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Captain George Cannon: One Man's Role in the Conquest of Sugar in the Transatlantic Slave Trade

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Honors Thesis

CAPTAIN GEORGE CANNON: THE ROLE OF ONE MAN DURING THE CONQUEST OF SUGAR IN THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

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ABSTRACT

CAPTAIN GEORGE CANNON: THE ROLE OF ONE MAN DURING THE CONQUEST OF SUGAR IN THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

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Numerous scholars have examined the transatlantic slave trade in an attempt to understand the brutal system. However, there has been little research on the "Middle Passage," the part of the trade system when the enslaved would be boarded onto slaving vessels and forced to endure months of abuse till they landed in the Americas. This paper examines the logbook of Captain George Cannon of the slave ship *Iris* to understand the life of one of the slaving captains and how a seemingly regular British citizen could become such a key member of the system. It came down to political, economic, and social pressures. At the time of his sailing, the British Empire was about to abolish the slave trade which created a high demand for slaves. Furthermore, being a captain came with a potential for great economic increase, simultaneously, British society had completely morphed with the introduction of sugar which had created a massive demand for the good. Influences in his life were likely similar to those of other slave ship captains, creating a dynamic where critical members of the transatlantic slave trade were being affected by various pressures from all facets of life.

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While taste of sugar has never been described as mirroring the taste of blood, the two are inextricably linked through the transatlantic slave trade. Sugar emerged as the reigning crop of the transatlantic slave trade, produced in various regions from Africa to the Caribbean to Brazil. While it is indisputable that sugar had a massive impact on the transatlantic slave trade, the full effects of the slave trade on the current day remain hotly debated. One specific legacy under consideration is that of its causational effect on modern capitalism and those involved. Since the slave trade was far-reaching and an attempt to include every possible influencing factor would be near impossible for one paper, parameters can be set for an investigation into the effects of slavery. In an effort to understand the connection between sugar, slavery, and capitalism, this paper considers the voyages of the slave ship *Iris* in the waning days of Britain's transatlantic slave trade. Captained by Manx sailor George Cannon, the Iris journeyed from Liverpool, England to the Bight of Biafra in West Central Africa, and from there to Kingston, Jamaica, transporting some 1000 enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean. The journeys of Captain George Cannon can be retraced through the logbook he kept onboard the *Iris*. Long forgotten participants in the transatlantic slave trade have been the captains of the ships themselves, and it is in these hidden lives that the forces of the slave trade can be examined on an individual level. This essay will use Captain George Cannon offers a microhistory of a single slave ship. By examining his life, this essay will dive into the factors motivating the trade, and how they would convince one slave ship captain to uphold the brutal system.

Historiography

"*People employed variously"*[1]

The amount of scholarship on the transatlantic slave trade is innumerable. Having affected millions of lives with a legacy that lives on to this day, many of its facets have been examined and debated for hundreds of years. However, there is a small lapse in research regarding the Middle Passage. At the point where the enslaved stepped foot onto the slave ship for the first time to when they disembarked – assuming they had not died at sea – little is written. In the words of Sowande' M. Mustakeem, "In an attempt to recover the wooden world of slave ships and the personal narratives lost behind the numbers, a small yet growing body of scholarship…has begun to deepen the analysis of slavery by recentering the forcible sale and oceanic transport of African captives into the New World." [2] Scholarship on the individuals involved in the middle passage and their experiences there is limited.

In the past few decades, a few works have appeared to begin an attempt to rectify the forgotten experiences of those aboard the slave ship. Influential scholars in this growing field include Stephanie Smallwood, Robert Harms, Marcus Rediker, and Sowande' M. Mustakeem. Each have approached the gap in scholarship differently.

Stephanie Smallwood focuses on the act of enslavement within Africa and its implications. She examined the connection of the Gold Coast to the slave trade and the African peoples who were largely affected by it through the political, economic, and social consequences of those enslaved and those who benefitted from the system. In

[1] Naval Logbook of Captain George Cannon of the Iris, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT (hereafter cited as Logbook, Cannon) 162.

[2] Sowande M Mustakeem. 2016. Slavery at Sea : Terror, Sex, and Sickness in the Middle Passage. The New Black Studies Series. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. https://search-ebscohost-com.byu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=e025xna&AN=1423215&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

doing so, she analyzed the populations that created the African diaspora as it is today. Throughout her analysis, she does not shy away from the brutality directed to the enslaved during this part of their lives.

Robert Harms's scholarship focused on the notebook and journal of First Lieutenant Robert Durand's journey aboard a slave ship. He read the account and sought of further information of those people and places mentioned, trying to understand the process of the slave ship. Throughout his analysis of Druand's writings, Harms concludes that, "the slave trade was really a kaleidoscope of diverse national and local endeavors that was constantly changing over time." [3] He debunks the generalizations given about the slave trade and breaks down the specific motivations behind Durand's experience.

Swande' M. Mustakeem wrote a gut-wrenchingly detailed book on the horrors which awaited the enslaved once they arrived on a slaving vessel. She asserted that the oppression of the Africans aboard was another kind of slavery, one so deadly and grotesque, it can be set apart and studied as its own field. She discovered that the main actors aboard the ships were the captain, the crew, the doctor, and the enslaved.

Marcus Rediker wrote the *The Slave Ship: A Human History* which examines the steps a slave ship would take, through its captain or its crew, to complete the Middle Passage. He does not shy away from discussing the horrors the captain and crew enacted upon the enslaved aboard, but he focuses mainly on the actions of those in power aboard the ships.

With so much insightful research into the middle passage, one aspect of it is reenforced above all others: its brutality. Like Harms, this essay uses documents from

[3] Marcus Rediker, The Slave Ship A Human History (England: Penguin Books, 2008) 5.

Captain Cannon to understand what happened aboard his ship and focuses on his ship. Like Rediker, it will analyze the captain and examine the influences in his life. With the understanding of the horrors inflicted upon the enslaved and the chaos of being aboard the boat in general from these scholars, this essay will analyze how a seemingly regular British man would be involved, and the factors of why he would stay.

Captain George Cannon and His Logbook

"*Expended 195 yams and 3992; 8 of Bains and 210 remains"*[4]

George Cannon was born to Hugh and Eleanor Cannon in Peel, Isle of Man in 1766.[5] From a young age, Cannon aided his father in smuggling – a growing industry due to English tax laws of the time. As those laws were relaxed, Cannon found himself in need of further employment. Outfitted with nautical skills from his time as a smuggler and a student of a naval academy, Cannon served aboard several vessels, most prominently the slave ship *Iris*.

In 1798, George became captain of the *Iris* once his captain, John Spencer, died at sea. As captain, he completed the trade, going from Bonny, Africa to Kingston, Jamaica and back to Liverpool, England. In 1800, Captain Cannon completed another cycle through the transatlantic slave trade, this time travelling from Liverpool to an unspecified port in West Central Africa, and then back to Kingston. His final trip as captain occurred in 1803 which traced his familiar route from Liverpool to Bonny and then to an

[4] Logbook, Cannon, 100
[5] "George Cannon," Family Tree. September 19, 2020. https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/LKKM-P9L

unspecified port in the Bahamas.[6] Despite the uncertainties in the record, it is likely that his journeys all mirrored each other.

Little can be gleaned about the remainder of his life except for his descendants and rather notable death. George Cannon died at sea in 1811 as a privateer in the British navy while serving as a captain. According to family tradition, Cannon was the victim of a mutiny at the hands of his crew. Captain Cannon had nine children with his wife Leonora Callister, including a son who carried his name. Little George Cannon would grow up to move to America where his son, the grandson of Captain Cannon, would become an apostle and major voice in the Mormon community.[7]

One resource Captain Cannon left is his logbook which he kept while captaining the Iris. It consists of hundreds of pages containing basic information about the ship such as its speed, longitude, latitude, and small notes which he would keep. By utilizing his notes, it is possible to track the journey of the Iris and glean information about the ports where it docked such as the weather or other ships present. The longitude and latitude are useful in understanding a ship's approach to the areas, while the speed helps us conceptualize the capacity of the ship to transport its passengers. Often, the health of the ship is mentioned through maintenance on its sails. In refence to the vessel itself, Captain Cannon's logbook is an invaluable piece of history.

Between the recordings of the weather, speeds, and location of the ship, the logbook only occasionally mentions either the crew or the enslaved captives aboard. For example, when the sails needed repair, he wrote "People employed variously mending

[6] September 19, 2022, https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database
[7] "Journal Released of 19th-Century Mormon Leader George Q. Cannon", Church of Jesus Christ, April 14, 2016, https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/george-q-cannon-journal-release

sails." There is little indication as to whether the "people" he was referring to are the crew he captained or the captive Africans he had taken, or perhaps some combination of the two groups. The only explicit mentions of the enslaved population aboard the ship concerns sickness and, in a few instances, their deaths "at sea." Despite having ample information about the vessel and scant mentions of the actual occupants, Cannon's writings do not deviate from the norm when compared to other logbooks kept by slave ship captain.

Due to the lack of information on the captured Africans aboard, study of the transatlantic slave trade tends to focus on accessible records. The logbook of Captain Cannon sheds light upon the actions of a ship captain and how one individual could fit into a massive system. His life touched several important aspects of the slave trade which have affected modern life, those being the enslaved as well as the sugar trade.

Throughout the logbook, lack of details about its occupants is evident. Mentions of the crew are infrequent, and only occur in reference to them mending the ship. As for the other occupants, the enslaved aboard are mentioned only in relation to their health. One death of a woman is recorded in general terms and mentions of "eye problems" are written. It is clear these scant mentions of the enslaved are ways for the captain to study the health of the human chattel. Most of the findings he recorded had to do with this malady of the eyes. He wrote, "Several slaves complaining of Sore eyes and Some got better."[8] Whatever this issue was, it lasted several days. He continued with, "Several Slavs Complaining Of their eyes and 2 with sore Mouth, buried one man Slave."[9] Cannon noted how he perceived the enslaved to be feeling as the disease faded, writing that they

[8] Logbook, Cannon, 100
[9] Logbook, Cannon, 103

were in, "Good Spirits."[10] He was attentive enough to attempt to read the feelings of the enslaved, but provides little else.

At one point, he notes that exactly "Five Slaves Complain[ed.]"[11] No resolution to their protests is given, and aside from a single line about forcing all of the enslaved to stay below decks a few pages later, no more is said about them.

Culminating the brevity with which the crew and enslaved are recorded, the logbook excludes the only other member on the ship which can be confirmed to be aboard: the captain. As a key factor in the entire situation, Captain George Cannon is the largest missing piece in the logbook itself. It contains no specific mentions of his health, or how he was occupied. While it can be inferred that he was also "employed variously" when the ship needed mending, he never mentions himself.

An understanding of the captain of a slaving ship must be reached to have a glimpse of the potential of the lives aboard. The captain of a slaving ship was a massive figure of authority and power. He would be the one charged with hiring the crew, setting the course, purchasing as well as selling the enslaved people, and maintaining the health of the vessel. He created the entire environment of the ship and would use his power, "however he saw fit to maintain social order aboard the ship."[12] While the social order may not seem like a huge factor in the livelihoods of those aboard, those dozens of people spent months of their lives interacting with each other while confined in a ship which ranged in length, but rarely over a couple hundred feet long. They were forced into a form of incarceration which had never been seen. This environment determined how the

[10] Logbook, Cannon, 104
[11] Logbook, Cannon, 240
[12] Marcus Rediker, The Slave Ship A Human History (England: Penguin Books, 2008) 58.

Africans aboard turned into the desired slave's people in their destinations wanted. The captain was charged with selling them, and to do that, he had to change from the ones he purchased, to the ones for which buyers would clamor.

While Cannon's logbook excludes him, the actions of other slave ship captains and their crewmembers help create an outline of who he was, and what may have occurred aboard the *Iris*. For example, Captain John Newton is one of the most well recorded slave ship captains of his time. He tracked information about his crew, notably implying that several were little more than drunkards or men with nowhere else to turn. Caleb Godfrey of the slave ship *Hare*, another captain, gave a similar review of his own.[13] Between each assessment, the crews bare large resemblance to each other. There seems a running theme amongst the crews to be people of misfortune and desperate means. Cannon gave no such overview of his crew. However, Cannon bore some resemblance to his counterparts in that most were reminiscent of their crews: in need of money, a naval background, and scant other employment options. After all, they would have once started as members of the very crews they were describing in such negative terms.

When it came to addressing crewmembers individually, names were rarely given. Throughout Newton's notes, he mentioned specific members of the crew by occupation and how their skills were serving the ship at the time, such as "the carpenter."[14] This unnamed person was listed as having specifically built several sections of his ship.

Writings can be found from crew members of various other slave ships which embarked around the time of Iris, such as crew members aboard the Emilia and the

[13] Sean M. Kelly, *The Voyage of the Slave Ship Hare A Journey into Captivity from Sierra Leon to South Carolina* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016) 36.
[14] Rediker, *Slave Ship*, 164.

Hudibras. Better details of the lives of the crews and the enslaved can be found in these, such as in the writings of Dr. Thomas Trotter who attempted to speak to the enslaved women aboard his ship and even recorded their despondent reactions.[15] In these cases, specific names of the crewmembers can be found, They tended to observe more of the crew and enslaved interactions, as well as record feelings amongst the crew which were not always friendly towards the captains.

As for the enslaved aboard his ship, Newton had them numbered and would individually identify them by such. For several companies, this numbering system was employed by branding the enslaved and requiring of captains to uphold it.[16] This practice is undoubtably a method of accounting for the enslaved rather than a sign of seeing any of them as an actual individual.

A member of one of these companies was Captain Peter Blake of the *James*. Furthermore, Blake's notes on the enslaved Africans aboard his ship mirror Cannon's slightly more than Newton's. For Newton, little else is recorded about the enslaved except for occasional updates on the "cargo." Similar to Cannon, Blake made note of diseases onboard the ship. He wrote of the flux claiming the lives of a few Africans.[17] He took meticulous records of the deaths of the enslaved and what his thought as to its cause may be. He also would record from where that individual came. [18]In contrast, a clear cause of death behind the ones Cannon recorded is not given in his notes.

[15] Rediker, *Slave Ship*, 278-279.
[16] Rediker, *Slave Ship*, 268
[17] Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007) 137.
[18] Smallwood, *Saltwater* Slavery, 142.

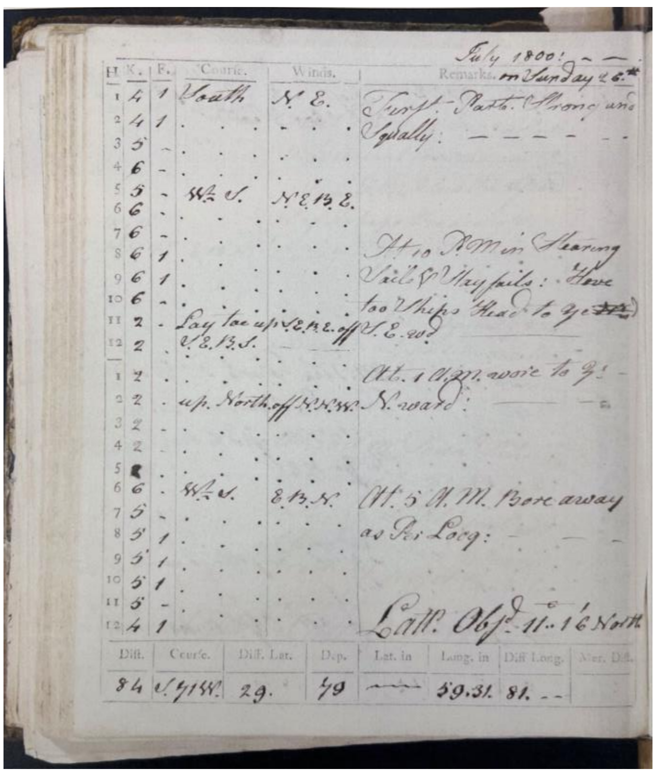
Another aspect of Captain's notes from which Captain Cannon differs, is the use of "I." Newton and Blake reference themselves throughout their notes, their reactions, and even their feelings at times. Notably here, Cannon's legacy is found in a logbook, while many of Newton's observations can be found in his journal. Whether Cannon used a journal is unknown. However, journals of other slave ship captains are available. While this is speculative, the pages of Blake's journals look to be of a similar make and format to a captain logbook, implying that he may have had a similar book to create a journal. Without belaboring the point, it appears possible for Cannon to have had one if he so desired. It could have been lost to time, or Cannon potentially never had one to begin with and relied solely on the logbook. If it was lost to time, then it speaks only to the period that an accounting record would be preserved rather than the thoughts of a single, lower-class man.

One incredibly notable difference between Cannon and his counterparts is the number of deaths aboard his ship. For whatever reason– be it a good doctor, generous rations, an especially hearty group of Africans, a rare kinder captain, or sheer luck – Cannon's journeys had much lower fatality rates than an average Atlantic crossing. Unfortunately, there is no information as to why that may be.

Captains during the Transatlantic Slave Trade often took notes of their ships. Those writings were largely concerned with the health of the ship and the health of the enslaved Africans, but the amount of detail and the kind of extra information added shifts from captain to captain. While the identities of the enslaved Africans aboard are near impossible to determine, the captains leave little more than their names and the discrepancies between their logs to create a picture of what may have occurred aboard

their ship. It creates scant and patchy scenes where no person aboard is truly identified beyond the rarely recorded name.

Even the captains of the slave ships are nearly forgotten in the records of the transatlantic slave trade. The system created a boom of unanimous lives in the enslaved, but it also consumed the identities of those of lower ranks who participated in it. The slave trade was more than a system for the Europeans to become wealthy on the backs of enslaved, it was a catalyst for the anonymity of those who helped run it as well.



(Figure 1: A page from Captain Cannon's logbook)[19][20]

George Cannon and Liverpool

[19] L. Tom Perry Collections. Captain Cannon Logbook. Brigham Young University
[20] Captain Cannon's logbook is currently held by his descendants, but a digital copy is available at Brigham Young University where it is being transcribed.

"Set Ye Prise for Liverpool"[21]

At the time of George Cannon's departures from Liverpool aboard the slave ship Iris, the economic system of England was already undergoing immense amounts of change. "English society was very slowly evolving toward a system of free labor [-]…the creation of a labor force that, lacking any access to productive property such as land, would have to sell its labor to the owners of the means of production."[22] At the beginning of the Eighteenth Century, the bare roots of capitalism were already beginning, one that would exclude slave labor in favor of workers.

At the time, part of Britain's economy was still being shaped by the overall Transatlantic Slave Trade. "Estimates suggest that these trades grew substantially… reaching a magnitude equivalent to about 11% of the British economy by the early nineteenth century."[23] Though the sugar economy in the West Indies only constituted around 2%, the trade overall constituted a larger fraction of the British economy. However, this fraction is not enough to create the entire foundation of the Industrial Revolution.

One resource often cited in this essay is *Sweetness and Power* by Sidney Mintz. Throughout his writings, he draws clear connections between slavery and Capitalism. For example, "Santo Domingo… pioneered sugar cane, sugar making, African slave labor, and the plantation form in the Americas. Some scholars agree with Fernando Ortiz that these plantations were "the favored child of capitalism," and other historians quarrel with this assessment."[24] While he's cautious to state a direct causational relationship, his

[21] Logbook, Cannon, 168
[22] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 43-44.
[23] Rönnbäck. "On the Economic Importance of the Slave Plantation Complex."
[24] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 32.

arguments tie back into Marx's that slavery provides a foundation for industrialization. He states clearly, "I have argued that the plantations were themselves precocious cases of industrialization. But this does not necessarily mean that the European economy that gave rise to these plantations was capitalist."[25] It becomes clear that there are ties, however it is not the entire picture.

Among the most influential and important recent reassessments of the relationship between sugar, slavery, and capitalism is Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power*. In his book, Mintz follows the impact of the plantations and sugar on English society. He claims boldly that sugar was a major factor in shaping English Society, particularly around the time of the Industrial Revolution.

If one considers the British relationship with sugar, more roots of capitalism can be found. After England invaded Jamaica in 1655, sugar consumption vaulted by 2500% to 1800.[26] The introduction of sugar to the English diet was revolutionary. No longer an elite good, people of all classes demanded the delicacy. In a larger picture, England's importation of sugar was larger than all of its other imports combined by 1660.[27] It took was a handful of years, and sugar redesigned British importing patterns. In the words of Mintz, "Once sugar became more readily available in England, the British people pounced, and **"**like tea, sugar came to define English "character."[28] It redesigned their popular image, their demands and their imports.

In light of the obvious fanaticism towards sugar, scholarship has delved into the reasoning behind the English's adoration. While sugar made waves in other cultures, the

[25] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 59.
[26] French, *Born in Blackness*, 161.
[27] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 137.
[28]Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 39.

British consumption of sugar was immense. Some historians posit that the pre-existence of other sweeteners might have impacted the popularity of sugar. Much of the consumption of sugar was done through drinking. Between coffee and tea, the demand rose, but prior to Jamaica, when British people wanted to sweet their bitter drinks, there were options like honey to add to their food. This tradition of sweetening their drinks may have primed them to consume sugar in large quantities. This "suggests not so much a special English predilection for sweetness…. It is conceivable that the sweetening of the drug drinks—coffee, chocolate, and tea—became customary not only because they were bitter as well as unfamiliar, but also because the habit of adding sugar to beverages was an old one."[29] There is no singular reason which explains how sugar had such an impact on English society, but scholars can be certain they liked it and they would continue demanding it.

Despite sugar's prevalence throughout the Transatlantic Slave Trade, there begs a question: Why focus on sugar? Cotton, gold, coffee, and more natural resources were also traded along the routes of the Transatlantic slave trade. Many of them had large impacts on where they were exported, however, when examining England, "by no later than 1800, sugar had become a necessity—albeit a costly and rare one—in the diet of every English person; by 1900, it was supplying nearly one-fifth of the calories in the English diet."[30] Something about sugar made it irresistible, and its popularity caused one of the largest trade networks in all of history. However, sugar precluded the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and Europe was introduced to the crop around 636 A.C.E. with the Arab conquest of the

[29]Mintz, "Sweetness and Power," 137
[30] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power,* 3.

Mediterranean.[31] During this time, only the wealthiest people could dream of affording it, and the industry remained as such for the next hundreds of years

It was not until the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries that the sugar industry underwent massive reconstruction. Sugar's main areas of production completely shifted continents—from the Africa and Europe to the Americas— while demand and access skyrocketed. Sugar only reached the Americas due to the Transatlantic slave trade after the Portuguese began their infamous sugar plantations on Sao Tomé during the inception of the entire trading system. Through the Portuguese, the processes of planting and growing sugar were streamlined till the plantations were more efficient than they had ever been.

With this new efficacy, the Portuguese knew they had obtained crucial secrets to securing wealth and it was not until the Dutch became involved as bankers that the secrets began to spread. Through their influence as middlemen, the Dutch brought the tricks of sugar plantations to other European powers such as the French and English. It was with these systems that the countries of the Caribbean were forcibly turned into sugar colonies.

Throughout history, there are few places that can indisputably be classified as "slave societies," these being: Ancient Greece, Rome, Brazil, the U.S. South, and the Caribbean.[32] What these places have in common is the cores of their societies centered on slavery. Economics, politics, demographics, and culture were not just influenced but directly shaped by it. With that definition in mind, it is important to remember that the

[31] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 12.
[32] Catherine Cameron, "What is a Slave Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective" Yale, September 19,2022, https://history.yale.edu/publications/what-slave-society-practice-slavery-global-perspective.

Caribbean's largest export was sugar, and it was that very crop which turned those countries into slave societies.

Sugar production and slavery are linked through economics, greed, and death. Since sugar completely revolutionized the English diet, led to the massacre of Jamaica's indigenous peoples, and fueled demand for African slaves, it would be an error to consider the Transatlantic slave trade and its effect on the modern world without adding in the influence of sugar. Furthermore, while this essay focuses on Jamaica, there is more to be said upon sugar's relationship with other slave societies, such as Brazil, the U.S. South, and the remainder of the Caribbean countries.

The industrial Revolution is famously known as being the impetus for modern-day capitalism. Tying the Industrial Revolution to sugar which has been proven to be a crop harvested at the cost of thousands of lives, creates a tie between the slave trade and capitalism. While the dollar value generated by the slave trade and sugar may not have been a massive part of Britain's GDP, the impact of sugar influenced British society so much so that it created a foundation for the Industrial Revolution.

The relationship between transatlantic slavery and capitalism is the subject of frequent debates in modern historical scholarship. One of the earliest and most influential voices in those debates is Eric William's *Capitalism and Slavery* published in 1944. Williams argued "it was the wealth accumulated from West Indian trade which more than anything else underlay the prosperity and civilization of New England."[33] In his work, he claimed the wealth generated by the slave trade, specifically that of the plantations in the Caribbean, provided the riches necessary to start the Industrial Revolution. Williams's

[33] Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 108.

book shaped much of the historical analyses that followed. Some have critiqued his arguments, while others have defended and expanded on them. But the argument, even 80 years later, has never died out.

Williams's interpretation that the Industrial Revolution was the breeding ground for modern day capitalism traces its roots to Marxist ideas. Karl Marx himself offered a foundation for the discourse, stating:

Direct slavery is as much the pivot of our industrialism today as machinery, credit, etc. Without slavery, no cotton; without cotton, no modern industry. Slavery has given their value to the colonies; the colonies have created world trade; world trade is the necessary condition of large-scale machine industry. Before the traffic in Negroes began, the colonies only supplied the Old World with very few products and made no visible change in the face of the earth. Thus, slavery is an economic category of the highest importance.[34]

He clearly states that slavery is a catalyst for industry. Even though not all historians would agree with his other, more popular works, it is difficult to dismiss slavery altogether as a cause of the Industrial Revolution, and he puts it concisely and clearly. While people have argued with Williams, it becomes clear that alternative causations, such as Marx's idea of industry, may hold answers to the debate.

Subsequent generations of historians (and economists) have taken issue with Williams's Marxist interpretation, pointing to, among other things, the GDP of England. Klaas Rönnbäck, for instance, showed that the estimated part of England's GDP in 1805

[34] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 66.

produced by the West Indies was only about 2%.[35] That sliver of the economy is not enough to jumpstart an entire revolution.

But others have come to William's defense, updating and expanding his argument. While economics play a role, albeit a small one in the catalyzation of the Industrial Revolution, to further the conversation on slavery and capitalism's potentially causational relationship, it is needed to examine other impacts of slavery. Rather than focusing solely on the wealth, other historians, such as Howard French and James Sweet, have begun to recognize the role of sugar in the creation of the Industrial Revolution.[36]

As the demand for sugar increased, so too did the British consume. Interestingly enough, while Britain maintained its demand, the unit price of sugar was falling, allowing them to purchase even more. What ties this into the Industrial Revolution is that while the sugar market was changing, people were able to see "increases in worker productivity at home."[37] Britain was becoming more efficient at the same time sugar was becoming more normalized. That relationship being causational would cement part of slavery's legacy as a contributing factor to Capitalism.

The link between sugar and the Industrial Revolution comes in the form of consumption. Sugar revolutionized the British diet. Some historians argue that "…Britain received a tremendous dietary boost from the takeoff of commoditized sugar, which

[35] Rönnbäck, Klaas. "On the Economic Importance of the Slave Plantation Complex to the British Economy during the Eighteenth Century: A Value-added Approach," Cambridge, August 31, 2018, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-global-history/article/on-the-economic-importance-of-the-slave-plantation-complex-to-the-british-economy-during-the-eighteenth-century-a-valueadded-approach/DBB1225FF928C09689B3EEFCA8F66C55
[36] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*; Howard French, *Born in Blackness*: *Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2021)
[37] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 45.

injected dramatically more calories into the daily fare of its population…. The caloric boost furnished by cheap sugar… fueled the long, intense workdays of England's early industrial mill laborer's."[38] Sugar changed more than just diet, it changed entire lifestyles. With more energy, people were able to work and tend to the new innovations being made.

Alone with helping people stay awake enough to be productive, this alertness also impacted the health of the workers. "The era of big sugar therefore ushered in a new age of alertness based on drinks that had the additional benefit of being hygienic, because their preparation required boiling water."[39] In a fell swoop, sugar made English workers more productive and healthier. Being a worker in the Industrial Revolution required these two factors.

In that same vein, sugar shaped even more of the British citizen's life. According to the historian Habermas, "conversation over caffeinated drink and newspapers in places like the coffee shop marked 'the first time in history [that people] came together as equals to reason critically about public affairs."[40] Sugar created the very impetus for people to come together and collaborate. The Industrial Revolution was a burgeoning of ideas, without a public sphere to collaborate upon them, there is no telling how much of it would have come to pass.

Even in Jamaica, British capitalism was spreading. While sugar helped create the capitalism, the system, as it had been for hundreds of years, officially changed. "The Caribbean cane-sugar industry… was absorbed into expanding overseas European

[38] French, *Born in Blackness*, 213.
[39] French, *Born in Blackness*, 214.
[40] French, *Born in Blackness*, 215.

capitalism. After the abolition of slavery in Cuba in 1884, all Caribbean sugar was made by proletarian labor."[41] In the end, the very processes of plantation slavery and sugar led to its final demise.

George Cannon and Bight of Biafra

"*Slaves all in Good Spirits"*[42]

Between his three documented journeys in the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, Captain Cannon was implicit in the taking of 1,035 people and he purchased all of them in the Bight of Biafra. About 13% of all enslaved people were taken through the port of the Bight of Biafra and the only two areas with more were West Central Africa and the Bight of Benin. Therefore, when Cannon set foot in the Bight of Biafra, he was another cog in a long and continuing system of slavery. During his voyages, he joined a larger trend in the slave trade since in the Bight of Biafra "Liverpool accounted for 85 percent of the slaves loaded on British vessels in the Bight of Boafra; in 1801-1808, the proportion was 94 percent."[43] In numerical terms, "Britain shipped 663,833 (87 percent) of the 759,512 embarked slaves."[44] During the time he dealt with the Bight of Biafra, there were a few major trends in the people he would be purchasing.

It is believed by historians that about 75-80% of Africans sold to slaving ships were Igbo.[45] This mass of population could potentially be caused by the Igbo having a

[41] Mintz, "Sweetness and Power," 69.
[42] Logbook, Cannon, 98
[43] Falola, Toyin, and Njoku, Raphael Chijioke, eds. 2016. *Igbo in the Atlantic World : African Origins and Diasporic Destinations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), ProQuest Ebook Central.
[44] Falola. *Igbo in the Atlantic Worl*d.
[45] Falola. *Igbo in the Atlantic Worl*d.

particularly good farming techniques for yams during the seventeenth century.[46] Their presence was so great that they developed a reputation among slave-owners and to their credit, they were known as being especially difficult and "bad." [47] Therefore, the people aboard his ship were more than likely of the Igbo ethnic group who spoke Igbo. Furthermore, at the time, more women were being sold into transatlantic slavery from Biafra than other ports, making the gender ration aboard his ship different than his other captain counterparts.

One other difference Captain Cannon can claim whilst participating in a long-established pattern, is that the mortality on his ships was lesser than expected. Slave ship captain were warned of purchasing people from Biafra since the people there had gained a reputation for dying along the Middle Passage.[48] Harkening back to Cannon's differences from other slave ship captains, his ships had an unusually high survival rate compared to all ships, not just those from Biafra. While that is no glowing recommendation, it begs the question what was he doing differently?

Cannon served as an intermediary between two incredibly complex systems – the transatlantic slave trade and the preexisting slave trade in the Bight of Biafra – and in doing so, he represented the European interests whilst tapping into a massive knot of African identity and politics. While he dealt in slavery, his presence there represented an ongoing European interest in the economic, social, and political power struggle ravaging the region.

[46] Rediker, *Slave Ship,* 94.
[47] Falola. *Igbo in the Atlantic Worl*d.
[48] Falola. *Igbo in the Atlantic Worl*d.

The most likely scenario is that Cannon dealt with the Aro people to conduct his business. The Aro spoke Igbo like the many other ethnic groups around them such as the Ibibio and Igbo, however they were an exclusive ethnic group, only allowing assimilation into their ranks if somebody truly submerged themselves into Aro culture.[49] They were the dominant ethnic group as they controlled the majority of coastal trade and were large propagators of connecting to the Transatlantic slave trade, making them the wealthiest of the surrounding peoples.

Cannon's exploits in the Bight of Biafra coincided with a redefined leadership as the Aro became the dominant Igbo class. While he bought Africans, the trade in exchange was that "[Europeans were] funneling… great quantities of commodities (rum, arms, cloth, jewelry, iron) into Africa for the purchase of slaves—an investment that did nothing for Africa's development but only stimulated more slave raiding." [50] Unfortunately, the chaos of the slave trade in Biafra did not bolster the economy, but it allowed them more access to finished goods. While it may not have boosted the local economies, it did help solidify the Aro as the dominant ethnic group among the Igbo group. Since a massive slave trade preexisted the Transatlantic slave trade among the Igbo, the Aro were able to situate themselves as the leaders of both systems of slavery. There they ruled with a bloody authority, using their connections to the "Ohafia, Abam, Edda, and related peoples" to outsource the slaves and resources.[51] This exclusive and violent leadership is credited with helping the Igbo language and people remain in the Bight of Biafra. While the economy may not have been aided as much as in other

[49] Rediker, *Slave Ship*, 93
[50] Mintz, "Sweetness and Power," 58.
[51] Falola. *Igbo in the Atlantic World*.

countries, it did allow for the Aro to survive such a tumultuous time in the history of the Bight of Biafra and they emerged a wealthy and established ethnic group with a preserved language.

George Cannon and Jamaica

And at 6 PM Came too Anchor in Kingston in 9 fathoms scator[52]

The status of Jamaica during Captain Cannon's arrivals was in flux. His participation in the Jamaican facet of the transatlantic slave trade follows a pattern of Liverpool ships. At the time "Jamaica took 218,404 (almost 35 percent) of the 629,200 disembarked slaves from the Bight of Biafra in that period."[53] There continued another pattern with Biafran slaves, as around "93 percent ended up in the Caribbean. Jamaica received captives far in excess of any other island (39 percent.)"[54] Furthermore, compared to the how much Jamaican planters would spend on enslaved Africans from other ports, the cost of slaves from Biafra was lower, making them easier to purchase.[55] This difference in price may have caused for there to be such a demand for Biafran slaves despite their reputation and mortality during the Middle Passage due to the economic troubles rocking Jamaica.

During his time, Jamaica went from being a thriving economy based on sugar, to undergoing a massive economic crash. To set the scene, Britain invaded Jamaica in 1655. As the Transatlantic Slave Trade flourished, it became a major port with a massive

[52] Logbook, Cannon, 129
[53] Falola. *Igbo in the Atlantic Worl*d.
[54] Falola. *Igbo in the Atlantic Worl*d.
[55] Falola. *Igbo in the Atlantic Worl*d.

demand of slaves. In the end, over 662,400 slaves were sold in Jamaica.[56] This massive demand came with a booming economy. At first, "one historian has estimated that annual per capita income on that island …was more than thirty-five times higher then in Britain's mainland colonies, 2201 pounds, compared their 60.2"[57] Jamaica was a powerhouse of wealth.

The need for sugar fueled the demand and economy of Jamaica. Starting with the plantation estates, it was often that the mortgages taken out ended up putting money in the pockets of English capitalists since the interest rates were so high. Having citizens in Jamaica also increased demand for England's goods since as much land as possible was converted into sugar plantations, leaving little room for the production of anything else. In all, "One thousand pounds spent by a planter in Jamaica produced in the end better results and greater advantages to England than twice that sum expended by the same family in London."[58] Jamaica was an incredible invest for Britain from the plantations to the imports.

Then came the expansion of sugar. Already in high demand, the variations of sugar took England by storm. "[F[irst sugar and molasses; soon after, rum; then a multiplication of crystalline sugar varieties and of syrup types—redifferentiations…were accompanied by (or, better, responded to) more elaborate and heterogeneous consumer demand at home."[59] Innovations like rum and syrup only served to expand the demand for sugar. By all means, the sugar crop was a benefit to England in every way, financially and as a food.

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[56] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 53.
[57] French, *Born in Blackness*, 212
[58] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 55-56.
[59] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 44.

Nearly every enslaved person in Jamaica worked on a sugar plantation. Of the crops farmed during the Transatlantic Slave Trade, sugar is the one with a staggeringly higher mortality rate. It is difficult to understand the sheer intensity of growing sugar without being the one growing it. Mintz in *Sweetness and Power* gives a basic overview,

> Cane is propagated asexually from cuttings of the stem having at least one bud. Once planted, the cane sprouts and with adequate heat and moisture may grow an inch a day for six weeks. It becomes ripe—and reaches the optimum condition for extraction—in a dry season after anywhere from nine to eighteen months.[60]

Amalgamating with the difficulty of tending to sugar, the enslaved population was severely malnourished. Despite being underfed, sugar made its way into the slave's diet as well. "…Slaves were given sugar, molasses, and even rum during the slavery period as part of their rations."[61] Sugar was the reason they were worked raggedly, but it also constituted some of their scant food supply.

Unlike in other areas where it was more expensive to buy another slave than feed the one present, for Jamaican plantations it was cheaper to work the person till they perished and purchase another. Economic reasoning such as this contributed to the high mortality rate of the enslaved people. Little else it known about the plantation slave's experience in Jamaica except for the morality rates, diets, and crops they grew.

One facet of why the enslaved population was so replaceable to the white landowners was the Saint-Domingue revolt in 1792. It brought more business and trade to Jamaica. In the wake of it, sugar prices were rising which added more wealth to the Jamaican plantation owners. With the excess of wealth from sugar, the life of a single

[60] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 21.
[61] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 72.

person was nearly meaningless to those in charge. An example of this economic growth can be seen in the "wealthy Kingston-based planter Simon Taylor [whose profits jumped]…from £17,639 in 1788 to an average of £32,635 per annum between 1789 and 1792, with a peak of £42,555.65 net profit in 1791." [62]The response to this wealth was a higher demand for slaves and sugar. In response, slaving voyage "increased from thirty-five to seventy-five from 1792 to 1793 while the numbers of the enslaved landed jumped from 9,791 to 20,507. Similarly, slave imports jumped from 13,384 in 1799 to 19,019 in 1800." [63] The slave trade in Jamaica was booming alongside the sugar industry. Here, sugar fueled the slave trade.

The years in which Cannon arrived in Jamaica to participate in this expanding trade were directly affected by policy changes in Britain. England abolished the slave trade in 1807 on the heels of several years of discussions and abolitionist attempts.[64] The years prior to the announcement held a surge of slave imports into Jamaica from final attempts to utilize the transatlantic slave trade system before one its major members departed. Cannon was one of many who held onto the slave trade for as long as possible, capitalizing on the fresh wave of demand for cheap labor coming from Jamaica.

Conclusion

[62] Trevor Burnard, "Slaves and Slavery in Kingston, 1770–1815," Cambridge, February 21, 2020, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-review-of-social-history/article/slaves-and-slavery-in-kingston-17701815/A7E958558A63A7DC296C3892960B09ED
[63] Burnard, "Slaves and Slavery in Kingston."
[64] "1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade," UK Parliament, https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/2015-parliament-in-the-making/get-involved1/2015-banners-exhibition/maria-amidu/1807-abolition-of-the-slave-trade/#:~:text=In%20Parliament%2C%20the%20campaign%20was,the%20British%20Empire%20was%20abolished.

"Latt. Obs. 13"34"[65]

Using Captain Cannon as a parameter for examining just England, Jamaica, and Biafra, his life provides an insight into how one forgotten man could navigate the massive powers and systems of the Transatlantic slave trade. He played a small but overlooked role in aiding the Transatlantic Slavery to fuel the Industrial Revolution. Even if it was not through direct capital, the sugar produced redefined English society. It changed their diets, working hours, and economy. Each innovation sweat over in the Industrial Revolution was made on the back of sugar, and those white crystals were harvested with the blood of thousands of enslaved Africans torn from their homes for the sake of the English pallet. Captain Cannon is evidence that people from all walks of life were implicit in the creation of this new England and the blood upon which it was built. His participation was a conglomeration of all of the different factors and the tensions budding between them. Even though the connections between the transatlantic slave trade, capitalism, and those implicated in its brutality, have built the pyre for more heated debates to come, when looked at through the angle of a man caught in the center of a system far greater than himself, its chilling to see how on a day-to-day level, it was just business.

[65] Logbook, Cannon, 112

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