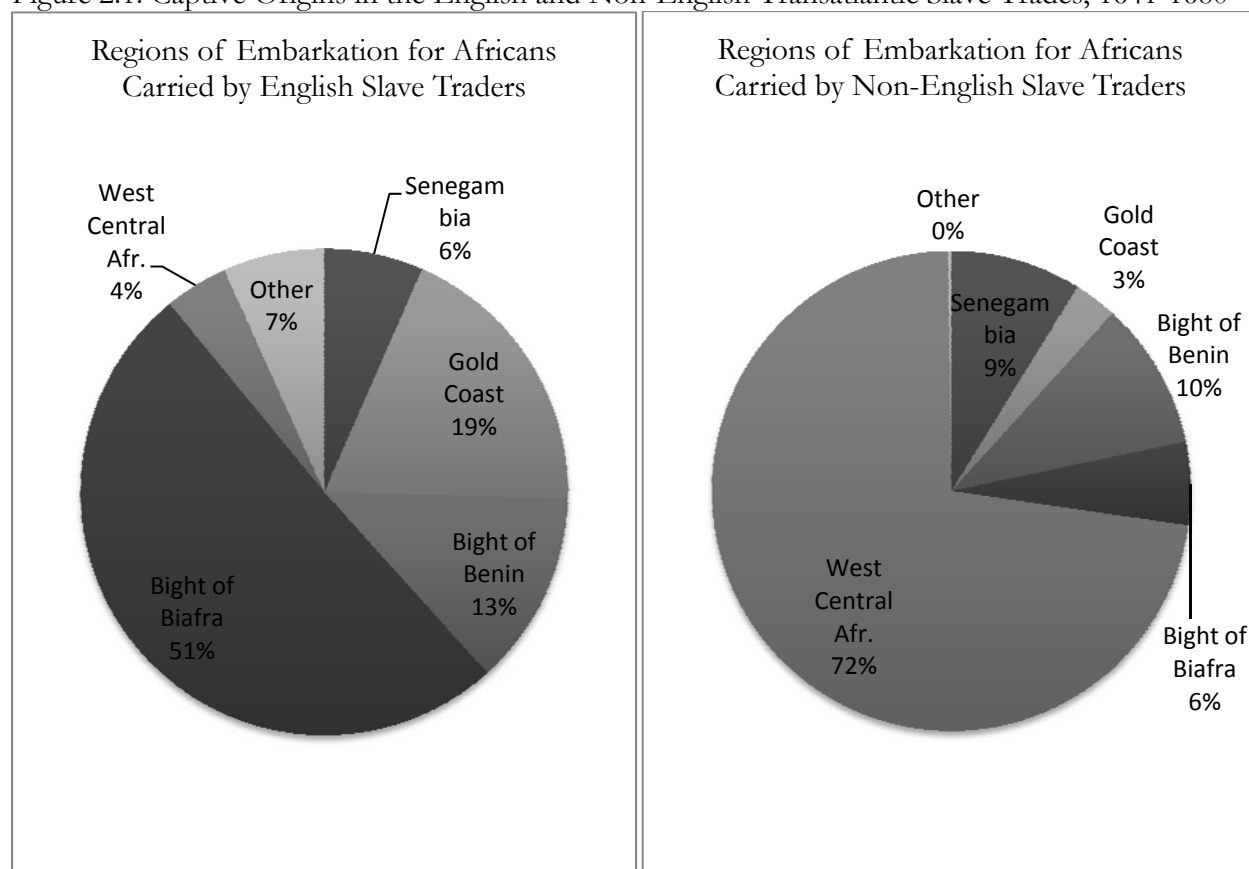
the slave trade, serving as an unconventional distribution network to a broader range of American destinations. Often the voyages themselves were violent and chaotic, as Africans were forcibly moved from ship to ship and their captors struggled to evade authorities and enemies. Haphazard captures and the security concerns of black-market sellers mitigated against a routinized trade along well-worn paths, but within the randomness were patterns. One key attribute that often determined whether colonists were willing to deal with pirates or interlopers was a lack of access to more regular or legitimate trade. Where slave trading was concerned, especially in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, this meant that black-market sellers often headed to mainland North America or to the minor English Caribbean islands to offload slaves. Settlers in the colonies that clamored against the Royal African Company's monopoly opened their harbors to illicit slave sellers, asking few questions about where these dealers or their captives came from. Some historians argue that such planters, starved for coercible labor, “regarded the interlopers as the Robin Hoods of the Caribbean,” and the same might also be said of pirates and privateers in some quarters. Hence, Blackbeard appeared in the backwater of North Carolina, and reports circulated in 1698 of unnamed pirates, who “delivered slaves to the Hudson Valley estate of Frederick Philipse.” In other words, piracy and privateering were particularly important to the growth of slavery in those colonies that were not important centers of the slave trade. Many English colonies got their first tastes of slavery, not because they requested shipments of Africans, but because pirates or privateers turned up with plundered people. Though difficult to assess, this was an important factor contributing to individual colonies' decisions to adopt slavery.³⁴

From the captives' perspective, capture by pirates or privateers complicated their

³⁴ 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); Bridenbaugh, No Peace Beyond the Line, 260; McManus, Black Bondage in the North, 20.

migrations, threatening them with additional dangers and cultural isolation. On one hand, corsairs and privateers often captured whole shiploads of Africans together, so the rerouting of their journeys did not necessarily add to the risk of separation from shipmates, kinsmen, or people of shared language and background. On the other hand, transshipment via pirate or privateer added to culture shock. In many cases, the new captors would have spoken different languages than the slave traders who had ferried captives across the Atlantic. More important, European traders usually purchased slaves at African ports frequented by their countrymen, so Africans captured by privateers of a rival crown found themselves sent in a different direction than the one traveled by most captives from their region. Transfer from one empire's domain to another increased the likelihood of settling among people from unfamiliar parts of Africa, with whom they shared less in terms of culture, language, and religion. For instance, English traders in the mid-seventeenth century supplied England's Caribbean colonies with people primarily from the Bight of Biafra, with the Gold Coast and Bight of Benin as the most important supplementary regions. Meanwhile, slave traders of other nationalities focused on different parts of the African Coast in the period; West Central Africans from the Congo-Angola region accounted for nearly three out of every four captives in the non-English trade. As a result, pirates and privateers who stole slaves from non-English traders for sale in the English Caribbean were likely to carry West Central Africans to colonies where people of other backgrounds predominated, diversifying the slave quarters and placing the West Central Africans at particular risk of isolation (figure 2.1). For the mainland North American colonies, the contrast between the populations arriving in the English slave trade and via piracy and privateering would have been especially stark. In the decades of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when

Figure 2.1: Captive Origins in the English and Non-English Transatlantic Slave Trades, 1641-1680



Sources: On English slave traders supplying England's Caribbean colonies in the mid-seventeenth century, see Voyages (accessed 9/17/2012): <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces?yearFrom=1641&yearTo=1680&flag=3.5&disembarkation=305.304.307.306.309.308.311.310.301.302.303>; on slave traders of other nationalities in the same time period see Voyages (accessed 1/27/2013): <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces?yearFrom=1641&yearTo=1680&flag=1.2.4.6.7>. If slave-trading voyages to Brazil are excluded as less likely to fall victim to English pirates or privateers, the proportion of West Central Africans declines significantly but still remains larger than the proportion of the migration from any other African region.

North America's enslaved population began to grow rapidly, English slave traders brought almost no West Central Africans to the mainland, instead drawing chiefly from the Bight of Biafra and Senegambia. By contrast, West Central Africans accounted for well over 40 percent of the total captive population forced across the Atlantic in this period by slave traders of all nations, so Congolese and Angolan people likely appeared more frequently among the captives

delivered by pirates and privateers (figure 2.2).³⁵

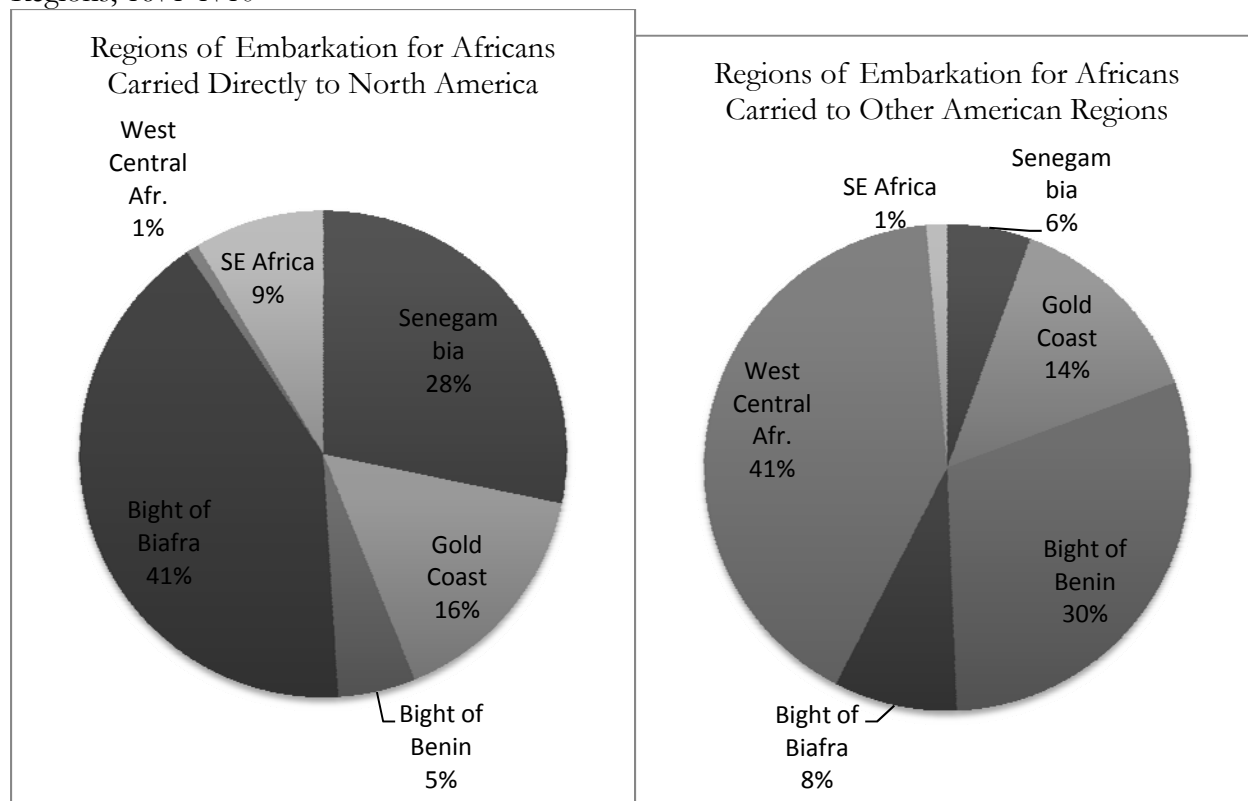
Capture in the dangerous world of piracy and privateering also increased the risks of bodily harm for those caught in the crossfire of battle. As the burning of the *Porcupine* and the shortage of food under Captain Spriggs attest, theft on the high seas created volatile situations in which pirates or traders might deem human commodities expendable. African men, women, and children could be sacrificed as pawns in power plays or abandoned when flight and survival trumped anticipated profits. Enslaved people seized by corsairs might also have faced increased risk of sexual exploitation. Charles Johnson's rendition of the adventures of pirate captain Edward England notes that when England's crew plagued the West African Coast near Cape Coast Castle in 1719, "they liv'd there very wantonly for several Weeks, making free with the Negroe Women, and committing such outrageous Acts, that they came to an open Rupture with the Natives." A slave ship captain taken over by England's crew offered a similar account, reporting that the pirates "diverted themselves" with the enslaved women on board before abandoning the ship. One historian of pirates argues that such sexual abuse was status- or race-specific, observing that most enslaved Africans seized by pirates were "sold as booty, . . . [and] female slaves were often abused and raped, a fate shared only rarely by white female captives." Of course, violations also occurred aboard nonpiratical slave trading vessels, but the transfer to captivity aboard a new ship under a crew that already operated outside the law might have escalated the danger of abuse.³⁶

In the summer of 1717, a group of about twenty Africans who had recently survived the Atlantic crossing to Barbados found themselves purchased by a merchant who loaded them aboard a

³⁵ For more on the significance of the large number of West Central Africans in the overall slave trade during the prime era for privateering and piracy, see Heywood and Thornton, *Central Africans*, ix, 8-48.

³⁶ Johnson, *General History of the Pyrates*, 117; Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, 138; Earle, *Pirate Wars*, 172.

Figure 2.2: Captive Origins in the Transatlantic Slave Trades to North America and Other American Regions, 1671-1710



Sources: On the composition of the English slave trade to North America, 1671 to 1710, see *Voyages*: <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces?yearFrom=1671&yearTo=1710&flag=3.5&disembarkation=205.204.201.203.202> (accessed 9/17/2012); and for the composition of the overall slave trade, 1671 to 1710, see *Voyages* (accessed 1/27/2013): <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces?yearFrom=1671&yearTo=1710&disembarkation=402.403.401.404.405.804.702.805.703.701.801.802.803.305.304.307.100.306.309.308.311.310.705.501.704.502.600.900.301.302.303>.

sloop called *Mary* that ferried them back out to sea, headed north. The captives shared space in their new vessel with barrels of rum and sugar. After about a fortnight at sail, the sloop steered these captives toward a second New World landfall, aiming for the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina, but they never made it. Nearing the inlet, the *Mary*'s sailors suddenly erupted in commotion as another, larger vessel rapidly approached. The captives heard a blast of cannon fire from this other ship—a warning shot—and then the *Mary* dropped her sails and slowed to a crawl. Soon a boat from this second vessel carried a crew to board the *Mary*. These new arrivals

took control of the *Mary*, sailed her some distance off, and dropped anchor.

Eventually, after the pirates had plundered another vessel bound into Charleston, the *Mary* put to sea again, carrying her captives farther north. The Africans had new captors, but their vessel remained the same, and they shared the same cramped space with barrels of trade goods. After a short passage, the *Mary* glided into a small inlet in North Carolina. This was no bustling port like the one they had entered at Bridgetown, Barbados, or Charleston, but rather a remote, unpopulated cove. Here they boarded small boats that ferried them to shore, along with the rum and sugar. Then, strangely, their captors “careen'd” the sloop “and then burnt her.” After a convoluted journey, the weary prisoners had finally disembarked in North America.³⁷

Unfortunately, the fate of these African travelers after touching land is uncertain, but presumably their pirate captor, Stede Bonnet, sold them to area planters or merchants willing to trade with outlaws. These migrants' experience illustrated the patterns in the black market and the changes afoot in the slave trading economy by the end of the “golden age” of piracy. For one thing, their erratic route through the slave trade was typical of the black market. Changes of ownership at sea via theft and the need of black-market dealers to move away from the prying eyes of colonial officials led to unusual itineraries. These stolen captives endured a similar fate to many others taken by pirates: their change of ownership steered them onto a new course—away from a major port and toward a backwater of the slave economy.

That Bonnet's crew stole these Africans from an intercolonial slave trader bound

³⁷ This narration of these slaves' “final passage” is pieced together from three primary sources: The Tryals of Major Stede Bonnet (London, 1719), rpt. in Baer, British Piracy, II, 327; Johnson, General History of the Pyrates, 96; and NOSL, CO 5/508, PRO. The quoted material appears identically in both Tryals and the General History (Johnson borrowed liberally from many published accounts of piracy). Those sources do not name the captured slave trading vessel Mary but simply identify her as “a Sloop with Negroes, Rum, and Sugar, Capt. Joseph Palmer from Barbadoes.” South Carolina import records for 1717, however, show an arrival earlier that same year of a Captain Joseph Palmer with a sloop called Mary, full of rum, sugar, and nineteen slaves from Barbados. Since all the other details of vessel type, route, and cargo match, I have assumed that the same Joseph Palmer repeated the voyage in the same ship later that year, when he, his crew, and their captives fell prey to the pirates.

from Barbados to South Carolina, however, was a sign of changing times. By the early eighteenth century, several elements converged to minimize the role of pirates, privateers, and interlopers in slave distribution in the Americas. As colonial societies matured, governments and merchants seeking law and order promoted (and funded) crackdowns on piracy; the reason we know about the African migrants aboard the *Mary* is that Bonnet was captured not long after landing these people in North Carolina. He hanged at Charleston in 1718. Interlopers were rendered obsolete less violently. In 1698, England rescinded the Royal African Company's monopoly, opening the transatlantic slave trade to all subjects of the empire. Thereafter, only foreign traders had to worry about smuggling slaves into English colonial ports. In addition, the black-market slave trade became less important owing to the growth of British Atlantic trade. The *Mary* represented this trend in two ways. First, by 1717, Barbados was importing enough slaves from Africa that such captives could be purchased at reasonable prices for reexport to other colonies. In fact, slave prices fell considerably in Barbados from the mid-seventeenth century to 1700 due to the increased supply. Second, commerce between various colonies gradually became regularized, and the slave trade was incorporated in the general intercolonial traffic. As this trading network grew and distributed enslaved Africans between colonies more efficiently, fewer colonists would look to the black market for black workers. As the eighteenth century wore on, the transshipment of slaves would increasingly become the role of merchants, not pirates.³⁸

³⁸ For another example of pirates' seizing an intercolonial slaver, see the account of pirate George Lowther's theft of Africans bound from Barbados to New England in 1722 (Johnson, General History of the Pyrates, 314). On falling prices in Barbados, see Larry Gragg, Englishmen Transplanted: The English Colonization of Barbados, 1627-1660 (New York, 2003), 103.