The Sons of Neptune and the Sons of Ham: 
A History of Slave Ship Sailors 
and their Captive Cargoes

Emma L. Christopher
University College London
A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the 
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
At the University of London

Department of History
University College London
May 2002
Abstract

This thesis studies sailors who worked onboard British and North American slave ships between 1750 and 1808. Its starting point is the discrepancy between maritime historiography and that of the slave trade: in the former seamen appear as radical, anti-authoritarian figures who were far more accepting of black men and women than other occupational groups in this era. In slave trade literature, by contrast, sailors appear as shadowy figures ready to do the captain’s bidding, which generally meant abusing, maltreating and assaulting men and women of African origin.

Through detailed analysis of the lives and working conditions of those who were lowly employees in the slave trade, it is possible to see that the much-vaunted radicalism of seamen as a group grew at least in part from their work onboard ‘guinea ships’. Freedom and fair payment for labour were hardly unconnected to slavery and the slave trade, and sailors who were involved in the delivery of slaves to the Americas had ample occasion to compare their own situation with that of slaves. It was this which, to some extent, led to their famous politicised protests for freedom and better pay around the Atlantic rim.

In addition the slave trade brought European seamen into contact with people of African origin on a large scale. Sailors on slave ships worked alongside free Africans and Afro-Caribbeans at all points of their journey, and often had men of African origin as colleagues even during the middle passage. While seamen were certainly the perpetrators of many of the middle passage’s atrocities, racial constructs and interracial interaction were vastly more complex during a slaving voyage than is often accepted.
# Table of Contents

**Introduction**
Race and Class in “the most magnificent drama...of human history” 4

**Part 1**

**Chapter 1**
Galley Slavery and Free Waged Labour 12

**Chapter 2**
Black Jacks and the Trade in Black Gold 44

**Chapter 3**
The Bloody Rise of Western Freedom 78

**Part 2**

**Chapter 4**
The Sons of Neptune among the Sons of Ham 110

**Chapter 5**
Sea Changes 141

**Chapter 6**
“This Market of Human Woe.” 170

**Afterwards**
The Transatlantic Slave Trade in Global Perspective 198

**Appendix 1**
Black Sailors on Liverpool Slave Ships, 1794-1805 203

**Appendix 2**
Black Sailors on Rhode Island Slave Ships, 1803-1807 207

**Bibliography** 209
Introduction

Race and Class in “the most magnificent drama...of human history”¹

When Derek Walcott turned his attention to the slave trade in his epic poem Omeros, he ended the beautifully haunting description of its victims by admonishing today's tourists visiting the Caribbean to “remember us to the black waiter bringing the bill.”² What Walcott’s poem so eloquently illustrates is that even now the wounds inflicted by the slave trade are far from healed, and the racial injustices it created still cut a cataclysmic divide through western society. Indeed, the middle passage—the voyage from Africa to the Americas—is often used to symbolise the shared pain of all those who have suffered and do suffer as the result of racism.³ Although academic scholarship, concerned with historical data rather than heritage, and facts rather than symbolism, remains somewhat alien to this public image of the slave trade, nevertheless works that gaze out from Africa into diaspora, or conversely look east over the ocean from the Americas identifying African roots, partially address this search for answers and meaning.

Another strand of historiography surrounding the slave trade is perforce even further removed from the wider perception of the slave trade, being the study of profit and loss, numbers and figures, accounts and economics. Philip Curtin’s 1969 The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census, the first monograph to seriously attempt to calculate the number of Africans who were traded across the Atlantic Ocean, is a work historians relied upon, with modifications, until the release of The Trans-Atlantic

³ I accept that the term ‘middle passage’ is unacceptable in many ways, and to many people, because of its Eurocentrism. Nevertheless, as to the majority of seamen of many nationalities the voyage was a ‘triangular’ affair, of which the middle, transatlantic section was the most feared, I have used it in this work.
Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM in 1999. Others have been concerned not so much with the number of Africans bought and sold, but the profits garnered by slaving merchants. Without such facts and figures this history would be without an anchor, to use a suitable maritime metaphor.

Despite this rich and diverse historiography, and to some extent because of the gap between public perception and academic study, a large group of people involved in the trade is hidden from view, appearing as ‘bit part’ players if they emerge on stage at all. Bridging that gap, the starting point of this work is neither the merchants’ economics nor the slaves’ suffering, but the men who were paid employees on slave ships, the irrepressible Jack and his brother tars. There were approximately 330,000 seamen involved in Britain’s slave trade during 1680-1780, but they are infrequently mentioned in slave trade studies, and analysed even less.

The implication of sailors being mentioned so seldom and their separate perspective rarely being acknowledged is that lowly tars appear passively complicit figures in the travesty wrought by slaving merchants. When a slave trade sailor appears in the literature, it is commonly with cat-o’-nine-tails or branding iron in hand, firing fiercely on rebel slaves, or mercilessly raping a captive African woman. This image of them is not incorrect; certainly seamen were responsible for many of the individual travesties of the trade. All these aspects of a slave ship sailor’s multipart character and behaviour are examined in detail in chapter five. Where this representation falls short is not that it wrongly ascribes brutality to seamen—that they were often cruel is beyond doubt—but that it tacitly suggests that they were consciously occupied in the production of one of the most repellent racial injustices the world has known. Along with the American or Caribbean slaveowner wielding his whip, a sailor standing over a captive African with a branding iron is part of our collective imagery not just of almost indescribable inhumanity, but racial hatred on a scale, in terms of longevity at least, virtually unsurpassed.

4 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson and Herbert S. Klein, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) [hereafter cited as Eltis, CD-ROM with, where relevant, the ID number of the voyage being discussed].

5 A large field of literature has developed around the assertions Eric Williams made in Capitalism and Slavery (London: Andre Deutsch, 1st published 1944). For a recent review of this debate and the latest understand regarding the profits garnered by the slave trade, see David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman, “The Importance of Slavery and the Slave Trade to Industrializing Britain” Journal of Economic History 60:1 (2000) 123-144.
A major problem with this supposition is that it is thoroughly in contradiction to the way seamen as a group in this time period are represented in the separate historiography of sailors in all trades, and in the profession in general. Jeffrey Bolster’s Black Jacks argues that white sailors in the eighteenth century Atlantic were more accepting of blacks as colleagues than their landlubber peers, often working alongside them as equals. Furthermore he argues that they “empathized with the plight of blacks” in general. Julius S. Scott has argued that in the Caribbean, sailors and slaves often found “common cause”. He posits slave trade seamen, furthermore, as major purveyors of information about the French Revolution and British abolitionism to West Indian enslaved field hands. In fact, the shared history of seamen and slaves, as Scott suggests, is in turn part of a much bigger history, that of the radical Atlantic. For example, sailors and slaves famously fought side by side during the opening frays of the American Revolution. The rebels who stormed Newgate gaol in London in 1780 consisted of both sailors and freed slaves working together. All around the Atlantic in this era sailors and (former) slaves were a visible and vocal element of the rebellious mobs that so terrified the established authorities.

In its widest implication, therefore, the picture of seamen revealed in these radical histories not only challenges the racial arguments of slave trade history, but also the economics embedded therein. Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh splendidly argue in The Many-Headed Hydra that a “multiethnic class...was essential to the rise of capitalism,” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and that its central protagonists were sailors and slaves. Thus not only were sailors and slaves working together, they opposed the capitalist framework which was central to, and bolstered by, slave trading. In fact Rediker and Linebaugh put sailors at the centre of what they see as international, multifaceted resistance to the rise of capitalism. They argue that while ships were the catalysts of capitalist expansion, the sailors who

---


10 Linebaugh and Rediker, Many-Headed Hydra 6.
worked on them spearheaded resistance to it. They develop and explore the concept of ‘hydrarchy’ to examine the alternative loyalties and ethics of sailors, which, they assert, “arose at sea to pose the era’s most serious challenge to the development of capitalism.”

To be sure, viewing the seamen of the slave trade through the historical lens of this radical tradition begs many questions. The issues of freedom, coercion, violence and fair payment for labour to which seamen were so devoted according to Rediker, Linebaugh, Scott and others, were hardly unrelated or extraneous to the trade in slaves. Slaves too attempted violent revolt in order to secure these rights. The dearth of freedom and fair treatment was an axis around which the lives of the many millions of African-American slaves revolved. In *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* Rediker argues that during the eighteenth century sailors united against the commodification of their labour—the reduction of their labour to a “‘thing,’ a commodity to be calculated into an equation with other things.” To those who were carried onboard slave ships as captives, this hatred of commoditization did not just relate to their labour but far more fundamentally to themselves bodily. Rediker and Linebaugh’s thesis is that sailors and slaves regularly united together in an attempt to achieve their aims in opposing the effects of the tidal wave of capitalist expansion.

As appealing as this theory might be, it is clearly difficult to reconcile this with the general history of the particularly bloodthirsty, savage commerce of slave trading. A more applicable question is how the conditions of the trade lent the ideals of liberty and fair pay additional currency, especially to those whose own lack of these assets was far exceeded by those they were employed to guard and transport. Feeding divisions of class back into the history of the slave trade does not reveal a secret history of shared aims between white seaman and black slave—cases where sailors were implicated in slave revolt were exceptional—but that the tars’ popular image was born, at least in part, of their slaving experiences. The twofold radicalism of seamen, and certainly their vaunted tolerance of Africans and African-Americans,

---

11 The authors describe hydrarchy as a way to understand the “two related developments of the late seventeenth century: the organization from above, and the self-organization of sailors from below.” Ibid 143-173; quotes 144, 145.
was not developed in spite of their employment in the slave trade, but rather because of it.

To examine the issue of proletarianisation first, it is necessary to consider which factors of employment in the slave trade made seamen especially likely to be rebellious, revolutionary, and anti-authoritarian. As I argue in the first chapter, the slave trade exaggerated the gap between rich and poor for those involved in it, while its wider implications simultaneously linked poverty to dependence and thus to a lack of freedom. Slaving merchants and captains invented new ways to part a seaman from his already meagre wages, while all the time silently reinforcing that remuneration was what separated slavery from ‘wage slavery.’ Concurrently, slave ships, almost universally hated among the low ranks of the seafaring profession for their appalling filth and high mortality rates, stripped sailors of their liberty not only by exposing them to the continual risk of press gangs, but also by resorting to crimps to make up a crew. Many a tar compared both impressment into the Royal Navy, and shanghaiing, to slavery.

Onboard slaving vessels as much as on land, furthermore, a seaman’s freedom was systematically compromised, while simultaneously the absolute lack of liberty allowed African captives was revealed. Daniel Vickers claims that deep-sea sailing ships bore some similarities to “absentee-owner plantations” because of their “captive work forces, their floggings and their terrorism, and their quasi-independent managers.” In the slave trade, as argued in chapter three, this was exaggerated as the horrors of the trade and the necessity of hegemonic violence to its rule suffocated the freedom of sailors even more than was generally customary at sea. The men whose own liberties were challenged by the conditions of the slave trade and of seafaring more generally were thus the Europeans who had come closest to real enslavement itself. Liberty became a uniquely cherished asset to deep-sea sailors, not least to those who had held violent sway over a ‘cargo’ of captive Africans.

Additionally, chapter five will argue that seamen were employed directly in the production of slaves to be sold at market during the transatlantic crossing. Seamen, I suggest, hated the slave trade not just for the reasons already mentioned,

---

but because of the tasks of cleaning, shaving, guarding, and feeding captive Africans, which were as much part of their duties as sailing the ship. This consequently raises another issue. Did seamen in the slave trade, as C.L.R. James has argued for whale ships’ crews, become closer to forming a proletarian workforce than their colleagues involved in trades that merely transported goods? Among all the horrors created by the melding of slavery onto modern capitalism, was this yet another irony? Did the enslavement of the one enhance the modernity of the other through some revolting twist of fate? Perhaps this is to push the matter too far. Perhaps it is not.

To turn to the issue of race, and racial formation, firstly it is clear that the kind of multiracial crews described by Jeffrey Bolster were also found onboard British and American slave ships. As illustrated in the second chapter, the evidence does not sustain the unquestioned image of seamen who worked in the slave trade as always white skinned. This would have come as no surprise to citizens of major eighteenth century port cities, who, intriguingly in the context of the slave trade, coached their derogatory comments about seamen not just in terms of contempt for those lower down the social scale, but also in racial terms. A man who found himself in London’s ‘sailortown’ in the eighteenth century, wrote “a man would be apt to suspect himself in another country” so unfamiliar did he regard those around him.

It was not simply the racially mixed composition of the seafaring workforce that made them appear so foreign to their contemporaries. Studying those who laboured onboard slave ships reveals that they were also conspicuously cosmopolitan men, taking their shared culture from all the places at which their vessels called. Africa and the Caribbean, the ports of call of the trade in slaves, contributed to seafaring customs not only because of the number of sailors who travelled there, but also because of the length of time many stayed there, and the numbers who ran away or were abandoned and made these regions their temporary home. Just as the European mercantile forces absorbed countless African merchants into the Atlantic financial network, so on the reverse side they drew in less noble born Africans as seamen, porters, interpreters, cooks, canoemen, sentinels and pilots. In the Caribbean disembarkation points too, black men were frequently hired to assist with a ship’s labour. These were men whom European tars worked alongside in the course of the

---

trade, becoming far more familiar with them on a reasonably equal footing than most white persons of the time period. These issues are discussed in chapters four and six.

Moreover, West Africa and the West Indies added to the composition of the men who crossed the ocean aboard slave ships, as they provided numbers of workers of different ethnic backgrounds who joined the ‘motley crews’ employed in this most abhorrent of trades. Just as in all other long-distance commerce, the slave trade enticed men into it as labourers, as well as in this case taking men, women and children as goods to be bought and sold. What is more, some of those who initially made the Atlantic crossing shackled below decks as human cargo would later return to the seas as seamen, stewards and cooks. The slave trade helped create this multicultural workforce, as ships constantly employed Africans and Afro-Caribbeans. European sailors may not have treated these men as equals, but they sometimes regarded them as fellow members of the crew, trusted them as co-workers and, on occasion, rebelled with them against a ship’s officers. For Europe’s seamen there was clearly a place at which loyalties to their fellow workers cut across their self-identity as a racial unit, and it was partially created from the conditions of the slave trade, regardless of the larger racial division the commerce’s merchants sought to impose.

Part 1

The crew are not human beings but things,
... "manufactured men"
... their permanent condition is sordidness.1

---

Chapter 1
Galley Slavery and Free Waged Labour

"I could not think but we had Boston here" commented one worried journalist during the 1775 sailors’ strike in Liverpool.\(^1\) It was less than two years since the Tea Party in that city and Britain’s American colonies were still in open rebellion. The following summer they would declare independence based on the premise that “all men are created equal.” Sailors had been involved in that burgeoning movement for a decade since the Stamp Act had caused colonial maritime activity to stagnate, and many tars had taken to the streets, their political motivations and economic needs intertwined. Impressment of American seamen into the British navy was a particular \textit{bête noire} among these men, along with the lack of freedom, want of pay, and appalling conditions and treatment that it bestowed. Jesse Lemisch summed up what these men wanted with one word—"justice.\(^2\)

In the meantime, while the American situation still hung in the balance, sailors in Liverpool—the slave trading capital of the world at that time—also rebelled. This uprising began onboard the slave ship \textit{Derby} bound for Angola and Jamaica, and was directly related to the outbreak of fighting in America. As trade in Liverpool was detrimentally affected by the crisis, many seamen found themselves unemployed. The merchants of the \textit{Derby}, faced with a glut of possible employees, decided to cut the wages of seamen they had already hired. Payment would be reduced from thirty to twenty shillings per month, well below normal rates in the ‘Guinea trade’. The men refused to accept this and struck the ship’s sails, preventing her from departing for Africa. In the mayhem that followed some damage was caused to the sails and nine of the company was put in gaol. By the end of the day 3,000 of their fellow seamen had assembled in the city centre to demand their colleagues’ release and had “forced themselves into a Ring with intent...to form a Combination for raising their Wages.”\(^3\) The problems only escalated when rented guards fired at the mob and a number were killed and wounded.

\(^{3}\) PL 27/5, Information of James Waring 4 September 1775.
As the riot escalated out of all recent national precedent it was merchants involved in the slave trade who were the special targets of the seamen’s ire. They began with Thomas Ratcliffe, owner of the *Townside* and *Little Ben*, then moved onto Thomas Yates (or Yate), who partially financed the *Derby*’s voyage. Later the homes of William James who invested in over 130 slaving voyages from the 1750s to 1770s, and John Simmons who had become a merchant after captaining several slave ships, were also attacked. In fact the sailors threatened “hostile visits” to all the merchants involved in the slave trade in Liverpool at that time. Slaver captains were also at risk: Henry Billinge would later testify that he was hit by a armed seaman named Thomas Pearson after the later heard a woman in the crowd identify him as “a Guinea Captain.”[^4] The Exchange was another focus of their furious rage. This building functioned as a town hall and so was where the eighty-one slave ships that returned home to Liverpool in 1775 reported the details of their voyages. The violence used was unwavering as sailors assailed this symbol of authority and commerce with weaponry including cannons taken from the whaleship *Betty* which was in the harbour alongside the *Derby*. A reputed leader of the seamen, George Hill, allegedly declared that he would not be satisfied until the building was razed to the ground.^[5]

This rebellion was more than just an enraged riot. The seamen of Liverpool, as with those who were seditious in America, were politicised as well as violent. In this northern seaport town approximately 1,000 sailors wore red ribbons in their hats to identify themselves. As a symbol of their defiance they marched behind a red flag, which, as an eye-witness recalled, “they called the Bloody Flag.”[^6] In the aftermath of the rebellion collections were taken throughout the town for the seamen, showing widespread sympathy and solidarity with their cause.^[7] In fact it would seem that many of the working class of the town had supported the rioters all along. Portending the Gordon Riots five years later, it was alleged that a large-scale attempt at gaol breaking had ensued. An illiterate woman named Elizabeth Scofield had apparently

[^5]: PL 27/5, Information of Cuthbert Bisbowery, 2 September 1775.
[^6]: PL 27/5, Information of Thomas Green, 5 September 1775.
[^7]: Richard Brooke, *Liverpool as it was during the Last Quarter of the Eighteenth Century, 1775-1800* (Liverpool: J. Mawdsley and Son, 1853) 323-345; Rose, “Sailor’s Strike”; Eltis, CD-ROM suggests that these reports are confused as to the captain of the ship on which the strike started, as they claim that the *Derby*’s captain was named Yates. The CD-ROM however suggests that the *Derby*’s captain in 1775 was Luke Mann, and although a man named Peter Yates was working as a slaver captain out of Liverpool in this period, having commanded the *Myrtle* in 1773, it is more likely that the confusion lies with the fact that two of the *Derby*’s owners are listed as John and Thomas Yate. See voyage 92523.
been heard, "with a Shout and Flourish of her Hatt, to call to the massed gang of seamen, 'Now My Boys, Fire away of the Door (meaning the Gaol Door) and let the Prisoners Free.'" And this was not the first time the seafaring fraternity in Britain had exhibited their radicalism: their insurgence had already endowed the English language with the rhetoric of proletarian protest. In 1768 seamen had struck the sails of their ships in the River Thames, preventing them from sailing out of London. In the process they had popularised the term ‘strike’ and given the red flag that they had raised “as a permanent bequest to the future proletarian movement.”

The radicalism of seamen on opposite sides of the Atlantic cannot be separated. To sailors the Atlantic was ‘bond’ rather than ‘barrier’, with its three and a half thousand miles of deep blue sea being the scene of shared experiences, the source of common dangers and the setting of possible triumphs. The ocean provoked deep sentiment among many whose livelihoods depended upon it. Co-existing with ties to nationality, the connections of seafaring meant that the men who rebelled in Liverpool, New York and Boston saw all these cities as temporary places of hospitality and excitement rather than as home and abroad. It is not impossible that some of the same men took part in more than one of these protests. Similarly, although history suggests that the rebellion in America called for independence from Britain—a pivotal historical moment—while that in Liverpool was merely a commonplace claim for better pay from an impoverished group of workers, what is clear is that the motive of the seamen in both cases was interrelated. The causes of freedom from impressment and shanghaiing, better treatment and better pay—‘justice’—were what had forced seamen out onto the streets in protest in both Boston and Liverpool.

The radical, politicised nature of seamen in the second half of the eighteenth century, and more specifically among those involved in the slave trade, is hardly surprising if viewed in wider perspective. Seafaring by nature demanded collective labour. Jobs such as handling the mainsail required the involvement of most or all of the crew to be completed successfully, and in the event of the ship springing a leak all would be put, in rotation, to the arduous labour of manning the pumps. Divided into two watches according to their perceived merits, and messing together, shipboard life...

---

8 PL 275/5, Information of Constable James Smoult, 5 September 1775.
and work created strong bonds between shipmates. So too did the omnipresent dangers of seafaring. Involved in collective labour, with no share in the means of production, seamen were early proletarians, while their working lives and worldwide experiences made them vocal in demand of better treatment, and ready to fight. The additional tasks of slave trading—those of trading in Africa, guarding captive Africans and fighting slave rebellion—did not mean that the usual rigours of sailing ships were lessened, although there would generally have been more men to share them.

By the time the British slave trade really took off in the 1720s and '30s the process of proletarianisation among sailors, as outlined by Marcus Rediker in *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, was already underway. Careful to distinguish the "social definition of the advent of capitalism" from the "technological", Rediker forcefully argues that by mid-century Britain's merchant seamen already comprised a self-conscious proletariat. Casting aside the arguments of some historians that the roots of primitive accumulation can be found in long distance trade, Rediker argues, following Robert Brenner, that the separation of the English peasantry from the land and the rise of export agriculture had already driven many into waged labour by 1750. That said, long-distance trade was central to the accumulation of wealth that made England's move to capitalism feasible. Some of those dispossessed from the land wandered into the newly expanding port cities where they found work as maritime labourers, hence having a two-fold role in the history of the transition to capitalism.

Many of those who have criticised Rediker's argument have done so on the grounds that the sailors in the particular places they have studied—those in Salem, Massachusetts or Bermuda for example—do not appear to have been class-conscious in the early eighteenth century. What is apparent though, is that those employed in

---

the British slave trade neatly fit Rediker's model. In the larger context this is hardly surprising given many historians' willingness to "label the British expansion in the Atlantic as capitalist." It is one of the supreme ironies that the trade which supplied millions of Africans in chains to the Americas to be sold as slaves was among the first to pay its own workers regular wages. Far removed from the paternalistic rule of earlier seafaring, sailors in the later eighteenth century slave trade were painfully aware of their situation, and perceived its injustices keenly.

Yet while the process of proletarianisation among seamen was well underway before the slave trade reached its height in the late eighteenth century, attitudes towards waged labour, freedom, and political rights continued to change fundamentally during this period. Rediker himself would agree that the British transition to capitalism was hardly complete by the year his study concludes. In fact, the transition to industrial capitalism was yet to commence. Between 1730, when British slave ships first carried in excess of 25,000 slaves to the Americas in a single year, and 1807, the final year of legal trading, concepts of free waged labour were transformed around the Atlantic littoral. Capitalism matured, and Britain began to industrialise, during the years of the most intense slave trading. Seamen whose fathers and grandfathers had first suffered the pinch of the transition to capitalism and whose lives were fundamentally changed as a result, were at the forefront of radical protest in the age of revolution. The abolitionist movement gave them a voice, as it protested their own treatment as well as the captive Africans they were paid to transport. Seamen's grievances were all the more heartfelt as capitalism became an inescapable force, and as the trade in slaves increasingly widened the gap between merchant, captain, and common tar.

From the point of view of seamen, therefore, it can be seen that the slave trade had a fundamental effect on British industrialisation, and opposition thereto, quite apart from Eric Williams's much disputed arguments. Those who worked as seamen onboard slave ships were at the forefront of battles for liberty, better pay, and

---

Jarvis in this matter, arguing in a more general piece that "until the workings of the waterfront community are better understood, we cannot know whether common seamen belonged to a seaborne proletariat", "Beyond Jack Tar" William and Mary Quarterly 3rd Series, 50 (1993) 418-424, quote 423.


Rediker, "Common Seamen" 340.

Eltis, CD-ROM.
'justice', fully cognisant of the changing nature of free wage labour as its antithesis was created by their very toil. Moreover, its effects spread far beyond those who were hired by slaving vessels, as seamen spread news of the horrors of employment in the slave trade among their colleagues, so giving the trade an importance the actual number of ships involved might not suggest. Just as men, ships, and Atlantic radicalism were swept around the ocean by the wind and the tides, so too were tales of suffering in this most abhorrent of trades.

* * * * * * * *

Isaac Parker experienced the extremes that seafaring had to offer in the eighteenth century. As a sailor on the Liverpool slave ship *Latham* that transported 308 slaves from Old Calabar and Bonny to Barbados and Grenada in the 1760s, he complained of being so short of food that he deserted. He left the ship in Africa, where he lived with an African trader’s son, and went with him up river in canoes “fitted out with ammunition, cutlasses, pistols, powder and ball, and two guns, which were three-pounders, fixed upon a block of wood”. Hiding until night, they ransacked villages, kidnapping the inhabitants for sale to European captains. Unusually for the later eighteenth century, Isaac Parker took part directly in the initial enslavement process itself. Yet this is not the end of Parker’s story, for three years after these events he signed on a ship called *Endeavour*. As a boatswain’s mate under Captain James Cook, Parker toured the uncharted lands of New Zealand and Australia’s eastern coast, and returned home feted as a hero, doubtless glowing in the reflected glory of one of England’s greatest explorers.

Parker’s fellow seaman Richard Drake had rather different life experiences. He not only worked as a slave trade sailor, but also personally endured considerable

---

18 Stanley Engerman and David Eltis have calculated that in 1792, the year of Britain’s greatest involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, the total tonnage of slaving vessels represented only approximately 3 per cent of the total tonnage of all ships departing Britain. They use this fact to discredit Williams’s arguments. I would argue that the importance of the trade added to the fears and realities of seamen far more than this number suggests, in much the same way that the threat of the was omnipresent, even among those who had never been onboard a naval vessel. David Eltis and Stanley Engerman, “The Importance of Slavery and the Slave Trade to Industrialising Britain” *Journal of Economic History* 60:1 (2000) 123-144, see page 129.

misery below decks. Of his misfortune, which began at a young age, he gave the following heartrending account,

I never saw my father. He was a seafaring man...lost in a gale four months after his marriage to my mother, a daughter of a spinner in one of the cotton mills at Stockford, England. I can just remember her and also a room full of strange people, a red box and a man standing beside it, talking in a loud voice; then a dismal walk through the rain, to a field where some men had just finished digging a hole in the ground.

After that Drake's home was the workhouse, until he went overseas also at the age of twelve. He travelled to America as one of 450 Irish immigrants crowded into steerage on the ship Polly, whose sailors "knocked [him] about." Drake remembered the voyage as "pestilential" as "whole families literally wallowed in poisonous filth...their tattered garments...incrusted and impregnated with the most offensive matter." Only 186 of the original number survived the typhus and dysentery that broke out in the horrendous conditions. Then at the age of fourteen he went onboard the slave ship Coralline and remained engaged in the trade even after it passed out of legality.

Within these stories lies the central contradiction at the heart of seamen's histories, for they were at once perpetrators and victims, heroes and villains. Exploiters of men and women who were forced onto their ships or who lived in the ports they visited, they too were brutally exploited by the merchants and captains who employed them. Committing many of the baser acts that made the middle passage such an unforgettable outrage against humanity, they themselves were contemporaneously viewed as peripheral, abject members of society. Two of the most well known slaver captains of the era both considered sailors in these terms. John Newton wrote to the Reverend D. Jennings from his slaving voyage in 1750 that sailors were "the refuse and dregs of the nation," that many were from gaol, and that he spent much time while in Africa pondering on their "unhappy degeneracy." Hugh Crow, who sailed half a century later, stated that seamen were "the very dregs of the community."
These sentiments were obviously shared by merchants, as one investor in slaving voyages expressed his belief that “half the fellows who ship themselves for Seamen are little better than pick Pocketts.”

If we were to look for a more marginalised occupational group than seamen it would be hard to find one outside of criminal groups, or, of course, slaves. Most seafaring men were recruited from “the lowest ranks of society,” that is, men whose families formed part of the hugely swelling ranks of the urban poor, and who had little choice but to eke out a living earning meagre wages however they could. It was, as Marcus Rediker has pointed out, a profession cleaved by divisions of class as well as gender. Men who went to sea “were overwhelmingly of humble birth.”

Even for penniless seamen, though, slave trading was regarded as an uncommonly abhorrent occupation. Slave ships were notorious for reeking so badly that other ships at sea could smell them before they could see them, and the filth and disease were so infamous that they in many ways. With very high mortality rates—resulting variously from the disease environments in Africa and the Caribbean, mistreatment and slave revolt as well as all the usual dangers of the seas—only despairing men would enlist on a slave ship in a junior position. It was not unknown for a ship to lose all her original crew, as happened to the Depsey of London in the late 1750s, the Virginia of Boston in the 1760s, and numerous other vessels. Seamen would have heard rumours of such horrors, and not only feared death but also loathed on principle the idea of becoming a calculated number in a ship’s log alongside dead slaves. The Comte du Norde’s log, for example, noted “departed this life Daniel Broad, Seamen no 12” and then “Buried a woman girl slave, no 33.”

Those tars who surreptitiously threw their dead colleagues overboard so as not to alert the slaves of their weakness spread legend-making tales of their appalling circumstances all around the docks—if they were themselves lucky enough to survive.

---

24 Davis Davenport Papers, MIC 392, Liverpool University Library.
26 Rediker, Between the Devil 155-6.
28 Liverpool RO 387 MD 62/1.
29 British Library Add Mss 39946.
Boys who had gone to sea for romantic reasons did end up in the slave trade, but generally only because of trickery or other misfortune. Samuel Robinson had taken a fancy to sea life because of the “long yarns” an acquaintance had told “after being on a voyage to the West Indies.” Before long, however, his “ocean paradise [was] shorn of its beams” by his experiences onboard the Lady Nelson. Similarly William Butterworth had decided upon a career at sea after being impressed at the sight of his cousin wearing a naval uniform. It was not his intention to make a ‘guinea voyage’ though. He and a fellow runaway were shown kindness by a man recruiting for a slave ship and were tricked onboard despite an old seaman’s attempts to warn them of the horrors of slave trading.

Most common sailors joined slave ships out of immediate financial need, or were from seafaring families and had been apprenticed in their early teens thus knowing no other life. Others went to sea to escape ruin. Robert Barker had been apprenticed to Thomas Holland of Liverpool at the age of fourteen, and later worked as a barge builder before signing on the slave ship Tryal. One of his shipmates on a later slaving voyage was John Richardson, who, according to his mother, had gone to sea after he had given “himself up to lewd women” and drink. Silas Told signed onboard the slaver Royal George after his father had died on a previous slaving voyage, leaving his mother and siblings in much reduced circumstances. When John Wilson testified before the High Court of the Admiralty he related that he had first gone to sea at the age of twelve on the schooner Ann and then transferred to the Tarleton at the River Congo. Wilson’s father had been a ship’s carpenter, and the family lived in Liverpool, so it is not unlikely that his father had made slaving voyages before him. By the time Wilson first went to sea both his parents were dead, so his alternatives were doubtless minimal.

Although the slave trade was generally a hated industry for seamen to be involved in, during periods when the number of tars far exceeded the available work—in peacetime, for example—a berth on a slave ship would obviously be readily

---

31 William Butterworth, Three Years Adventures of a Minor (Leeds: Edward Baines, 1822) 1-2, 6-7.
32 Robert Barker, The Unfortunate Shipwright, or Cruel Captain: Being a faithful narrative of the unparallel’d sufferings of Robert Barker, late carpenter on board the Thetis Snow, of Bristol, in a voyage to the coast of Guinea and Antigua (London: Printed for, and sold by the Sufferer, 1760) 5, 3.
33 Silas Told, Life of Mr. Silas Told (London, 1976) 4.
34 HCA 1/25.
accepted in preference to none at all. Many seamen doubtless just happened to be
offered employment on a slave ship at the time when their wages from their previous
venture had been spent, and they were again in dire need. These famously incautious,
rough and ready men were hardly the kind to prepare in advance a position in a more
desirable business. In Liverpool, furthermore, as perhaps also with Bristol in earlier
decades, the slave trade was simply part of life, a trade seamen from the town were
inured to from childhood. It seems, among these hard-bitten and long-suffering men,
to have been considered something of a necessary evil.

There was, by contrast, considerable incentive for men to become involved in
slaving voyages as captains or senior officers. Namely, the profits they hoped to
accrue could be substantial. Of course officers were paid very much more than the
men they commanded in all maritime trades, but the gap between the relative wealth
of sailors and the ship’s officers was wider in the slave trade than others. This was
not so much due to their actual wage rates, but because of the practice of allowing the
ship’s senior officers to take a number of ‘privilege’ slaves, free of the costs of
‘freight’, to be sold on their own account. These were slaves, usually the higher-
priced males, who were under the sole ownership of the officer allowed them, and
who would be sold for his own advantage rather than contributing to the profits of the
ship. The right to carry such men was almost always restricted to the captain, surgeon
and chief mate, and thus beyond the prospects of most ordinary seamen. The
carpenter of the Blackmore in 1730 had the right to take a privilege slave across the
Atlantic with him but this was highly unusual.\(^{35}\) The number of slaves an officer could
take as his privilege varied, but could amount to a very substantial extra earning for
the seller.\(^{36}\) And the possible gain from privilege slaves grew immensely during the
late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The average gross sale price more than

\(^{35}\) Davis, Rise of 149.

\(^{36}\) Inevitably there was controversy about this between officers and merchants, with claims that it was
common practice for men to take privilege slaves over and above those sanctioned by their employers.
Other merchants were apparently worried that their officers would take slaves from the general number
as their own if their original privilege slaves died during the voyage. This, indeed, was one of the only
reasons that slaves continued to be branded during British and American slaving voyages in this period.
Captain William Snelgrave was ordered by his employer to put “his own mark” on his privilege slaves,
while Captain John Fowler of the Molly was ordered to brand his own slaves or “bear an equal
proportion of the Mortality. Bank of England, Humphrey Morice Papers, 7/10; Bristol Record Office,
Bright Family Records, the snow Molly 1750.
doubled just in the period from the 1760s to 1807, and so the value of privilege arrangements also doubled.\footnote{Roger Anstey, The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition (London: MacMillan, 1775) 47; Robin Blackburn, The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800 (London: Verso, 1997) 510.}

Equally, sometimes merchants paid out considerable amounts to captains as ‘commission’ rather than allowing them privilege slaves. The investors in the Perseverance that departed from Liverpool in 1798 recorded that after the voyage was completed they paid Captain John Lawson £1,500, while the chief mate and surgeon together gained another £150 in privilege. To put this into perspective, the second-hand purchase of the ship had cost £1,700, and the total wages for the captain and his crew of fifty-six men crew (on a voyage that had already lasted 249 days by the time it reached Tobago) amounted to £2,650.\footnote{Birmingham RO Galton 564; Eltis, CD-ROM 83068, seven men are known to have died during the voyage, and another deserted.}

While profits from privileges and commission grew during the late eighteenth century, wages for seamen remained remarkably stable. They rarely amounted to more than twenty-five shillings per month except in times of war.\footnote{Davis, Rise of 137.} This meant that sailors generally earned approximately 1/5 per month of what their captain did, with other officers somewhere between the two amounts, before privileges and commission were taken into account. On the Sally, which left Liverpool for the Windward and Gold Coasts in 1768, for example, Commander David Tuohy earned £5 per month, his chief mate Matthew Flannagan £4 per month, while the common seamen earned £1.15.0 in the same time.\footnote{Liverpool RO 380 TUO 4/3: Papers of the ship Sally.} When commission or privilege was added, however, the gap was vastly greater. Furthermore, those who were allowed the perquisite of carrying privilege slaves, or earning commission on all slaves sold, were much more thoroughly a part of the Atlantic world economy on a level other than consumer. It tied the captain and his mate into the success of the ship’s voyage, and the world of slave trading more generally, far more tangibly than the wages paid to common seamen. Their wages, rather, were suffused with the commonplace simplicity of money due for work performed, a fiscal rationale that both transcended and mitigated the horror of the work for which they were being paid.

For the vast majority of common seamen their chances of ever becoming wealthy from slave trading were extremely slim. Although many had minor ‘ventures’
of their own, trading small amounts of produce or alcohol during the course of a voyage, few ever broke away from poverty and want. The effects of sailors who died at sea generally comprised a few worn items of clothing and a knife, which were auctioned off among his crewmates for the benefit of any dependants he left behind. Slave ship captains by comparison, left far more considerable bequests. Captain Lewis of the *Racehorse*, for example, who died at the African coast in the 1750s left not only his clothes but also a ring valued at five guineas and £150 to each of his sisters. For those who captained slaving vessels half a century later as the trade reached its denouement, gains from the trade could be far more substantial still.

The real way of accruing vast wealth from slave trading, though, was for a man to accumulate enough from his days at sea to retire onshore and indulge in the far safer profession of slave merchant. Far and away greater than the amounts left by captains, let alone the common seamen, some slaving merchants secured amongst the largest self-made fortunes of their day. Liverpool merchants Thomas Leyland and John Earle both left around £100,000 upon their deaths in the early eighteenth century. Some were wealthy enough to build country estates or establish the banking facilities in their towns. These were the sizeable gains that slave ship captains aspired to: the wealth to set themselves up in business and then ascend the ranks of society, revelling in the power which often went with it. Relatively few would make it, but many considered the risks involved worth taking. It was the returns from privilege and commission that allowed a captain to dream of retiring from the sea, becoming a merchant, and thus gaining the possibility of entering the ranks of the wealthy.

If there had been general social mobility within the slave trade, with promotion theoretically accessible to all, then naturally such gains would also have been within the reach of all, at least in terms of their ambitions. Seamen might have been tied to the ideology of slave trading to a greater degree because they sought their fortunes in the trade. The chance of promotion, however, was not open to all, so this was simply not the case. Despite the high mortality rates for the majority of seamen there were limited opportunities to rise up the ranks of command beyond the junior

---

mate positions. Of men who progressed from second mate to captain during the
course of a voyage because of the death of their superiors, less than half appear to
have gone on to captain a slave ship subsequently.\textsuperscript{44} The overwhelming majority of
both common seamen and their captains were young men so there was clearly limited
chance for major promotion.

A typical example of the career path of a slave trade seaman of impoverished
background comes from the parliamentary enquiry into the slave trade. James Morley
sailed on the \textit{Eagle} to Angola in 1760 when he was only nine or ten years old, and the
\textit{Amelia} three years later to Old Calabar working as a servant on both voyages. Then,
by 1767 he was ‘before the mast’ on the \textit{Marcus} which also sailed to Old Calabar and
then to St. Kitts. By his fourth slaving voyage, on the \textit{Tom} to Gabon under Captain
Matthews he had become a gunner. On his final two voyages in the 1770s he worked
as a gunner and a junior mate.\textsuperscript{45} As this was a large number of slaving voyages for
any one man to take, progression past the ranks of junior officer, and thus the
opportunity to earn substantially higher wages, was simply beyond his grasp. For
many, disease, an accident or some other (often occupation specific) misfortune
prematurely ended their careers anyway. For all too many there would be no return
from the tropics at all. The bones of seamen, like those of so many captive Africans,
were frequently cast to eternity at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

The key to success in becoming a slave ship captain was not hard work or
longevity or even sobriety, although these things helped. Rather connections were
what mattered, especial those of consanguinity. The best way to become a slave ship
captain, with all the possibility for wealth that that offered, was to be the son or
nephew of a slaving merchant. George Greaves, who captained six voyages to Africa
between 1786 and 1797 was the son of merchant William Greaves. His contemporary
Robert Forbes who also led six slaving voyages from 1786 to 1791 was the son of
Edward Forbes who had been listed as an Africa merchant in Liverpool as far back as
the 1750s. Gerard Backhouse who captained eight slaving vessels from the \textit{Robert} in
1773 to the \textit{Squirrel} in 1789 was almost certainly related to the brothers Daniel and
John Backhouse who were among Liverpool’s most prominent and wealthy slave

\textsuperscript{44} Calculated for Liverpool vessels. Eltis, CD-ROM.
\textsuperscript{45} ZHC 1/84 150.
In the American colonies too this pattern was not unknown. Robert Champlin who captained the *Adventure* in 1773-4 belonged to one of the big Narangansett planter and merchant families.\(^{47}\)

Also common were men who followed in their father’s footsteps as slaver captains. Some men had their sons working with them onboard slave ships, obviously priming them for a life in command. William Woodville who captained the *Sam* had his son William Junior with him when he left Liverpool in 1782, as did Joseph Williams in the *Ruby*, *which* departed from Bristol five years later. Two years after that William Fairfield’s son was writing home from sea to his mother to tell of the sorry loss of his “Honour’d Parent”, the captain of the Rhode Island ship *Felicity* who was killed in a slave revolt.\(^{48}\) Even more common than this was for captains to apprentice their sons to their contemporaries. Similarly, men who worked in other maritime-related industries often followed this course of action. This gave their sons the chance that they would progress very quickly once their apprenticeship was served to the more lucrative positions among a ship’s officers.

Thus the career of being a slave ship captain seems to have been something of a ‘closed shop’. Ambrose Lace, who captained seven slave ships in the 1750s and ‘60s delivering approximately two thousand Africans to the Americas, later became wealthy enough to establish himself as a merchant in Liverpool. His son William became a slave ship captain, commanding nine voyages to Africa and the Americas with cargoes of human beings.\(^{49}\) A captain who later became a slave merchant, David Tuohy, wrote to his brother telling him of the loss of his son Ned off one of his ships in 1778. “If he had lived he would have been captain in less than 3 years” he wrote to the grieved father.\(^{50}\) Stories like that of William ‘Billy’ Boats, a foundling who made his fortune in the slave and privateering businesses and died as a wealthy merchant, were highly unusual.\(^{51}\) Some seamen were set upon a ‘rapid track’ of promotion from


\(^{47}\) Verner Crane, *A Rhode Island Slaver: The Trade Book of the Sloop Adventure, 1773-4* (Providence, 1922) intro.


\(^{49}\) Behrendt, “Captains” 85; Eltis CD-ROM.

\(^{50}\) Liverpool RO 380 TUO 2/1: Papers of David Tuohy.

\(^{51}\) Boats had been found abandoned as a small baby onboard a vessel at Liverpool, hence his name, and was later apprenticed to a captain after growing up in an orphanage. He made seven slaving voyages as captain, first of the *Byrne* in the 1740s, and then of the *Knight* during the 1750s. After retiring from sea and becoming a merchant, one of his ships captured a Spanish vessel loaded with gold, upon which
their early days at sea, whereas for others the most they could realistically hope to progress was to one of the lower mate positions. The real social and economic status leap, to captain, was beyond the scope of the ordinary men. Slave ship captains generally came from far less lowly backgrounds than the men they commanded.

There was one other relatively common way to be appointed the captain of a slaving vessel in the last decades of the British trade. This was to be firstly a slave ship’s surgeon, and then to move onto captaincy. This interesting development appears to have come about largely because of regulations about the experience that captains of slave ships were required to have. Surgeons, rarely impressed into the Royal Navy, literate and experienced, were able to fill the requirements for captain as few others were. During the 1785-1807 period Stephen Behrendt found thirty-six men who served as both surgeons and captains on slave ships.\(^\text{52}\) John Knox, for example, who testified before Parliament during the enquiry into the slave trade, stated that he had been a surgeon for seven or eight years, and then a captain for about the same period again.\(^\text{33}\) Even though medical knowledge was extremely rudimentary compared to today, these men had had to undergo education and training which meant that they came from a different background to the generality of common seamen. Latin-speaking William Chancellor, who was the doctor onboard the *Wolf*, expressed this when he claimed that he had suffered more than most from the conditions onboard “because [of] the manner in wch. I was bred”.\(^\text{54}\)

Chancellor’s comment also hints at another gap between seaman and officer. The cultural separation between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ in Britain in this period extended to profound dissimilarities over the way money should be spent. Many of the richer elements of society felt that the inability to spend money wisely was the sole source of the financial woes of the large swath of society that were practically destitute. This was exaggerated even more where seamen were concerned, as they also had their own peculiar maritime ethos that promoted enjoying life on shore while their money lasted with little thought for the future, and then returning to sea to begin the cycle again.

---

\(^{\text{32}}\) Behrendt, “Captains” 98.

\(^{\text{33}}\) ZHC 1/82 73.

Many contemporary observers wrote of sailors living their lives in such a reckless way, and especially of their irresponsibility with regard to money. Thomas Clarkson, with vastly more compassion over their plight, and not a little condescension, claimed that a seaman’s fondness for spending recklessly was because while onboard ship he had everything provided for him, so did not have to “look about him here and there, nor any calculation to enter into to see that ends meet. Thus a child, when a cabin boy” thought Clarkson, “he continues a child when a man at the mast, as far as any thought of his own maintenance [was] concerned.” Nicolas Owen, who made several slaving voyages, agreed with the end result if not the reasoning, writing, “sailors are commonly merry, harry people and wares out the difficulty of a voyage with patience, but upon their return lay out the fruits of their labour in debaucheries, without consideration of future wants.”

A fellow tar, James Field Stanfield, was more specific in attributing the tendency of seamen to squander their wages and live rashly to the horrors of slave trading in particular. He wrote,

Imagine to yourself...a poor worn-out wretch, after the miseries and sickness of a slaving voyage – after a long want of every cheering beverage – now first set ashore – his own master – among people of his own colour and language – with money in his pocket, and temptations to excess on every side: picture this – and for a moment recollect the unsuspecting, thoughtless, dissipated propensity that marks the character of an English sailor, and you must conclude the consequences as unavoidable – that the feeble remains left by the cruelty and disease of an African voyage, are speedily sacrificed by intemperance [emphasis in original].

His language of the seaman becoming his “own master” upon reaching land, is also particularly revealing in this context.

While these images are clearly somewhat stereotypical, there is certainly veracity in the picture of Jack Tar as a young, single and flighty man with no responsibilities or family ties, who spent his wages recklessly and then had to return to sea out of pressing need. Most seamen were young and relatively few had families compared to the population at large. There is plenty of evidence that they spent their

---

55 Thomas Clarkson, Grievances of Our Mercantile Seamen: A National and Crying Evil (Ipswich, 1845) 9.
money on drink, tobacco and women. Men directly off ships were often on the look out for alcohol and prostitutes, and plenty were prepared to provide such services. Many women, just like men, had been left destitute by the changing society, and with very few choices indeed some chose or were forced into prostitution. Men employed on slave ships had, of course, recourse to find women by various means in their other ports of call, and not infrequently sought out the enslaved women onboard their vessels as unwilling sexual partners. Others had even engaged prostitutes while at sea: John Nicol the steward onboard the Lady Juliana that shipped 237 British women convicts to Australia in 1789 remembered that the most faithful customers of the women who operated out of the ship as prostitutes were the crews of slave ships.58

Certainly too the slave trade, as all other long distance seafaring trades, was awash with liquor. Reports of men being too drunk to do their duty were commonplace, among the officers as much as the seamen.59 In sailor mutinies alcohol played a major role, with drunkenness frequently being cited both as a catalyst for revolt and the reason for men not being able to remember before the courts what had occurred.60 Rhode Island ships commonly traded rum for slaves in Africa, and tapping the casks for their own consumption seems to have been a favourite occupation. Dying from excess alcohol was common—perhaps it should come as a no surprise that John Richardson, the man who had gone to sea already addicted to “lewd women” and drink, died from the latter vice.61 Many shared the fate of Alexander Robinson on the Jupiter who died in Africa in 1793 from the ill effects of alcohol on his liver.62 Alcohol was an essential palliative in this era, and the consumption of it in vast quantity was an accepted part of seafaring life. A Liverpool merchant recommended giving the crew “a little brandy” and tobacco in order that they would “do the ship’s duty with good will.”63 Charging excess amount for alcohol during the voyage was a common way for the captain to increase his earnings.64

59 C107/13; C108/214; Liverpool RO 387 MD 55; HCA 16/59/18.
60 HCA 1/64; Newton, Journal 14; HCA 1/58 ff. 6-11.
61 Barker, The Unfortunate Shipwright 40.
62 House of Lords’ Record Office, 5/11/12: Slave Trade Papers and Certificates of Slaves Taken onboard Ships (undated).
63 Liverpool RO 380 TUO 4/2: Papers of the Ranger 1767.
A few examples of crew accounts onboard slaving vessels still exist, and reinforce that the most common purchases were alcohol and tobacco. This should not be overemphasised, however. Many seamen also paid for additional articles of clothing and even knives and other tools, as accounts of expenditure onboard the Rhode Island ship *Resource*, which transported slaves to Montevideo in 1806, show. Seaman John Country bought two shirts for $3.33, a month later bought a ‘Nankin Jacket’ for $4 and another two months later purchased another three shirts for $5. Another sailor, Lewis Seriff purchased two shirts, a jacket, some trousers, and a “Jack Nife.” Their fellow sailor George Maccomber apparently needed three knives during the voyage, “2 Jacknives” on 20 June and a further “Knief” on 17 September. Such needs seem to have been shared by sailors of other racial origins: a man recorded only as ‘Henry the Sandwich Islander’ purchased shoes for $2, stockings, a “Baze shirt,” a pea jacket for $9 and “1 Jack Knief Small Size.” Meanwhile the cabin steward, recorded only as “Arsree - Chinese” also purchased stockings and trousers near the start of the voyage. Even the slave, Cipeo or Sippeo, who was a member of the crew had an account of this type, showing that he purchased a baize shirt, some trousers, a checked shirt, and two jack knives.

The crew accounts of the *Lyon* frigate, which left Liverpool for Africa in May 1761, also show this pattern of copious purchases of rum, tobacco and clothing. Some quantities of alcohol purchased were exceedingly large for one person’s use: the carpenter, for example bought fourteen gallons of brandy within a seven and a half month period. These accounts also reveal some far more tragic circumstances, however. John Kelsey was charged for a “New St. George’s Ensign” as he had “worn out [the original] with sleeping in it” presumably lacking anything else to keep him warm. John Williams paid 15 shillings for “sick lodgings on shoar”. All paid ‘hospital money.’

These ships’ petty accounts also reveal another aspect of the triangular trade’s dubious reputation among sailors. In the slave trade, there was not only the usual ways for seamen to lose money, but also some specific to ‘guinea’ ships. Captains invented creative means by which sailors were reminded of their place as the dominant group in relation to the slaves they shipped, while at the same time

---

66 HCA 15/55.
reinforcing their lowly position in terms of capitalism. Many of the Lyon’s men had part of their wages deducted for African captives who had escaped while they were on watch duty. Seamen John Bruce, for example, paid £1.10—approximately one month’s wages—for “part of a slave lost at sea”. William Gamsby, the fourth mate, was charged the value of an “18th part of a Man slave lost” and for “part of a new Yawll and 2 Slaves lost”. The cook, William Sharp, was charged for a “7th part” of two male slaves who had run away during his watch, and later again for another two slaves who managed to escape. And the Lyon’s captain was not unusual in making these charges against his men. The captain of the Spy tried to deduct £3 from each of his seamen for two female slaves who had thrown themselves overboard and been eaten by sharks at Bonny, so adding insult to injury to men who had just been impressed onto HMS Nemesis.

Similarly, although it was long established practice in maritime industry as a whole to only pay seamen once the freight had been earned for the owners, the risk of not being paid at all in the slave trade increased because of the added dangers. These included the hazards of slave revolt, attack by free Africans or another European nation, or being lost on one of the sandbars that made landing treacherous at several West African harbours. Of course these risks were feared also by the merchants and captains whose financial losses would far outweigh that of the sailors in absolute terms. Slave trading was always a high-risk venture. Nevertheless, many merchants deemed the odds worth gambling on for their own potential gains could be vast. For seamen, unless the ship took a prize during battle, they had no such hope of considerable accumulation of money to counterbalance the huge hazards they faced. Even the cost of the seaman’s chest with his clothing, hammock and few meagre possessions would on average take a further twelve months of toil on successful voyages to replace.

Another reason that seamen felt cheated out of their dues while on a slaving voyage was the payment of part of their wages in the West Indies in local currency. This was commonly paid at the same rate as they would be paid in sterling, even though colonial currency was worth substantially less. Most seamen were content to

67 Ibid.
take any payment they could and used the money to procure alcohol and women in
the Caribbean, or even to abscond from the ship altogether (see chapter 6). David
Wilkes, second mate of the Union, even sued in the Vice-Admiralty court of Virginia
to be paid what was owed to him at that time. Some, however, fervently resented
what they saw as an underhanded way of paying them less and were prepared to fight
for payment in sterling. Isaac Parker, who would later sign onboard Cook’s
Endeavour, was imprisoned in the West Indies for refusing to accept colonial
currency. There was clearly an advantage for merchants to pay their hired men in
less valuable colonial currency: Captain William Earle of the Chesterfield in 1751, for
example, was instructed to “pay what seamen’s wages they’ll take in the West
Indies.” This, then, casts new light on arguments, which have raged since the
parliamentary enquiry into slaving, as to whether the slave trade paid higher wages
than other long-distance trades because of the additional dangers and unpleasantness.
Even if seamen were indeed paid around ten shillings more in the slave trade than in
other trades, as some have claimed, it is not at all clear that this was in fact passed on
to them in real terms. The perceived higher wages, could, nevertheless, have
attracted seamen to slave ships at the outset of a voyage.

The truth was that even without spending all of their wages on alcohol,
nicotine and prostitutes, and having to pay for runaway slaves and their own health
care, sailors were extremely hard pressed to support a family on the wages paid to
them. Studies of seamen in the early USA found that although a captain’s pay would
support a family, a mate’s would only just do so. Common seamen, therefore, could
not hope to support a family on their wages alone. Billy G. Smith found examples of
sailors’ families in Philadelphia during the second half of the eighteenth century who
survived from almshouse charity and were too poor to bury their own children. In
Britain the wives and children of seamen were frequently found in workhouses,
waiting hopefully for their husbands and fathers to return from a voyage. The

_____

70 George Reese (ed.) Proceedings in the Court of the Vice-Admiralty of Virginia 1698-1775
(Richmond, VA: Virginia State Library, 1983) 91-3.
71 ZHC 1/84 136.
72 Merseyside Maritime Museum, D/Earle/1/1.
73 ZHC 1/82 105; ZHC 1/85 55.
74 Daniel Vickers and Vince Walsh, “Young Men and the Sea: the Sociology of Seafaring in 18th
75 Billy G. Smith, “The Vicissitudes of Fortune: The Careers of Laboring Men in Philadelphia, 1750-
1800” in Stephen Innes (ed.) Work and Labor in Early America (Chapel Hill, NC: Institute of Early
alternatives were bleak. So many of these women were forced into prostitution while their husbands were away that society recognised little difference between the two groups. Poor seamen's wives formed such a ubiquitous part of society that ballads were sung about their plight.\(^\text{76}\)

Ruth Wallis Herndon discovered that sailors in Rhode Island were also frequently too poor to support their own families, and often had to rely on town charity for survival. More importantly, she suggests that “when white men could not adequately govern or provide for their households, they joined a dependent class already inhabited by black men.”\(^\text{77}\) Her findings have wider implications, for this racialisation of dependence had relevance across the ocean in Europe. Dependence everywhere had become tainted with the lack of freedom associated with slavery, and so repellent. Wealth meant personal independence and self-determination. For men who had been employed in the ‘triangular trade’ these matters took on a significance above and beyond the hunger pangs of poverty, for they knew that this inability to support their own families was a form of dependence and they vehemently resented it. The ethos of white manhood, deemed eighteenth century Anglo-American society, was to be the master not only of yourself but also your wife, your family and your servants.

Hardly surprisingly, therefore, the issue of advance wages was yet another matter over which seamen were prepared to take to the streets. In May 1783 *Gentleman’s Magazine* reported that “a body of sailors, to the number of 5 or 600, paraded the streets” of Bristol “with music and colours.” They were demanding an advance on their wages. The following year the magazine again reported trouble, when “A body of sailors, ship carpenters, &c, assembled before the Queen’s House.”\(^\text{78}\)

Commonly men hired by slaving vessels would have one or two months wages advanced to them before the ship set sail. For many who were single this meant that they had the finances to go on one last carousal before departure, but for those with families it meant that wives and children had to survive for the duration of the


\(^{78}\) *Gentleman’s Magazine* May 1783; *Gentleman’s Magazine* November 1784.
voyage—normally around a year—on only one or two months’ pay. In the meantime they were left to hope that he would not spend all his income on alcohol and women while on shore leave, and also would not run up a large amount on his on-ship account.

The reasons why merchants were resistant to paying large sums to seamen in advance are obvious, quite apart from the large outlay involved. Sailor George Bishop took his advance wages and then deserted before the ship even set sail. His would-be colleague Samuel Hooley had a cash advance on his wages, and then during the voyage bought a bed, two and a quarter gallons of brandy, three pairs of trousers and two shirts. When he also had his hospital money, and charges for “a 12th part of a slave lost” deducted from his wages due, he actually owed £2.17.9 at the end of the voyage. Giving money to a seaman’s family during the voyage rather than giving out a large advance before his departure did not surmount these problems. On the muster roll of the Colonel’s 1793 voyage it is noted that sailor James White absconded in the Bahamas, so being “indebted to the owners” because of the “monthly money left his wife”.

Part of the unwillingness to support wives and children while the sailor was away did not relate to fiscal matters per se, however, but rather can be attributed to the capitalist ethic that employers were no longer responsible for the family at large. This was part of the larger picture that had seen smaller ports edged out of the British slave trade by the major powers of Liverpool and London, so that lowly sailors were rarely commanded by men they had had any relationship with on land. Even Liverpool, by far the smaller of the two cities, had little left of the village environment that would have seen men go to sea with those they had known all their lives in the kind of vertical rather than horizontal societal structure known in smaller ports and other time periods. Admittedly the trade of North America was less clear in this regard, for the major slave trading centres of Rhode Island were vastly smaller towns than Britain’s

79 HCA 15/55.
80 BT 98/55 f.276.
81 By the latter part of the eighteenth century the small ports of Britain had almost entirely been excluded from the trade in slaves, and even Bristol had fallen back from its peak in the late 1720s. The vast majority of Britain’s slave ships, over seventy-two percent, left from the urban areas of Liverpool or London, Eltis, CD-ROM; M.M. Schofield, “The Slave Trade from Lancashire and the Ports Outside Liverpool c.1750—c.1790” Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 126 (1976) 30-72; Nigel Tattersfield, The Forgotten Trade: Comprising the Log of the Daniel and Henry of 1700 and Accounts of the Slave Trade from the Minor Ports of England, 1698-1725 (London: Pimlico, 1998).
major slaving ports. Ships that left from there were more likely to have employed men who were known to each other in a social setting. Nonetheless, paternalistic bonds were breaking down all around the Atlantic world in this era.

By the later eighteenth century there was little chance that the captain of a slave ship would write home asking his wife to check on the wives of his men, as happened in other trades and in other centuries. The social gulf between the trade’s authorities and its common seamen was vast. In Bristol where the slave trade reached its apex in the early eighteenth century, by mid-century there was a noticeably “increased social distance between the ‘rulers’ and the ‘ruled’.” This represented a conscious effort on the part of the merchants, eager to slough off their reputation for being “as rough mannered as their sailors.” Such gaps in the social hierarchy between sailors and their commanders were equally omnipresent in Liverpool, where small numbers of men and their families grew wealthy, while a large mass of downtrodden, subjugated men lived hand to mouth existences down by the seafront. Merchants who made profits from slave trading built elaborate homes, sought positions of power and lived lives they felt would bestow that quintessentially Georgian value of respectability upon them. It was as if they hoped it would purify their fortunes from the dual stains of slavery and trade.

There was still a residue of paternalist sentiment that had characterised worker-employer relations in an earlier era, but it was becoming increasingly rare. Liverpool merchant Robert Bostock ordered Captain James Fryer, whom he had employed to command the slaver Bess, that “you must behave...Like a Father and not like a Brute”, but this seems to have been related to Fryer’s fear that one crewmember in particular would prove unsuited to the job in hand. It was the absence of this kind of paternalism that Thomas Clarkson, who used the ill-treatment of seamen as a central tenet of his argument against the slave trade, saw as so wrong. He agitated for the rather unrealistic aim that captains would see themselves as fathers to the seamen, and the latter as children or servants to their captains. On the whole, however, the class divisions in Britain were such that contact between the two groups was generally

---

84 Liverpool RO 387 MD 55.
85 Clarkson, Grievances 18.
minimal. Common seamen were largely divorced from the world of merchant and captain.

Far from Clarkson’s ideal, seamen and their families seem to have been treated with something between cool disdain and downright derision by merchants. One writer in the early eighteenth century wrote that the sea taught men “the seven liberal sciences of swearing, drinking, thieving, whoring, killing, couzening [sic], and backbiting” and these were doubtless not the ‘virtues’ with which the socially aspirational merchants wished to be associated.*^ There are two examples of the families of seamen who died on slaving voyages asking the employing merchant for details of their deaths and meeting with an uncaring response. In 1792 George MacLaurin’s brother wrote asking when exactly his sibling had died on the African coast so that their father could put it in the family bible. He received no answer. In similar circumstances, merchant Thomas Leyland, wrote to John Berry of Soho, London in 1788 offering little sympathy for the death of a seaman who presumably was Berry’s kin. He hastily dismissed the enquirer by reporting that the logbook of the ship the man had sailed on, the Enterprize, had been lost in Jamaica.** Leyland was an investor in over seventy slave ships between 1782 and 1807 employing countless seamen and doubtless had little individual concern for these men.***

This social distance extended to the recruiting of the men for a voyage, for merchants did not sully their hands by dealing with this issue. The appointed captain of the ship was in charge of engaging sailors for the voyage ahead, the status of the sailors being too lowly to occupy the time of the merchant. It was the captain who straddled the world between merchant capitalism and maritime concerns. Only he and prospective surgeons could apply for positions and negotiate terms with the merchant directly, thus finding work in ways far more genteel than the recruitment of common seamen. In August 1764 Joseph Wanton of Newport wrote to the Brown brothers of Providence enquiring if they would like to employ him as master of their brig Sally. Wanton stated that he was “well aquainted and well experienced in the Ginea Trade all Down the Coasts” and was ready to “Come up to providence and fitt

---

** C107/10.
*** Liverpool RO 387 MD 59; Letter Book of Thomas Leyland, May 1786-September 1788.
**** Thomas Leyland was the fifth listed owner of the Harlequin in 1782, the third cited owner of the Golden Age a year later, and beginning in that year was also the principal investor in a further seventy-one slaving vessels, Eltis, CD-ROM.
her with what Dispatch will Sute you." In 1790 John Marshall, veteran of a possible eight slaving voyages by that year, wrote to James Rogers offering his services as the master of a slave ship. He apparently had been waiting to see if war was imminent because he was hoping for the higher wages the government would have paid in that eventuality.

The only other people who sailed on slavers who had this kind of leeway of negotiation were surgeons. An act of 1788 guaranteed that every British slave ship had to carry a doctor, but even before this most had done so. Merchant James Rogers struggled to get a surgeon for his ship the Trelawney and in the end had to acquiesce to the wage and privilege demands of James Burton. He also had to pay three guineas for Burton's medical certificate as he had never been a slave ship surgeon before. John Loughlin who wrote to Rogers in 1790 was also obviously a man who had never been in the Guinea trade before as he demanded his "expenses of Passing Surgeons Hall" as well as "£4.10 per month two Negroes free of all costs...and Coach hire from London to Bristol." Rogers could have saved the certificate fee if he had engaged John Walker instead, as his offer of service included the information that he had already sailed on three slaving voyages, one to the windward coast and two to Bonny, as an employee of a Mr. James. Although doctors were not required by law on American ships, some did carry them. One of the first fiscal costs the Resource bore, for example, was the cash paid "to take Doctor Knowles from Gaol". Other captains, surgeons and mates worked together on more than one voyage and sought each other out as colleagues. Captain Woodville of the Rodney, for example, specifically requested to his employer that he be allowed a surgeon named Irwin with whom he had previously worked. It is not known whether his solicitation was complied with, but Woodville would almost certainly have had his choice in the rest of the crew for in his selection of them he needed no sanction from the merchant.

Generally captains took men who were wandering around the docks looking for employment, or found them in the taverns they so often frequented, but

67 C107/9: Papers of James Rogers; Eltis CD-ROM voyages 17654, 17702, 17760, 17815, 17850, 17931, 17979 and 81208 all have a John Marshall listed as the captain of the vessel.
92 C107/7.
93 C107/9.
94 C107/9.
95 Coughtry, Papers A/2/19/968.
96 C107/13.
occasionally they did have recourse to other means. Although Peter Earle denies that many seamen were recruited by crimps in this period there are examples of this allegedly occurring for slaving vessels. Rather than just kidnapping men off the streets as the naval press did, crimps more often worked in collusion with local publicans and landlords. Seamen generally signed securities for their board and lodging with innkeepers who then endeavoured to make the men spend as much money as possible through “intoxication, prostitution and debauchery”. Then when they had incurred a huge bill they were sold to slave ships for their debts, their only alternative being gaol.

James Stanfield claimed that the only way to “collect a crew” for a slaving voyage was by crimps. He wrote a detailed description of how crimming operated,

there are public houses, under the influence and in the pay of merchants. Every allurement and artifice is held out to entice [sailors] into these infamous dens. Festivity and music lay hold of the deluded senses, prostitution throws in a fascinating spell with too much success, and intoxication generally gives the business its fatal period. In these houses, every temptation to run to debt is most studious offered; this, with an unthinking sailor, is easily brought about. And once that wheel is set in motion, it is soon accelerated to the wretched point which was aimed at. When the debt is sufficient for the purpose, a Guinea ship is offered, sometimes through the medium of the inexorable hostess, and frequently by one of those numerous agents on that business, who under the mask of pity or friendship, win the attention and confidence of the unsuspecting victim. If this be refused he is thrown into prison, which fixes him their own; for from that place, other vessels will scarcely engage him.

Stanfield himself had been “dragged into houses three times, in the course of one street” and had once been forced to sign a will in favour of his landlady should he not return from a voyage.

James Morley, whose career has already been discussed, related that he knew of a publican named Sullivan in Bristol who deliberately got sailors into debt and then offered them a choice between “Guinea service or gaol.” Another sailor, James Towne, concluded that the major method of procuring sailors for slave ships was by

97 Earle, Sailors 29-30.
98 Clarkson, Grievances 15-18.
100 ZHC 1/84 160.
using their tendency towards “drunkenness and indebtedness” to ensnare them. In his book Liverpool and Slavery ‘A Genuine Dicky Sam’ described sailors getting drink in a pub called ‘The Sailor’s Block’, then waking up to find themselves onboard a slave ship “bound to Africa, slaving, fevers, tortures and death”. William Butterworth, who was entrapped into serving on a slaving vessel when a young boy, related that he and a friend had been “easy prey to these dealers in human flesh”. His terminology was not too much of an exaggeration, for crimps apparently received around £3 or £4 for an able-seaman.

So slave trade sailors were not only trapped on the ship in the usual way that all seamen were, with the only escape—not infrequently resorted to—being either desertion when they reached shore, or a headlong suicidal leap overboard. More than this, sailors in the slave trade were sometimes sent on board these vessels against their will. This loss of liberty was the cause of tremendous acrimony among seamen, and the men involved in this racket in workers were especially hated. During the Gordon Riots of 1780 at least twenty crimping houses were attacked and the sailors held therein freed. Again, as in the other rebellions around the Atlantic rim, sailors were major actors within this revolt with their traditional weaponry of cutlasses and marlin spikes being carried by many in the mob. It was a sailor who pushed himself through a window of the Newgate gaol-keepers house, so enabling others to get in and locate the keys for the main gaol. Liberty in this case encompassed those immured in the crowded, malignant setting of Newgate, but its protests were intended against a far more wide-ranging lack of liberty. This lack of liberty was that of poverty, the heart felt cry of the impoverished masses left beached by the tide of industrialisation.

This interrelated demand for freedom and better pay similarly found expression in the seaman’s fight against the naval press. In Bristol in 1756 the crew of the slave ship Virginia Merchant fought back when men from a naval tender attempted to board her, resulting eventually in her sinking and loss of life. In Liverpool impressed seamen mutinied by “knocking down the centinels, and securing

---

101 ZHC 1/87 26.
102 Liverpool and Slavery: An Historical Account of the Liverpool-African Slave Trade. Compiled from Various Sources and Authentic Documents... With an Interesting Plate of the Famous Slave Ship the “Brookes” of Liverpool (Liverpool: A. Bowker & Son, 1884) 20-21.
103 Butterworth, Three Years 6.
104 Crow, Memoirs 90.
their arms” and so gained possession of the naval vessel. The mate they drove off in a small boat, and later many of the impressed men escaped into Liverpool. It is hard not to see the obvious parallels with the language of slave revolts. Men were taken from slave ships even before they sailed for the coast of Africa, while others were pressed just as they arrived back in Britain from a yearlong slaving voyage. This meant that they had to leave immediately again without, as one press victim put it, having the “Opportunity of setting my Foot upon the Shore of my Native Country.”

Fear of a “warm press” or even a “hot press” swept around the ocean by word of mouth as seamen went to extraordinary lengths to avoid conscription into the Royal Navy. The threat was omnipresent in many of the slavers’ ports of call, with the Caribbean Islands, and (prior to the Revolution) the North American mainland being favourite capture spots as well as the British mainland. In June 1790 at the outbreak of war “all the seamen in St. John’s Harbour [Antigua] were impressed into His Majesty’s Service.” In November 1803 sailors from the brig Sally were sent onshore in Barbados by their captain in order to hide them from press gangs. Some of the sailors seized the opportunity to enjoy another kind of freedom and absconded. In 1792 sailor George Walker wrote asking merchant James Rogers for the money he had already earned when he was pressed off Rogers’ ship Crescent at Montego Bay, Jamaica. The examples are numerous. Relatively often slave ships, just like those in other trades in the same era, were left so short handed by the press that they could not sail.

Small wonder that this was considered a kind of servitude. Hugh Crow, who had had men pressed in Jamaica, wrote that he had “always considered [impressment] to be, in many points of view, much more arbitrary and cruel than what was named the slave trade.” Thomas Clarkson argued that because of the press seamen lost “some of their civil privileges, merely because they are bred to the sea; the privileges

---

107 Gentleman’s Magazine May 1756.
110 See for example, Pennsylvania Gazette 12 December 1787; Pennsylvania Gazette 7 July 1790.
111 C 108/214: Log of the Sally of Bristol.
112 C107/10.
113 Captain James Williams of the Fame wrote to shipowner James Rogers that he would have already departed from Kingston, Jamaica, but “all my people went onboard a man of war,” C107/5; the name of the vessel is given in Eltis, CD-ROM 18069.
114 Crow, Memoirs 72.
of all other British subjects.”

In this period of vociferous cries for liberty it was considered increasingly indefensible. For seamen the problem was much greater than just the loss of liberty inflicted by the naval press. Apart from the very real chance that a sailor would die during Naval service, it also meant extreme hardship for the seaman’s family. “Throughout the eighteenth century the Navy preferred impressing its men to offering them adequate wages”, and worse still, any remuneration was often years in arrears. This was as much a deliberate tactic to prevent men from deserting as the result of chaotic conditions and lack of government funding. It rarely had the required effect, but whether a man deserted or stayed he often suffered the loss of several years of income. For a sailor who had a family dependent upon him this could mean extreme hardship for them.

The fight against impressment also illustrated the racialised nature of freedom. The press took men of any ethnic background. Black men John Paul, Thomas Sharp and John Anderson, for example, were impressed from slaving vessels at Jamaica, Demarara and an unnamed West Indian island respectively during the period 1805-7. But if the press was “quite colorblind” the implications of its actions were not. There was a definite feeling among Britons that it was the fact of treating white Europeans (especially males) in this way that was so appalling. This indeed was considered a justification for the slave trade among its defenders, an argument based on the perverse notion that if the liberty of European sailors could be removed so summarily, then, ergo, it should be considered acceptable to treat Africans in this way too. How could the captivation of ‘uncivilised blacks’, ran this argument, possibly be criticised if free, white, and by implication superior, men were also so treated?

115 Clarkson, Grievances 7
116 Lemisch claimed that “the British government seemed to treat the Sons of Neptune little better than slaves”, Jack Tar 24. Nicholas Rogers pertinently notes that “seafarers were the one class for whom indefinite service to the state remained a reality”, in “Liberty Road: Opposition to Impressment in Britain during the American War of Independence” Colin Howell and Richard Twomey (eds.) Jack Tar in History: Essays in the History of Maritime Life and Labor (New Brunswick: Acadiensis Press, 1991) 60.
117 Lemisch, Jack Tar 17.
120 In an attempt to defend the slave trade prominent merchant James Baillie commented that sailors are not also free, given that many of them were stolen away to sea. He stated, “have we not also heard, Sir, even in this country of boasted liberty, of seamen’s being kidnapped and carried away, when returning from distant voyages, after an absence of many years, and that even without being allowed
There was a larger context to these issues as sailors had long been considered to be "bondsmen of the sea". The term 'galley slave', which originally referred to enslaved oarsmen on Greek or Roman galleys had come to symbolise any person condemned to drudgery, so closely tied were seafaring and moil in the view of contemporary society. This linguistic linkage of seafaring and slavery was so ubiquitous as to be hackneyed—sailors had long called their time on shore 'liberty,' their time at sea, by implication, being seen as a period of bondage. The term master referred to both captain and slaveowner. Even during the parliamentary inquiry into the slave trade, this rhetoric was common. Naval man Sir George Young, for example, reported that slaver seamen repeatedly asked him for refuge "from their owners."\(^{121}\) Slaver captain and surgeon John Knox claimed that 'landsmen' died more frequently than seamen on a Guinea voyage because they were "unseasoned".\(^{122}\) His comment had some truth behind it, but it is his choice of language that is particularly evocative of the practice of seasoning slaves in the West Indies.

What is indisputable, however, is that waged labour set sailors decisively apart from the captive Africans they would forcibly transport by placing them on a different level in the fiscal landscape—merchant sailors were not commodities in themselves. Sailors, whatever the violence and brutality pervading their working lives, were basically free men, with a wealth of choices beyond those enjoyed by slaves. Critically, their lowly position did not, of course, threaten to thwart their posterity in perpetuity as was the fate of those they transported as slaves. Yet sailors did face both the pull factor of wages paid, and the rather more direct means of compulsion and naked force. They were ostensibly free men whose working conditions were compared in contemporary language with bonded labour. Seamen were paid to administer the whip while their backs often proudly bore the marks of this particular correctional aid themselves.

The fact that the European men whose own freedom was most in doubt understood the nature of true slavery through first-hand contact profoundly affected the nature of freedom in the Atlantic world. Sailors were rhetorically labelled slaves the comfort of seeing their wives and families." James Baillie, The Speech of James Baillie, esq., Agent for Grenada, in the House of Commons, on the Question of the Abolition of the Slave Trade (London, 1792) 5.
\(^{121}\) ZHC 1/84 201-10.
\(^{122}\) ZHC 1/82 84: Evidence of John Knox. This was probably true because new arrivals on the African coast died at the very high rate of between 300 and 700 per thousand per annum. Philip D. Curtin, "'The White Man's Grave': Image and Reality, 1780-1850" Journal of British Studies 1 (1961) 94-110.
and the same language used to express their state with that of plantation slaves. Those who had worked on slave ships knew it was inappropriate. They had scraped the blood, vomit and faeces of true incarceration from the holds of their ship, the men being too tightly bound to be allowed the most basic of dignities. They had held a cat-o'-nine-tails over those too melancholy and despairing to eat. They had loaded human cattle onto their ships and disgorged the survivors from the rancid holds to be sold into ceaseless bondage. They had moved men and women from lands where to have black skin was universal to places where its stigma was ingrained in society. Those who had lain with captive African women knew that any children so conceived would be slaves in perpetuity. Slave ship sailors, even if they cared little for these matters, knew them to be true.

Unsurprisingly these men expanded their tenuous links to freedom at every opportunity. They had plenty of scope, for these most well travelled and worldly-wise of men not only encountered the realities of African enslavement, they also saw its antipodal creation up close. As liberty took on new tenure and became an increasingly racialised phenomenon, seamen onboard slave ships were uniquely placed to process this information, as they were quite literally in the eye of the storm of this transformation. What they never forgot, and indeed could not forget given the circumstances of those they transported below decks, was that payment that allowed a decent standard of living was central to ideas of liberty. Political and social rights were, and are, essentially meaningless without the economic resources to back them up.

So the argument comes full circle, back to the protesters on the streets of Liverpool and Boston for whom fair pay and liberty were indivisible parts of the larger idea of justice, while the spectre of racism loomed ever larger on their horizon. The transition to capitalism theoretically ensured the primacy of labour that was both free and waged, but seamen felt that they were badly treated on both counts. What is more, those employed on slave ships worked in a trade in which the importance of both of these benefits were the fundamentals which separated them from those they transported. The racialisation of freedom and waged labour was also tightly tied to the trade in slaves, as each slave ship arriving in the Americas fuelled the menacing, repellent appetite of western racism ever more. The issues that compelled men to march the streets of the major port cities around the Atlantic rim demanding better pay and freedom from all kinds of oppression, were central implications of the slave
Seamen’s radicalism, as shown by the 1775 Liverpool strike, was the result, at least in part, of their employment in this most hated of trades. The reasons why sailors’ fights were often alongside men of African origin, in defiance of the larger ethics of the trade, will be examined in the next chapter.
Chapter 2

Black Jacks and the Trade in Black Gold

The rebellion on the slave ship *Amity* occurred when the ship was heading eastward across the Atlantic having set sail from Norfolk, Virginia in the summer of 1785. Two slaves known as Dick and Will were involved, the latter, we are told, was "an exceeding good looking boy". From what part of the African coast they had originally been forcibly shipped is not known, what we do know is that when this rebellion occurred the two men were on their way back towards Africa. Having left the African continent one-year previously, they were labouring as seamen onboard the *Amity* at the time they rebelled, or "turned pyrate" as their contemporaries may have phrased it, for their captor was also their captain. James Duncason was their master in both uses of the word, being both their slave owner and the commander of the ship on which they were working. Their rebellion was simultaneously both sailor mutiny and slave insurrection.

Dick and Will’s fellow mutineers are equally fascinating for they really were a 'motley crew' representing many strains of Atlantic rebellion. There was a mulatto Bostonian named Stuart who sported a cut on his nose and a scar on his forehead. John Mathew and Alexander Evans were Irishmen, reported in stereotypes common to both their nationality and their profession, to “have a good deal of the brogue” and to be “very subject to liquor”. Richard Squire, possibly their leader, was an Englishman of about thirty years of age who claimed to have been a lieutenant onboard the *USS General Washington*. The last known rebel, and also the oldest man by a decade was John Boadman, described as having a “black complexion” and being “about five feet seven inches high.” Equally interesting is the ethnicity of those of who were cast off in the ship’s longboat as the rebellion progressed, for the three men set adrift along with the captain, mate and boatswain were all said to be “black boys”.

When the owners of the *Amity* named the vessel after the virtue or blessing of friendship, a rebellion fomented among her multiethnics crew was obviously not what they had in mind. What provoked the men to act in this way in this particular instance is lost in history, but sailors frequently rebelled at sea as well as on land. In fact the demand for fair treatment—"justice"—and the willingness to shed blood for the cause
was seen onboard ships even more habitually than ashore. The class loyalties that sailors were developing by the final decades of ‘legal’ slave trading were partly born of conditions at sea, and were bolstered by their well-known “morbid attachment to their profession.” This was built upon a bedrock of rough kinship with their fellow tars. Tough and often callous men, they nonetheless frequently aided their colleagues, and formed loyalties that extended far enough to join together in rebellion if they felt it to be mutually advantageous. A “common jack tar” described his colleagues as “wild and rakeeshly inclin’d, turbilant”, and this combined with the “fictive kinship” system of “mutual responsibilities and protections” onboard a ship created men who were both united and ready to use violence.

Some of the bands of mutinous crewmates, as on the Amity, were racially mixed. In the context of the slave trade this may be hard to comprehend, but in the wider picture of maritime industry this was hardly unique. Despite the fact that slave trading ministered to the rise of one of the most odious and destructive racist creeds the world has known, the slave trade, just like other deep-sea trades of the era, employed a multiracial workforce. Part of the reason for the perceived racial ambiguity of sailors was that the profession incorporated men from many parts of the world. Thus in unravelling the myth that slave trade seamen were simply enigmatic adjuncts to the will of the merchant or uni-dimensional evil abusers of captive Africans, it is necessary to also acknowledge that they were not a homogenous group of men either. Those who laboured onboard the death-ridden vessels of incarceration occasionally included men of African origin.

Boadman and Stuart were part of a large number of black men who were employed in seafaring work during the eighteenth century. In Northern American Atlantic seaport cities by the post-revolutionary period black men are estimated to have totalled seventeen per cent of the seafaring labour force. Likewise, Mathew, Evans and Squire were certainly not unusual in having had men of African origin as colleagues, and having rebelled with them if they thought the situation demanded

1 Pennsylvania Gazette 31 August 1785, 7 September 1785.
such action. Jeffrey Bolster's *Black Jacks* is at the forefront of scholarship in this area, arguing that white sailors in the Atlantic world were among the most accepting of blacks as colleagues, often working alongside them as equals. His subtle and elegant argument shows that while it would be wrong to view seamen as necessarily charitable towards black men (or indeed any others), they nevertheless shared an egalitarian union with fellow members of their profession that could include men of African origin. It is a viewpoint shared by African-American historian Julius S. Scott, who quotes a contemporary observer who noted that “sailors and Negroes are ever on the most amicable terms”, sharing “mutual confidence and familiarity.”

Although the work of Bolster and other historians such as Ira Dye, Martha Putney and James Farr has acknowledged anew the huge contribution to maritime industry made by black men, their place onboard slaving vessels remains veiled.

Outside of academe the slave trade has become symbolic of all who have suffered or do suffer as the result of racism, making this a highly contentious issue. It may be very hard to understand why black men would sign on board slaving vessels, but this is to discount the predicament of their lives. That some men were compelled to accept employment on slave ships does not suggest any compliance with the evil of slave trading. Rather, a gross lack of other possibilities—or want of freedom as sailors would have deemed it—meant that some black men had to return to the enslavement process in order to feed themselves. The transatlantic slave trade created a vacuum that drew men and women out of Africa, but it also simultaneously contrived a particularly invidious form of racism which provided its victims with very narrow choices and few opportunities in the societies into which they were sold.

One of the only options for men who either escaped their bondage or were manumitted was to go to sea. Seafaring was a rare occupation in being open to free

---


blacks in eighteenth-century America—many whaling ships’ crews were around half African-American. Fredrick Douglass, it will be remembered, escaped from his enslavement dressed as a seaman. For later generations of African-Americans who had been born free, mostly in the Northern states, maritime employment remained one of their best, or only, choices. The lure of the sea was partly its escape potential—a characteristic it has been imbued with in men’s minds since time immemorial—but also that seafaring by its nature challenged many of the assumptions of colour enshrined by society on land. Free black sailors were issued with seamen’s protection certificates by the United States government after 1796, attesting that they were “citizens” despite the fact that this was more than they could ever claim on land in this period. Those who went to the sea as freemen symbolised not only endurance, but also reclaimed the ocean as a setting for regaining liberty as well as the scene of the African diaspora’s wretched ordeal.

Beyond these reasons, a primary factor that made nautical employment accessible to men of African origin was that the internationalism of seafaring made it tolerant to men of other ethnic backgrounds. Swept along by the ebb and flow of the tide, the ships involved in deep-sea trades have always involved the exchange of workers as well as goods, disease, culture and genes. Just as Lascars worked on East Indiamen, having being caught up in the transnational trading systems moving cotton and spices across the globe, so Africans joined slaving vessels as free workers as well as forced trading goods. It is implausible that they would not have done so, as the internationalism such men brought to the occupation was a defining trait of deep-sea employment. In a period generally characterised by intense regionalism and parochialism it was partly a seaman’s worldly character and cosmopolitan make-up that set him apart from his non-seagoing peers. Maritime culture, as well as employment, was transoceanic.

African men, and their understanding of the world, were therefore incorporated into the seafaring domain more easily than others partly because of the transatlantic trade in slaves. Men do not go and interact with other peoples in the

---


Farr, “Slow Boat to Nowhere” 159-170.

Bolster, Black Jacks 1-2; Rhode Island Historical Society, Seamen’s Protection Certificates.

name of trade over such a vast period of time without assimilating far more than the goods they have purchased. That the ‘goods’ they acquired in this particular case were men, women and children does not alter this basic fact. The European mercantile forces behind the trade absorbed countless African merchants into the Atlantic’s financial networks, and also drew in less noble born Africans as seamen, porters, interpreters, cooks, canoemen, sentinels and pilots. As a result, by the eighteenth century African culture mingled on the margins of nautical societal norms, most appreciably in the form of sea shanties. As early as 1743 a European seamen was reported to have sung a “negro song” at court martial. More than this, Africans too became members of the seafaring rabble which was employed on ships that plied their trade around the Atlantic’s shores.

Like latter-day ‘Atlantic Creoles’, free Africans enlisted on slave ships as sailors, interpreters, cooks, sentinels and stewards, showing the “linguistic dexterity, cultural plasticity and social agility” which made them the most feared kind of Africans among American planters. By illustrating that Africans were employable in maritime occupations just like men of any other ethnicity, they gave lie to the vaunted justification of slaveowners who distanced themselves from the actual enslavement process by seeing their human acquisitions as imported goods. The numbers of men of African origin who laboured onboard slave ships (as opposed to being captives on them) might be tiny, but they were a visible section of the mass of men. Their lives are also unique in that they reveal a little-recognised complexity of the system, and, in essence, the narrowness of only seeing the transatlantic slave trade as an adjunct to ‘real’, settled, slavery. Here the controversy over African slave merchants and their culpability in events can be extended to show the complex, composite identities of those with little power and vastly lesser wealth.

As historians such as Paul Lovejoy, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovich and Peter Gutkind have found, Africans workers were essential to slaving vessels while they were at the African coast. Enjoying some control over trade and their working lives, they withheld their labour for more money, were aware of their position, and formed a

---


relatively unified group. Some of these men joined the ships on a more permanent basis, lured by the same mixture of potential financial gain and lack of other opportunities that had entrapped many European sailors into a career at sea. Some of those hired by European slaving vessels as ‘linguists’ or interpreters did not just stay with the ship while she was anchored in West Africa, but also crossed the Atlantic Ocean with the rest of the crew. And not all the men worked in these uniquely African roles. There were free African sailors too. One factor in Africa wrote home to Britain claiming that, “Fante sailors from the Gold Coast, who whenever their services are required, readily enter on Board any English ship whose crew has been weakened by mortality, and return in her on the ensuing voyage.” There was no sense of shared African identity that would have morally precluded them from doing so.

This willingness was certainly not restricted to the Fante. Captain William Barns of the Lightning added two Africans to his crew at Annabon whom he named Black Tom and Bigg Tom. They were both discharged from the ship back home in Liverpool, after the ship had delivered 328 Cabinda-bought slaves to St. Vincent. Another 95 slaves originally purchased did not make the Caribbean. The Polly, commanded by John Ainsworth, also gained two men at Annabon whom he endowed with their place of origin as a surname, recording them as Jem Anabona and Mat Anabona. How they were treated in relation to, and interacted with the four French prisoners listed on its muster roll can only be imagined. The Woolton and its captain William Sherwood also gained a man there named Manuel who is recorded with simply the word “black” in the rank list. This seems to have been a relatively common place to enlist more seamen, perhaps because as a small island its men were accustomed to sea-going ventures.

The men who joined slave ships as sailors, servants and cooks were almost certainly from along the Atlantic littoral, in contrast to the slaves they transported who, by the eighteenth century, mostly came from far inland. Some African tribal

---

15 BT 6/7.
16 BT 98/58 f.88; Eltis, CD-ROM.
17 BT 98/61 f.159.
18 BT 98/66 f.14.
groups from along the coast had excellent seafaring skills, which often far surpassed those of the European visitors. Small wonder that captains, who had generally selected their original crew from a diseased and malnourished pool of men, thought it a great opportunity if they could replace any who had already died with these capable men. They did not generally record their origins, however, so the ethnicity of many who laboured onboard slaving vessels can only be assumed. The Liverpool vessel Two Sisters, for example, took four men named Ambree, Baggy, Bassanta, and Banna onboard while in Africa in 1800. As this ship loaded its captive cargo on the Windward Coast it is likely that the men were also from this region of Africa, but this cannot be proven. What is known is that they travelled with the ship to Demerara and were discharged when the ship got back to Liverpool.19

Others were not part of the African maritime groups whose seafaring expertise captains were happy to utilise, but members of the merchant hierarchy involved in supplying slaves to Europeans. Perhaps those who made the ocean crossing with a slave ship and planned to return to Africa on a later voyage were learning skills that they hoped would serve them well in the future, just as African merchants sent their sons to school in England for this reason. With more power than common sailors because of their presumed ability to understand and intercede with the captives, these African men had a different position onboard than those who joined as lowly crewmembers. They also had more guarantees than most African seamen, as their associates on shore could retaliate by stopping trade if they did not return.

For all those Africans who signed onboard slaving vessels as free seamen, at least as many joined in the extremely humble position of cook. This was not a position of authority, but one that few Europeans wished for. There were specifics about the position of cook among the crew that marked it out as suitable for Africans in captains’ minds. First of all, it was lowly, thankless, and acutely unpleasant in the heat of the tropics. Secondly, it was a position that lay outside of the main body of the crew, and could be alienating and solitary. One historian wrote that cooks on all ships were men who had been crippled by an accident, or were disabled in some way, and as those crowded beneath the decks of a slave ship could testify, having black skin was judged to be a peculiar kind of disability among transatlantic white society.20

---

19 BT 98/61 f.187; Eltis, CD-ROM.
In addition there was something slightly effeminate about being a cook, so it was a job ensured not to challenge the white man's sense of supreme masculinity when faced with largely naked men they viewed as strangely libidinous.  

Undoubtedly to see the position in the most positive light, there is cause to think that some traders wanted African food to be cooked for their captive passengers, with many at the time believing that the Africans hated for ships' food such as salt beef and hard tack caused problems such as 'bloody flux' and even melancholy among the slaves. Some of the largest slave ships may even have employed an African to cook for the slaves, while a man of European origin produced food for the crew. There is no doubt that Europeans feared that Africans had special knowledge about toxic substances, and would poison them if given the chance. Yet given the number of African men employed as cooks on slave ships this consideration seems to have frequently given way to the more pressing need of employing a cook. 

Whether Africans joined as cook or seaman, they certainly took risks by enlisting on slavers. Their willingness to go onboard was no doubt over-optimistically judged by the English factor quoted above. A letter from another British factor expresses their fears and rather more candidly identifies the risks they took. Joseph Debat wrote to the African Committee in England from James Fort, Accra, on 17th February 1764, “One of the Black Freemen who Shipped himself on board the Ross Capt. Tear is safe returned as he is Next Heir to the Crown of a Neighbouring Kingdom.” “It is” he continued, a “fortunate Event, tending to Encrease that Confidence Necessary on all Occasions to be Preserved by the Natives.” The implication, of course, is that many potential African seamen did not trust slave ships' captains to honour their freedom when the ship reached its American destination. They had good reason, for there are cases where free African sailors were sold as slaves, such as the two free black seaman sold at Newport, Rhode Island in the late 1780s by Captain Moses Smith. Even if not betrayed by their employing captain, circumstances might prevail against them, such as happened to two free Senegalese

22 John McLeod, for example, feared being poisoned by his cook named Cudjoe and so ate only eggs while he was being fed by him, A Voyage to Africa: with some account of the manners and customs of the Dahomian People (London: John Murray, 1820) 87. The unnamed sailor who left an account of his voyage onboard the Florida in 1753-4 also wrote that he had been warned by the other seamen onboard the ship not to drink African palm wine as it could be poisoned. British Library Add Mss 39946. 
23 PRO T 70/31. 
24 Donnan, Documents III 341.
seamen who were sold from the slaver *Amelia* in 1777 at Hispaniola after French privateers captured the ship.\(^{25}\)

A free African seaman named Amissa who was sold at Jamaica was eventually more fortunate. While he was engaged rowing slaves ashore at that island he discovered that he too had been sold, just like those he had helped to transport. The captain had double-crossed him, and sold him into slavery after having extracted his labour to help work the ship. To cover his duplicity he told Amissa’s countrymen in Africa on his next voyage that he had died. Later, however, Amissa was reported to be alive and his friends and family—who were clearly people of authority and standing—exerted pressure on another Liverpool captain to return him to the continent. After around three years enslavement in Jamaica Amissa was taken to London, where he managed to regain his freedom and was awarded £500 in damages against the captain who had sold him. When the *Gentleman’s Magazine* reported the case, it explained simply to its readers that Amissa had been “hired as a sailor, to help navigate the ship,” suggesting that it was a far from unique practice. The rarity of the case was that he regained his freedom and presumably was returned to Africa, not the nature of the contract he had first made with a slaver captain, or the fact that this contract had been broken in the most perfidious, calculating way.\(^{26}\)

While the potential to be enslaved suggests that the experiences of free African seamen in the slave trade was distinct from their European colleagues, there is other evidence to suggest that they sometimes did form alliances across the colour line. An African named Cudjoe joined the slaver *Lovely Lass* of Bristol, a ship that also employed two other Africans known as Joe and Quow. Later gaol records described Cudjoe as around thirty years of age, 5’7” tall, and simply ‘black’, whereas his colleague Joe was five years younger, had been born in the Anamabo area, and had “shock hair”.\(^{27}\) These three men, along with two of their English crewmates, were accused of murdering the second mate of the vessel, Robert Milligan. The notes of their trial before the High Court of the Admiralty suggest that Cudjoe and one of the English men, John Owans, were the ringleaders in the crime. The catalyst for the murder appears to have been the mistreatment of another of the Africans, Quow, the cook of the vessel, by Milligan after he had apparently answered only “yes” rather

\(^{25}\) Bolster, *Black Jacks* 52.

\(^{26}\) Ibid, 52-3; *Gentleman’s Magazine* March 1779.

\(^{27}\) HO 26/3 20.
than "yes, sir" to one of his orders. It would seem that the other men took against Milligan after seeing him beat Quow and cut him on the head with a cutlass. Although the exact actions of the men are lost in claim and counter-claim, two things that stand out from the trial records are the complete and utter gory carnage which reigned, and the fact that no-one considered it unusual that black and white sailors would have joined together in revolt.

Perhaps this is less surprising that it first appears, for Cudjoe was truly an Atlantic African who was an experienced seaman, could speak English, and earned wages for his labour. Presumably of Akan origin, he had originally sailed on the slave ship Mars from Africa to Grenada where it delivered two hundred and thirteen slaves. He was discharged from this voyage in Liverpool where he would have mingled with the men of many nationalities who lived and roamed among the dockside communities, inveigled into life on the edge of the Atlantic along with the trading goods from around the world unloaded onto her quays. After his sojourn there, Cudjoe returned to Annamaboe in the Jane under Captain James Backope, where he worked for a "Mr. Torrane" for two years until he joined the Lovely Lass. Another interesting facet of this case is that there was apparently no question that the sentence Cudjoe, Quow and Joe would face was that of perpetual slavery, like those they helped ship to the Americas. Instead they were sent to England on HMS Charon along with their European co-defendants to stand trial in the Admiralty Courts. After their acquittal due to lack of evidence, Cudjoe and Joe returned to Africa, so much pressure being exerted on Archibald Dalzel, governor of Cape Coast Castle, that he anticipated "a very serious Palaver" if they were not returned in haste.28

In another case that bears some similarities, onboard the Wasp in 1793 was an African seaman known as Jack who was accused of having united with some of the other crew, and some of the captive slaves, to throw the surgeon of the vessel overboard. There were also parallels between Jack and Cudjoe, for after this revolt the Pennsylvania Gazette described Jack not only as "a yellow negro, of very stout make" but also pointed out specifically that he "spoke a good deal of English." He had "shipped himself at the [African] coast" possibly at the Old Calabar region where the ship had loaded its human cargo. Like the case of the Lovely Lass the crime allegedly committed onboard the Wasp is both hard to discern and seemingly
improbable. Here it was alleged that Jack, along with the steward Joseph Nees who “appeared to be a man of colour [with] curled black hair”, and a white cabin boy named Thomas Beddo joined with some of the captive slaves and “pelted the doctor with stones....kept for scouring.” Although it was Jack that apparently finally pushed the doctor overboard, an interesting facet of this case is that one of the other crewmembers alleged that Nees, Beddo and the captain had been abusing the doctor from the time they left Bristol, the inference being that Jack and the accused slaves continued this work.\(^{29}\) Again, perhaps the most remarkable part of this case is that a major American newspaper related this story without questioning the normality of having an African-American and an African working as freemen onboard a slave ship. That they could have united with their European colleagues does not seem to have caused surprise, or, more pertinently, alarm.

Also in the 1790s the ship *Mary*, captained by Richard Williamson, had a free African seaman onboard named Quadgeo, who had enlisted at Cape Coast Castle on 5 April 1795. Although it cannot be certain as two slave ships named Mary were trading in Africa in this year, it is probable that this was the man named as a “Negro cabin boy” who prevented a slave mutiny on the *Mary* when he informed the other crewmembers that the slaves were planning to revolt. Of the African informer’s part in the ensuing battle little is known, presumably he fought alongside the other sailors. During the combat two slaves drowned, one was shot dead, and another sick slave was trampled to death in the chaos. Quadgeo survived this hazard, and all the others intrinsic to slave trading, and was discharged the day the voyage ended back in Liverpool.\(^{30}\)

It is not hard to see how many African seamen’s sense of identity and loyalty might have encompassed their fellow crewmembers more easily than those held captive below the decks of slave ships, especially if they were from the merchant class. Even for those of more humble standing, there was reason to identify with the free crew rather than the captive cargo. Separated by ethnicity or tribal affiliation and lacking any sense of shared African unity—for it was results of the slave trade which fermented solidarity through showing “otherness”—free African seamen could and did occupy some fringe place at the edge of crew society. Eager to share the

---

\(^{28}\) HCA 1/25; HCA 1/64; T 70/33; letters from Archibald Dalzel to the African Committee dated 8 August 1795 and 30 August 1796.

\(^{29}\) *Pennsylvania Gazette* 3 April 1793.
experiences of those free men above decks rather than express affiliation with those of similar skin colour to be sold as slaves, they certainly had reason to act as loyal employees and colleagues.

One free African, employed as the cook of a vessel, was acting upon these principles when, armed against the slaves when they revolted, “d___d their black souls, and fought furiously.” Acting far beyond what was a required part of his job, this man allegedly also threw a bucket of boiling water over “his much injured countrymen, whose naked bodies were ill calculated to endure the scalding fluid” to the “pity and indignation” of the other crewmen. But the observer of this event was clearly wrong in deeming the slaves to be the cook’s “countrymen” for it is most unlikely that he saw them as such. Not only were they not from his ethnic group, a free black seaman’s life experiences diverged greatly from those of his kin group as soon as the ship left Africa.

In fact free African men on slave ships occupied an extremely ambiguous place within the hierarchy of the ship. Contingent upon far more than just the colour of their skin, such men’s positions rested upon their skills, status within Africa and on the individual personalities involved. Often the officers and the men viewed them in different ways, although both may have cursed the fact that their invaluable roles gave them a certain begrudged authority. The case of a man hired as an interpreter to the slave ship *Rainbow* illustrates this well. The African, known as Dick, was apparently taunted by some of his European colleagues that he would be sold as a slave when the ship reached the West Indies. As has been shown, this was a far from unlikely outcome, and one that fully showed the divisions in potential experience between white and black crewmembers. All may have been whipped, tortured and half-starved, but none of the European men would face this particular fate.

Dick’s plight did not go unnoticed, however, and his importance onboard the ship is revealed in the following passage:

> Captn. Harrison having Observ’d an Alteration in Dick’s behaviour, ask’d him what was the matter, and with some reluctance Dick told him what he had heard, That Capt. Harrison thereupon enquired into the matter, and found that [seaman Richard] Comer was the Author of the said Reports. Whereupon the said Dick demanded Satisfaction of the Said Comer, but the Captain told him

he could give him no Satisfaction having no power to beat any White Person on board, but Dick being Dissatisfied, and stormed and Raged upon Deck;...the Captain apprehended danger from the Slaves, and therefore to prevent Insurrection Desir’d the said Dick to take Satisfaction of the said Comer – which he did, by tying up the said Comer, and giving him at two different times, about three or four and twenty lashes.

Clearly the priorities of the captain put the safe delivery of the slaves above the necessity of upholding the racial inequalities of the trade he was involved in. The attitudes of the common seamen, however, are harder to discern. Richard Comer died from the beating Dick was allowed to give him, but the matter was far more complex than a divide over skin colour. Dick’s authority onboard ship was based on his ability to communicate with, and control, the slaves, and this was his ultimate downfall. The slaves killed him, the only one of the crew to be murdered, when they rebelled.

Another African who had similar standing to Dick, and who suffered a similar fate, was a man named Shakoe. He was described variously as “a mulatto overseer” and “a sort of Negro doctor...[who] could tell an unsound slave almost at a glance.” When examining the slaves before purchase, Shakoe allegedly “handled the naked blacks from head to foot, squeezing their joints and muscles, twisting their arms and legs, examining eyes teeth and chest, and pinching breasts and groins without mercy.” On the day of their branding, Shakoe is reported to have “plied his leather until it became actually encrusted with blood.” None of this was unusual but, less commonly, Shakoe was planning to go with the vessel to Dutch Guiana [Suriname] where the slaves were to be sold. He, like Dick, was almost certainly not a sailor, but both men were treated as essential part of the ship’s crew.

As it turned out, however, it was not the white men that Shakoe, again like Dick, should have feared. The ship was nine days out from the coast of Africa when the slaves attempted to revolt, and according at least to the white boy who recorded the incident, Shakoe was the prime focus of the captives’ hatred. One morning one of them “struck him with his shackle and then jumped overboard.” Shakoe rushed towards the others lashing out with his whip, and was caught and beaten to death by some of the men slaves who had escaped their chains. By this time it had escalated into a full-scale revolt, with the captives on one side, and the crew, both black and white, on the other. At least thirteen slaves were killed in the revolt, as well as two

---

32 Donnan, Documents IV 370-2.
sailors, but it was Shakoe who seems to have been the focal point of their frustration. "His head was beaten to pieces—a ghastly sight" remarked the writer, and tellingly, the whip with which he had abused them, was symbolically torn to "bits no larger than my finger."  

Unlike Dick and Shakoe, many Africans did make it to England with their ships. Men of African origin can be identified relatively frequently within the muster rolls of Liverpool slave ships, showing the truly cosmopolitan nature of their life experiences, and the diverse ways that Africans interacted with the Atlantic world. African seamen were discharged from slave ships in Liverpool or London, and from there often joined other slaving vessels in order either to return home or to make another circuit in this most catastrophic of trades. Maintaining their own identity, however, or revealing how they were viewed as people apart by the ships’ officers, many seem to have adopted place names as their own, or more likely been randomly assigned them by the person completing the required list. The Ann, captained by Reuben Wright had a seamen named on the muster roll as "Peter Coast Guinea". The huge ship Kingsmill had Peter Annabona from Africa among her eighty-two man crew in 1799, he most likely had been given this name by one of his previous employers. The Amazon, captained by James Coznahan, lists James Amacre from Africa having been on board when she departed from Liverpool, a name often used for the New Calabar area. The Elizabeth had a man named Joseph Samuel listed fourth on her muster roll as "Island Princes"—today called Principe—among lots of men all listed as being from Liverpool. He made the whole voyage with the ship. Other men took non-African place names as their own, such as the man called John Liverpool onboard the schooner Goodrich from an unnamed African place. He also had an African crewmate named John Sabally, possibly a play on the term ‘sable’, just as a man named Peter Black from Annabon had presumably been given this rather crude descriptive surname by some captain he had come into contact with. Others from Africa are alone on the crew lists as having no surname listed at all, such as the men named Dick and Sam who worked onboard the Eclipse.  

These men stand out among the Liverpool muster rolls because of their African names, but men from all over the globe can be found in these lists. In

Britain's major port cities dwelled men who had been swept into a maritime life for a variety of reasons and from a wide spectrum of backgrounds. Britain's role as primary seafaring trader in the eighteenth century meant that men from at least five of the seven continents lived and worked among her dockside communities. The crews of slave ships inevitably reflected this gathering of people from around the world, so while African seamen remained relatively unusual, they were only a section of a multiracial body of seamen by the later eighteenth century. If the slave trade was entered into only by the most lowly and desperate of seamen, the acute xenophobia of most of British society meant that this included those of non-British origin who searched for employment among Liverpool's wharves. To take one example, the crew of the slaver John included John Prussel from Jamaica; Joseph Rodrigues from the West Indies; Joseph Galley from Leghorn [Livorno]; Mich Gray from the Gambia; Barry Bollers from Norway; Golperce Charles from Copenhagen; Sven Nelson from Sweden; John Salvadore from Naples; Antonio Rodrique from Portugal; John Swift from Salem, Massachusetts; Edward Kitchen from Jersey and John Brown from New York. These men sailed with the ship to an unspecified African embarkation point, delivered two hundred and eighty slaves to Kingston, Jamaica, and then sailed back to Liverpool.35

While it is perhaps unsurprising that men from other slave trading nations were frequently employed on slavers leaving Britain, (and presumably the reverse was also true) it is over simplistic to see these men as Europeans unreceptive to their African colleagues. Just as there was little African unity in this period, Europeans too had their differences and were prepared to fight over them. Sailors, as men who were frequently impressed into Naval service to fight against the French, Dutch, Spanish, Americans or whoever was deemed the enemy, were most unlikely to have completely put aside these animosities. Relatively often men who served onboard slave ships had previously been imprisoned by another European nation as a prisoner of war.36 What is more the Irish, who were a vast percentage of all slaver seamen as a

34 BT 98/56 f.265; BT 98/59 f.162; BT 98/62 f.276; BT 98/63 f.284; 98/60 f.93; BT 98/64 f.29.
35 BT 98/63, f.63; Eltis, CD-ROM.
percentage of their relative population, had, as Nicholas Canny and others have shown, long been demeaned in English thought and literature. Because of the necessity of justifying their ‘civilisation’ through colonization, the English conceived the Irish as being a separate race of mankind. Most remarkably of all, the English saw these ‘heathen’ Irish as dark skinned.37

Beyond Europeans men of other origins can certainly be identified among slaver crews. Despite the fact that until 1802 Lascars, or Indian seamen, were not officially allowed to work on ships sailing west of the Cape of Good Hope, Asians can be found among the muster rolls.38 Liverpool ships the Crescent, Amacree, Hinde, Dart, Mary, Lord Nelson, Levant and Martha all clearly had men of Asian origin onboard, and in all probability many more whose origins are more ambiguous. Sailor William Butterworth wrote that one of his fellow tars on his voyage on the Hudibras was Antonio, a Lascar, whom he described as “not of the cleanest sort.”39 Men from the Americas apparently worked alongside them—there was Simon Peters from Curaçao for example, and Peter Jordan from Quebec who was a sailor onboard the Polly in 1800.40 Additionally Joseph Dournett from Cartagena was employed on the Elizabeth in 1799 that took 327 slaves to Barbados.41

A poem written by W. Clark Russell in this period, entitled The Sailing Ship, expresses the international, racially mixed nature of men who worked at sea, and acknowledges too their rebellious, radical image:

The Dago and the Chaney Man,
The Dutchman and Hindoo
The Proosian and Hi-tal-ian’
Do form her measley crew.

They flies our red flag on such craft,
And honours thus the rabble;
No Anglees shoken fore or aft-

39 Butterworth, Three Years 14.
40 HCA 1/58.
41 BT 98/60 f.258. There were also mixed crews onboard ships in other trades which sometimes supplemented their profits by transporting slaves across the Atlantic. One English whaleship, for example, docked in Rio with a crew which consisted of men from Spain, Portugal, Africa and Macao—it carried papers from Mauritius and regularly voyaged between Africa, Brazil and Argentina. Jeremy Adelman, “The Slave Trade and the Crisis of Iberian Empires” Unpublished Paper given before the Comparative Labour History Seminar, Institute of Historical Research, London (May 2001).
Nowt speech but gabble-babble.\textsuperscript{42}

Although the poem does not mention Africans, in these circumstances free black men felt themselves less conspicuously different working as seamen than in other occupations. For black men in Britain going to sea was a mixture of preference, survival and absence of other possibilities. Although it had not always been widely recognised that Britain had a sizeable black population until after the Second World War, more recent work has shown the fallacy in this belief.\textsuperscript{43} By the days in which Britain was the primary slave trader of the world, many men and women of African origin had been taken to Britain as servants to wealthy families, or had drifted there as escaped or manumitted slaves. The Royal Navy employed others in the Caribbean but discharged them in Britain.\textsuperscript{44} At the time of Lord Chief Justice, the Earl of Mansfield’s judgement on James Somerset’s case in 1772, the total black population of Britain was calculated at 15,000.\textsuperscript{45} In 1786 Granville Sharp, an acquaintance of Olaudah Equiano and prosecutor in both the Somerset and Zong cases, established the ‘Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor’ in London. Many whom the committee helped were those who would later settle Sierra Leone.

Because Britain, and in particular London and Liverpool, were centres of trade with the West Indies and North America, they became hubs where men of African origin often found themselves. Certainly after the Somerset decision, which made it unlawful for slaves to be shipped out of the country against their will, slavery in England became increasing untenable, due mainly to the agency of the Afro-British themselves. Many escaped their bondage and took up residence in the newly expanding urban areas. As Peter Fryer writes, they “voted with their feet...[and] had largely freed themselves by the mid-1790s.”\textsuperscript{46} Because of this, Britain ended up as more of a sanctuary, however flimsy the freedom and insalubrious the living conditions, than either the Caribbean islands or the North American colonies/states. Just as runaways flocked to urban centres on the American mainland and islands because of their increased anonymity and chances for employment, so London and

\textsuperscript{42} W. Clark Russell, The Turnpike Sailor (London: Skeffington and Sons, 1907).
\textsuperscript{44} R. Pares, “The Manning of the Navy in the West Indies, 1702-63” Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 4\textsuperscript{th} Series, 20 (1937) 31-60.
\textsuperscript{45} More recent estimates have lowered this total to around 10,000.
Liverpool offered more of both, being so much further away from their former masters and with livelier port communities.

To get there African-American and Caribbean men, often runaway slaves, joined ships heading that way. Inevitably sometimes this meant joining slave ships, taking the place of European seamen who had deserted in the West Indies, as between approximately one eighth and one quarter of them did. Robin Blackburn has called the “ports and ships engaged in the Atlantic trade” a “slave frontier”, which, “given the slaves’ powerful urge for freedom, [was] often a porous one.” In fact so widespread was this practice that laws had to be passed in some Caribbean islands cutting down on grand marronage at sea by making all potential black sailors have a pass and written permission to enlist on a ship.

Many slave runaway advertisements in the West Indies worried especially that the men in question would escape by sea. A man called Durham was known to have already worked as the cook of the Lady Juliana at the time of his escape, so his owner warned in particular that “he may possibly pass for a free fellow, as he knows how to work in boats or craft”. Twenty-three year old Hector was described by his owner as having “followed the sea, [so] it is probable he may attempt to pass for a free man, and endeavour to ship himself aboard some vessel.” Another man, known as Gil Blas, was described as an “expert seaman.” Pompey had learned his seafaring skills when he “served on board a vessel for two years [in the] last war.” All of these men’s owners implored ship captains not to employ these men and so remove them from the island and take them out of their grasp.

Some of these men had probably gained their seafaring skills within Africa or the Caribbean, but there is also a suggestion that some had learned this proficiency

---

61

---
during the middle passage, while they were being transported as captives. Jeffrey Bolster writes “every new slave came face to face with European seafaring technology during the ordeal of the Middle Passage.” There are indeed many cases when captives had to help man a ship, but most were simply put to the exceedingly arduous, repetitive work of assisting with the pumps if the ship was taking on water. Aboard the Charlestown, an American ship captained by Charles Harris, the crew took “some of the ablest men out of irons” when the ship “became so extremely leaky as to require constant exertion on the pumps.” In this case the male slaves were “worked beyond their strength” at this gruelling task. In 1797 the crew of the James “determined to let a dozen of [the slaves] come on deck” after the ship grounded on the sandbar at Bonny. The Africans “went to work...at the pumps.” Similarly, onboard the Phoenix in the early 1760s when the ship started leaking during a gale and a lightening storm, the crew was “under Necessity of letting all our slaves out of Irons, to assist in Pumping and Baling.” The crew of the Mary required the help of her captives when the “Ship sprung a Leake” and they were in “very bad condition” struggling against the odds to “keep the Ship above Water.” They, like the other ships, let some of the men out of their shackles to help at the pumps.

---

52 Bolster, Black Jacks 57.
54 Hugh Crow, Memoirs of the late Captain Hugh Crow, of Liverpool; comprising a narrative of his life, together with descriptive sketches of the western coast of Africa; particularly of Bonny (London: Frank Cass, 1970) 63-4; Eltis CD-ROM 81973.
55 Pennsylvania Gazette 11 November 1762; Gentleman’s Magazine January 1763.
56 Gentleman’s Magazine July 1737. Many other examples can also be found in the sources. Robert Barker recalled that the crew of the Theis was “so reduced thro’ death, sickness, and desertion, that we had no more than three who were able to perform duty” even before they sailed from Africa. Even though they were able to get some help from a Bristol slaver that was at Calabar at the time, they nevertheless needed “the assistance of our slaves, there being no possibility of our working the ship without them.” Robert Barker, The Unfortunate Shipwright, or Cruel Captain. Being a faithful narrative of the unparalleled sufferings of Robert Barker, late carpenter on board the Theis Snow, of Bristol, in a voyage to the coast of Guinea and Antigua (London: Printed for, and sold by the Sufferer, 1760) 19-21. Likewise, on the Wolf in 1750, one of the captive slaves “during a strong wind was put to holding the gaff.” Darold D. Wax, “A Philadelphia Surgeon on a Slaving Voyage to Africa, 1749-1751” Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 92 (1968) 465-493; quote 491. In another incident, Samuel Robinson’s ship had safely reached Barbados when so many of the crew deserted that there were only nine men left to sail the ship onwards to St. Vincent or Jamaica, where they had been instructed to sell the slaves. Robinson related, “as there were only the officers and the other boy and I who could steer the ship, and as my ankle was still weak, I was placed in a chair, with a stout slave at the lee side of the wheel to turn as I ordered him.” Robinson, Sailor Boy 97-8. An American newspaper report told of an equally sorry tale. “By Letters from Capt. Hopkins” it related, “we learn That soon after he left the Coast, the Number of his Men being reduced by Sickness, he was obliged to permit some of the Slaves to come upon Deck to Assist the People”. Pennsylvania Gazette 28 November 1765; Donnan, Documents III 213; Eltis, CD-ROM 36299.
Evidence suggests, however, that other African captives did assist more with the sailing of the ship than simply working the pumps. Seaman James F. Stanfield recalled how as disease, mistreatment and death drastically reduced the crew of his ship, “all idea of keeping the slaves in chains were given up” and a large number of the captives “were therefore freed from their irons and they pulled and hauled as they were directed by the inefficient sailors.” In this case they were clearly being instructed in basic seafaring tasks. When the Mermaid approached Grenada in 1792 it was reported that, “Capt. Taylor [had] lost all his Hands to four, & these together with himself, were in so weakly a state” that he only succeeded in getting the ship into port with “the assistance of a few Negro Boys, who the Capt. had wise precaution to train a little to the Business of working the Ship.” The Benson must have trained some of her captives as she had “only two white men upon her yards handling the sails, the rest were black boys, slaves.”

Even more incredibly, African captives were also used to fight off attack from pirate or privateer vessels. This might seem incredible since the reluctance to arm Africans and African-Americans lasted well into the era of the American Civil War precisely because of the hugely increased risk of insurrection. Yet slave ships could be desperate enough to resort to such tactics, as being attacked by privateers was a far more common event than is often recognised. One calculation suggests that about two thirds of all British slave ships that failed to return were lost as the result of capture by an enemy nation. Joseph E. Inikoiri “Measuring the unmeasured hazards of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Documents Relating to the British Trade” Revue François D’Histoire D’Outre Mer 83 (September 1996) 53-92. There are numerous examples. James Penny alleged that on the ships he had captained slaves had been “entrusted with powder and Ball.” BT 6/9. Peter Whitfield Branker, who made ten slaving voyages as mate and then master, recorded that on one of his voyages, “in the course of the last war” he “put arms into their [the slaves’] hands”. He claimed to have trained them with “both with the small arms and great guns” so that they could assist him make the trip from Antigua to Jamaica safely, despite only having twelve seamen to defend the ship. ZHC 1/90 38. In a celebrated incident in 1758 Captain William Boats, known as “Billy Boates”, armed the slaves onboard the Knight and successfully fought off a French ship. Daniel P. Mannix and Malcolm Cowley, Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1518-1865 (New York: Penguin, 1962) 131-2. In 1777 a black “boy” was killed helping the Jane to try and repulse an attack off the coast of Barbados. Gomer Williams, History of the Liverpool Privateers (London: Heinemann, 1897) 560-1. Similarly, in 1781, when fighting against a French ship, Captain Stevenson of the Rose reported that he had “fifty men, black and white, on deck at great guns and small arms, halfpikes, boathooks, boat oars, steering-sail-yards, firewood, and slack ballast, which they threw at the Frenchmen in such a manner that their heads rattled against one another like so many empty calibashes.” One white man and one black were killed in this battle, and many more were wounded. Ibid 564-5; Eltis CD-ROM 83406. (Although it does not explicitly state that the black men fighting in this case were slaves, it is most likely that they were, given the number of them onboard ship and the fact that we are told they were more badly burned than the white men “having no trousers on them.”)

It is not hard to see why slave men would fight valiantly in these circumstances. Their only alternative, after all, was to just wait out the battle helpless below deck, where they could easily be maimed or killed. During a battle with a French ship in 1800, for example, a “nine pound shot went through the mens’ [sic] room and wounded 12 slaves, two of whom died the next day, and two have their thigh bones broke.” Gore’s General Advertiser 17 April 1800.

58 C107/13: Letter from Munro MacFarlane to James Rogers, 18th November 1792.
59 ZHC 1/85 521: Evidence of John Ashley Hall.
However runaway slaves had learned the skills that secured their position onboard a ship to England, most found when they arrived there that their options for future employment were severely curbed. For those not in servitude to a wealthy family, career choices were extremely limited—one recent writer has summed them up as “going to sea...begging and crime”. The lack of alternative employment can be seen in the fact that, as a rough estimate, more than one in twenty seamen working out of Britain was of African origin by the 1770s. Many of these men in fact seem to have been reduced to both seafaring and petty crime, as seventeen of the fifty-two black men transported to Australia as convicts prior to 1830 listed their occupation as seaman or ship’s cook. Moreover, fully twenty-six per cent of black men recorded in England’s Old Bailey records in this period worked as seamen. A committee founded to help Lascars in London found that in fact more black than Asian seamen were in desperate need.

For many of Britain’s black men the necessity of going back to sea was pressing, whatever the potential risks. This meant some had little choice but to sign onboard a slaving vessel. We can only surmise what led a man named James Blue, who presumably had found his way to the relative freedom of life as a seaman in Britain, to sign on the slave ship Blanche in 1802. Whatever his motivation he paid dearly for it, for his freedom was curtailed when he was “taken out of the ship 21st May 1803 by his Master at Barbados being a runaway negroe.” (It is an interesting footnote that he would almost certainly have lost his freedom soon after even without this unfortunate circumstance, for the ship was captured on its way home by the French.) Although it is perfectly possible that some men of African origin who joined slave ships as sailors did so because it was their only chance to see their home continent, or their ancestral homelands again, the majority doubtless made a pragmatic choice between a slaving voyage or penury. Others, forced onto ships just like their white counterparts by crimps or unholy alliances between unscrupulous

---

60 Ty M. Reese, “Toiling in the Empire: Labor in Three Anglo-Atlantic Ports, London, Philadelphia and Cape Coast Castle” Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Toledo (1999) 110. For the approximately twenty per cent of black people in Britain who were female, prostitution could more accurately be substituted for seafaring in this unholy list of choices.
61 Shyllon, Black People 101-2.
62 Ian Duffield, “From Slave Colonies to Penal Colonies: The West Indian Convict Transportees to Australia” Slavery and Abolition 7 (1986) 25-45.
63 Myers, Black Past 67.
publicans and gaolers, had no choice at all. Many were forced to take employment with captains with whom they had already worked, so having enlisted when the ship was in ballast or carrying plantation produce, they found themselves on a slaving voyage.

Evidence for exactly how many of Britain's black seamen men ended up employed on slave ships is scanty, particularly so as the muster rolls of English slave ships, unlike those of North America, did not require any physical characteristics of the men to be listed. Given the ethnically mixed nature of Britain's capital city it seems likely that among the 1120 slave ships that left from that port between 1750 and 1807 were found numbers of seamen of African origin. Unfortunately muster rolls from this city have not survived for this period. There is, however, the case of Briton Hammon who signed onboard a slave ship in London and who has left one of the only instances where a black man recorded the events which led him to sign on a slaving vessel. Hammon had been on board HMS Hercules in 1759, and had been wounded in the head and had his arm injured, leaving him unable to work and incarcerated in Greenwich hospital. After a short spell on a naval ship, Hammon, in his own words, “ship’d myself on board of a large ship bound to Guinea” from London. His feelings about this, and the morality of it, are not mentioned, but the economic necessity of his decision is clear. Similarly though Hammon never made this journey, choosing instead to return on another ship to Boston, he says nothing about this choice other than that he preferred to go with a captain he knew, and wished to return to his home. Briton Hammon, like so many other African-American seafarers, had a “multi-dimensional sense of self” which was not solely reliant on his colour.

England's premier slave trading port, Liverpool, may not have been the most cosmopolitan of cities, especially when compared to London, but its deep involvement in the slave trade meant that many of African origin either lived there, or passed through on their often tortured journeys. Alongside the shops selling shackles and thumbscrews, the black 'trophy' servants, the crowded Goree docks, and the wealthy merchants with plenty of blood-soaked guineas to spend, people of African

65 BT 98/63 f.292.
66 Eltis, CD-ROM.
67 Briton Hammon, A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man reprinted in Dorothy Parker (ed.) Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) 522-528.
origin were inevitably also to be found there. When William Butterworth joined the Hudibras in the 1780s as a young boy at that port, he found a city whose “commercial pursuits collected, as a focus, the diversified inhabitants of Asia, Africa and America”. 69 Another who sailed on a slave ship as a young boy wrote in his memoirs that he “had seen black men in Liverpool” when he had travelled there to embark on his voyage. 70

For ships that left from Liverpool, muster rolls exist from 1772 until the abolition of the legal trade, but it is impossible to evaluate a percentage of black crewmembers from these lists (see appendix 1). Although ‘place of abode’ had to be given, many captains wrote in either the place where the men joined the ship, or even used this space to list their men’s rank. Thus many ships listed all of their seamen as being from Liverpool, or the majority from Liverpool, then some from Africa, and others from the port of slave disembarkation. Clearly it would seem more than likely that this is where men joined the ship than their actual place of origin. In addition, of course there were plenty of black seamen whose place of abode was Liverpool. The Fisher for example lists all its men as being from Liverpool, but one, George Williams, was a black man. 71 Similarly no residences are given for the crew of the Betsey which left in 1772 for Bonny and Jamaica, but the man listed right at the bottom of the muster roll and named only Cato was very probably of African origin. 72

Occasionally Liverpool ships listed men as blacks, as if their skin colour held some inherent definition of status – as indeed it contemporaneously did. The ship Hibernia listed six of its crewmembers as “black sailors” in the “station” section of his muster list. Named as Thomas Tittle, Peter Tittle, Anthony Cacandia, Henry Caffirr, James Curtes and John Banks they were all discharged at Liverpool at the end of the voyage after selling their cargo of slaves. Another man on this same vessel, ranked as a “black ordinary seaman” and named Abraham Newland, is reported to have “ran at Cacandi 10 Jan. 1804”, no doubt also telling us where the man named Anthony Cacandia had originated from. The brig Mars listed a man as simply “Alfred – a Black” at the very bottom of its muster roll. Definitely a seaman and not the cook, he made the entire voyage with the ship. In other cases it seems likely that

68 Bolster, “An Inner Diaspora” 419-448.
69 Butterworth, Three Years 4.
70 Robinson, Sailor Boy 33.
71 BT 98/58 f.203.
72 BT 98/33 f.142.
some of these men listed as Africans were in fact African-Americans or Afro-Caribbeans, but were listed as Africans either due to the registrar’s ignorance or their own wish to be seen as inviolably free. The Mercury for example, captained by John Sillars, had a John Dido listed from Africa who shipped at Liverpool before the ship left. He died at Surinam on the 12th July 1801.

Information about men of African origin working onboard slaving vessels is not just confined to crew lists. Among more scattered evidence from parliamentary papers to ships’ logs, instances of men of many different ethnic origins working onboard slave ships are repeatedly revealed. Onboard the Lady Nelson there was a “stout black man, an American” among the crew. On the list of men who had wages advanced to them before the sailing of the Calveley in 1757 was one named “Coffee Black”. A sailor testified before the House of Commons commission into the slave trade that the Black Joke of Liverpool that sailed in 1764 was reduced by death during her passage to “the captain, 3 white men, and one black.” Thomas Lee, recorded as “a Black,” testified to the Admiralty Court that he was an American and the cook onboard the Sarah when she sailed from Liverpool to Bonny. The brig Sally had a black steward named Adam Messoe on her slaving voyage that took the ship from Liverpool to the Rio Pongo. Among those who were probably of African origin is a man named only as “black John” who was onboard the Lyon while she slaved at Angola, but who absconded when it reached Guadeloupe.

Although it seems likely that the vast majority of these men were of African origin and had made their way to England as part of the maritime flow of people along trade routes, the presence of a man named John Cook onboard the Rosalind challenges this assumption. He was listed as being chief mate for the voyage and was from the West Indies. There is one other example: John Hassel, second mate on the Retrieve was listed as being from St. Kitts. If indeed these were Afro-Caribbean men, they were certainly unusual in having been promoted to these officer ranks.

Among the huge mortality rates in the slave trade those appointed first mate, and

---

73 BT 98/64 f.215; BT 98/64 f.140; BT 98/61 f.220.
74 Robinson, Sailor Boy 52.
75 Merseyside Maritime Museum, DX 169.
76 ZHC 1/84 126: Evidence of Isaac Parker.
77 HCA 1/61.
79 HCA 15/55.
80 BT 98/66 f.113.
sometimes second, could quite easily become master during the course of the voyage, with other sailors filling their former positions. Yet to have a black man in command of a slaving vessel and its predominantly white crew was, as far as is known, unheard of. Far more common were men of African origin in the most lowly positions on the ship, such as West Indian Robert White who was employed as steward (or servant) onboard the Beaver on her voyage that delivered slaves from Bonny to St. Lucia. The class barriers of Britain intersected with racial divisions at a place which ensured that almost all foreigners would be relegated to the lowliest positions.

For slave ships that departed from Bristol, where the high point of trade had been in the 1720s and '30s, there is little sustained evidence, but plenty of random examples of men of African origin. As usual, they were employed in the lowly positions as cooks, stewards, and common seamen. On the Ruby from Bristol on its voyage that departed in August 1787, the cook was described as “a poor black Portuguese sailor.” The Alexander of Bristol had a cook who was a black man. There was also a black cook onboard the Juno. On her 1792-3 voyage the Wasp had a “man of colour” as the steward as she delivered captives from New Calabar to Kingston, Jamaica. Thomas Clarkson met a free black sailor at Bristol named John Dean, who had been one of the original crew of the slaver Brothers which had sailed for Africa in July 1785. Captain Tucker on the Royal (or Loyal) George had a black cabin boy. Free black sailors were also not unknown on the ships which left from smaller British ports in an earlier period: a black man named George Yorke was listed as a sailor onboard the Daniel and Henry which sailed from Dartmouth in 1700.

For much the same reasons, in the American colonies/states as much as in Britain black men came to be engaged onboard slave ships. Runaway slaves, ex-slaves and free blacks had few other employment opportunities, saw the sea as a means of escape, and could mingle into multi-ethnic seafaring culture more easily than onshore society. America’s ports as much as Britain’s denoted long distance

---

81 BT 98/66 f.276.
82 BT 6/11.
83 ZHC 1/85 631: Evidence of Alexander Falconbridge.
84 Fryer, Staving Power 57.
85 Pennsylvania Gazette 3 April 1793.
87 Silas Told, Life of Mr Silas Told (London: G. Whitfield, 1796) 18.
trading routes, as men from far flung trading ports crowded her dockside communities. Some of these men, just as in Britain, made their way onto slaving vessels. There was the Chinese “caben Stewart” and “Henry Sandwich Islander” onboard the *Resource* in 1805 as already mentioned, while the *Adventure* during its slaving voyage of 1773-4 listed “Indian” John Warwick as its cook. It is unclear whether this man was of East Indian or, in true *Moby Dick* style, Native American origin.)

Reflecting both the pull of the sea and the lack of other opportunities, a large proportion of free black men went to work onboard ships. It is certain, however, that the numbers of black sailors working on slave ships, unsurprisingly, were significantly less than the percentages for maritime industries as a whole. Of course there was ethical opposition to the slave trade among the majority of blacks of all occupations, and the first black benevolent society in Providence, Rhode Island voted that its members would vow not to work on slave ships. Outside of this principled resistance, however, was a real world of hardship and poverty. Given the total numbers of black sailors, and the fact that the slave trade represented a considerable percentage of potential employment in the period in question, some would have had little choice but to enlist on a slaving vessel. Certainly many of the reasons that drove European-American sailors into the trade—debt, destitution, or downright shanghaiing—were not unknown, and may have been accentuated, among black sailors. While they probably understood the greater danger that they would face in the trade, and many no doubt had ideological objections, they too understood that the trade would provide them with rudimentary food, board, wages and maybe opportunities to better themselves.

From the crew lists of Rhode Island’s ports—Newport, Providence and Bristol—which exist for the slave trade’s final years of legality, it is possible to locate a number of free black men (see appendix 2). Just like Africans, Afro-Caribbeans and black Britons, they were overwhelmingly confined to the lowest positions onboard ship, most commonly filling the rank of cook, steward or common seaman. Many were apprenticed to the captain of the ship, and were often years older than would have been deemed acceptable for a white man holding this position. A mixture of

---

racism, fear and bigotry severely limited black men's options, and many continued to
go to sea, some confined to the position of apprentice, long after their European
colleagues had settled down to a more secure life ashore.91

What is also clear is that free African American sailors who signed onboard
slave ships had completely different understandings of racial designations than free
Africans they might have worked alongside. The case of a black sailor named
Thomas Lee is instructive. Lee had completed his duties as cook of the slave ship
Sarah and signed onboard the Bacchus when he testified before the Admiralty Courts,
but he still "had upon his mind the bloody Murder he had seen committed" onboard
his former ship. She had already arrived in Jamaica, having sailed from Liverpool
and Bonny, when sick slaves, Lee claimed, were dumped into Port Royal harbour
from fear that they were too diseased to sell. Another of the Sarah's crewmembers, a
man named James Graham, backed Lee's assertions, reporting that he had seen a
slave woman thrown overboard. Those guilty of this do not seem to have even made
a clean job of the murder: the woman slave was not thrown directly into the sea but
clung to the ship's side begging for assistance. Needless to say nobody helped her.
Lee's conscience troubled him, however, and he remembered the act as "a Wicked
thing" that "he was much shocked" by. Lee had not stepped forward to help the
woman himself because he feared that he too would be thrown overboard if he did so.
His fears were probably amply justified, for as a black American, Lee likely knew the
dispensability of slaves from personal experience.92

A free black man born in the United States, Thomas Lee lived in a society in
which the divisions were black and white, and where the racial constructs of the age
decreed that anybody with noticeable African heritage was "black", with all the
negative implications that had. Lee was part of the maritime community in which
racial lines could be blurred, and presumably he had some kind of co-worker
relationship with white man James Graham, but nevertheless he came from a society
in which lines were hardened. He undoubtedly felt loyalties to his fellow sailors, but
he also understood the overriding loyalties to his race that belonged to the Americas.
Free African seamen had their own realities dependent upon the categories of Igbo,
Fante, Yoruba and all the other dispossessed ethnicities of Africa, but Lee knew that
North America had a far less complex interpretation of race. He also knew which side

91 Bolster, "To Feel Like a Man" 1190.
of the divide he stood on, despite his free status and his employment onboard the ship. The ties of the job and to the seafaring lifestyle in general were critically at odds to the paramount racial identity that was so central to black life on the North American mainland.

African-American slaves who were hired out to slave ships as workers were also familiar with America's uncompromising racial boundaries. The Resource had a slave named Sippeo among its crew in 1805—the man who had purchased trousers, shirts and knives totaling $7.55 from the ship's stores during the voyage. American slaver captain George Scott had his slave as a member of the crew of his ship in 1740, later writing home to the shipowners to report that "My negro Bonner is ded." A similar situation befell one of his fellow captains, who wrote to his employer from Anomabu in 1736 that he was "now very weke handed" having lost his "chefe mate" and another sailor, plus "the negro man Prymus and Adam" who had been lost overboard during the voyage to Africa.

American slave ships in fact lagged far behind those of Brazil in their use of slaves as crew. Herbert Klein writes, "Unique to the Brazilian trade was the large number of American slaves who made up the crews of slave ships...42 percent of the 350 slave ships arriving in Rio de Janeiro from Africa between 1795 and 1811 indicate slaves in their crew. The average number of Brazilian-owned slave sailors in the crew for the 148 vessels that had them on arrival was 14." Although Klein's assertion that the use of slaves as crew was "unique" to Brazilian ships is obviously overstating the facts, there is no doubt that the numbers he gives are far above those found on US ships even in the last years of trading.

Some American slaveowners, however, did hire out their bondsmen to ships to secure for themselves the wages they would earn. Slaveowner Samuel Freebody sent his slave Benjamin Freebody to sea on a slave ship in 1775 as "a new hand at about Six Dollars per month." "After One Voyage to the Coast of Guinea & back again he ought to have Sailors Wages which was Eight Dollars" he concluded. Similarly, the slave Bristow Champlin was one of five sailors listed on the muster roll of the

---

92 HCA 1/61.
93 Coughtry, Papers A/2/19/1004.
95 Ibid.
97 Rhode Island Historical Society, MSS 9003, XVI 96-100.
Adventure of Rhode Island—notably he was the most highly paid, reflecting that his wages would go straight to his owner. When Captain Thomas Rogers was recruiting crew for the Adventure which sailed from Rhode Island in the early 1770s, one of those he engaged was Prince Miller, the slave of John Miller, who was hired as a sailor for the entire voyage. Whatever these men’s opinions about being thrust back into the trade that had brought themselves or their ancestors from Africa, they have gone unrecorded just like so many facets of slaves’ lives.

What is immediately apparent, however, is the strange position that they occupied, being neither one of the incarcerated captive Africans who comprised the ship’s cargo, nor enjoying the freedom of the other sailors. Slave ships, as working environments, should be seen as societies with slaves rather than slaving societies (as ephemeral societies as they were) but slaves employed on ships nevertheless inhabited a uniquely marginal position. Ben Freebody’s life at sea is a wonderful example of this. Amazingly, he was literate and after having been sent to sea by his owner he occasionally wrote letters home. Freebody’s ship captured a prize vessel while at sea, and Benjamin clearly believed that he was entitled to the £90 that his crewmates had apparently received as each man’s share of the profits. While positioning himself firmly among the other Jack Tars in this regard, however, his different standing was also apparent. Not only did he not receive his share, he could not appeal for it either. Rather, he had to write to his master begging that he would claim the money on his own behalf. What Freebody’s fellow sailors intended to spend their money on is not known, but tellingly the bondsman himself hoped beyond all hope that it would purchase his freedom. Benjamin’s bizarre standing was similarly revealed in another instance when James Brattle, his captain, tried to charge Samuel Freebody insurance for him when the American Revolutionary War broke out. Samuel was angered, and asked “what right [he] had to Charge me a large premium for Insureing my servant against my own Countrymen.”

---

98 Coughtry, Papers A/2/5/10.
101 Rhode Island Historical Society, MSS 9003, XVI 96-100.
Caught between the worlds of slaver seamen and enslaved merchandise, or more accurately outside of both of these groups, slave seamen onboard slaving vessels almost certainly led a tortured existence. Ben Freebody’s case is again revealing. In one of his letters to his owner he reported how badly he was being treated by Captain Brattle. “I have Sincerely wished I’d never had left you the Swill that was given to the hogs I have often wish’d for” he wrote. In another instance, an eyewitness wrote of the treatment metered out to the slave cook onboard an American ship when she dined with them off the coast of Sierra Leone in 1792. “Dressed in the noble Captain’s dashing coat, hat, sword, &c” he was ordered to re-enact the firing of a gun with a “mop stick” to “shew with what expertness he could perform the manual exercise.” He did it, claimed the observer, “to the ridicule of himself, and the great amusement of his colleagues and the ship’s crew.” Figures of fun, objects of torment, and alienated outsiders, slaves employed on slave ships as seamen were perhaps the most debased men who sailed the Atlantic oceans above decks.

Their lives were also fraught with danger. If the liberty of all free black sailors was at risk as the ship sailed into Caribbean waters, the predicament of those already enslaved was in some cases more hazardous still. Many must have been working desperately to exhibit their worth aboard ship in the hope of not being sold into plantation agriculture. Furthermore, many had families and other attachments to return home to. In some ways the lives of sailors who worked onboard ships were preferable to those bonded to plantation labour in terms of working conditions and relative freedom. The disadvantage of life at sea was the unpleasant proximity to slave markets—the dreaded scourge of every slave’s life—if this ship was involved in slave trading. For slaves employed onboard slave ships there can have been little escaping the fact that they were people “with a price.” The uncertainty of life as the ship sailed into North American waters must have been palpable.

Although slavery was untenable in Britain by this period, there surprisingly were some slaves (as opposed to the numerous runaways) employed as seamen onboard slave ships. Archibald Dalzel, sometime governor of Cape Coast Castle, slave trader, historian, and bankrupt, took a slave to England with him in the 1770s of

102 Ibid.
103 Anna-Maria Falconbridge, Two Voyages to Sierra Leone During the Years 1791-1793 (London, 1794) reprinted in Deirdre Coleman (ed.) Maiden Voyages and Infant Colonies: Two Women’s Travel Narratives of the 1790s (London: Leicester University Press, 1999) 101-2.

73
whom he wrote, “this boy is a Cooper by trade & I brought him home to improve him, with a view to get him employed in a guinea ship.” A captain of a slave ship that was on its way to England called his slave seaman Boatswain. Both campaigner Thomas Clarkson and seaman William Richardson encountered female slaves employed onboard slave ships.

The number of Africans enslaved to British slave ships was small; most were the personal slaves of a ship’s captain or, more rarely, a trading merchant. Onboard sailor William Butterworth’s ship, for example, an African slave owned by the captain was used as an interpreter between the captives and the crew. He was expecting to continue on with the ship to England after the other slaves had been sold. In a wonderfully metaphorical example of how marginalised such men and women were, during a slave revolt onboard ship, this man, who was known to the seamen as Bristol, was held half up and half down the hatchway to the slave quarters. The crew tugged him upwards while the captives tried to drag him below. The slaves wanted to attack as part of the crew, the seamen wanted to protect him as one of their own. Such was the position of African slaves who dwelt aboard slave ships not as captives, but as workers.

** Ever shifting with the tides, late eighteenth-century maritime culture was a mixture of many land-based ones, yet with a singularity all its own. With each all too frequent death and personnel change, the culture aboard these floating microcosm societies subtly altered. Contingent upon those who lived and worked between bow and stern, sailors’ identity was fluid, and their sense of self could change rapidly in the many different circumstances they encountered. It was partly this malleability which made seafaring more amenable to sailors of non-European origin than land-

---

based ones. The wind which propelled the ships and their debased cargoes across the seas also carried with it ever-changing cultural understandings, not a small part of which were from Africa. The numbers of Africans who worked onboard slave ships as crewmembers may have been tiny compared to those who made the Atlantic crossing only once, but their experiences have much to reveal about the nature of race in this period.

Far away from men such as Afro-Brazilian Francisco “Cha Cha” da Souza who became wealthy trading slaves after having deserted the crew of a Brazilian slaver, men of African origin embroiled in the Anglo-American slave trades during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century joined slave ships for reasons of survival rather than riches.109 Already marginalised by the extremely limited opportunities offered to black men in the North Atlantic, they did so as freemen, slaves and every permutation between. Africans travelled all ways across the Atlantic world. At the same time it was the conditions of the slave trade that made it impossible for those of European origin to be enslaved by other Europeans, as their racial identity solidified against this most racially divisive of backgrounds.

Therein lies the paradox, for the very fact of the “guinea trade” employing so many ships and sailors changed the maritime world by the later eighteenth century, with both Africans and African-Americans enlisting on ships. Seamen became more accepting of Africans as colleagues than other occupational groups at the time—at the same time sailors continued to be directly involved in the enslavement process which had resulted in such extreme racial inequality. European slaver sailors retained ambiguous sentiments towards Africans, pragmatically signing on slave ships if it would earn them wages, while also being renowned for treating people of African origin with egalitarianism unheard of among eighteenth century shore-based society. Put another way, seamen were an occupational group who paid less heed to colour lines than most; they also viciously quelled slave rebellion, raped enslaved women, and committed many other untold atrocities against Africans. One young slave trade sailor recalled the time on his first voyage at which he first became “a young citizen of the world” who “looked on all mankind as my brethren”.110 Certainly this seems strange to those used to reading of sailors as the men who committed such horrendous

---

deeds onboard slave ships. It is stranger still to imagine that the trade in Africans contributed towards seafarers’ unique nature, a uniqueness which, conversely, made it occasionally possible for men of African origin to integrate into maritime society as free men.

The *Amity* can stand as a potent example of this paradox, being a slave ship involved in the trade that had been the agitator behind this hardening of racial lines, while her crew apparently fermented inter-racial rebellion between her decks. This can only be understood by seeing it in a maritime context—the racial intermixing among slave trade seamen directly reflected the ports and regions the slaving vessels touched at, and so involved a “motley crew” of men from around the Atlantic littoral. It is often noted that ships had specificity in terms of racial admixing, with Paul Gilroy citing “the image of a ship in motion” as a launching pad to explore his concept of a Black Atlantic, and Peter Linebaugh calling them “extraordinary forcing house[s] of internationalism.” What is less readily accepted, however, is that this refers to the slave trade not only in terms of those who began the creation of a unified African-American identity while crammed into the foetid holds, but also, albeit on a much smaller scale, with those who worked the ships.

What happened to the *Amity*’s rebels is not clear. The captain and mate definitely regained control of the ship, for around a year later it arrived at St. Kitts with a cargo of enslaved Africans ready for sale. Whether Richard Squire, John Mathew, Alexander Evans, John Roadman, and Stuart made this voyage or were being tried for piracy at the time is not known. It is improbable that Dick and Will were facing the Admiralty Courts. Far too valuable in themselves to be removed from the voyage, they were almost certainly among the crew that went slave trading after the initial rebellion. Whoever their white colleagues were, they would have treated their captive passengers with little humanity, and little regard, for such was the nature of slave trading.

The men of the *Amity* had thrown racial ties to the winds when it suited their purpose, uniting as seamen in defiance of their different racial origins in order to fight the officers of the ship. Yet such occurrences were transitory and pragmatic rather

---

110 Butterworth, *Three Years* 72.
than binding and ideological. The reasons why should be sought among their vastly different circumstances. For Squire, Mathew and Evans seafaring was a profession that would offer them the least in the way of freedom that European men would suffer in the eighteenth century Atlantic world. For Boadman and Stuart this was their best hope of freedom, liberty and equality. Dick and Will represent a rarely acknowledged part of the forced African exodus, men with few choices and even fewer liberties.

Chapter 3
The Bloody Rise of Western Freedom

In 1767 the Gentleman’s Magazine published a short, fairly commonplace news article informing its readers that the crew of a British slave ship had “mutinied on the coast of Africa, and attacked their officers.” It referred to the men of the True Blue, who had sailed from Liverpool earlier that year under the command of Joshua Hutton. Such a rebellion against a ship’s officers was not an uncommon event. Far more remarkable than the scant details of the mutiny itself were the insightful, and quite sympathetic, words the magazine offered its readers about the incident.

“Several attempts of the like have lately happened on board merchant ships” it noted, “where the petty officers are too apt to exercise cruel and wanton severity towards the common men, by which they are rendered desperate.” Rather than condemning the men out of hand, it offered further explanation to its readers, stating, “the slave trade is in itself a brutal trade, by which the feelings of humanity are suppressed, and all tenderness towards fellow creatures totally obliterated.”

When abolitionism gained in strength and support towards the end of the eighteenth century, the plight of seamen in the slave trade was almost as common a cause of complaint as that of the slaves. Thomas Clarkson in particular made many pleas for abolition based as much on the sufferings of seamen in the business of slaving as on its African victims. Seamen were referred to as “the other victims” of the trade. Of course there was a great deal of racism inherent in this line of argument, for Clarkson judged that the British parliament would care more that numbers of British seamen were suffering and dying than that African slaves were.

Undoubtedly Clarkson dramatised to promote his cause, as did the seamen who reported to him with their complaints. The abolitionist movement did, however, bring the injustices perceived by seamen in the public arena, and in a sense empowered them by revealing to many the injustices they had long suffered.

Arguments regarding the treatment of seamen in the slave trade touch upon a larger historiographic debate about the severity of punishment in the maritime world.

---

1 Gentleman’s Magazine 39 (1767) 265; Eltis, CD-ROM 91087.
during the eighteenth century. The protagonists, at opposite extremes as it were, are N.A.M. Rodger who argues that discipline in the Royal Navy in this period was “enlightened” and based on Christian principles, and Marcus Rediker who argues for a far less optimistic picture. My intention is not to join in this increasingly unpleasant dispute. While accepting, as Marcus Rediker does, that much of the evidence about violence and discipline onboard slave ships represents only the most extreme cases because these were the ones that ended up in front of the Admiralty Courts, the crucial point I wish to make does not concern the frequency or fairness of whipping. Rather, the additional severity of control and punishment in the slave trade is the starting point for exploring the paramount relevance freedom came to have for seamen employed on slave ships. Going beyond Rediker and Jesse Lemisch’s thesis that cases of abuse amounted to a “folk memory of tyranny” through which a captain ruled by fear of what might happen as much as what actually did, it is possible to show that in the slave trade seamen objected specifically where their treatment was considered to be parallel to, or even worse than, that of their captive cargo.

Just as the opposition to impressment into the Royal Navy gained ground during the 1770s when freedom took on a whole new connotation during the American Revolutionary conflict, so on each slave ship seamen loathed physical punishments and constraints not only in themselves, but because they were tainted by their association with slavery. Summing up his seminal argument about the concept of freedom and its peculiar place in western culture, Orlando Patterson writes, “freedom was generated from the experience of slavery. People came to value freedom, to construct it as a powerful shared vision of life, as a result of their

---

3 Marcus Rediker set the subject alight by describing punishments onboard merchant ships in the early half of the eighteenth century as “sordid and vicious” and listing a large number of cases where seamen were cruelly treated by their officers, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 9 and chapter 5. In reviewing Rediker’s work, Rodger accused him of being “burdened by serious professional disabilities” and of having produced “a mass of anecdote rather than a sustained argument.” “Review of Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea” Mariners Mirror 74 (1988). See also N.A.M. Rodger, The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy (London: Fontana, 1988) 211-7. The ideological and political differences between the two do, of course, range much further than the nature of authority and discipline onboard ships. This is, nevertheless, a central bone of their contention, as summed up by Peter Earle, along with other maritime historians’ views on this issue, in Sailors: English Merchant Seamen 1650-1775 (London: Methuen, 1998) 145-7.

experience of, and response to, slavery.”^  The small acts of this drama of reinterpretation were played out onboard wooden slaving vessels.

Thus was not the actual nature of seamen’s punishments that particularly provoked them, but what they implied. Some theoretical attachment to the notion of freedom was not what mattered to the average sailor, but that his condition as a free man should be fundamentally different to that of the captives he was paid to transport across the Atlantic. This was particularly pertinent in the case of men who had been crimped onboard their vessel—where the divisions of free and non-free were blurred—because by the late eighteenth century society and culture in both Britain and America decreed that the lines should be absolute. Seamen had first hand experience with slavery from which to construct their own ideas of liberty, and it is hardly surprising that it came to be crucially, vitally important to them.

While asserting that seamen rejected treatment they considered to be akin to that inflicted on slaves, it is important to point out that they did so by invoking long-established maritime methods of rebellion. Stealing food, deserting, votes of allegiance, and even the extreme action of taking over the ship and becoming pirates were old forms of protest reconceptualised to take into account the particular grievances of the era. Seamen’s revolts were manifestations of class struggle. Yet the kind of colour-blind egalitarianism found by Rediker and Linebaugh for the earlier part of the century is harder to locate in the later decades. Where freedom became a prized commodity because of the proximity of slavery, it grew to belong to one racial group more than any other. The language of freedom protests was proletarian, but its colour was increasingly white.

******

The past was indubitably a harsher, crueller place than denizens of the twenty-first century would tolerate. In eighteenth century Britain “convicted whores [were] stripped to the waist and whipped” in public, and a man who tired of his wife could still break his ‘wed-lock’ by ‘selling’ her. A healthy wife might fetch a nice ox. Mass crowds would turn out to enjoy the spectacle of a felon being hanged, and there was little outcry even when the crimes they had been convicted of were incredibly

minor, or the guilty very young. In Norwich, for example, a seven-year old girl was hanged for stealing a petticoat. In his wonderfully entertaining book *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, Roy Porter takes his readers into a world in which gory fascination was considered normal. When a Bristol man poisoned himself after having been convicted of murdering his wife, a mob, cheated out of his hanging, dug up his body and mutilated it. Even the upper classes defecated in public. Porter says,

> Life was raw. Practically all youngsters were thrashed at home, at school, at work—and child labour was universal. Blood sports such as cock-fighting were hailed as manly trials of skill and courage. Felons were publicly whipped, pilloried and hanged, traitors were drawn and quartered. Jacobites’ heads were spiked on Temple Bar till 1777...People were not squeamish about inflicting or bearing physical pain.⁶

Even though most people were free wage earners in this period, physical means of control remained quite standard. Nowhere was this truer than at sea, where the lash was the established punishment for any number of offences. Studies of discipline in the Royal Navy suggest that severity actually increased over the eighteenth century, with up to five hundred lashes being the designated sentence for a man convicted of theft by the later part of the period.⁷ Onboard merchant vessels too many seamen encountered the ‘cat,’ as they familiarly called the “instrument of torture” known as the cat-o’-nine-tails. One slave trade sailor remembered this as being “composed of nine pieces of whipcord, about eighteen inches long each, with nine knots on each strand.”⁸ Even in this world of ubiquitous bloodshed, seafaring and the lash—and the resulting welts in the flesh—were closely associated in the public conscience in both Britain and America. As late as the nineteenth century American planters fought abolitionists who decried the whipping of slaves as inhumane by pointing to the fact that men were regularly whipped in both the navy and merchant marine.⁹

Not unlike the way African-American slaves dealt with the brutality of the regime they found themselves in, seamen adopted the scars of the lash as proudly worn symbols of defiance. One early eighteenth-century sailor remembered, “many a

---

tar was ‘as proud of the Wales on his Back, as a Holy-Land Pilgrim is of a Jerusalem print.’
It was a method by which the brutality of the system was turned to their own advantage, as every attempt to discipline through the whip was subverted in the sailors’ alternative honour system that deemed it a matter of esteem. The precise number of whippings was not the crucial factor. Officers tried to enforce discipline through the threat of the whip as much as the use of it, and seamen conversely used any resulting scars as symbols of their own subversive anti-authoritarianism. Scars from flogging became the insignia of endurance and rebelliousness, and a component of the collective occupational identity of seafaring.

Part of the reason that the rule of a ship was often based on terror, or the threat thereof, rather than more modern forms of control, was the circumstances that prevailed in deep-sea trades. Geographically distant from any other authority, while a ship was at sea a captain had practically absolute power. His word was law, and that law was to be upheld as he saw fit. Ships were “total institutions.” Physical remoteness meant that they had to provide at least the minimum requirements of food and lodgings for those onboard in return for which the inhabitants lived and worked in a manner that was totally dominated by the figures in authority. A sailor’s contract stated that he had to obey the officers’ commands, and to not do so constituted behaving “in a riotous and disorderly manner.” The men of the slave ship Fame, for example, agreed “to behave with due Subordination and Respect, and to obey the lawful Commands of our Commander.”

This concentration of authority in one man’s hands was in many ways a necessity of seafaring, for the lives of all those onboard could depend upon cohesion and co-operation. But it also rendered the captain singularly powerful, the vessel being something of a kingdom of which they were king. Captain John Newton indeed used this terminology in a letter home to his wife Mary in 1752, describing the

10 Rediker, Between the Devil 211.
11 Marcus Rediker writes, “I wonder whether those who trivialize the use of violence in the eighteenth-century merchant shipping industry would also argue that since 99.9% of black folk in the post-Civil War American South were never lynched, the terror of lynching was not an important part of their experience. The point, of course, is not whether lynching (or flogging) was the exception or the rule, but rather that “rule” was organized through exceptional example.” “The Common Seamen in the Histories of Capitalism and the Working Class” International Journal of Maritime History 1 (1989) 337-357, quote 342-3n.
14 CO 17/5; C107/6.
African as “my peaceful kingdom.” William Butterworth wrote of Captain Evans of the Hudibras, “in him were blended the most discordant passions: this moment phlegmatic, the next choleric, in the extreme...an unlimited despot.” Speaking more generally, American seaman John Willock remembered, “The most absolute monarch on earth, has not his subject more completely in his power than the captain of a vessel those under his command, when in his element: he can render them happy or miserable at please.”

While this may have been true of any ship involved in a long-distance trade in this era, in the slave trade this took on a new terror because this particular branch of maritime commerce seems to have employed some peculiarly sadistic men as captains. There were some humane masters who treated their men well, but on the whole it would seem to have been a profession that either attracted, or bred, cruel, violent men. The idea of mass inhumanity to the slaves they transported has of course become rather clichéd, fed in part by the claims of abolitionists that have been rather subjectively accepted by later readers. Roger Anstey alleges that the picture of immense cruelty related to the idea of enormous profits, which now, through the work of historians such as Anstey himself, David Eltis and David Richardson, have now been proven to be exaggerated. Nevertheless, it would be preposterous to argue that violence did not pervade the trade in slaves. The basis of all slave systems was the power of the whip, and this proved especially true in slave trading. The transatlantic slave trade was only successfully executed through the frequent resort to simple, stark force.

Violence was not a by-product of the trade in human beings, but rather its founding principle. Melded with this to create the kind of horrors commonly associated with the middle passage was the intemperate masculinity of the maritime culture of those paid to transport the slaves to the Americas. While it is worthwhile to point out that this was not genocide in the traditional meaning of the word—the purpose was to deliver the men, women and children for sale, and clearly for this they had to be alive—there are nevertheless lessons to be learned from other historical

---

16 William Butterworth, Three Years Adventures of a Minor in England, Africa, the West Indies, South Carolina, and Georgia (Leeds: Edward Baines, 1822) 6.
atrocities. 19 Hannah Arendt’s famous insight that during the holocaust there was a ‘banality of evil’ is certainly pertinent. The same kind of all-pervading inhumanity meant that rather than being exceptional, physical aggression was mundane in its regularity, and gained widespread acceptance simply by being the norm. Certainly it could be argued that the situation existing on slave ships was more complex, because of the large financial value of those who were primarily on the receiving end of the cruelty, but still this was a trade “founded in blood”, which legitimised violence through making it a part of everyday life. Ultimately, those who inflicted the worst degradations were degraded themselves as normal ethics, even by eighteenth century standards, were thrown to the winds.

Two men who had witnessed events on British slave ships certainly wrote of what they had seen in these terms. Surgeon Alexander Falconbridge expressed his belief that, “the common practice of the officers in the Guinea trade...justify the assertion, that to harden the feelings, and to inspire a delight in giving torture to a fellow creature, is the natural tendency” [emphasis in original]. 20 In a similar vein Reverend John Riland, who was a passenger on the slave ship Liberty in the early years of the nineteenth century, wrote “such was the influence of familiarity with scenes of oppression, cruelty and human wretchedness...that my own colour was contracting a darker hue.” He continued, “the truth obviously is, that all evil is contagious; and especially in the absence of any counteracting influence.” 21 Aside from the racial implications of evil as “a dark hue”—phraseology which reminds one of Winthrop Jordan’s work—Riland’s choice of words unambiguously reflects his belief that the trade in slaves spread iniquity among those involved in it. 22

This ‘contagion’ of evil affected seamen in two ways, a factor symptomatic of their role as both debasers and debased, abusers and abused. They, indisputably, shared in the general brutalising. The cruelty exercised by captains on captive Africans, and the universal degradation of the trade as a whole, created an environment where stark violence appeared to have no consequences for the

persecutor, and where the squandering of human life appeared mundane. Infamously hard, rough men who often lived by the law of their fists, and whose own lives were frequently cheaply dispensed with by the Royal Navy, seamen undoubtedly absorbed this vice. Not infrequently they then turned it outwards onto those whom they had in their power—the Africans who were to be sold as slaves. Some officers and merchants even claimed that seamen were the major persecutors of cruelty towards African captives; they had the unabashed tendency towards aggression characteristic of the trade in human life, without sharing in the financial expedience that required captives be delivered alive, and healthy, at market.

The general mercilessness, however, also directly influenced the way in which the sailors themselves were treated. Onboard ship the only real limitation on the captain’s power was the (often violent) rebellion of the seamen, so the capacity to rule the crew through brutality was omnipresent. This is why, whatever the disputes about the relative harshness of naval vis-à-vis merchant punishments of seamen, most maritime historians agree that sailors on slave ships suffered additionally to those onboard ships involved in other trades. Peter Earle, for example, examined the logbooks of merchant vessels and found that only those of East Indiamen and slavers recorded the flogging of seamen, and the latter had far more instances of this. Marcus Rediker writes, “Seamen in the slave trade, themselves the captors of slaves, were at the same time the captives of their own merchants and captains.” Captains, whose recourse to violence had been encouraged by their rule over captive Africans, turned this onto the seamen over whose lives they also had considerable power. This power, moreover, was clearly linked to the fact that sailors employed onboard slave ships were generally recruited from the lowliest elements of Britain’s working classes.

Beyond the general descent into violent degradation, a case that came before the courts in Charleston, South Carolina, suggests another rationale behind the especially harsh treatment of seamen on slave ships. The sailors of the Cleopatra of Liverpool claimed that their commander, John Butman, had killed three of their original crewmates, and the rest of them had been “miserably bruised and maimed.” Butman’s defence, which ultimately proved successful, was that “the assaults...were,

---

23 Earle, Sailors 154-8.
24 Rediker, Between the Devil 50.
in some measure, rendered necessary by the state of the slaves.” In the sense that the entire trade in slaves was rooted in violence and so spread violence, this was true, but what is interesting in Butman’s statement is the implication that the captain had to divide in order to rule.

As improbable as it might be in the twenty-first century to think that sailors may have helped the slaves to revolt against their imprisonment, it is not clear whether the men whose money was invested in the slave trade considered this a totally unfeasible outcome. Onboard the Wolf in 1750 the second mate, Thomas Gelston, was accused of having been the ringleader of a slave rebellion. The ship’s officers could not “without the greatest reason be persuaded but that he is deep in the plot” despite the fact that an entirely other explanation of him having been seen in the women slaves’ room might appear to be more likely. Two years later, while onboard the African, Captain John Newton worried not only that the divisions within his crew would lead to slave rebellion because they perceived their captors to be weak, but his worst fear, “had it ever come to extremity”, was that the sailors and slaves might “have joyned hands” against him. As late as 1790 a Bristol sailor was hanged for his part in a slave rebellion off the African coast.

The case of the Wolf is the most instructive here, because it illustrates well that Gelston did not provoke rebellion out of sympathy for the slaves’ plight, but “in revenge to the usage he rec’d from the Capt, since the loss of the long boat.” In other words, the disgruntled seaman saw the captives, and their propensity to rebellion, as the ultimate weapon with which to scupper the success—that is, the profitability—of the voyage. In the ensuing chaos he could then “turn pirate with the Vessel” and “procure the Gold dust to himself.” This, therefore, casts another light on the brutal way in which sailors were treated in the slave trade, for as Captain Butman insinuated, the crew had to be provoked into conflict with the captives. Captains could not risk sailors using the captive Africans onboard their vessels in their own struggle against authority.

27 Newton, Journal 72.
The divide and rule tactic was certainly used by captains to create divisions among their crew and so make them more malleable. Doubtless this was also an approach used by many captains in the merchant marine, but in the slave trade it took on a new importance because of the ever-present threat of slave revolt. Lives as well as profits would be lost if the slaves were provoked to rebel. Captains, while ruling by the whip and the fear of it, nevertheless regularly focused their brutality on one or two of the hands. The basis for this was sometimes just a personality clash between two men, one of whom had a position of authority over the other. Within the close confines of a wooden world, grievances often became personal, and sadism took on an individual temper. More often, however, victimisation was linked to a specific incident, not unlike that of Thomas Gelston who apparently felt he had been badly treated since he had lost the ship’s long boat. Similarly, The Spy’s captain apparently turned on one particular seaman after he lost one of the boat’s oars, after which he flogged him so severely that he died.\textsuperscript{30}

Captains in the ‘guinea trade’ also exploited the divisions that always existed among a ship’s crew. Certain positions, such as the surgeon and his assistant, the cook and the steward, stood apart from the main body of men. Moreover, captains rived divisions by singling out those who were particularly young, old, foreign, or otherwise different for especially harsh treatment. Cabin boys, for example, were markedly susceptible to the captain’s brutality, if he was so inclined. The Briton’s cabin boy allegedly jumped overboard after being repeatedly beaten, while John Bromley, a boy on the Africa was thought to have died after frequent beatings from his captain.\textsuperscript{31} The second mate of the Gambia of Lancaster, named Harold, “stabbed an apprentice Boy, & abused him afterwards in such a manner than he died on the spot.”\textsuperscript{32} Of a separate case a seaman observed, “The cabin boy...was kept in a state of perfect misery [and] made a perfect coping-block of by the miserable old man.” Exhausted to “a state of delirium” he died soon after.\textsuperscript{33} All were usually the youngest, smallest and weakest crewmember.

There was an element in all of this of hardening young boys for a life at sea, and the position of cabin boy was not an easy one in any maritime industry. The

\textsuperscript{31} ZHC 1/84 370-1: Evidence of Henry Ellison; HCA 1/23 f.52.
\textsuperscript{32} T70/30; Eltis, CD-ROM 24009.
problem was partly that the apprenticeship system had been founded when paternalistic relations ruled the workplace, but by the late eighteenth century "economic rationalization [had] nibbled through the bonds of paternalistic discipline." In the harsh setting of a slave ship few men appear to have found it in themselves to treat the boys assigned to their ship as sons. In fact there were incidences where men treated incredibly harshly their own sons and nephews who worked under them in this role. Cabin boys were, self-evidently, just learning many of the skills of the men before the mast, and in so doing they often frustrated the officers with their ineptitude. Seaman John Hellen revealed that the cabin boy of his ship, another tyro victimised by his captain, "did his duty as far as he was able as a seamen," suggesting that he was still a novice at many of the skills of seafaring.

This is not the entire story, though, as it was not only the very young who suffered the fate of being on the receiving end of a captain's, or mates' ire. Elderly sailors also seem to have attracted the officers' attention in a similar way, perhaps because they too were no longer the strongest and most able men aboard. Both the young and the old were certainly easy targets for persecution, and by singling one man out the captain no doubt aimed to create a voice within the crew: a deck hand who might well relate to him any discontent among the common seamen, and any plans for rebellion. Sometimes this went beyond the dictates of ruling by dividing, for there was the possibility to create a kind of fawning dependency among young boys, who generally began their seafaring careers at the age of fourteen. The homosexual implications of this lie beyond the bounds of this work. Suffice in this context to quote a slave trade sailor, who remembered that the cabin boy had been "a fellow intirely [sic] dependent upon [Captain] Wabshutt, and therefore obliged to say or do what he ordered."

If age did not set a man apart, his position might. The rather peripheral figure of the surgeon's mate often endured more than his share of vindictiveness. This was

33 Robinson, Sailor Boy 68.
34 Rediker, Between the Devil 207.
35 BT 6/11.
36 HCA 1/23 f.40.
37 See for example Falconbridge, Account 39.
38 There is a small literature on gay pirates. See, for example, B.R. Burg, Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition: English Sea Rovers in the Seventeenth-Century Caribbean (New York: New York University Press, 1983).
possibly because they were not true seafaring men in the sense of being inured to the maritime life, or because surgeons were among the only men who challenged the captain directly over his treatment of the slaves. Attacking his lowly mate may have seemed the easiest way to grind out the frustrations the officers felt towards this alternative, non-nautical, power source. The captain of the *Lilly* apparently treated the assistant surgeon, John Coffee, so cruelly that he died. A "young man of the name of Thomas, who had served as the surgeon's mate on board" the *Alfred* reported that he had been "repeatedly knocked down by the captain" to the extent that he had grown "weary of his life" and attempted to commit suicide by throwing himself into the deep blue sea. Captain Stubbs of the London slave ship *Black Joke* went one further. He claimed that he had got "in a scuffle" with his doctor, during which, it was reported, the doctor had "called out Murder & expired in a minute or two after."

Other ranks that suffered the stigma and isolation of being disparaged as landlubbers in a body of men very proud of their maritime expertise were the cook and the steward. There were certainly several factors in this, as these were the ranks most commonly occupied by men of non-European origin. Whether these positions were additionally tainted by their association with black men, or whether the non-whites who held them were more vulnerable to the all-pervading violence because they were outside the main body of able-seamen is a matter of debate. It is, though, a rather fruitless argument, because the reason that these positions were often taken by non-whites was because of their lowly, separate station. Their racial nature was therefore central to their fate.

Black cooks attracted the captain's sadism on many occasions. Surgeon's mate James Arnold made special mention of the treatment of the black cook of the *Ruby*. He stated that although "It would be tedious to enumerate the many instances of barbarity wantonly exercised on the seamen by the captain and mates" he felt that he had to speak of this case in particular. He claimed that the captain and mates took a specific pleasure in torturing this man, and that the former "often amused himself by forcing the man to swallow cockroaches alive...and having beef brine rubbed into his wounds." While in Africa this man was tied up with a chain. A surgeon who had

---

39 Robert Barker, *The Unfortunate Shipwright, or Cruel Captain Being a faithful narrative of the unparallel'd sufferings of Robert Barker, late carpenter on board the Thetis Snow, of Bristol, in a voyage to the coast of Guinea and Antigua* (London: Printed for, and sold by the Sufferer, 1760) 18.
40 ZHC 1/84 105: Evidence of William Dove.
worked on the *Alexander* recalled that when the black cook of that ship broke a plate by accident "he had a fish-gig darted at him, which could certainly have destroyed him, if he had not stooped or dropped down." On another occasion both he and the carpenter's mate were "tied up, stripped, and flogged, but the cook with the greatest severity." "After that the cook had salt water and Cayenne pepper rubbed on his back."

Ordinary black seamen were also picked out for atrocious treatment, despite having occupied positions normally central to the main group of unified crew. Their fellow seamen may have been prepared to accept them as colleagues, but to the officers of the ship they stood out. There was clearly racism in this. All around the Atlantic world people of African origin were belittled, and black jacks were, without doubt, divided from the rest of the men by their racial origin. On the *Brookes* one free black sailor from Philadelphia was said to have been lashed "to one of the topmast heads" for twelve days, a punishment the captain was later heard relating to some fellow ships' masters with "a degree of triumph and satisfaction that would have disgraced an Indian scalper." His audience "applauded his invention for the novelty of the punishment." Captain Noble remembered of the incident that he "was a very turbulent, troublesome man, and after we arrived at Kingston, he was caged almost every night, until he went off the Island."

Another free black sailor who was very harshly treated was John Dean, who shipped on the *Brothers* of Bristol in July 1785. Thomas Clarkson, who interviewed Dean during his investigation into the conditions of the slave trade stated, "the report was, that for a trifling circumstance, for which he was no-wise to blame, the captain had fastened him with his belly to the deck, and that, in this situation, he had poured hot pitch upon his back, and made incisions in it with hot tongs." Others testified that they had often seen the disfigurements on Dean's "scarred and mutilated back" caused by this incident. On another Bristol slaver in the 1780s a "black boy" was allegedly so badly treated that he jumped overboard after having been "beaten daily."

Yet the alienation of a crewmember singled out because of his racial origin was not restricted to men of African origin. Thomas King, captain of the *Surry* of

---

42 T70/30.
43 ZHC 1/85 631; BT 6/11.
44 ZHC 1/84 88; ZHC 1/84 112.
46 ZHC 1/85 598: Evidence of Alexander Falconbridge.
London was accused of having kicked sailor John Warren to death in 1771 while off the coast of Cameroon. The cooper of the vessel, Edward Shingles, later claimed that King, "in a great Passion damned his [Warren's] Blood calling him at the same time an Irish son of a Bitch." Warren died several days later, after having complained to the boatswain, Alexander Henderson that "his heart was broke and that something within him had burst" as the result of the captain having kicked him repeatedly in the stomach. The reason for Warren's fate would appear to have been founded in his ethnicity, as he is not mentioned to have been particularly old, young, inept, careless or drunk. He might have been any of these things, but when this case was related before the courts it was his nationality that was particularly mentioned.

Additionally, white British men who occupied the positions of cook, steward or surgeon's mate were, on occasion, singled out for cruel treatment. The case of a man named Peter Green who had been steward of the Alfred illustrates the complexity of this issue well. If this man was other than ethnically British it is not apparent from the details of his death. The incident that led to his untimely demise occurred while the ship was at Bonny, and fascinatingly involved "a black woman, of the name of Rodney" who belonged to the ship's owners, and had been sent out to act as an interpreter. After Green and Rodney fought over the keys to the food store the captain beat the former "severely, and ordered his hands to be made fast to some bolts on the starboard side of the ship...and then flogged him himself, using the lashes of the cat-of-nine-tails on his back at one time, and the double walled knot at the end of it upon his head at another; and stopping to rest at intervals, and using each hand alternately, that he might strike with the greater severity." As Green called for the first and second mates to assist him, they too were ordered to join in his flogging. The captain wore out one whip in the process and had to replace it with another, and it was two and a half hours before the captain allowed the man to be taken down. He was then shackled and put in one of the boats, where he was later discovered to have died. One of Green's crewmates testified that "If Peter Green was not murdered, no man ever was."

So the objects of brutality inflicted on the crews of slave ships are hard to categorise, for the "dread Middle Passage [was] brutalizing to any man" and this

---

47 HCA 1/24 f.57-59.
violence, while not random, could strike anybody. There is clearly more than a suggestion that those who were non-white were more harshly treated than those who were, and that those who were notably different because of their age or position onboard ship also suffered more than average from the cruelty. The only thing that truly guaranteed that they would not be ruled by the lash, however, was the captain of the ship. His only meeting with the ‘cat’ would come about if his sailors or the slaves revolted, and treated him as he had treated them. Thus the violence was focused on a few of the crew hands, but anybody could be susceptible. A captain who would beat his cabin boy to a point of incapacity would frequently do so to other men too, perhaps having got a taste for megalomania or the infliction of suffering. Captain David Wilson of the Britton of Liverpool, for example, was accused of having committed “divers enormous abuses on several of his people.” While one of those he was accused of having killed was a fifteen year old named Lewis Loatham, who died after having been beaten with a “stick woolded round with Tar Twine commonly called a Rattan” and thrown repeatedly against a gun, it was not only he who had been abused. Two other sailors named James Ellison and Joseph Morris also died after ill treatment from Wilson, who reputedly beat Ellison to death in much the same way he beat Loatham.

Violence could strike anyone. In one well-known case where murder was alleged to have occurred the gunner, or armourer, was the victim. Several of the crew of the Thomas in 1785 later testified that while they were at anchor in the Calabar River, James Lavender, the second mate of the ship, beat William Lines “with the said stick [a broomstick] in...an unmerciful manner.” Lines cried out not to be killed, and eventually two of the other sailors carried him into a hammock. He died three days later, after having frequently cried out “O my Bowels” and having blood pouring from “his private parts” and his ears. Yet while the second mate was the perpetrator on the Thomas, onboard the slaver the Plumber in 1767 it was the third mate who was alleged to have been murdered by his superiors. The ship’s cooper, William Christian stated that Matthew Bailey had fallen asleep on the quarterdeck when Captain Edmund Brown “being informed thereof called for a glass of rum and a candle which having got he...poured said rum upon the face and about the head and hair of the said

---

50 HCA 1/22 ff.174-176 and f.195.
Matthew Bailey” and set fire to him with the candle. At Bailey’s plight, “Edmund Brown laughed heartily and he and [surgeon] Alexander Cahoun…seemed greatly pleased and diverted at what had been done.”

A list of such alleged incidences could go on and on. Despite counter claims from the accused that the seamen in question had died of various illnesses, what is clear at least is that the “folklore of tyranny” was particularly strong with reference to the slave trade. It may be fruitless to make a quantitative analysis of the exact number of men whipped, flogged, held in irons or even killed, but it is certain that seamen associated the slave trade with particularly harsh rule. Even if the men testifying to the above abuses exaggerated their claims in order to enhance their cases, this was unlikely to have been to a level that made them appear absurd. Evidently seamen considered that the brutality of slave ships was so widely acknowledged that their stories would be believed. Or, of course, they could have been simply telling some version of the truth.

The threat of violence such incidences imposed, however rare, spread much wider than the actual event, and created coercive fear among the men. Indeed some captains gained such a reputation for cruelty among seamen that they could not secure a crew by legal means, and had to resort to crimps even more regularly than most captains employed in this trade. Such an outcome happened to the captain of the *Brothers* in the late 1780s, after having apparently lost thirty-two men on his previous voyage. Reports of particularly sadistic officers continued to circulate between ships while the ‘triangular trade’ was in progress. A young sailor onboard the London ship *Spy* was warned by the men on slave ships stationed at Anomabu at the same time that the captain and second mate of his vessel were known as “sharp hand[s]” in the trade. The captain had apparently “paid some hundreds in the course of law for bad treatment to the men.” The chief mate, “Thorsby alias Cummins” also had a dark past he was informed. This man had been chief mate of the *Gregson* and had been accused of having “thrown the ship’s cook into the boiling coppers,” a crime for which he had been sent to gaol in Liverpool, but had escaped, changed his name, and gone to London to ship onboard the *Spy*. In the public houses of the Caribbean too

51 HCA 1/25 f.147.
52 HCA 1/23 ff.19-20.
53 Earle, *Sailors* 147.
word of cruel captains spread on the nautical grapevine, so that those who were accused of having ill treated their crew had difficulty hiring any additional men needed for the journey home.

Beyond the ubiquitous associations of cruelty and the slave trade, something else is also visibly apparent from studying Admiralty court records from the traffic in human cargo. Not only were slave ships likely scenes of violent rule, but when seamen from them protested they frequently did so by invoking comparisons of their own situation with that of those they had carried as captive cargo. While this illustrates clearly that the treatment of slaves in the Anglo-Atlantic world had become a by-word for the ultimate in debasement by this period, it also reveals the growth in the importance of freedom as a concept, and the ever-hardening lines between free and non-free. ‘How can I, a free man, be treated as a slave’ sailors implored. Freedom had noticeably taken on new significance when in such close contact with slavery, and those in possession of this uniquely acclaimed asset felt keenly any blurring of the lines between the two.

One case before the Admiralty Courts, for example, heard that Thomas Hall, surgeon of the Nanny, beat both a sailor and then a slave in quick succession. Seamen Michael Roach reported that he saw Hall “strike a Negroe Slave (who was then shitting upon the gratings and complaining of a Pain in the Bowells) several times about the head and Stomack and then laid hold of his Head and beat it against the gratings, until the Blood gushed out of his nose and Mouth, and that the said slave died within about ten minutes.” This happened while the ship was at anchor in Bonny. A major part of the controversy of his case was not the cruelty towards the sick slave, however, but that it followed directly the beating of a sailor named Beith, who was being beaten by the captain when Hall shouted, “beat the son of a bitch more” and then joined in.\footnote{HCA 1/23 f.158.}

Likewise, a key cause of the resentment towards Captain John Steele of the Elizabeth was that he had used the instruments of torture designed for use on the slaves on his cabin boy, Thomas Watson. While on the coast of Africa the captain had allegedly put Watson in thumb screws “which he screwed till the blood flowed from the ends of his thumbs & kept him in that pain & torture for about ten minutes at same time flogging him naked with a horse whip till his back was raw.” He then
ordered some other boys on the vessel to "rub him so raw & naked with a hard brush such as they clean decks with, & also salt water." Later other crewmembers were ordered to beat Watson, which they did, "one with a cat with nine tails and the other with a horse whip." Fellow cabin boy Richard Murphy also testified that Watson was caught sleeping among some cotton bails for warmth, and for that the captain flogged him until he "wore off the cord of a horse whip." Interestingly, he was also made to sing before the captain just like those who they would transport as slaves. It was said that Watson used to "frequently cry out murder, in Language of Negroes, & to Captain Steele don’t kill me".  

Other seamen's comparisons to the treatment of slaves were subtler. One ship's carpenter related that he had been tied to a seaman "me by the right leg, and Richardson by the left, and to compleat [sic] the matter effectually, confined my right hand to his left, with a pair of handcuffs." He did not expressly compare this to the way slaves were shackled, but anyone familiar with the way the trade was run could have identified with the descriptions of slaves chained "a right and a left leg, and a right and a left arm." Similar reference was made by the seaman who complained that Captain Coil of the *Lancashire Witch* had, "for some trifling offence" tied up one of his men while at the African coast with "an iron collar about his neck, shackled upon his right leg and arm, and then chained to a ring bolt on the deck." Another man claimed that he had once seen a sailor onboard a slaving vessel chained by the neck while they were at St. Vincent. The crew told him that he had been chained there for three months. The implication of all was that they had been treated as slaves.

Such complaints, and the rhetoric of comparison with slaves, surfaced not only in relation to the seamen's punishments, but also about their general treatment onboard ship. James Towne's protests about his treatment onboard the *Peggy* of Liverpool encompassed both the poor conditions, and the resort to the kind of torture and restraints associated with slavery. "[A]s soon as we were round the rock of Liverpool" he later claimed, "people were brought to an allowance of 41b of bread per week; their chests brought on deck, and staved and burnt by the cook, and themselves

---

57 HCA 1/23 f.38-40.  
58 Barker, Unfortunate Shipwright 18.  
59 ZHC 1/82 85: Evidence of John Knox.  
60 ZHC 1/87 14: Evidence of Richard Storey.  
61 ZHC 1/87 102.
turned out from lying below”. “They were put in irons and chains and beaten if they complained.” Towne also alleged that “when on the Coast of Guinea, if not released before their arrival there from their confinement, they were put into the boats, and made to row backwards and forwards, either with the captain from ship to ship, or on any other duty, still both legs in irons, and an iron collar about their necks, and with a chain locked to the boat.” At night they were chained to the deck he stated. The assessment that they had been treated as slaves often extended to the conditions they had endured as well as the discipline.

The food and conditions on slaving vessels could, undoubtedly, be grim. Sailors often had to sleep on deck after their human cargo had been loaded, so exposing them to the heat, humidity, and rainfall of the African coast. Drinking water, rank at the best of times, could be in fearfully short supply for the tropical climate in both Africa and the Caribbean. Food was monotonous. The articles of agreement between the investors of the voyage of the *Fame* in 1792 and the men they hired as crew guaranteed the following “good and wholesome victuals”:

- Sunday - One Pound and a half of Beef...and Half a Pint of Flour
- Monday - One Pound of Pork...and Half a Pint of Pease
- Tuesday - One Pint of Oatmeal, and Two Ounces of Butter, and Four Ounces of Cheese; or One Pound of Stock Fish, with One-Eighth of a Pint of Oil, and a Quarter of a Pint of Vinegar
- Wednesday, the same as Monday – Thursday the same as Sunday – Friday, the same as Tuesday – Saturday the same as Monday. Each person also to have six pounds of bread per week, and a Quarter of a Pint of spirits.

This example was probably as good as food got onboard British slave ships. Many fared much worse. If the voyage took longer than planned, food often ran short, so that by the time the Americas approached they could be “in great Distress for want of Provisions.” Such was the fate of an American brig which spent 100 days at sea in the middle passage during which she lost the captain, mate, and seventy slaves, and was found by another ship “destitute of almost every necessity of life.”

Such hardships, however, were certainly not exclusive to slaving vessels. The food of the working classes in Britain at this time was also deficient in both calories

---

62 ZHC 1/87 27.
64 C107/6.
65 Pennsylvania Gazette 7 November 1754.
66 Gentleman’s Magazine November 1786.
and nutrients, and seamen on any other kind of ship could equally suffer if food or water ran short. What was peculiar about complaints made by those employed on slave ships, though, was that they increasingly formulated their grievances in wording that compared their lot with that of their slaves. That their food and lodgings were as abysmal as, or even worse than, those of African captives, was a frequently heard protest. Their close proximity to the obscenity of Atlantic slavery meant that seamen could easily compare it to their own plight, and often considered themselves to be not much better off.

The harsh conditions and poor food, therefore, became symptomatic of a much larger issue, as sailors demanded better circumstances based on their different place in the economic system of the Atlantic world. Hard line discipline, rotten food, and appalling living conditions characterised much of working class British life, but when brought into close relief with the realities of African enslavement these things took on a new meaning. They were reviled not just in themselves, but because ‘freedom’ was considered to equate to a materially better standard of life and work. The reality of their situation a propos the slaves was of course hugely different if viewed in wider perspective, but such considerations were beyond Jack’s knowledge or interest. The seamen’s perspective was that they were treated as slaves, and they fought their conditions with this particular injustice in mind.

William Butterworth, for example, complained that he and his fellow tars onboard the Hudibras had been put on short rations during the six months they spent at the African coast. If a sailor became sick his food allowance was cut further. Although Butterworth and his crewmates ended up with very little personal clothing, having bartered away much of what they had for additional food, it was the fact that he considered the slaves to have been “infinitely better fed” that really seems to have galled him. Richard Storey of the Tyger similarly complained before the parliamentary investigation into the slave trade that he had been “beat unmercifully …with a rope” because while “handing some rice forward to the slaves, I took a handful out of it for my own use.” The crew had been put on short rations at the time.

When Robert Barker, who had sailed on the Thetis as carpenter, having already made one slaving voyage onboard the Tryal, published an account of his

---

67 Butterworth, Three Years 40-1.
grievances entitled *The Unfortunate Shipwright, or Cruel Captain* the lack of food was central to his complaints. He wrote that by the time the ship was in Africa loading slaves his food allowance was so meagre that he had often finished the entire week’s allotment by Monday, and then had to starve until the following Sunday. At Annabon he managed to trade the shirt off his back with an African who came to the ship in a canoe in exchange for “two fowls, some caffavi bread, a few cocoa-nuts, and a quart of brandy” which he considered was “sufficient to have served me a week” if the first mate had not stolen any. Barker claimed his in publication that having traded what clothes he could for food, he was forced then to sleep among the goats and hogs for warmth, and begged that he might be able to share the hogs’ food but not allowed to do this. In common with other seamen who made slaving voyages, Barker recalled that the slaves had been moved by his plight, and had given him some of their own food.69

Similarly, among the long list of complaints of mistreatment endured by Thomas Watson, the boy on the *Elizabeth*, it was especially mentioned that his allowance had been cut so much that he “fed constantly with the hogs upon [illegible] rice, such as was tho[ught] too mean and bad for slaves to feed upon.” His crewmate Richard Murphy claimed that Watson was so hungry that he would pick up the crumbs when he was sweeping steerage and eat them, while another, Robert Crosby, said that Watson was given only “burnt rice (which sticks to the bottom of the Copper in boyling Rice for slaves) such as they usually give to Hogs.” This poor young boy did not even have clothes to barter, for he had had few when the ship sailed, and he “was quite naked before they got to the Coast of Guinea.”70

Unsurprisingly, seamen regularly sought to improve their lot through their own actions. Most benignly, they found ways to supplement their diet, thereby also increasing their strength. Onboard the *Lilly* the men caught and enjoyed a meal of catfish. On other vessels sharks, dolphins, and various kinds of fish were hooked, and the captain of the *Sandown*, Samuel Gamble, even found time to draw pictures of the latter in his logbook.71 Repulsively, the crew of the *Florida* learned that it was easier to catch sharks when dead slaves had been thrown overboard, as they would follow

---

69 23-4.
70 HCA 1/23 f.38 and f.40.
the ship until the bodies were eaten.72 While they were anchored off the Banana Islands the men of the *Rising Sun* had “a fine dinner” after having caught five turtles, and had several times before this acquired a quantity of “fine oysters”.71 The men on this ship seem to have fared better than most, as the ship’s doctor even sent quarter of a goat to them so that they could celebrate Christmas Day. The *Rising Sun*, not coincidentally, was a Rhode Island ship, and was therefore manned with seamen probably used to better quality food than their English colleagues. On other ships the men were reduced to less inventive methods of securing additional food. The crew of the *Pearl*, like Butterworth, Barker and doubtless many others, bartered articles of their clothing with free Africans for extra supplies.74 The seamen of the *Gregson* frequently tried to beg food from the men of the *Warwick Castle* while they were on the African coast.75

Others, evidently believing that it was not the shortage of food on the whole ship that was the problem, but rather the inequality between captain and crew, merely helped themselves to the ship’s stocks. There was indeed a major difference between some tragedy that caused food for all to be short, and incidences where seamen just felt that they were unfairly discriminated against in the allotment of what food was available. The former, which led to the incidences of cannibalism infamous in maritime lore, were an accepted risk of seafaring, and occasions when all the men suffered equally. The latter, however, were instructive of seamen’s desires to improve their relations as a unified body. Robert Barker told his captain that if all the crewmembers were not equally treated with regard to food, they would be “obliged to go where we can to get provisions, and not be forcibly starved by you.”76 Here were the tenacious tentacles of class conflict, played out pragmatically rather than ideologically over a piece of salt pork or a humble potato.

If caught, however, this regularly led to the ever-downward descent of human moral values. Captains fought back in ways characteristic of the cruelty deeply embedded in the slave trade, and of their resistance to the nascent proletarian claims.

72 British Library Add Mss 39946.
73 Rhode Island Historical Society, Mss 828: Log of the *Dolphin*.
74 C107/12.
75 ZHC 1/87 123: Evidence of John Douglas.
76 Barker, *Unfortunate Shipwright* 16.
of the seamen for better treatment. The captain of the Bristol slaver *Phoenix* was apparently so incensed after a piece of his ham was stolen that he ordered his surgeon to make all the seamen vomit to see which of them had stolen it. "None of them threw any of it up," stated Henry Ellison. On the *Lilly*, Captain John Scrogham allegedly took an even more extreme tactic. Initially having beaten a man for trying to get extra food, when the captain "was tired of flogging himself, and could not prevail on any of his officers to second him, he made the men Slaves come off the main deck, and flog him until such time as the man was dead." For men who considered their situation to be close to enslavement and who were so eager to escape bondage, being flogged by one of their captive cargo must surely have provoked intense discontent. In the close confines of a wooden ship, thus could the seemingly small matter of food be inflated into a matter of ideological importance.

The way that common sailors fought against their other hardships similarly reflected this duality between practical, spontaneous reactions to their situation, and the larger picture of class conflict of which such rebellions were minute aspects. They also were symbolic of Jack’s growing fascination with the idea of liberty—that in asserting his right as workingman, a central tenet of that argument was that he should be free. Perhaps the most common form of rebellion, desertion, was often a knee-jerk reaction to escape the privations of the ship, to withhold labour as the ultimate method of rejecting their conditions and treatment. It also, however, had relevance in the slave trade above and beyond removal of labour if seen in the context of Rediker’s comment that it “affirmed the ‘free’ in free wage labor.” As men who protested about their meagre food allowances, appalling working conditions and physical punishments by contrasting their lot with that of slaves, desertion forcibly illustrated their rejection of such treatment. When a seaman ran from a slaving vessel, he was not only protesting his treatment, but was doing so in ways that showed his fundamentally different position in the economic system of the Atlantic world. Desertion was a way of asserting freedom.

Thus the number of men who absconded from slave ships, and the manner in which they did so, is illustrative of both the harsh conditions that prevailed in the trade, and the growing anger at authority that it provoked among its lowly employees.

---

77 ZHC 1/84 372.
78 ZHC 1/87 29-30.
79 Rediker, *Between the Devil* 105.
Naval man Thomas Bolton Thompson reported that the sailors on the Liverpool slaver Fisher had been so badly treated by Captain Richard Kendal that they swam “between 2 and 3 cable lengths” in “shark filled waters” to protest their treatment to him. The men on the Liberty were also so “eager to get from under [the captain’s] power” that “eight of them swam on board a frigate, which lay in the harbour, at the risk of being devoured by sharks.” They had previously mutinied. These testimonies are particularly insightful because the Royal Navy was notoriously feared, and seamen, as has been mentioned, went to extreme lengths to avoid being pressed into service.

Seventy five per cent of pressed men died in their first two years of naval service, so these men must have been extremely fearful of their existing situations to have contemplated desertion into His Majesty’s ‘care’, even without the added hazard of shark filled waters.

Indeed men ran from slave ships in huge numbers. Some, fearing what lay ahead, escaped even before the ship left its home port, regaining their freedom after having been crimped aboard. They did so on the inhospitable coast of Africa, where opportunities to better themselves were certainly scarce, although they might have secured a berth with a more benevolent ruler. Mostly they did so in the Caribbean and North American ports where they discharged the ship’s load. Although it may be true that this was primarily an independent decision, it is problematical to ignore the larger significance in the setting of the slave trade. The brutality that circulated created a situation where men were desperate enough to desert even to naval ships. They deserted in places which normally would have been considered extremely hostile by most Europeans of the period, and in so doing contributed to the racial interaction which made maritime race relations run somewhat counter to the general picture in the countries that faced the ocean. Moreover, for men who frequently compared their conditions with slaves, and who were often referred to with the same rhetoric, here was a conclusive way to prove their distinctiveness, both to their employers and to themselves.

More daring, threatening types of rebellion on slave ships similarly illustrated resistance to their extreme exploitation in ways that placed the important of not being treated like slaves at the fore. Men who, in their working lives, saw the sufferings of

---

80 ZHC 1/84 168-9.  
81 Riland, Memoirs 62-3.
those who were not free, placed liberty on a pedestal, and fought for their own freedoms through the prism of proletarian struggle. Collectivism, equality, and the rights of workingmen were the central tenets of their protest. In 1789 when Captain William Corren of the *Gregson* tried to quell a drunken rebellion amongst his men by placing some of them in irons in Dixcove fort, he found that “they had signed a Note, to stick by one another, and that nobody should use them ill.” One of the men warned the captain that if he wanted peace onboard his ship he should retrieve the men from the fort, but when he failed to do so, and in fact tried to place more under arrest there, “the Ship’s Company, immediately begun to arm themselves” with “handspikes, marling Spikes, Scrapers, Iron Hoops, beat together, and made into a kind of Cutlass”. The rebellion was eventually overcome with the help of some free Africans and the crew of another ship, but as one of the *Gregson*’s men would later claim, there had been “no dissatisfaction among the Crew till the Men were put in irons onshore.”^83^ The crew of the *Gregson* rejected being treated like slaves—being put in a slave trading fort in irons—but they did so in ways characteristic of maritime insurrection. In resisting they showed both reckless bravado and collective anti-authoritarianism.

Collectivism was a central tactic of rebellion. One surgeon who stated that a seaman had been “mercilessly flogged” by the captain had also witnessed a group of the men on one occasion, “coming aft from the forecastle with the view to rescue the man.” The captain, seeing himself outnumbered, let the man go.\(^84\) Instinctive this may have been, but cooperative forms of protest against the captain’s omnipotence were deeply entrenched in maritime tradition, and were still used among slave trade sailors in the late eighteenth century. The Round Robin was a way for seamen to show their support for rebellion, but in a peculiarly egalitarian way so that none of them appeared to be the leader, and none to have been forced to join under coercion. Nathaniel Uring, a man who had experience of the slave trade, described them as a piece of paper on which the men drew two circles with their names signed around the outer one, and inside “they will write what they have a mind to have done.”\(^85\) Captain John Newton was informed that one Richard Swain had pressed others onboard his

---


\(^83\) HCA 1/64.

\(^84\) ZHC 1/84 87.

\(^85\) Quoted in Rediker, *Between the Devil* 234.
ship to sign such a document, so that the officers struggled “to be upon our guard against the slaves and the round robin gentlemen” at the same time.66

Seamen on British and American late eighteenth century slave ships had hundreds of years of maritime rebellion to build upon. Men who participated in the upsurge in piracy during the early eighteenth century “had an alternative social order within living memory” to build their ideology upon, namely the buccaneers of the previous decades.67 Their followers a half century later had the folkloric knowledge of their exploits, doubtless exaggerated among those that followed them as merchant mariners, as well as the ethics of the revolutions which circled the Atlantic world in this era. Ideals of liberty, brotherhood, and equality may not have seemed so different to the Robin Hood style deeds of the buccaneers which tars would have heard repeatedly since they were young boys green before the mast. Whatever the harsh realities that Black Bart Roberts, Blackbeard, Calico Jack and their ilk had wreaked upon those they had captured, to the men who sailed in their wake decades later they were undoubtedly heroes. They had, after all, defied a highly hierarchical age by allowing their captain few bonuses the rest did not enjoy, had divided their loot equally, and terrorised the merchants and captains who were the butt of many of the seamen’s complaints. They had been free, and had lived by their own interpretation of ‘justice’.

Piracy and the trade in slaves had a long history. In the 1710s to 1720s men had rejected the harsh conditions onboard ships, including slave ships, and had sailed instead under the black flag of piracy, swapping the omnipotent rule of a captain for their own brand of egalitarianism, characterised by Rediker and Linebaugh as “hydrachy.” Choosing their own leader, pirate men executed their own system of justice according to their own laws of right and wrong. Their rebellion was undoubtedly cast in class terms, as voiced by the pirates who captured the slave ship Bird Galley at Sierra Leone in 1719 who attested that they had adopted this way of life to “revenge themselves on base Merchants, and cruel Commanders of ships.” The life of the Bird Galley’s commander was saved because his crew had no complaints about their treatment of him, the pirates instead deciding to order him to trade the remainder of his goods for gold, and then to return to London and “bid the Merchants defiance.” This band of brigands illustrated their contempt for authority

66 Newton, Journal 70.
by regularly toasting the ‘Old Pretender’ as King James the III, instead of drinking to the health of the actual English king, George I. However fair their old captain may have been, eleven of his men, including his chief mate Simon Jones and another seaman named Thomas Wilder, deserted him anyway and sailed henceforth under the black flag.  

Early in the century the Royal Navy had crushed gangs of pirates and hanged many of the most infamous and their followers by the neck as an example to others. Yet in spite of the fact that piracy was largely a spent force by the late eighteenth century, it would not die. In the face of the added danger and increased likelihood of being caught and executed, men employed on slave ships continued to take this extreme option. In 1766 Richard Brew at Anomabu wrote to slave merchants warning them, “the coast is very much infested with pirates.” The worst offender was “a schooner, copper sheathed, commanded by one Hide, [that] had onboard 34 men…[and] cruises between the river Settra Crue and Cape Three Points.” In December 1772, David Mill wrote from Cape Coast Castle, “A Sloop about Sixty Tons and which by all accounts must be a pirate” was hurting trade in the area. He thought that the ship was mostly trading for gold, but also had some slaves onboard and was supposed to have carried off some free blacks as well. In May of the following year, Captain Luke Collingwood, who would become posthumously infamous in the Zong case, gave chase, and “stranded her, but was not able to secure the Blacks on Board, who swam on shore.”

Slaver crews did not only take the less pro-active method of merely joining a pirate vessel when their own ship was captured. They also employed the more radical and treacherous method of taking over their own ships and raising the black flag. In 1791, when Samuel Kitson was the captain of a ship that sailed to Anomabu and Tantumquerry, he suffered this fate. Later at trial, the accused perpetrators, John Slack and Charles Berry, claimed that their reason for attempting to take the ship was that Kitson had used them ill. Berry, a twenty-seven year old Swede, had declared to Kitson that he was now the captain after an armed struggle. This was a short lived attempt at piracy, however, as Kitson managed to get hold of Slack and threaten the

---

87 Linebaugh and Rediker, Many-Headed Hydra 159.
89 Pennsylvania Gazette 6 October 1766.
90 T 70/32.
crew that he would throw him overboard if they continued to resist. They were found guilty and sentenced to hang, probably meeting their demise at the 'Execution Dock' in Wapping, where countless other mutineers had publicly been “hanged by the neck until dead.”

Another man who was brave and reckless enough to steal away with a slave ship was John Wynne (or Winn), who preferred to be known as ‘Captain Power the Brave.’ On the pretext of chasing a pirate vessel, he endeavoured to leave the coast without giving the captain time to rejoin his ship, the Polly. Seamen Jack Tomlyn, Robert Fitzgerald, Jack Hughes, Charles Dee, Dick Thomas, and Jack Putt were also involved in the rebellion, and armed themselves with cutlasses and pistols. Wynne attempted to unify the crew by getting some liquor from the captain’s cabin, and forced them to “take an Oath upon a Book to be true to Captain Power of the Bravo meaning him the said John Wynne.” Wynne was thrown in the cabin by the other seamen for a while, supposedly while they discussed the merits of “turning pyrate” and whether the man who called himself Captain Power “had navigation enough to conduct the said Ship”. This mutiny was more successful in that it had a longer duration, but after having been betrayed by some of the men he now commanded—one of whom was a mulatto man—Wynne, like Berry and Slack, was returned to Britain where he was sentenced to death by hanging in 1776.

Seamen challenged the brutality that they frequently suffered onboard slave ships by replacing it with their own democratic, if harsh, alternative social structure. Aboard pirate vessels the captain was chosen by the men themselves, and could be removed from his position if they later did not support his rule. All hardships, food, alcohol and loot was shared in a far more equal way than above an ordinary merchant ship. Even more remarkably in the context of the slave trade, an important part of the ethos of piracy was its unhesitating acceptance of sailors of African origin as equals under the pennant of skull and crossed bones. In the early years of the century “hundreds of people of African descent found places within the social order of the pirate ship.” Black men were certainly part of many pirate crews, including those of

---

91 HCA 1/61; Rediker, Between the Devil 24-7; HO 26/1.
92 HCA 1/58 ff.106-110.
Bartholomew Roberts, Edward Teach and Sam Bellamy. What is more, some pirates settled on the West African coast, and lived among the native inhabitants.\(^9\)

It is important, however, not to misinterpret the egalitarian nature of piracy: these were hard, cold-blooded, rashly cruel men, who did not hesitate to expend the life of those of African origin if they stood in the way of their plans. Although many Africans and African-Americans—some of them escaped slaves—enjoyed relative equality among pirate crews, those who were captured while being shipped as slaves rarely benefited. Sailors were used to working alongside men of different ethnicities and were happy to do so under a black flag as much as any other, but this impartiality often did not extend to chained captives being taken for sale. John Wynne and his fellow mutineer John Putt, for example, murdered a pawn named Bassam, presumably from the Grand Bassam area, for motioning to the slaves who were imprisoned on the vessel. They claimed that he had been encouraging them to revolt. Wynne whipped the pawn and cut him with a cutlass, and then Putt allegedly decapitated him with an axe.\(^9\)

More significantly, many latter-day Atlantic pirates did not hesitate to use slaves in the manner that their former captains had displayed. In other words, they saw them as disposable commodities. When John Fawcett of London “with force of arms did turn pirate” on the Plumber when it was off the coast of Guinea he took an African canoeman hostage. Fawcett tried to get to Suriname, but the winds and his navigation skills proving unequal to this task, after several weeks the mutineers agreed to go to Sao Tomé instead. There Fawcett went on land and sold the black man he had captured.\(^9\) When John Richardson of the Thetis attempted to take the ship his boast to those he wished to join him in rebellion was that he knew “where to carry the vessel and how to dispose of the slaves.” The would-be pirate, “speaking to the people on board, said, lads, will you live or die?” and when one of them said “live” he said, “then cut the cables and slip the other, loose the top-sails, and hoist the Jolly Roger.” This particular rebellion was short lived as the rebel was soon put in

\(^9\) Rediker and Linebaugh, Many-Headed Hydra 165-7; H. Ross, “Some Notes on the Pirates and Slavers around Sierra Leone and the West Coast of Africa, 1680-1723” Sierra Leone Studies II (1928) 16-53. See also Rediker, Between the Devil chapter 6.

\(^9\) HCA 1/58 ff.106-110.

\(^9\) HCA 1/23 f.9; HCA 1/23 f.23; HCA 1/58 ff.114-124.
shackles, but undoubtedly his intention had been to sell the human beings imprisoned below decks for his own financial benefit.  

Similarly, a sailor named William Harry remembered that when the Bristol slave ship *William* had been taken by Stephen Porter and his accomplice Richard Hancock, the slaves were sold for the men’s profit. The rebels reportedly “murdered the Captain and Mate with a Broad Axe, when asleep, the former on the Round house, and the latter in the Cabbin.” When, after this the men had succeeded in sailing the ship to St. Kitts, “the Slaves were sold to the Portugueze for 50 Dollars a Head.” Most revealingly of all, the pirate crew who captured the *Bird Galley* demanded that their captain go to São Tomé to sell slaves in order to pay the seamen “handsom” wages.

All around the Atlantic littoral the association of blacks with inferiority was strengthening among the ruling white society, and for men as desperate, heartless, and tumultuous as common sailors the temptation to use them to further their own aims sometimes proved too strong to resist. When Wynne killed the pawn named Bassam, and Fawsett captured and sold a man who came to trade, they repeated crimes committed many times throughout the history of the slave trade by those who were ‘legally’ in charge of slaving vessels. Over three hundred years since Europeans took the first West African slaves away from their homelands, the association of black skin and saleable merchandise was deeply entrenched. Even those who did not enslave Africans directly regularly considered those they were shipping as cargo to be fair game as the spoils of piracy. African seafarers were treated well, but others of African origin were considered as expendable as coin, cloth, or any other kind of captured booty.

******

The slave trade denigrated seamen above and beyond the usual rather brutal conditions, especially at sea, which were common to the era. Slave ships were certainly floating tinderboxes, and the spark to the flame could come from a variety of sources. What was crucial, however, was that sailors hated the particularly violent

\[97\] Pennsylvania Gazette 2 April 1767.  
rule not only because of the pain and distress it caused, but because they associated it 
with slavery, having experienced the inhumanity of this in close relief. They 
protested their living conditions, treatment, and the severity of their punishment by 
invoking comparisons of their own situation with that of slaves. When they forwent 
protest and instead rebelled, they did so in ways that formulated their grievances in 
terms of class protest—they were free waged labourers, and demanded to be treated as 
such. Protests against employment in the slave trade built upon traditions of maritime 
rebellion, such as collectivism and egalitarianism, and co-opted them for their 
renewed fight for freedom.

In this sense, the growth of freedom in the western world was made possible 
by the gross sufferings of those who were forcibly transported across the sea, and the 
resulting harshness of the conditions of those who were employed to take them. In 
seeking to explain why, in the late eighteenth century, slavery suddenly became an 
abhorrent institution in the western world, David Brion Davis concluded that it was 
because it was in direct contradiction to the powerful movement for personal liberty. To those who worked onboard slave ships, and who in many ways had their own 
freedom impinged by their working conditions, this was not some remote ideology, 
but a tangible goal to be fought for. Liberty to the average tar was to be found in 
respite from floggings, better pay, sufficient food, and more control over their lives. 
It was this that they would fight for in port cities all around the edges of the ocean, 
and often onboard their vessels too. They had been shown the importance of such 
benefits by their close contact with the unfortunate Africans who they were 
transporting for sale as chattels.

David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 
1966).
Part 2

Full fathom five thy father lies:
Of his bones are coral made:
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.¹

¹ William Shakespeare, The Tempest (London: Methuen, 1961) Act 1, scene II.
Chapter 4

The Sons of Neptune among the Sons of Ham

White men are gone & daily going to live among the Negroes.

*Thomas Melvil, governor of Cape Coast Castle, July 1751*

There are sometimes a Dozen of worthless Sailors living in this Town getting Drunk and abusing the Negroes, these fellows think themselves above all Law, if I restrain them, I should only get into the Hands of some Wapping Sollicitor, who in Guildhall would present me as the greatest tyrant that ever lived.

*Thomas Melvil, December 26th 1751*

Among a trade littered with peculiar perversions, it is nevertheless a curious fact that slave trade seamen occasionally spent more time as incarcerated captives in forts such as Cape Coast Castle than did African slaves. To sailors accused of mutiny, piracy or some other transgression, the forts represented outposts of Britain’s rule, places where the long arms of the law reached out and detained them until they could be sent back ‘home’ to stand trial. Locked away in miasmal conditions—infinitely better than those of the Africans trapped in the dungeons though hardly humane—they were susceptible to malaria, yellow fever, dysentery, and a host of other diseases to which they had little resistance. The reason their confinement could last longer than that of Africans reflected the vagaries of the slave trade’s economic rule. Quite simply, British naval ships arrived to transport the temporary captives home far less frequently than predatory slave ships arrived hungering to purchase human cargo.

Central as the coastal forts are to the history of the slave trade, holding in their dark past the final view that millions of Africans had of their home continent, to seamen they also functioned as outposts of the motherland’s penal jurisdiction. This fact is symptomatic of a larger and often forgotten picture: to Jack Tar the harbours of the African seaboard simply represented ports of call on a long journey. Among the (very valuable) scholarship researching the various embarkation points of slaves,

---

1 T 70/29.
supply routes, prices and trading relations, it remains largely unnoted that numbers of seamen, principally of European origin, frequently spent considerable amounts of time along the African littoral. This omission mostly derives from the fact that works on the slave trade generally focus on either the merchants’ economics—thereby citing the African coast as supply regions—or on the slaves’ suffering, which of course places Africa as the violated homeland, dispossessed of millions of its citizens. That to seafaring men Africa was often merely yet another continent visited in a varied life is left unsaid, and thus, by implication at least, unimportant.

This oversight, however, disregards the significance of the inter-racial contact that took place between the lowly seamen and Africans of all social stations. The seamen who spent time anchored off the coast engaged in countless small acts of cross-cultural contact, so fashioning the ports and towns they frequented along the coast into a discrete part of the larger Atlantic frontier. The Africans they dealt with contributed immensely to this tapestry of relations. Philip Morgan is quite correct when he states “most Britons and Africans encountered one another, not in either of their respective homelands, but in the New World.” The “approximately 333,000” sailors who visited West Africa while engaged in the slave trade from 1600 to 1800 were undoubtedly a tiny percentage of the overall flow, both forced and free, of people around the Atlantic world in this era. Nonetheless, the way that those men acted and interacted while stationed on the African coast reveals an important, and variant, aspect of racial formation in the slave trade.

Seamen from slaving vessels used the towns that peppered the coast just as they did outlying ports associated with other long-distance trades, as places from which to procure extra food, alcohol, women, and entertainment. Sometimes they were temporary homes as sailors deserted in search of a more amenable position, or were left on shore for a variety of reasons. The black skinned inhabitants of the ‘Dark Continent’—or, more correctly, those not loaded onto their ships for forced transportation—were part of a large mosaic of races, ethnicities, cultures, and skin colours with whom seamen came into contact on their voyages. Sailors were familiar with this array of different people, for maritime culture lived off its boundaries,

---

drinking from all of its disparate elements, while all the time creating something of its own.

Contrary to the received image that eighteenth-century Europeans considered Africa inhospitable and populated by savages, desertion from slave ships all along the African coast was not rare at all. In fact it became one of the catastrophes that slaving merchants feared, another common reason that voyages could fail to ensure the hoped for profit. Before the Bloom's 1787 voyage merchant Robert Bostock wrote to Captain Peter Burne warning him specifically of the danger of his men stealing one of the ship's boats in order to escape, a danger which, he claimed, had "overset" many slaving voyages. While it would be wrong to presume any solidarity with the native inhabitants in these actions, nevertheless it is clear that for many sailors life among the Africans was considered infinitely preferable to subjection to the cruel whims of their captain, even if most later joined another slave ship to journey home. Sailors undoubtedly were sometimes dubious about the reception they would receive if they absconded ashore—and rightly so, given the trade they were employed in—but that sense of 'justice' was evidently not dimmed by such fears. The beacon of maritime rebellion shone along the African shores.

A number of the crew, rather than an individual seaman, was often behind an escape attempt, but even when it was one lone man who fled there is evidence that the spirit of such action was well regarded by his colleagues. After John Hawkins attempted to desert, for example, he was caught and returned to the ship, whereupon he recorded that "the captain received me with great coolness, but the Doctor, the mate, and sailors all with the greatest cordiality". In 1750 three sailors named as Edward Shiddefield, Daniel Lake and Sampson Hardy ran away with a long boat belonging to the Antelope of Bristol, which as Captain Thomas Sanderson later lamented at the Admiralty courts, was never recaptured. This action clearly had the support of other crewmembers, as they later took the ship ensured that it never reached its American destination.

Some groups of seamen who deserted in Africa comprised a significant proportion of their ship's crew, and acted as a unified company to make their escape. At least five men ran from the Elizabeth, captained by John Steel, while at its African

---

3 Liverpool Records Office 387 MD 54: Letterbooks of Robert Bostock.
5 HCA 1/58; Eltis, CD-ROM 17198.
slave embarkation port. On a 75 ton vessel this would have constituted a very severe loss of men. On one of surgeon Alexander Falconbridge’s voyages, eleven “of the best seamen deserted at Bonny from ill treatment” where most of them died. Falconbridge could remember the name of only one, a man named Surman from Bristol. Captain Daniel Darby’s entire crew deserted him when his ship was forced back to the Isle de Los after a slave revolt “thirty leagues out.”

The Irishman Nicolas Owen provided a first hand account of deserting on the African coast when employed onboard a slave ship from Rhode Island. He later wrote that five of his crewmates who shared a watch were “all of one mind” to regain the “liberty to which every Europain is intitle to” after mistreatment. Leaving at four o’clock in the morning, Owen and his co-conspirators left in the ship’s longboat with some weapons they had stolen from the captain and “steer’d W.N.W.” They were followed by an armed boat but managed to get away, and existed for some days in the area around Cape Mount, occasionally putting into shore to trade for food to supplement the exceedingly meagre amount they had appropriated from the ship. When Owen became ill the men “call’d a councel of war...[and] concluded that we should proceed to Sierelone and lay ourselves at the mercy of the English governour of the factory.” The men must have been united in aims and the desire to escape, as to survive for some time in these conditions at sea in a small boat was a feat of survival. That the men were from a diverse area is suggested by Owen’s comment that the men would afterwards all go back to their own countries.

While Owen mentions ill treatment as the motivation for running, other seamen undoubtedly felt that their options were better in Africa. Isaac Parker, who went capturing Africans with a trader’s son after deserting, almost certainly wielded more power during this phase of his life than he had previously, albeit of the most morally corrupt kind. Likewise a young Irishman was persuaded to desert at Bimbe island by a countryman of his, known as Old Paddy, lured by the possibility of taking part in the trade which the elder man had built up in the area. In his book The

---

6 HCA 1/23 f.38; Eltis, CD-ROM 24874.
8 Pennsylvania Gazette 16 November 1774.
10 ZHC 1/84 123-5.
Forgotten Trade  Nigel Tattersfield conjectures that seaman William Hodge ran from the Daniel and Henry at São Tomé because the island was exceedingly attractive, as were the “mulatto Portuguese senhoritas”.

After the settlement of Sierra Leone for Britain’s free blacks, one visitor to the area wrote that they were “frequently much pestered by renegade seamen, quitting ships employed in the Slave Trade, and refuging here”. While the writer was there, one ship, the Fisher of Liverpool, could not leave the coast because so many of her crew deserted to the settlement. Only five of this ship’s original complement of twenty-nine men would return with the ship to England. In fact a number of whites had gone with the original black London settlers to the colony, including fifty-four women who were married to African men, so the seamen may have been able to hide among the settler population. These people, both white and black, came overwhelmingly from the same social groups that the English seamen themselves occupied in England, and could be said to have created an outpost of welcome drawing disillusioned seamen from their slaving vessels. Certainly so many seem to have been tempted that John Clarkson, Governor of Sierra Leone, felt compelled to put up a notice in the settlement warning sailors that they would not be given shelter by the colony. It was a decision that rather tormented Lieutenant Clarkson, for he had been instructed to “protect every man”, and he felt that his pronouncement that this would not apply to slave trade sailors rather dented the ideology upon which Sierra Leone had been founded.

Sailors who deserted at Sierra Leone undoubtedly had opportunities to live among men with whom they shared some common understandings, but for others life in Africa could be alien. Three men who were among the mutineers onboard the Plumber that sailed for Africa in 1765 worked on plantations at São Tomé after escaping firstly from the ship, and then from the main body of seditious sailors. Twenty-three year old John Quinn from Armagh tried to secure help from the resident Portuguese governor, a mulatto man, but the latter not sharing any common language
with the seaman he “drove him away from his House as a Vagabond”. Quinn then went with two of his crewmates, Jeffrey Sugworth of Lancashire and Abraham Berry of Stockholm to a plantation in the interior “to work for their subsistence.” They later shipped onboard the Phoenix. John Newton, who became a slave ship captain, worked on a lime-tree plantation in Africa, not after deserting, but after being threatened with naval service because of his insubordination. Afterwards he worked as a slave trader, and when a ship arrived to take him back to England was “reluctant to give up his profitable job” but eventually did.

Of course some men just temporarily left their ships, absconding in pursuit of things they were deprived of onboard. The young, innocent ship’s boy William Butterworth claimed to have eaten with Africans because he was “half-starved on his ship” and, while there, to have taught Africans to read and write, again revealing his comparatively genteel upbringing before going to sea. A small incident noted by another unnamed diarist writes of an African coming to him as he gutted fish to make an impromptu trade of the fish for a coconut. Food was secured in less honest and affable ways too. Three seamen from the African Queen killed a duck onshore at Sierra Leone and provoked the ire of the inhabitants. And obviously it was not just food that men went in search of. The crew of the Duke of Argyle “got drunk; [and] afterwards went on shoar to fight.” A slave ship surgeon wrote that at Princes Island [modern day Principe] the sailors got free of their captain and proceeded to go around “pilfering the Negroes, and debauching their Wives.”

The temptation of the proximity of women on the coast did, of course, provide a potent reason for a seaman to desert at least temporarily from his berth. Jack Tar was infamous for having women in every port of call, and one maritime historian has

---

17 HCA 1/58 ff.114-124.
19 William Butterworth, Three Years Adventures of a Minor in England, Africa, the West Indies, South-Carolina, and Georgia (Leeds: Edward Baines, 1822) 32-4.
20 British Library Add Mss 39964.
21 Falconbridge, Two Voyages 129-31. A similar story is told by Bryan Edwards. He reported that in 1788 two seamen from a Liverpool slaver killed a “guana” while at Bonny (accidentally he claims), and so enraged the inhabitants that they were first sentenced to death. Eventually, after their captain interceded on their behalf, the punishment was apparently commuted to “700 bars” and enslavement to the king. unwilling to pay this fee, Edwards reports that their captain left the unfortunate sailors to their fate. The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British West Indies (New York: AMS Press, 1996) II 91n.
even claimed that such forays ashore were necessary to reinforce masculinity in the traditional woman-less nautical setting. In Africa, just as elsewhere, men left their ships to go ashore to look for prostitutes and other willing—or not so willing—women. It was a practice shared by both crew and officers. One man named only as Captain Corbett enters the historical record because instead of arriving at Cape Coast Castle to meet his interpreter as arranged, he went on shore with the ship’s surgeon “one in pursuit of Game & the other of a Doxey”. We know that it was the captain who was searching for a woman because the doctor lost himself in the woods and missed his ship sailing. Yet while it was clearly commonplace for seamen to look for available women, including prostitutes, at all ports of call, something can be gleaned from their descriptions of African women to reveal an aspect of their attitudes towards race, at least here where it intersected with gender.

As the misbehaviour of seamen in foreign ports of call was notorious, it would be extremely naive to think that they did not treat African women with the same lack of respect. In fact as African marriages were often supposed spurious, not conforming to English models of monogamy, most African women were considered to be potentially available sexual partners. Coupled with the centuries old European belief that Africans were strangely libidinous, this created a myth which circulated among seamen that African women were generally willing and rapacious sexual partners, who knew little of the contemporary middle class English ideal of women as prudish and sexually submissive. This, of course, was a trait that seamen believed, or at least fervently chose to believe, to be true about women of various nationalities they came into contact with. The salacious Polynesian women that Captain James Cook’s men encountered are perhaps the best-known example. In Africa part of this image was born of occasions when African traders offered ships’ captains and other European traders women for the evening or the duration of their stay as a means of showing good faith and securing a good deal. Sailors spent many, many hours at sea without the company of women, and doubtless tales of welcoming foreign damsels spread rapidly among them taking on ever-greater connotation as they circulated the oceans.

25 T 70/30.
That such attributes were accredited to African women of some regions by seamen is clear from the writings of John McLeod. He professed to be knowledgeable about such matters when he sailed on a slave ship in the final years of lawful British trading. He was disappointed, however, for he found that in Dahomey the ‘mutinous wives’ or “vixens” he expected—“the treasure and delight of an Englishman...the safeguard of his ennui”—were not forthcoming. McLeod, lamenting the absence of female company during his coastal stay regretted the dearth of “that noble spirit which animates the happier dames” on other parts of the coast. Or so the lonely man imagined.27

Perhaps the written works of men such as William Smith, who had been an employee of the Royal African Company in the 1720s, and Nathaniel Uring, a slave ship captain in the first years of the eighteenth century, had helped promote this image of African women. Uring recalled in his Voyages and Travels that while he and a fellow captain were lodged with an African merchant, “a young Woman was sent to each of us, who came and whisper’d softly, and offer’d themselves to us.”28 William Smith wrote that he at first protested to the African King who offered him a woman for the night, saying that it would be a sin to sleep with a woman unless married to her. The king, however, then asked Smith whether he had never ‘lain’ with a woman to whom he was not married ‘in his own country’. Smith, acknowledging his hypocrisy, accepted the woman.

Smith’s account is not just the story of being offered a woman as part of a deal. He also had plenty to impart to his readers about the attractiveness and compliance of the woman. Although most seamen were not literate, such an account, published in London as early as 1744, can only have helped spread ideas about African women as sexually available. In Smith’s words, he found attractive the “natural, pleasant and inartificial Method of her Behaviour” which he described as “not forward, yet not coy” and seemed surprised that she responded to him with “equal Ardour and Fervency.” Smith was obviously pondering on the difference with women he had encountered in England when he felt the need to explain to his readers that “the Ladies of this Country imagine it no Fault to be free, nor to be fond of a Man; their Notion is that they were made for their Diversion as well as Use.”

27 John McLeod (or M’Leod), A Voyage to Africa, with some account of the manners and customs of the Dahomian people (London: John Murray, 1820) 51.
28 Uring, Voyages and Travels 97.
nonetheless, remained uncertain of the attractiveness of the woman he had been offered, a fact that he directly linked to her skin colour. The fact that she was dark skinned was a 'fault' that had to be "recompenc’d" in Smith’s mind by "the Softness of her Skin" and "the beautiful Proportion and exact Symmetry of each part of her Body." Nevertheless, he confessed that later, in bed, he was able to "forget the Complexion of [his] bedfellow" in order that he could "obey the Dictates of all-powerful Nature."

Sexual licentiousness was one of the central tenets of the stereotypes of savage foreigners with darker skin, and undoubtedly in the seamen’s writings of African women there is part of this fiction. There was certainly some false piety in their claimed surprise that women could be sexual predators, for these were men who frequented prostitutes in many of their ports of call, and whose wives and girlfriends in Britain were sometimes engaged in this occupation. It is easier to believe from the young William Butterworth than from others, who was certainly still "a minor" when he was apparently "led away by two African women" along with a fellow tar. What can be read into other, less innocent seamen’s remarks is both the comparison between African sexuality and the repressed ideals of British middle-class womanhood, and an affirmation of the savagery myth Europeans had long held with regard to Africans.

There was, however, another aspect of the myth of dusky scandalous females that appears to have been played out in the setting of the slave trade. In this most antagonist of port situations the fear arose among sailors that treacherous seductive women might inveigle them into paying fines for adultery. Fiction or not, it was fear, akin to that of Africans’ special skills at poisoning, that continued to spread among the sailors stationed on the coast they considered so inhospitable. The fourth mate of one British slave ship was allegedly tricked by an African woman in this way, for she apparently made him think she was free, but later he was forced to pay a fine to her husband for his adultery with her. If this artifice was indeed used, it is unlikely

---

30 Butterworth, *Three Years Adventures* 74.
31 ZHC 1/84 81: Evidence of Thomas Trotter.
many were as scrupulous as the deeply religious John Newton who fervently rejected any possibility that he could be misled in this way.\textsuperscript{32}

However often seamen were tricked into paying fines of this kind, there were unquestionably many more occasions on which they took advantage of women, sometimes even taking their “temporary wives” into a life of perpetual bondage. Joseph Hawkins was rebuked by the other officers onboard his ship for not having brought the “wives” he had acquired when trading inland back to the ship with him, as they had done. They would have brought “a good price when we arrived in America” he was told.\textsuperscript{33} Others were apparently not so scrupulous as Hawkins in this regard, taking away the women who had been offered to them by African chiefs for the purpose of sealing a deal as if they had been purchased as slaves.\textsuperscript{34}

Some sailors did have more long-term relationships with African women who lived on the coast, although this was rare. Nicholas Owen, the Irishman who made several voyages on Rhode Island slave ships and did not hesitate to refer to himself as “a common jack tar” later in his life lived in Africa and mentioned “my woman” in his journal.\textsuperscript{35} Richard Drake, the young orphan boy who also shipped onboard Rhode Island slavers “became a husband at the age of seventeen years” when he married ‘Soolah,’ the daughter of ‘King Mammee’ with whom he was trading. Initially Drake’s comments about Soolah were ambiguous at best, noting in his remembrances that his “vanity was touched by this mark of royal favor”, especially as he “was not averse to the princess who was the handsomest young negress”. Later, however, when he was taken on another slaving raid and was separated from his wife, Drake lamented her loss.\textsuperscript{36}

It is yet again from a Rhode Island vessel that we have another example. Captain Thomas Rogers left an African woman and “his blak boy” some cloth and other items in his will when he died in 1773. Having made seven slaving voyages, beginning on the \textit{Titt Bitt} in June 1756 and continuing until his death near Anomabu onboard the \textit{Polly}, there is the possibility that this was a long-term relationship,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{32} Newton, \textit{Journal} 76. \\
\textsuperscript{33} Hawkins, \textit{A History} 150. \\
\textsuperscript{34} Anonymous, \textit{An Account of the Evidence Delivered before a Select Committee of the House of Commons in the years 1790-1791} (Edinburgh, 1791) 18. \\
\textsuperscript{35} Owen, \textit{Journal} 63, 85. \\
\end{flushright}
renewed on each of his previous visits. An even more intriguing fragment of information comes from the story of Cudjoe and Quow, recorded in chapter two. Robert Milligan, second mate of the *Lovely Lass*, and the man who they were accused of murdering, apparently had a free African woman named Eccauh (or Ecour) who was interchangeably termed his "wife" or his "wench". After Milligan's death John Owens, the other accused ringleader, "slept with the deceased's Wench every night from the time of the Murder". The longevity of Milligan's relationship with Eccauh is unknown, nor how willingly and freely she had entered into it, but nevertheless the image of an abused, totally subjected African woman is brought into question by the fact that Owens was known to have shared his loot from the ship with her. He gave her "a Cloth", perhaps to secure her favours in the aftermath of Milligan's death.

As sailors seem to have found a variety of reasons to desert their ships in Africa, it is perhaps surprising that being "put ashore" was considered a punishment. It is certainly a reflection of the racist beliefs pervading the trade's command, for life among the Africans was considered to be an exceedingly sorry fate. It was a common event. From the ship *Nile*, commanded by John Gwin, five men including the second mate were "left on shore in Africa". From the *Otter* sailors John Darlington and John Smith were "discharged at Gaboon" [sic] for mutiny. From the small crew of the schooner *Venus* John Robinson was "discharged on the Coast for bad conduct".

In a similar case, a twenty-one year old sailor named Thomas Powell was put ashore from his ship the *Pearl Galley* with only "a shirt, wastcoate, a cap, a hat, a pair of trousers, a pair of shoes, and a pair of buckles." The subsequent fate of all is unknown.

Onboard the *Africa*, indisputably a ship of horror and forsaken morality, the fate of one sailor, Thomas Carlos, was to be punished by being put onshore "among the Negroes" after having allegedly been forced to sign for wages he had not received. The punishment value in this was clearly linked to the supposed savagery of the local inhabitants at the place Carlos was abandoned. The rumour that circulated was of a British slave ship having been "cut off" in that area just a short while before, and all

---

38 HCA 1/64.
39 BT 98/65 f.365.
40 BT 98/68 f.127.
41 BT 98/63 f.224.

120
except one sailor and one boy killed. The warped rationale of this amercement is brought into focus by the events that followed, however. Carlos was not present at the trial to state whether in fact he considered his “punishment” to have been providential. He certainly might have believed so if he had bumped into his fellow tars from the *Africa* at a later date, as they could have told him that the sole survivor from the vessel previously “cut off” was taken onboard the *Africa* as his replacement, where he died under the merciless rule.\(^\text{43}\)

Thus *Africa* was indeed all things to seamen—the scene of desertion and rebellion, a trove of unrequited fantasies, the setting for seamen’s tall stories, and a place of punishment—just as other ports along long-distance trade routes. To crews of men closely confined within the boundaries of a wooden ship for around a year, foreign lands inevitably came to have a dreamlike quality, a whimsical location where untold luxuries and welcomes could be found. Lying in his hammock, Jack thought of land as a place of opportunity and potential, crowded with things he was deprived of at sea, a refuge from the captain’s command and the sea’s dangers, and respite from hard work. Consequently, in the all too frequent event of disease attacking a ship, seamen, accustomed to a mishmash of folk law and broadcast fable, were more eager to try out native cures than might be imagined. Such was the case with an English doctor’s son, Silas Told, who sailed on the slaver *Royal George*. He spent six weeks onshore in the care of a man he named as ‘Prince Arigo’, where he was treated with what he considered to be typical African treatments, including animal sacrifice.\(^\text{44}\)

Some places, indeed, came to be celebrated in seafaring lore for having curative qualities. As the West African coastline was regarded by most Europeans as one of the least healthy places on earth, in the transatlantic slave trade this generally alluded to the islands off the coast where the ships sometimes weighed anchor for short periods. Although none of the islands was reputed to have the panacean qualities ascribed to St. Helena, nevertheless the islands of São Tomé, Príncipe, Annobon and Fernando Po, as well as the Banana Islands off Sierra Leone, were all considered to be places that white men could recuperate from the mysterious dangers of African diseases. In some ways such assumptions were correct, for the breezes that refreshed the offshore islands were partially effective in keeping mosquitoes away. Many seamen, however, were suffering as much from the effects of scurvy, venereal

\(^{43}\) HCA 1/24.
diseases, poor diet and floggings as from malaria or yellow fever. The ubiquitous “flux”, as dysentery was commonly known, could strike anywhere.

Many captains sent sick sailors ashore not so they could convalesce, but rather to abandon them. They were left onshore in Africa because they were already too sick to continue the voyage, and so to have any financial worth to the merchants. Being of little use in the running of the ship in their reduced state of health, a captain would simply put seamen on shore to survive as best they could. Naval man John Simpson would later report before Parliament that a slaver seaman had begged him to be taken home to England after having been abandoned on the African coast because of his “ulcerated legs”. In April 1789 the *Manchester Mercury* printed a letter from a seaman who had sailed with Captain Hewitt for Africa, but who had been forced to leave the ship while there because he had “frequent eruptions breaking out on his Legs and Thighs”. By the time he was lucky enough to get home to Liverpool he had “blotches all over his body.”

From the ship *Jemmy*, under the command of Richard Pearson, James Colen was “left at a factory in Africa” after he had “lost his leg by a Shark 12th April”. Also left there with him was James Chambers who left “by his own request to take care of J Colen”. This fate was certainly not restricted to the white members of the crew. Jack Williams, the African cook of the *Otter* was “sent on shore at Congo – 9 Mar. 1803 – by his own consent being lame”. If this was Williams’ home region, then undoubtedly he had better survival chances than most, and perhaps had even desired to be discharged after having experienced the horrendous conditions of a slave ship. This is unlikely to be true of an even more remarkable case, however. The slave ship *Dart* discharged its steward, a man from Calcutta called Antonio Rosario, while at the African coast. The outcome of this case of racial mixing is not known. Perhaps an equally anomalous case comes from the crew list of the *Fanny*, from which a sailor named Francis Myers had been “Left on the Coast Oct. 18. 1800 by accident”.

---

45 ZHC 1/87 42.
46 *Manchester Mercury* 14 April 1789.
47 BT 98/56 f.148.
48 BT 98/64 f.100.
49 BT 98/64 f.175.
50 BT 98/61 f.347.
Aside from all these reasons Jack Tar could also end up spending time on the African coast (as opposed to anchored off it) because of shipwreck, the not unlikely event of the ship being declared "unseaworthy," or after having been taken by a privateer. Ships did not have a long life in the slave trade, and on occasion they were found to be so rotten they could not be used, sometimes at the instigation of the crew who refused to travel further in her. In 1796 the Rhode Island vessel Rising Sun was the subject of a joint decision by "all the white men on the island" that she was unseaworthy having being damaged in a tornado the year before. For that year the unnamed seaman who wrote a diary of the occurrences had been stranded at the Île de Los, presumably with his crewmates. Such events were common aspects of maritime life and trade.

Another ship was similarly condemned at Cape Coast Castle, "she being so eaten with worms for want of sheathing that by the time he came in our Road his pumps would scare keep her above water and his people were so jaded with pumping they refused to proceed any further." In this case too, a delegation of captains and carpenters from other ships laying at Cape Coast was gathered, and these men "unanimously condemned her to be hauled ashore, because they found her plank so hollow that it was not capable of holding a nail or bear sheathing or doubling." At the time the letter was written the captain and his crew were lodged at the castle looking for further employment or transportation 'home'. Despite the fact that Cape Coast Castle was undoubtedly a less salubrious setting than São Tomé, these men were more fortunate than the crew of the brig John Bull of Liverpool which was wrecked at the latter. This body of men were found "wandering about the island in a destitute and deplorable condition...emaciated by famine and sickness."

********

That sailors were generally not hesitant to go ashore in Africa in many differing circumstances was thus a manifestation of both their cosmopolitan and

---

51 House of Lords Records 1791; Bank of England: Humphrey Morice papers VIII; T70/31; T70/33; Coughtry A/2/28/166-178; Anna-Maria Falconbridge, Two Voyages 99.
52 Coughtry, Papers A/2/28/166-178.
54 Hugh Crow, Memoirs of the late Captain Hugh Crow, of Liverpool; comprising a narrative of his life, together with descriptive sketches of the western coast of Africa; particularly of Bonny (London: Frank Cass, 1970) 80.
rebellious nature, as well as on the strictures of maritime life. Sailors used the landmass of Africa as a place of rebellion as they did all other locales, and the multiracial nature of seafaring, combined with the myriad cultural forms it embraced, meant that the stereotypes most Englishmen had about Africans were somewhat broken down through familiarity. Both of these factors were ultimately affected by the agency of the Africans with whom the seamen came into contact. It was these men and women whose employment created an important aspect of the multiculturalism of maritime life, and whose own rebellions in some senses provided the backdrop for the radicalism of seamen.

When ships arrived at the coast to purchase slaves they employed a wide variety of African workers to supplement the labour provided by the seamen. Porters, cooks, washerwomen, canoemen, pilots, and translators were all hired on a regular basis by visiting ships, producing groups of African men (and smaller numbers of women) who survived at least in part by earning wages from Europeans. Some of these men were slaves, commonly belonging to the European forts along the Gold Coast, but unlike those traded into the transatlantic market they were paid wages and could be sold only in most unusual circumstances. Just like the free waged seamen, the labour of non-free Africans who worked in the companies' forts “underlay the mercantile relations that bought and then transported ‘chained slaves’ to the American plantations.” “In this sense” notes Ray Kea, “they were part of the Atlantic world’s working class.”

The necessity of Africans to slave ships is illustrated fully by the logbook of the Sandown that sailed for Africa in 1793. The incapacity of its crew had already been exacerbated by the fact that some of the men were impressed onto HMS Iris in the dead of night before the vessel had even left Gravesend. The following excerpts reveal what happened on the African coast:

**Monday 5th August 1793:** Departed this Life Thomas Rawsley Aged 18 and at 3PM Departed this Life Humphrey Sullivan Seaman Aged 23 Years. Interr’d.

**Wednesday 7th August 1793:** Departed this Life Charles McLean Aged 25 Years.

---

55 Ray Kea, “"But I know what I shall do": Agency, Belief & the Social Imaginary in Eighteenth-Century Gold Coast Towns” in David M. Anderson and Richard Rathbone (eds.) Africa’s Urban Past (Oxford: James Currey, 2000) 169. Kea is referring specifically to the Danish companies, as described by Ferdinand Romer, but his comments could equally apply to the labour of other European company slaves in the region.
Friday 9th: Ships company very Sickly. All hands sick but me and the Doctor and he complains very much. Got some of the Natives onboard and employ’d Men in Cleaning making fires and smoking the Ship between Decks fore and aft with Tobacco. All hands in a very bad situation.

Monday 30th: Got 2 White and 2 Black Carpenters to come & do the Necessary duty. Ships Carpenter very ill. 3 Grometas on board.

Thursday 3rd: 3 Carpenters 3 Grometas, Cooper and what are able employ’d at sundry necessary duty. One of the White Carpenters taken ill and gone.

Saturday 5th: Carpenters & Grometas at work...only 2 Seamen able to do Duty.

Saturday 12th October '93: Departed this Life, after a tedious illness of eleven Weeks, Marshal Fair Carpenter Aged 32 Years inter’d him.

Monday 14th: Grometas getting Ballast for the Ship.

Thursday 29th October 93: Employ’d a Black Cooper to trim the Casks.

Thursday 30th October: At 2AM Departed this Life John Rutherford Seaman Aged 32 Years. Interr’d him, paid the River Custom, and sold his Cloaths by Auction.56

Grumetes or “grometas” as the Sandown’s log named them were African seamen. By the later eighteenth century they had become familiar with European ways, and had often partially assimilated the visitors’ culture as their own. Most spoke a hybrid form of a European language. The extent to which they were controlled by Europeans varied significantly along the coast—the most well known group, the Kru, were able to use their seafaring skills to largely protect themselves from becoming as subservient as other groups. Their maritime skills in most cases, although not always, saved them from the fate of the millions of Africans who were transported to the Americas to be sold as slaves.57 At other places along the coast Europeans came to use the term grumetes more generally for all African seamen, including those who were not accustomed to work on the deep seas. In other locations too they more directly controlled the grumetes.58 The African man John Newton hired in this role, “to go in the yaul, at 3 bars per month, if he behaves well” would seem to have had at least nominal freedom and negotiating powers over his freedom, although being subject to a strict code of conduct.59

African seamen could, and did, have an important part to play in the lives of English and North American seamen. Nicholas Owen, on his third slaving voyage, utilised grumetas as a means of escape from other Africans. After having been

---

captured by some men at Sierra Leone in retaliation against a Dutch ship that had carried off some free people as slaves, Owen and his fellow crewmembers were held as prisoners. Doubtless showing symmetry between crime and punishment not shared by the Europeans, they were “secur’d by the natives, put in irons, and hove down on the ground in a barbarous manner” and were stripped of all their clothes. The men were “detained in irons for 4 or 5 days” before being freed by a European named Mr. Hall. Yet while it was a white man who had secured their freedom, Owen, his brother and his captain utilised free African seamen to make their escape. They put distance between themselves and their attackers by voyaging from Sierra Leone to the Cape Verdean island of Brava, with a crew that comprised of “10 or 12 black saylors, commonly known as gremetoes” who agreed to go with the white men for “a small demand of wages, not above 2 crowns pr. Month.”

Linguists, or translators, who were sometimes known as ‘gold takers’ around the Anamabu area, were also crucial to vessels employed in the slave trade, and few British or North American slave ships spent their time on the coast without hiring at least one man in this role. Others hired several, or at least one at each of their major ports of call. William Snelgrave, for example, hired two linguists at wages of twelve “barrs” per month each, for a period of five months. Some linguists, like the Benin man known as Dick mentioned in chapter two, made the Atlantic crossing with the ship, but most were simply employed by the ship for the duration of its stay. Their role was multi-faceted, as was their relationship with both the captive Africans and the foreign crewmembers. One slave merchant, who specifically mentioned to his chosen captain that he had to treat his translator “with familiarity and good nature,” implicitly acknowledged their importance to the success of a slaving voyage. The truth was that many were from the merchant hierarchy along the coast, and could be very influential. John McLeod, the surgeon of the Trusty in 1803, wrote in his account of the voyage that the chief African merchant of Ouidah at that time had worked as a linguist in his youth.

What is notable from the few accounts lowly seamen have left of their interaction with translators is that Africans holding this position had more power than

---

62 Liverpool RO 380 TUO 4/7.
63 McLeod, A Voyage to Africa 35-6.
the average European tar. One linguist, for example, stood by a cabin boy onboard the *Africa* who was severely beaten after having been accused of stealing. This boy had been tormented all the way to Africa by the captain who told him that he was going to be given to the Africans as a sacrifice when the ship reached the River Gambia. The rest of the seamen apparently feared the captain's rule too much to protest the boy's treatment, but the linguist was prepared to do so. It was not enough to save the boy's life, however; he was sacrificed to the captain's sadism, the moral support of the African linguist unable to save his life.64

While the linguists often worked individually onboard ships, and could be said to have represented something of a labour aristocracy whose skills certainly demanded high regard, potentially more significant to the success of a voyage than the linguist, if only because of the sheer numbers required, were the canoemen employed by European ships.

On the Gold Coast, where more than 300,000 African slaves were loaded onto British ships in the course of the eighteenth century, these men formed a distinctive and voluble part of the workforce. By 1790 there were between 800 and 1000 men who worked as canoemen in this region. Some were enslaved to the coastal forts but most were free.65 That these men were an essential part of the European slave trade is not in doubt, and as such the Europeans had in some ways moulded the labour market to their own requirements. Hugh Crow, for example, was approached by a canoeman brandishing certificates from other European captains testifying to his good character and hard work.66 Others were recommended by word of mouth to other captains if they proved honest and industrious.67

Canoemen, as with other African maritime workers, became part of the larger picture of Atlantic citizens upon whose nominally free, paid labour, the slave trade's profits were made. Alexander Falconbridge recalled that the canoemen as well as the

---

64 HCA 1/23. Another linguist, known as Acra, was interviewed in Africa in 1776 over the allegation that he had murdered two seamen, and was later sent to England to be tried for this offence. Acra stated that he had merely been part of a number of Africans who nailed a sailor “dead of the flux” into a coffin to be thrown overboard at Dixcove. HCA 1/58 f.118, see also f.112.
linguists often spoke English. In addition, they formed a unique part of the trading network, for they often went on slave ships in large numbers and journeyed a short way down the coast on them. This occurred because Gold Coast canoemen were frequently employed by slave ships to be taken down to the Slave Coast where their skills were needed on the impressively rough surf that pounded that part of the African coast. Formed into crews of between fifteen and thirty men, they and their dugout canoes were transported to Dahomey and the surrounding areas to transport goods and captive Africans between shore and ship in conditions so hazardous that few others could attempt the crossing. Robert Norris wrote that European ships could not manage without the Fante canoemen they took to Ouidah to shuttle goods and people between ship and shore. John Adams chronicled that canoes and canoemen brought down from Cape Coast were “indispensable” to the slave trade between the ports of Ouidah and Lagos because the Africans native to that region “never passed the heavy surf”. Captain Nathaniel Uring also praised the skill of the canoemen, noting that they “manage their Canows very dextrously”. He had ventured to shore in one of their craft, crewed by eight men who had assured Uring and a fellow captain that “there was no Danger”, and illustrated their skill in going close to the breakers, where they “laid still and watched for a Smooth, and then push’d forward with all their Force, paddling the Canow forward or backward…often lying between the Breakers” then “paddled with all their Might towards the shore”. Over a century later surgeon John McLeod wrote a similar description, paying compliments to the canoemen’s “skill in swimming and diving” by describing them as “literally amphibious”. His main addition to Uring’s description was in adding that the men sang or shouted a song as they went about the dangerous task of landing. McLeod explained his ship’s decision to take canoemen and canoes from Cape Coast down to Benin by stating that

68 ZHC 1/85 617.
69 Robin Law, “Between the Sea and the Lagoons” Cahiers D’Etudes Africaines 29 (1989) 209-237; for examples see T70/30, where both Captain Benjamin Ashbrooke of the Nancy, and Captain Andrew Lesley of the Bassnett were both mentioned getting canoemen from Cape Coast Castle to take to Ouidah, and T70/30, which mentions Captain Chambers of the Gascoyne doing the same.
70 Robert Norris, Memoirs of the reign of Bossa Ahadee, King of Dahomy … To which are added, the author’s journey to Abomey the capital and a short account of the African Slave Trade (London: W. Lowndes, 1789) 61-2.
72 Uring, Voyages and Travels 95-6.
in the latter area the sea was very rough, with such “tremendous surf” that “no European boat can live.”

Yet while the African canoemen’s skills were essential to slave ships, and their seafaring skills were acknowledged by many European observers, it will come as no surprise to learn that many were taken to the New World as slaves, after having been tricked or simply overpowered. Such was the reprehensible duplicity upon which the slave trade functioned. A more salient question, however, than how captains and surgeons dealt with and perceived canoemen is how the common British or North American sailors interacted with them. As in all cases with the largely illiterate seamen, hard evidence is rarely to be found. However, the educated boy Samuel Robinson who went to sea on the slaver Lady Nelson in 1800 wrote an evocative memoir of going to shore with the African canoemen. “I liked it very much,” he recalled. “It was very exciting to be perched on a puncheon of rum, or a bale of goods, while twelve naked savages were driving the canoe along like a weaver’s shuttle—keeping time with their paddles to a chant struck up by the steersman, in which, at intervals, all hands would join.”

His fellow sailor William Richardson termed one of his canoemen, known as Jack, “his right-hand man”. Jack’s fellow workers, too, Richardson noted were “a set of willing fellows” but Jack was the most useful because he had learned to speak

---

73 McLeod, Voyage to Africa 6-9.
74 Despite the centrality of canoemen to the ‘success’ of the voyage (that is, from the perspective of the investing merchant) there were many times at which free African canoemen were carried off by slave ships as captives, just like those they had helped to deliver to their transport. Allegations that this had occurred transpired during the British parliamentary investigation into the slave trade, and letters written from the factors at Cape Coast Castle reinforce this, suggesting that they had sometimes been made to pay for the misdemeanors of captains in this regard, ZHC 1/84; ZHC 1/85; T 70/31. More damningly still is the information from Africans who wrote protesting at the stealing away of their canoemen. Prince Davie of Badagry, for example, wrote to David Mill, governor of Cape Coast Castle, in May 1776 protesting that his canoemen were “thought carried off the Coast by one Johnson, who succeeded to the Command of the Sneau Patty of Liverpool”, T 70/32. Duke Ephraim of Old Calabar forwent the appeal to the closest British rule when some of his canoemen were taken, but rather wrote straight to the owner of the guilty ship, James Rogers. “Sir, I been very good friend for that Ships [the Jupiter] and I have settle all my Debt & Family – I go for Corrott Island with Ships and Come Back for friend – So two my Cannow Man go onboard him to Sell Som Yams – he Carry of for nothing and Supose sold my people.” The men Ephraim named as Abashy and Antegna, and concluded his pleas for their return by stating, “I Done Very well with Capt Leroach and he take my people of. I am your Friend, Duke Ephraim.” C107/12.
75 Robinson, Sailor Boy 76-7.
some English. These men got their rations from Richardson’s ship just like the rest of the crew, though what they made of the English ship’s food can only be imagined. William Richardson wrote of these men throwing a libation of brandy into the sea at a piece of land known as “ju’ju’ creek”, but though he clearly thought this outlandish he still found the people “civil and obliging.” The sailor’s comment that he found the canoemen to be “harmless” is more telling on the other hand, implying that he had been primed to find them just the opposite. Similarly, Samuel Robinson’s mention of Africans as “twelve naked savages” invokes the rhetoric of brutality, primitiveness and incivility that Englishmen so frequently used to describe Africans. The complexity and conflict of the two seamen’s viewpoints is clear, for Richardson referred to the Africans that he worked with as his “motley crew”. In this most amoral of settings manifold tensions and dimensions grew in such relationships, and developed in ways which both bred personal tolerance, and created hostility in the wider setting.

As Peter Gutkind’s research shows, the attitudes of the high ranking Englishmen stationed on the coast was highly ambivalent to these men, with words such as “‘rascally’ ‘impudent’ ‘ruffians’ ‘outcasts’” and “vagabonds” frequently used to describe them. Such words, it will be noted, are analogous to those the same men used to describe the European lowly workers onboard slave ships. And the similarities do not end there, for the canoemen of the Gold Coast were renowned for being peculiarly rebellious—a group of workers who early took on a self-conscious identity bounded by their job and the status it brought. Canoemen became notorious for being frequent protestors in both political and economic disputes. They, like their European and North American fellow maritime workers, were regarded as men likely to be rioters, known as agyesemfo, in disturbances along the African littoral. They rebelled in smaller less cohesive ways too, such as stealing and ruining goods by exposure to the seawater. Most commonly they rejected terms by withholding their labour, striking just like their English visitors in an attempt to secure better pay or conditions.

Living in an era of embryonic class-consciousness just as European mariners were, canoemen rejected being “abused, beaten or starved” because they were

freemen, and demanded better wages as a primary condition of making freedom
tenable. Like their paler skinned fellow seafarers, they too were at the forefront of
labour protest. Fascinatingly, an early ‘strike’ can be found in the annals of West
African maritime labour history that clearly pre-dates the radicalism of European and
North American sailors mentioned in the first chapter. In January 1753 Fante
canoemen ceased work for several days during the British building of Anomabu fort.
It was the final stage of a labour protest in which the people of Anomabu had tried to
make their British employers raise the wages they paid for the building of the fort.
Even the resort to striking did not prove successful, however, as the British brought in
workers from Cape Coast, so eventually forcing the Fante to work at the old wage or
not at all. In the case of the canoemen, therefore, there remains the possibility that
strategies for rebellion, and even the spirit of rebellion itself, were adopted from
Africa by European seamen. Even if this proves not to have been the case, it is clear
that largely excluding Africa from the historiographic tradition of radicalism
surrounding the Atlantic is Eurocentric at best.

Yet rebellion, and the suppression thereof, had far more diverse causes and
implications than that on the eighteenth century slaving coast, for it was not only
Africans’ maritime skills that were utilised by the slave ships. The crew of the Upton
were grateful when a canoeman who could speak English warned them of an
imminent revolt. On other occasions Africans were needed to help crews put down
extant slave rebellions. After a revolt onboard the Nightingale, Henry Ellison
recorded that the leaders were flogged by both, “the African’s people and our boat’s
crew till we were all tired.” On the Mermaid in 1792 the captain and crew had
already taken extreme measures before begging the assistance of the local Africans
when their slaves attempted revolt. First they fired upon the slaves as they tried to
break through the hatchings, and when that failed they twice tried to blow the slaves
up by dropping lit gunpowder down into the hold. Only then did they send “Six of
the Natives down with Cutlasses” and so secured the rebels’ surrender.

---

77 Robinson, Sailor Boy 77.
of a Pre-Colonial African Labor History” in Michael Hanagan and Charles Stephenson (eds.)
79 Margaret Priestley, “An Early Strike in Ghana” Ghana Notes and Queries 7 (1965) 25.
80 ZHC 1/84 370.
81 ZHC 1/84 369.
82 C107/13.
On the Rhode Island ship *Royal Charlotte*, about sixty of the captives onboard rebelled after having been allowed on deck while the ship was in the Gabon River delta. Captain Frost was thrown overboard and then killed by a lance “which penetrated his Body” as he tried to climb back aboard. The first mate, who was sick in his cabin, had his throat cut, while an African “who belonged to the ship” was thrown overboard but swam ashore. Whether he alerted those on land as to what was happening, or whether it was apparent from the noise and confusion is not known, but soon after “some Blacks coming off in Canoes to retake the Vessels” caused the rebellious captives to fire at the canoes with the arms they had on the captured ship. Like most slave revolts this one did not end happily from the rebels point of view. Around thirty of them were killed when the gunpowder on the ship caught fire and exploded. It was several days later before the surviving crewmembers and their African allies could retake the ship.83

The complex truth, however, is that Africans were also sometimes engaged in subduing the revolts of seamen as well as the slaves they had purchased to carry to the Americas. Samuel Kitson later recalled before the High Court of the Admiralty that when he was captain of the *Fairy* in the early 1790s he had been forced to leave several of his men on the coast after they had taken the ship from him. He recalled that he had been woken one night by a noise on deck, and upon going up to see what was happening, was met by “[John] Slack with a pistol & saw [Charles] Berry with a Cutlass”. He claimed, “they both told me not to come any further or I was a dead man.” Kitson asked Berry if they had taken the vessel from him, and while confirming that he was indeed the captain now, he refused to answer Kitson’s question regarding their intentions. Kitson attacked John Slack in an attempt to quash the insurrection, but it was only when some Africans arrived in a boat to assist that the rebels were overcome.84 A similar case occurred on the *Gregson*, captained by William Corren, while she was anchored at Dixcove. When the sailors revolted they were only overcome with the help of “blacks and mulattoes” who came off from the shore to aid Corren.85

Likewise, in the case of the runaway sailors that began this chapter, free Africans returned many to their billets. The peculiar mixture of race and class

---

83 *Pennsylvania Gazette* 16 June 1763.
84 HCA 1/61.
85 HCA 1/64.
stratification on the African coast ensured the ransom of many to the profit of the few. African merchants, embroiled in the trade just as their European and North American customers were, would often help to regain crewmembers who deserted. Many captains gratefully accepted this deal, as Africans were better acquainted with the terrain and possible places to hide, and in contrast to the Caribbean, where sailor desertion was actively encouraged, in Africa these men were still badly needed for the major purpose for which they had been employed. The six crewmembers of the *Phoenix* of Bristol, for example, who tried to escape in the ship’s yawl were “taken up by Africans”. Captain George Bishop apparently ordered them to be kept on shore chained by the neck, legs and hands, and to have only one plantain a day to eat. They all died there, the boatswain, Tom Jones, having become “raving mad”.  

Similarly, from the *Thomas* in 1785 the boatswain and others from the crew tried to escape while on the coast of Africa, but were “brought back by the Black people.” They allegedly had been very badly treated by the second mate of the ship, James Lavender, and ran to escape his reign of terror. After being returned to the ship by Africans they were put in irons and flogged. William Snelgrave hired canoemen to look for a boy who ran away with his yawl. He noted in his accounts that he paid four shillings for their services in this matter, money that no doubt came out of the errant crewmember’s wages if he was indeed caught. John Newton likewise had two sailors, named as John Wilkinson and Richard Griffiths, who ran away with his yawl “tho chained” while they were anchored off the windward coast. Newton saw the boat lying on the shore and managed to reclaim it, but the men who had taken it were not so easily retaken, and Newton was forced to tell the local King that he would offer a reward to any men who captured them.  

From one of Alexander Falconbridge’s ships “near a dozen” of the crew deserted in one of the boats with the intention of heading to Old Calabar. Taking with them what food they could from the ship and water, they “made a sail of a hammock and erected one of the boat’s oars as a mast”. When the captain returned from an evening of drinking onshore with some African traders and discovered them gone, he set off in search of the men. He did not find them. Later they were captured by some Africans, stripped, and marched across country from Bonny, where they had landed,  

86 Anon, Extract 95-6.  
87 HCA 1/25 f.147-9.  
to Old Calabar. While making their intended destination, the result was certainly not what they anticipated, for upon arrival at Old Calabar they were ‘sold’ to Captain John Burrows of the Lion. Three of the men died on the march, while another five would be dead before the Lion delivered 315 slaves to Grenada. Another dying in the West Indies, only two of the runaways would ever make it back to Britain to explain why they had run. The list of corrections inflicted upon them was long according to their surgeon, Falconbridge. One would always bare the scars from where Captain McTaggart had set his dog on him.90

At other times both the ruling Europeans and the local African chiefs worked to returned escaped sailors to their ships. Some Africans were given a gallon of brandy for the capture of seaman William Lees who tried to desert from the Duke of Argyle at the Banana Islands [Sierra Leone]. Yet while the captain needed their services in this matter, it was fully his decision to look for a naval ship to send Lees home in.91 The crew of the brig Garland were captured after Captain McQuoid “ordered the Gentleman in Charge of Annamaboe to catch the Sailors [and] put them in irons.” Nine of the sailors were caught, whereupon McQuoid desired that they be held in Cape Coast Castle until they could be sent home on a man-of-war.92

The rule over seamen on the African coast thus involved both Europeans, and the Africans it bound up in its pressure for profit. The two worked hand in hand in governing the seamen, Africans often being used to capture the men, whose fate and punishment was then left to their compatriots. It is notable that it is from the diary of an African trader known as Duke Ephraim that we know of another case where Africans returned Englishmen who had deserted from a slaving vessel. Probably from the Gascoyne, they had run from an English ship by taking a boat from the mate, and made off with “goods for fifteen slaves.” There were certainly enough of them to warrant being termed the captain’s “people”, and enough to need a whole party of men to go in search of them.93

91 Newton, Journal 17.
92 T 70/33.
This need for the assistance of local Africans in running the slave trade was symptomatic of trading relations on the coast, for try as they might Europeans never succeeded in dominating the local Africans to the degree they wished. European command on the coast was always a series of negotiations, albeit bolstered by all too frequent recourse to the musket, because they needed African merchants in order to fulfil their main purpose. Without the cooperation of local sellers the trade in slaves ground to a halt.

The African limits to European power on the coast varied greatly over time and location, but were disregarded only at the outsiders’ peril. Despite the late Walter Rodney’s influential work suggesting that the Europeans always held sway—an appealing theory certainly, given the havoc the trade wreaked on the continent—it seems clear that prominent Africans always held some degree of influence. They stopped trade if they disliked the terms offered, and played off the European powers against one another just as the Europeans tried to rule by dividing the African groups. And, just like the Europeans, they often resorted to more bloody and direct tactics, notwithstanding the settlers’ powerful guns. Even on the Gold Coast where European dominance was most entrenched, the Africans were certainly not too cowed to protest their case. Local Africans beat the Governor of Tatumquerry fort in 1786, for example, after he had tried to levy a fine on them. Africans were needed too for the smooth, efficient running of the transatlantic slave trade, and that meant that they were involved in the return of deserting seamen to their ships.

Notwithstanding the African involvement in governing seamen in the event of them deserting, the judicial iron fist that controlled their behaviour on the coast was indisputably European. Violent domination could come from any quarter, but only the power of the British Navy to return seamen home to face the Admiralty courts constituted ‘real’ authority as they saw it. This is not to suggest, of course, that they always accepted the courts’ rule. Nevertheless it was considered to have a substance seamen certainly did not imbue the Africans’ power with. In this respect then, final authority over the behaviour of the seamen employed on British slaving vessels resided in the hands of the highest-ranking man at the place the misdemeanour was

---

alleged to have been committed. Commensurate with British influence, this control had a much firmer grip on the Gold Coast than elsewhere, supported as it was by the eight forts that stretched from Dixcove in the west to James Fort [Accra] and Prampram in the east. The hub of this dominance was Cape Coast Castle. The slave trade denigrated both the captives it was to sell as slaves and its lowly employees, and both were, to vastly different degrees to be sure, held ransom to profitability within the walls of the Gold Coast forts.

In the annals of Atlantic history the European forts along the West African coast represented an early incursion into the continent, and one that attempted to secure the interests of capitalism a place on Africa's accessible coast. It should come as little surprise, therefore, that this same system worked as a restraint on the activities, and freedom, of sailors. Although the forts were satellites of the home nation's labour ethics, and this, theoretically at least given the capitalist context, should have equated to free labour, in the late eighteenth century the issue was far murkier than that. British pressgangs found men not just for the ships that plied the Atlantic route in human beings, but also for the forts that administered the African end of the commerce. Masons, soldiers and carpenters were taken from the streets of London to toil at Britain's African coast forts just as men were crimped onto slaving vessels. Even convict labour was temporarily toyed with as a possibility. To some degree, therefore, the rulers of the forts attempted to reconstruct Britain's class structure in the heat and humidity of the tropics.

---

97 A.G.L. Shaw, Convicts and the Colonies: A Study of Penal Transportation from Great Britain and Ireland to Australia and other parts of the Empire (London: Faber and Faber, 1966) 43. Many of Governor Miles' letters to the Company in 1782 concerned the convicts. In June he wrote, “We surmise Government will de disposed again to send out some of the Convicts – in such case for God’s sake send us good Locks, for we have already experienced that those we now have here are not proof against the Villiany of these Wretches...indeed unless a power is sent out to try the most Notorious of them and to hang them, they must be kept always in Irons, for how in the name of God can it be thought the Lives of 8 or 10 Officers are safe among such a Crew of Felons.” The convicts frequently ran away, and Africans sometimes returned them too, just as they did seamen. A year later the problem still existed, and Miles wrote, “They [British convicts] are landed as it were naked and diseased on the sandy Shore; the more hardy of them probably will plunder for a living for a few Days untill the Climate stops their progress, and then shocking to Humanity, loaded with the additional Diseases incident to the Countrny, these poor Wretches are to be seen dying upon the Rocks, or upon the sandy Beach, under the scorching heat of the Sun, without the means of Support or the least relief afforded them.” Miles at this point was horrified about the fate of some convict women who had been sent out on the Den Keyser who had turned to prostitution “among the blacks” in order to try and survive. T 70/33.
In this context then it is clear that the men who imprisoned sailors within the walls of Europe’s coastal forts saw nothing ironic in this act. Archibald Dalzel, governor of Cape Coast Castle for a decade from 1792, wrote that seamen were sometimes held there for up to a year awaiting a ship to take them home to stand trial. Given the seamen’s rebellious nature, and the harsh conditions of slave trading, such occurrences were not isolated events. It was a regular responsibility of the coastal forts to function as temporary prisons for sailors, and many instances can be found in the historical record. In April 1771 governor David Mill took two seamen from Captain Parkinson of Liverpool, and held them under the piracy act. They were taken back to England on *HMS Weazel* to stand trial. Captain Arnold of the *Hannah* left a sailor named Darcy as a prisoner at Cape Coast Castle on 26 October 1800.

On the 10 September 1803 the captain of the *Sally* wrote in his logbook that he had “deliver[ed] the Boatswain Thomas Loren up to the Governor of Cape Coast Castle concerning a very serious case of Mutiny.” More unusually it was the first mate of the *Lady Nelson* who was put ashore at Winneba Fort for alleged nautical insubordination.

In some cases the crimes these men were accused of seem flimsy pretences, or at least within the usual range of behaviour at sea. Captain Corran sent some of his sailors, who were taken home on *HMS Adventure*, to be imprisoned at Dixcove, apparently merely for the crime of drunkenness. Others showed more propensity to real rebellion. The ten seamen from the *Antelope* of Bristol who were imprisoned in Cape Coast Castle later succeeded in escaping from Newgate gaol while awaiting trial. Captain William Sims of the *Hawk* took three seamen to Cape Coast Castle in 1781 to be imprisoned on the charge of “piracy” and “plotting to steal his ship away”, but was later persuaded by the governor to take them back onboard his vessel. Other sources reveal, however, that the *Hawk* was captured by the crew and failed to make what her owners would have considered to be a successful voyage.

---

99 BT 6/1.
100 BT 98/62 f.195.
101 C108/214.
102 Robinson, *Sailor Boy* 53. Robinson actually remembers the name of the ship as the *Lady Neilson*, but Eltis, CD-ROM 82216, tells us that the correct name was *Lady Nelson*.
103 HCA 1/64; T70/33.
104 HCA 1/20 f.35; HCA 1/55.
105 BT 6/6; T70/32; Eltis, CD-ROM 17900.
This case clearly reveals the vastly superior range of freedom that seamen enjoyed over those to be shipped as slaves even while both were incarcerated in the coastal forts. Sailors might be considered to be mutinous and piratical with little evidence, but they had recompense to protest their innocence, and on occasion, as on the *Hawk*, took advantage of this leeway for their own gain. Incarcerated seamen had infinitely more hope for liberation than the African men, women and children packed into the stifling dungeons. The men imprisoned by Captain McQuoid of the brig *Garland*, for example, were freed by the fort governor because he feared that the sailors would come after him for wrongful imprisonment if they were later cleared of the charges by the Admiralty courts.¹⁰⁶

Yet while the seamen enjoyed privileges that were undoubtedly dependent upon the fact that the majority of them were of European origin, class still mattered to those who managed the forts. In 1788 so many seamen were held in Cape Coast Castle that governor Thomas Norris feared for the safety of the employees there, and hastened to send the prisoners home. “Accounts of their crimes attested on oath go with them” he wrote, which “will be sufficient to detain them in Prison untill the arrival of the Masters and Officers of the different Ships.”¹⁰⁷ It seems most unlikely that Norris would have feared other groups of his fellow Englishmen in the same way that he feared the rebelliousness of the seamen. Additionally, it is worth remembering that African seamen employed in the slave trade, if accused of mutiny, were held in the forts as prisoners not as captive slaves, as the case of Cudjoe, Quow and Joe revealed.¹⁰⁸ If race was the dominant factor deciding the freedom and treatment allowed those incarcerated in Britain’s African coastal forts, its divisions were not absolute.

At other places along the coast British authority lacked the focal point that Cape Coast Castle, looming on the rocks, so obviously provided on the Gold Coast. The web of fiscal allegiances, however, extended much further. Along the Slave Coast, around the English fort at Ouidah (of which, incidentally, Archibald Dalzel was also the director in the late 1770s) lay numerous small factories built and sometimes fortified to protect their interests in the area.¹⁰⁹ The fort on James Island in the Gambia River remained the centre of British influence in that region, while all

¹⁰⁶ T70/33.
¹⁰⁷ T 70/33.
¹⁰⁸ See chapter 2.
along the coast between Senegambia and the Gold Coast were dotted small British concerns. At some places the representative of English trade was merely a lone man who had settled in the area with aspirations to a fortune. In the Rio Pongo area, for example, a man from Liverpool named John Ormond was the dominant slave trader during the later decades of the eighteenth century. Although these outposts lacked the powers of the major forts, nonetheless they were a part of the slave trade's network of influence, and as such helped reinforce the structures necessary for its successful fulfilment. That task included seeing that sailors remained in their billets onboard ship, and subservient to the captain's regime. Where there was insufficient established British power, ships' captains and officers from other vessels acted to try and control seamen. As has been shown, sometimes this necessitated asking local Africans for help.

To sailors, therefore, the class and race-based aspects to their situation while they were in Africa definitively intersected, rather than the colour of their skin always being the decisive factor in their treatment and fate. English seamen did not shelter behind the privileges of European origin that the slave trade fashioned in the New World while they were at the African coast. Indeed they could not, for not only was overt racial stratification untenable in such an environment, the English merchants on the coast felt strongly that the class stratification they had been born and bred into should be upheld. For the majority of seamen who were of European origin, their ethnicity labelled them as foreigners in Africa, and in all probability as slave traders, with all the negative connotations this had inevitably come to have. To the European factors, merchants and captains who they came into contact with, however, their position was linked tenably to their lowly social status. Seamen, as has been argued, fell far outside the realm of respectable gentlemen. A certain dignity and respect had to accorded the captain of a vessel, but for lowly Jack there was no such honour. The average English sailor cared little, for he had an alternative value system.

His ethics, instead, involved ties to his profession and a fondness for the spirit of rebellion. Seamen of many nationalities interacted with African labourers, both slave and nominally free, while they waited for their ship to be loaded with its wretched human cargo. Some found temporary homes with Africans, others just

109 Law, "Here is no resisting" 55-6; Akinjobin, "Dalzel" 70.
wanted to escape the rule of a callous captain and sought refuge among them. Doubtless each of the estimated 333,000 men who sailed to Africa as employees of slave ships had slightly different perspectives on their experiences there, and on the inhabitants of their ports of call. This contact had some notable results, though. From it developed the habit of employing free African seamen on slave ships. It also fostered seamen’s vaunted tolerance for men of African origin, and imparted facets of African culture to the larger maritime understandings of the world. The African seaboard was the scene of many distinct relationships and interactions which shaped part of the Atlantic frontier. They were infinitesimal aspects of the nature and meaning of race that the slave trade made, and constantly remade.

Most tars, needless to say, were hardly sorry to leave the African coast. As they were largely illiterate, we will in this case let an American slave ship surgeon speak for them. He was so moved by his finally leaving the coast that he felt composed the following verse:

Safely departed Afric’s shore at last,
I feel nor think on Dangers I have past,
And hope in time, to reach my native shore,
And never think of these dread voyages more.

William Chancellor, onboard the 'Wolf,' January 1751.

---


In 1805 Abū Bakr, an educated Muslim boy born in Timbuktu, was captured during an African conflict, marched to the coast and sold to an English slave ship. Almost thirty years later, after having been freed from his bondage, he used the following words to describe his experience:

On that very day they made me captive. They tore off my clothes, bound me with ropes, gave me a heavy load to carry, and led me to the town of Bonduku, and from there to the town of Kumasi, where the king of Ashanti reigned, whose name is Osei. From there through Akisuma and Ajumako, in the land of Fanti, to the town of Lago, near the salt sea (all the way on foot, and well loaded.)

There they sold me to the Christians, and I was bought by a certain captain of a ship at that time. He sent me to a boat, and delivered me over to one of his sailors. The boat immediately pushed off, and I was carried on board of the ship. We continued onboard ship, at sea, for three months, and then came on shore in the land of Jamaica. This was the beginning of my slavery until this day. I tasted the bitterness of slavery from them, and its oppressiveness.¹

It is uncertain whether Bakr meant that he had first experienced slavery from the men onboard the slave ship, or that he had first been a slave upon landing in Jamaica, but one thing is clear from this narrative: Abū Bakr did not regard his time as a captive in Africa to have been slavery. When he was first taken onboard the ship that would carry him far away, Bakr considered himself to be an African man who just happened to have been captured. And so he was.

By the time he was offered for sale in Jamaica, however, as Bakr himself implied, other forces had come into play. Those who crowded the docks of the New World eager to purchase workers saw the Africans who disembarked from the ship as already enslaved, with all the associations of both racial inferiority and ultimate possession that this state involved. They saw the men, women and children whom they purchased as ready-made slaves, separated from the people they had once been by the fact that they had arrived on their shores already reduced to the status of

chattels. This was a device with which planters distanced themselves from the injustice of the system, as it allowed them to reconcile their notion of themselves as humane with their ownership of slaves. Somewhere in the Atlantic crossing captive had become slave. In the larger picture of transatlantic slaving, governed as it was by the “silver coins multiplying on the sold horizon”, imprisonment became enslavement as it traversed the ocean.2

This fact is central to understanding the role of seamen in the middle passage, because conversion of African captive into slave required more than simply time spent below decks and transfer across the Atlantic: it also involved the preparation of sovereign people for sale at market as chattels. To the men and women chained below decks many of the acts of this conversion were simply stark, horrific terror, but they also formed part of the larger panorama that attempted to alter human being to thing. Sailors were employed not only to ensure that the ship crossed the ocean as safely and quickly as possible, but also, intertwined in the fabric of their daily tasks was involvement in this process.

It was partially these trade-specific jobs that led seamen to loathe employment on slave ships, and to take a berth in any other trade in preference. Cleaning up after the human cargo, force-feeding those who had lost the will to eat, and controlling African men and women while they were washed and exercised were all tasks that seamen hated. Adding to the normal transportation aspect of seamen’s work, this participation in production meant that tars were more deeply involved in this trade than in others in which they might find a berth. Even in the first and final legs of a triangular slaving voyage, cotton goods, guns, rum, and sugar had simply to be packed onto the vessel, safely transported, and then off-loaded when they reached their destination. It was only in the middle passage that they were required to change the form of the ‘merchandise’ as it crossed the seas.

Such work fundamentally changed the nature of seafaring by altering seamen’s place in the economic scheme. Tellingly, one of the only other long distance trades where this occurred was whaling, and C.L.R. James writes of a whaleship that it was, “the modern world—the world we live in...industrial civilisation on fire and plunging blindly into darkness.”3 According to James,

2 Derek Walcott, Omeros (NY: Farrar, 1990) 149.
3 C.L.R. James, Mariners, Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World we Live in (London: Allison and Busby, 1985) 51.
therefore, sailors' involvement in production as well as transportation furthered their proletarianisation. Slave production did not require additional skills or machinery, however, as whaling did; the additional work was guarding, punishing, quelling, and generally trying to break a captive's spirit. The creation of slaves was not an industrial process but one of unmitigated, vehement coercion. Innate to the reduction of human to possession, and therefore in a sailor's labour, was the squandering of normal limits on human behaviour. Aggression, violence, cruelty, and sometimes sadism were institutionalised in the trade's ethos.

A seaman's work, therefore, drew him into the modern world through his employment in capitalist long distance trade, but at the same time it revealed to him in close relief what slavery—in its New World, chattel variant—entailed. In such circumstances these already brutalised men increasingly acknowledged that their own harsh treatment was unacceptable in terms of the new focus on free waged labour, under which they should theoretically have been controlled solely through payment or the withholding thereof. Violent subjugation was central to the system of slavery, as it had been since biblical times. Seamen came to question how, in this age of newly defined freedom, it could also be acceptable for them, as paid employees, to be treated in the same way. It is hardly surprising that sailors were at the forefront of battles for liberty—in its various guises—in this era, as their lowly paid employ had engaged them in the production of non-freedom.

While this understanding of slavery and freedom affected seamen's radicalism and anti-authoritarianism in the long term, their immediate, knee-jerk reaction to the conditions of the slave trade often led them to simply abuse the captives over whom they had some authority. They took the violence demanded by their work as carte blanche to take out their pent up frustration on their captive cargo. The debasement value of the slaving merchants' economic demands regularly slipped into anarchic cruelty out on the open seas. In fact seamen (and captains for that matter) often took the violence mandated by the fiscal necessity of making human into slave and expanded it to a point at which it actually detrimentally affected the merchants' potential profits. Many of the ignominies heaped upon those who were forcibly transported across the Atlantic were not so much part of the attempted commodification of mankind, but rather individual acts of callousness by sailors.
As Claude Meillasoux and Orlando Patterson among others have argued, slavery is, at base, a process. An essential element of the first stage of enslavement is that “the slave is violently uprooted from his milieu.” Thus part of the attempted reduction of human being to slave was inherent in the work of seamen, for it was their tending of the sails to catch the prevailing winds that took their African cargo into societies in which they would be perpetual outsiders. Their “liminality” increased with each nautical mile traversed. Their marginality grew in direct relation to the distance from their homes until the final rupture of sale. Alexander X. Byrd writes that “the men and women who set off from one side of the Atlantic were not the same men and women who arrived at the other.” Just so, for somewhere between “home” and “exile” the status of the men and women changed.

There was more to the first stage of enslavement, however, than simply transfer to the enslaving region. Captives had to be rendered ‘socially dead.’ For this to occur they needed not only to be separated from all that they knew, but also to be stripped of their power and personal honour. What was significant about these tasks was that while the ‘natal alienation’ of the captives was contained in a sailor’s usual terms of employment, the ritual disempowerment and dishonouring went well beyond what was generally required of a tar employed in any other trade. It is in understanding this that insight can be gained into why sailors loathed the slave trade above all others: they simply reviled the additional and very unpleasant tasks required by the business of ‘making’ slaves. The removal of a human being’s honour and power, moreover, encapsulated the truth of all slave regimes: violence was their central tenet, the only way that the state of slavery could be sustained.

In the eighteenth century British transatlantic trade the transformation of person to slave was couched in the rhetoric of economics, but its overarching consequence was the same as in other slave systems. Ankles were shackled and hands bound to stop a valuable article of trade from escaping, but the loss of personal power and self-will was evidenced in every bolted limb. The shaving of heads and

---

removal of any clothing may have been considered necessary for health reasons, but these acts nevertheless signified loss of independence just as surely as those things do today upon entry into the army, prison, or a host of other institutions where individuality is not prized. The next stage of slavery, the introduction of the slave to the enslavers' community, took place off the ships and after sale, and thus beyond the duties of the seamen. It was in this period “between capture or first sale and the acquisition of a new social identity” that “the slave was unambiguously a commodity.” A sailor’s task, therefore, was to render them socially dead without worrying about the intricacies of re-socialising them.

Being reduced to the state of a possession had a whole new horror in the transatlantic trade because commodities have relevance in capitalist society with which they are not otherwise imbued. At other times and places in history to be alien, an outsider, was enough to make one a slave, but in the plantation economy of the Americas, allied as it was to capitalism, slaves had to be exhibited at market as desirable possessions. This was a world in which there was fetishism about owning commodities. It is not co-incidental that one of the major differences between autochthonous West African slavery and its New World counterpart was in the prevalence, and ease, with which masters sold their bondsmen. As Walter Johnson has illustrated wonderfully in Soul By Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market a central feature of slave life in the American South was the close proximity of the slave market. Slaves in the plantation South were ‘people with a price’. American slavery was chattel slavery, and in their reduction to possessions, slaves suffered the indignity of being merchandise in a society obsessed by the ownership of commodities.

Thus when Olaudah Equiano wrote of asking another slave onboard the ship, “if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces and long hair,” he may have been wrong about the nature of abhorrence he was to face, but not necessarily in the scale of it. Johnson’s thesis that “the slave trade was understood by slaves as threatening literal death” as well as social death is also relevant in the Atlantic setting. In the traditional sense, clearly the primary purpose of slave trading was not cannibalism. Indeed, the valuable African human merchandise, variously

---

known as black ivory or black gold, was far too prized and profitable to be eaten by men for whom salt pork and ships' biscuit were the normal fare, even if they had so desired. Although in times of dire necessity cannibalism was resorted to at sea, the type of 'consuming' to which Stephan Palmié refers in his work is that of the voracious appetite New World planters came to have for slaves. Perhaps Mungo Park chose a better phrase than Equiano when he spoke of the fear among Africans that Europeans purchased them "for the purpose of devouring them," for that is exactly what the plantations of the Americas did. They devoured men, women and children as labourers, their demand not sated as profits grew and mortality rates remained high.9

Employed in the (attempted) reduction of men, women and children into these fetishist products, seamen, themselves suffering as the result of the same economic forces, hated this additional and particularly unpleasant labour. It is rather ironic that William Littleton, who had worked as the mate of a slave ship in the 1760s, in an attempt to justify the trade before the Houses of Parliament, stated "the sails requiring but little attendance – therefore the sailors are wholly employed in their attention to the slaves."10 Aside from the fact that the rigours of the job in times of severe weather or crisis could be extreme, Littleton's point is in some ways very revealing. Sailors were aggrieved and hated the slave trade partly because many of the tasks they had to perform were not related to a seafaring life. Rather they were acting as warder or guard, and as the overseers of the transformation into a slave ready for market. "I considered myself as a sort of jailer" wrote one slave ship captain.11 Sailors were indubitably tough salts, often ready with their fists and partial to the bottle, but they were also by all accounts proud of their seafaring skills. To have the kind of duties that Littleton stated can hardly have been popular, especially not when those duties were so execrable.

A good example of the process of commodification was central to the running of the slave trade. Male slaves' movement was severely restricted by the iron fetters bolted around their ankles, and sometimes their wrists and necks, ostensibly because

10 ZHC 1/82 182.
of the threat of revolt. In thus chaining them, however, they were also often forced to wallow in their own excrement because they could not reach the buckets provided as toilets. In the interest of security basic human dignity was denied them. Those who experienced slave ships as both free and white used the noxious smell, moreover, to imply that the captives were ‘beast-like’ in some way. The surgeon of the *Brookes*, for example, stated that the air was so stale below decks that the prisoners gasped for breath like “expiring animals.” The only halter on their degradation was that they had to be kept alive, and thus seamen had to descend into the malodorous hellholes to clean. One man who had worked as a sailor before the mast remembered that, “the floor of their rooms, was so covered with blood and mucus which had proceeded from them having flux, that it resembled a slaughter-house...I was so overcome by the heat, stench and foul air that I nearly fainted.”

Merchants and shipowners demanded some of the work that implicitly enshrined this reduction—explicitly it was purely for the sake of profits—in the instructions they issued to their chosen captain. They wrote of the standards they expected of cleanliness, and of the necessity of washing the slaves. Such work, of course, was not performed by the captain himself but passed onto lowly crewmembers. Captain Edward Williams was ordered by the merchant/owner of his voyages, Robert Bostock, in 1787 and 1788 to “take care to have them [the slaves] well cleaned.” David Tuohy issued more specific instructions to one of his captains, William Spurs of the brig *Ranger*. Tuohy ordered Spurs to supervise “washing the beams and over the slaves heads with vinegar three times a week...while the slaves are twined up.” While at sea, sailors were employed in “scraping the slave rooms, smoking with tar, tobacco and brimstone for two hours, afterwards washed with vinegar.” Similarly when a ship neared its American destination the sailors were employed in cleaning the slaves and getting them ready for sale. As the ship approached land Alexander Falconbridge recounted, “care is taken to polish [the slaves] for sale, by an application of the lunar caustic [silver nitrate].”

12 ZHC 1/84 84.
13 ZHC 1/84 368.
15 Liverpool RO 380 TUO 4/2: Papers of the *Ranger*.
In the detailed log of the ship *Mary* there are numerous repetitive entries to show that the crew was busy with tasks that were peculiar to the slave trade. On Wednesday, 3 February 1796 the sailors were “Glaring [the] Mens room out” after eleven slaves had been purchased in a day of “Brisk Trade.” The following Tuesday they were employed “tending Slaves.” Three days later, as the ship was travelling down the Gold Coast, they were again cleaning the men slaves’ room. The following week as the carpenter made gratings for the men’s and women’s rooms they were still “Imployd in tending Slaves”. This was followed by a day where they were busy “overhauling …potatoes and cleaning out the Womens Slave room”. Tellingly, the next week as the number of slaves increased, they were “Imployd onbord in tending Slaves and Over hauling our Arms”. And so it goes on, with frequent entries such as “Cleaned out the Slave rooms fore and aft” and “Emp[loye]d Cleaning Slave Rooms and tending Slaves.”

Given that the average length of stay on the African coast was seven months, seamen doubtless regarded this work as monotonous and odious. Many seamen considered their skills and no doubt their macho bravery to be insulted by the rather effeminate task of cleaning up after slaves, but such precautions were essential to the lowering of the mortality rate among slaves in the eighteenth century British trade. As such, therefore, they were also a vital factor in ensuring the merchants’ profits. Two historians recently noted that in the British slave trade “Cleanliness was not only next to godliness, it was the handmaiden of commerce; it was worth pursuing for its own sake”. As others have argued that over forty percent of slave deaths can be attributed to gastrointestinal diseases—contemporaneously often commonly lumped together as ‘flux’—cleaning and providing uncontaminated food can be seen to have been a major part of the success of a voyage from a merchant’s point of view. This is true even if the absolute causes of such diseases and the preventative measures against them were unknown at the time. Thus such chores were not just random necessities, but an essential part of the job of the seaman as seen from the point of view of their employer, the merchant. If job descriptions

---

had existed for seafarers in the eighteenth-century these duties would have featured prominently. In the bigger picture, however, keeping the slaves in the appalling conditions that required these tasks was part of their attempted subjection into slavery.

It is patent that not many sailors, who were renowned as hard, heartless men, nurtured sympathy towards those they perceived to be the cause of these hated chores. Two sailors from the ship *Africa* reported that “an elderly [slave] woman” who was suffering from dysentery had done “some dirt upon deck” for which she was whipped until “her back was as raw as beef steak”. She “in her own Language begged Pardon” and then tried to throw herself overboard to escape the whipping, but a member of the crew jumped after her and took her back on deck to whip her some more. She was then thrown back overboard. Cleaning out the faeces from the women’s and men’s rooms, a job which was unpleasant at the best of times, cannot be imagined when a cargo of say, three hundred or more slaves crammed in a dark, airless room was suffering from dysentery—a common occurrence on slave ships. One seaman claimed that he had only made one voyage in the slave trade “because I could not bear with the nasty filthiness”.

Of course the misery for those who lived in this mess incomparably exceeded that of those who just had to clean it, but it is not hard to imagine too that sailors, men who at the best of times had little in the way of compassion or tenderness, often lost their tempers when faced with the non-stop task of clearing up the excrement of those they considered to be their cargo. Surgeon Ecroyde Claxton recounted that sailors “inhumanely beat” the captive Africans “either with their hands or a cat [-o'-nine-tails]” when forced to clean up their mess. In fact the work did pass from utterly unpleasant to thoroughly dangerous given that hygiene was minimal and that most of the major gastrointestinal killers were, and are, passed faecal-orally. Cruelty not sympathy abounded. A slave ship’s ghastly hold was not a suitable environment for human beings, much less was it conducive to humanity.

Some of the seamen’s work was clearly intended to depersonalise the captives, to ritually dishonour them. One entry in the *Mary*’s journal reads, “Men Emp[loye]d tending Slaves, Shaving and triming them etc etc, also making mats and Sundry

---

22 HCA 1/23.
23 ZHC 1/87 121.
24 ZHC 1/87 34.
Necessaries." A sailor recorded how he had been involved as "the heads of all slaves, without distinction of age or sex, were shaved and they were then scrubbed with sand while standing in the water." Another seaman noted, "began yesterday to shave them all and this morning finished." The log of the Sandown states that on Thursday, 10 April 1794 the men were "Employ’d cleaning ship shaving slaves & filling up salt water." A similar task was the removal of any clothing the Africans might be wearing when they first embarked on the ship. Slave ship captains often claimed these things were done solely for health reasons, but Job Ben Solomon was closer to the truth when he remembered the shaving of his hair and beard, prior to his embarkation on a slave ship, as "the highest Indignity." Carrying out these tasks, a seaman’s identification with his own occupational group increased, and his pride in a tar’s clothing and hairstyle became the symbols not only of his work and his skills, but also of his free status in the Atlantic world. In executing the removal of a captive’s identity—central to the loss of his or her personal honour—seamen began more than ever to value the characteristics considered unique to maritime workers.

Similarly, sailors’ body markings, tattoos, which represented a pride in their job and their ties to home, came to have added significance. They were in stark contrast to the African captives’ branding marks which signified their bodily ownership by another, and their imposed removal from the tribes whose markings they might also bear. A sailor’s tattoos were proudly worn “vocational badges” often showing ships, mermaids or anchors. Moreover, while a slave’s markings represented his forced alienation from his previous existence, a sailor’s tattoos often declared his love for a woman back home, his country or his god. A seaman’s tattoos indicated that he sold his labour on the open market; a slave’s branding marks showed that his or her whole being was to be sold in the same way. It is probably not co-incidental

---

25 Donnan, Documents III 360-378.
27 Quoted in Earle, Sailors 78.
29 ZHC 1/82 220.
30 Donnan, Documents I 21.
that Kru seamen from Sierra Leone used tattooing as a means of displaying to all that they were free workers and not enslaved cargo.32

Just as branding and shaving had a theoretical cause in addition to the more obvious economic one, so barbarity was not an unfortunate consequence of the slave trade but rather one of its founding principles. Violent subjugation was central to the process of commodifying human beings. Putting a whip in a sailor’s hands was the regular method of processing the debasement of African captives. One required part of their daily duty, for example, was to flog the slaves until they danced. Captives were forced to do this, at least in fine weather, ostensibly because the physical and mental health benefits of jumping up and down were considered to be great.

Numerous sailors would later recall this part of their work when the slave trade was investigated by parliament. John Ashley Hall of the Neptune of London admitted that the slaves were forced to “dance” by using the cat-o’-nine-tails. Hall though was perceptive and honest enough to mention that “what I have heard called dancing” could more aptly be described as “being made after each meal to jump up and down upon the beat of a drum”. It was not, he added, “to music of their own”.33

Such practice was common: slaver surgeon Alexander Falconbridge recalled that slaves who refused to “dance” were flogged, and that when the drums wore out they improvised with the buckets their food had been served in.34 On 7 July 1756 the captain of the slaver Venus bought a “Negro Drum for slaves” as a tool of this peculiar form of torture.35 Clement Noble stated that the slaves were made to dance “as best they can in irons, hands and legs tied together.”36 Ecroyde Claxton of the Garland in 1788 reported that the African captives were “compelled to dance by the cat” even when they had “the flux, scurvy, and such oedematous swellings in their legs as made it painful to them to move at all”.37 The dual needs of keeping men and women captives alive, and of breaking their spirit meant that sailors were required to

33 ZHC 1/85 519.
34 Falconbridge, Account 23.
36 ZHC 1/84 119.
37 Anon., An Extract of the Evidence delivered before a Select Committee of the House of Commons in the years 1790-1791 (Edinburgh, 1791) 39.
work as gaolers or guards, and to subjugate through the use of the same instruments of punishment that were frequently used on themselves.

For similar reasons, and with similar results, sailors also flogged the captives until they sang. What the Africans sang, though, could not be controlled by any means, and were more “melancholy lamentsations of their exile” than the upbeat morale boosting tunes for which their captors hoped.\(^38\) Few captives, noted a man who was a passenger on a slave ship, would sing or dance without at least the threat of a whipping, and even then some “were content to have the cat smartly applied across their shoulders several times, before they would so much belie their feelings as to make merry, when their heart was sad.”\(^39\) Surgeon Claxton, when asked whether the slaves on his ship ever ‘amused’ themselves by singing, answered:

I believe they very seldom amuse themselves by it – they were ordered to sing by the captain, but they were songs of sad lamentations. The words of the songs used by them were Madda! Madda! Yiera! Bemini! Bemini! Madda! Aufera! that is to say, they were all sick, and by and by they should be no more; they also sung songs expressive of their fears of being beat, of their want of victuals.. .and of never returning to their own country.\(^40\)

Seamen saw that the exceptional singing and dancing performances they had sometimes witnessed in Africa had been reduced to a parody of painful shuffling and moaning. Rather than feeling compassion for those under their control, this sordid diminution induced derision among seamen. The 1790 poem ‘The Sorrow of Yomba’, penned by an unknown slave reads:

At the savage Captain’s beck,  
Now like brutes they make us prance:  
Smack the Cat about the Deck,  
And in scorn they bid us dance.\(^41\)

The last sentence is especially revealing. Scorn, disdain and mockery marked the sailors’ attitude towards captive Africans at such times. These proud, gifted men and women for whom singing and dancing had central cultural roles infused with meaning had been reduced to jumping up and down laden with ironware in answer to the whip.

\(^{38}\) Falconbridge, _Account_ 23.  
\(^{40}\) ZHC 1/87 36.
Themselves largely at the mercy of the ship's officers, sailors saw that they had physical power over the African captives.

The savage inhumanity that was sanctioned in sailors' work did not end with this travesty of singing and dancing. They also had to prevent the captives from committing suicide, and could do so by virtually any means. Such work illustrated another peculiarity of slave trading to sailors, because no other kind of 'goods' listed on the bill of lading ever resisted in the innumerable and diverse complex and clever ways that human cargo did. No other attempted self-destruction because they "prefer[ed] death to slavery." On the other side of this divide, seamen had their own incentive for preventing suicide, for, as mentioned in chapter one, if a captive managed to jump overboard, the sailors who should have been on watch duty could be charged the computed cost.

Those Africans who lost the will to live and stopped eating—which could have been because the food was often strange to them and anyway barely edible, or because of depression, seasickness or shock—were simply forced to eat. Often captains and their crews believed that the slaves were deliberately starving themselves as a means of escape, and had very little sympathy indeed for their predicament. Sailor John Radcliffe later recalled how on the Moth food was pushed down a slave's neck with the handle of the cat-o'-nine-tails. "She was an elderly woman," he remembered of the victim.

This was no ad hoc occurrence: the trade in slaves had adopted its own assortment of tools with which to subjugate. Captive Africans who refused to eat would be flogged until they did, or sometimes the speculum oris was used on them. This was an implement of torture, initially invented as a remedy for lockjaw or tetanus, which was readily available in shops in Liverpool and London at the height of

---

43 William D. Piersen, "White Cannibals, Black Martyrs: Fear, Depression and Religious Faith as Causes of Suicide Among New Slaves" Journal of Negro History 62 (April 1977) 147-159. In contrast to the crew of the boat, the surgeon sometimes did express dismay at the treatment of slaves in forcing them to eat in this way.
44 HCA 1/23 f.52.
the trade. Isaac Wilson, who sailed on slave ships during the 1780s related that he had once tried to force a young male slave to eat firstly with "mild means" then by whipping him, then with the *speculum oris*, and finally with a bolus knife, but to no avail. Wilson stated that he had often to whip them to get them to eat, yet "in the very act of chastisement they looked up to him with a smile, and in their own language have said, 'presently we shall be no more'". Unfortunately, for each captive who resisted in such a manner, there was a seaman willing to stretch the margins of his inhumanity ever more.

Even the normal boundary of halting torture prior to a victim's death was not insuperable, as sometimes murder was part of a sailor's work. There is little doubt that many of the captives must have thought themselves in hell, for the trade led to some simply horrendous inversions of reasoning, and no less often to the abandonment of human compassion. In the same wooden craft where men and women were cast to their deaths so that merchants could claim on their insurance policies, others were forced to eat so as not to deny the opportunity for sale. Attempted suicides were dragged back on board and murdered for trying to cheat the merchant of his profit, as in the twisted logic of the officers and crew this was their prerogative alone. Sometimes a slave was killed as an example to the others not to rebel or disobey, or sometimes one of the crew's acts of torture simply went too far and a captive died.

At other times a captain coldly decided that it would be more profitable for the slaves to be dead than alive. The result of this peculiar mixture of an ancient labour form with modern economics, seamen were sometimes employed in the task of throwing slave men, women and children to their deaths for financial reasons. The rationale was simple: insured as merchandise at such institutions as Lloyd's of London, slave losses by drowning would be paid for by the insurers, but those lost onboard ship to sickness and disease were not covered. Naturally, the ones who did the work of throwing the men and women overboard were the seamen whose paid employ such reprehensible action encompassed, and whose own billet was not insured, being of a far more easily replaceable nature. It represented the ultimate in

---

46 Anon, *Extract of the Evidence* 45.
the reduction of human to commodity in the modern world, and illustrated to all the
crass sacrifice of Africans to Western riches.

By far the most well known case of live slaves being thrown overboard was
that of one hundred and thirty-two slaves thrown overboard from the Zong in 1781.
The ship had mistakenly missed its destination, Jamaica, and as sixty-six slaves (and
seven crewmembers) were already dead, and many of the others sick, Captain Luke
Collingwood gathered together the ship’s officers and proposed that they throw the
sick slaves overboard. Although James Kelsal, the chief mate, at first objected to the
plan, at length they all submitted to Collingwood’s suggestion, and began to separate
the sick from the healthy. The first day of the massacre fifty-four live slaves were
thrown overboard; the following day another forty-two followed them. On the final
day of the atrocity thirty-six more men and women slaves were cast overboard to their
death. Legend has it that one man survived by clinging to a rope when thrown into
the sea, climbing back aboard, and then disguising himself back among the remainder
of the ‘cargo’.

The jettisoning of goods, or murder? How did seamen see these events? It is
interesting that one commentator on the Zong case has written that when James Kelsal
was questioned at the trial he displayed an “almost Eichmann like” detachment from
the crime, stating that “he thought such orders enough warrant for doing anything,
without considering whether it was criminal or not.” Clearly even the chief mate,
ever mind the common seamen, considered that the orders of the captain should be
followed no matter what. Indeed they had good reason to believe this, for
obedience to the captain constituted mutinous behaviour, for which the Admiralty
court could try them. Defying the captain was indisputably an offence. Throwing the
sickly slaves of the Zong overboard, on the contrary, was an act of such legal
ambiguity that the civil courts were unable to come to a conclusion about it. The laws
of their nation unwilling to condemn their crime, whatever the economic claims of the
underwriters and merchants, the seamen had acted within the boundaries their job
mandated. There is of course irony in this, for these were men who so often
disobeyed the captain’s orders, whatever the consequences. Among reasons to rebel,
saving the lives of slaves obviously did not rank highly.47

47 Prince Hoare, Memoirs of Granville Sharp (London: Henry Colburn and Co., 1820) 236-247 and
Further incertitude in the seamen's reaction to such events is evident in other accounts. One passenger on a slave ship claimed to have heard “a sullen debate among the crew” about who would do the unpleasant job of throwing sickly slaves overboard after the ship ran short of water. Although some of the crew seemed reluctant to commit this act of murder, nevertheless most of the comments seem to have related to the imputed nastiness of the task—to the men being “squeamish”—rather than to any moral outrage.48 In a comparable case onboard the *Polly* of Rhode Island, the crew agreed with the captain, James DeWolf, that a slave woman with smallpox should be jettisoned so that the disease would not spread among the “Crew and Cargo”. Only those among the crew who had previously had smallpox were enlisted to assist in this activity, but all were adamant that they were behind the captain’s decision. Two crewmembers, Isaac Shortman and Henry Claning, later testified at St. Eustatius that “so far from having been accompanied by malice or wantonness or want of due consideration, the Captain and whole Crew were equally affected by the circumstance.”49 Not enough to make any attempt to save the woman’s life evidently.

The reality was that many a slave trade sailor too was ultimately thrown overboard to a burial in ‘Davy Jones’s Locker’. As their labour became a commodity to be calculated by merchants along with all others, seamen found that if they were no longer required as workers they too could be cast aside, if generally in a less murderous way than slaves. So for men with as little authority as the average tar employed on a slave ship, the act of manhandling Africans overboard to their death was conclusive proof that commodification had to be resisted at every opportunity, because its ultimate horror was that human life came second to profits. Freedom came to have real significance to these men in life and death terms rather than some notional theory, and hardly surprisingly, freedom, materially better living conditions, and the absence of corporal punishment became closely linked.

The fact that violence was central to the trade, as it was to all systems of slavery, was apparent in the crew’s very make-up. More than any other individual task, aside from those associated with sailing the ship, slaver seamen were hired to guard against rebellion when captives tried to cast off their slave status and reclaim

---

their ties of belonging. The need for security against such revolts was why slave ships recruited numbers of sailors far outweighing the needs of the ship, commonly carrying up to fifty percent more crewmembers than a non-slaver of the same size. David Richardson recently calculated that the additional wage cost involved in hiring extra men to defend against slave revolt accounted for eighteen percent of the total costs of the middle passage.\textsuperscript{50} This was another pivotal part of a slave trade sailor’s role, a planned for contingency rather than an incidental occurrence.

Sailors had to be competent to man the armaments that all slaving vessels carried against slave insurrection. A central part of the instructions issued to a captain from a shipowner usually focused on prevention against rebellion. Liverpool merchant Robert Bostock warned Captain Stephen Bowers of the Kite “to be continually watchful...to guard against an insurrection.”\textsuperscript{51} Captain Samuel Rhodes was counselled to “have a needful guard over your Slaves, and not put too much Confidence in the Women nor Children lest they happen to be Instrumental to your being surprised which may be fatal.”\textsuperscript{52} Merchant David Tuohy warned the officers of the Ranger in 1767 to have “white people under arms” guarding over the male slaves to not give them any opportunity to “rise on the crew.”\textsuperscript{53} Leading merchants Thomas Leyland and James Penny instructed Captain Charles Wilson of the Madam Pookata in 1783 to be “uniformly watchful to guard against Insurrections, as they always proceed from Neglect, and will inevitably ruin the Voyage.”\textsuperscript{54} Such warnings would have been especially important to merchants because underwriters would not insure against the loss of slaves as the result of rebellion.\textsuperscript{55}

Consequently shipowners equipped ships with vast amounts of goods designed to control their human cargo. When it left Liverpool in 1784 the Comte du Nord had “110 leg irons, 110 pairs of handcuffs” plus iron “collars, chains etc.”\textsuperscript{56} Other contemporary records list ships having blunderbusses and cannon ready to train on the

\textsuperscript{51} Liverpool RO 387 MD 54: Letter Book of Robert Bostock.
\textsuperscript{52} Quoted in Lorenzo J. Greene, “Mutiny on the Slave Ships” Phylon 5 (1944) 354-364.
\textsuperscript{53} Liverpool RO 380 TUO 4/2: Papers of the Ranger 1767.
\textsuperscript{54} Sydney Jones Library, Liverpool University Library, MS.10.47: Records of the Madam Pookata 1783.
\textsuperscript{55} See for example Cl 07/13: Papers of James Rogers, insurance on the Fly 9 October 1788, “The insurers free from any Loss or damage that may happen from the Insurrection of the Negroes.”
\textsuperscript{56} Liverpool RO 387 MD 62/1.
captives when they were in their quarters on the ship. When slaves were on deck either being fed or washed these precautions increased, so that "four or more [sentinels] were placed, with loaded blunderbusses in their hands, on top of the barricade, above the heads of the slaves: and two cannons, loaded with small shot, were pointed towards the main-deck through holes cut in the barricade to receive them." One historian has written that slave ships had "all the characteristics of a floating Alcatraz." Slave trade sailors were guards as well as seamen, prison warders as much as mariners.

This indeed was another of the reasons why sailors hated the ‘Guinea voyage’ above all other deep-sea trades. Thomas Clarkson estimated during the final years of British trading that between approximately one fifth and one quarter of all slave trade seamen would die during the course of a voyage. This is roughly backed up by modern estimates. Naturally the majority of this huge mortality toll can be attributed to the dangers of the sea, the harshness of their treatment, and especially their lack of resistance towards diseases that are endemic on the West African coast. Yet a considerable proportion more were killed in slave revolts. The Marlborough of Bristol was “cut off by the Negroes” sometime after leaving Bonny and all the sailors except two were killed. Onboard the King David in 1750 the captives rebelled as she neared the Caribbean, “and killed the captain and all the crew, except four sailors” who managed to sail the ship to Guadeloupe. The William from Massachusetts lost all but three members of the crew in a slave revolt. When the Rhode Island ship of Captain Bear had a rebellion all the crew was killed except the two mates who escaped by jumping overboard.

These are just some random examples of sailor mortality from the estimated ten per cent of ships that suffered slave revolts. African captives resisted their enslavement from the moment of capture, revolted against their sale to white traders,

57 Falconbridge, Account 6.
58 Riland, Memoirs 54.
60 Thomas Clarkson, Grievances of our Mercantile Seamen: A National and Crying Evil (Ipswich, 1845) 4.
61 Behrendt, in “Crew Mortality” estimates a rate of 17.8% died on Liverpool ships between 1780-1807, but this does not include the 254 ships that failed to return at all, 54.
64 Richardson, “Shipboard Revolts".

158
and attempted at all times to regain their liberty and return home. A crucial part of a mariner’s job was to endeavour to ensure that they were unsuccessful. Upon the Atlantic Ocean a vast, prolonged, and desperately fought battle intermittently surfaced as the captive Africans tried to overcome their reduction to chattel. The men in the front line against this battle, the waged servants of the same economic reductionism, were mariners.

What is more, they fought this battle savagely, often going beyond the merchants’ dictates. Fear of slave revolts imbued the whole slave trade with a sense of dread, feeding the brutality that anyway pervaded the trade to an almost unbelievable level. Slaves were harshly treated not just because they had rebelled, but because sailors feared that they would. The crew of the Rhode Island ship the *Rising Sun*, for example, on their guard because they had heard of two other American ships having slave insurrections while they had been on the African coast, severely whipped two slaves they feared were plotting to poison their rice. Onboard the slave ship *Nancy* as the trade entered its final year of legality, one sailor is reported to have “fired the Pistol….imagining that the Slaves were about to rise” while he was on watch on deck at night. “The next Morning one of the Male Slaves was taken from below dead, and thrown overboard, who had been shot by the Pistol which had been fired off.” The following night, again fearing that the slaves were just about to revolt, the same man apparently “stabbed another of the Slaves.”

In a separate incident, when a slave ship struck some shoals off Morant Keys, Jamaica, the crew abandoned her leaving the captive Africans shackled onboard. “When morning came, it was discovered, that the Negroes had got out of their irons, and were busy making rafts upon which they placed the women and children, whilst the men, and others capable of swimming, attended upon the rafts.” Fearing that they might rebel seamen shot all but thirty-three or thirty-four as they approached the shore.

The cruelty with which slave revolts were crushed by mariners also went beyond the mere quelling of rebellion, and was symptomatic of the fact that sailors regularly took the violence demanded by their employment and turned it into more personal sadism. Severe floggings were routine in cases of rebellion, and other more

---

66 Donnan, *Documents* III 400-401.
67 ZHC 1/87 258: Evidence of Hercules Ross.
creative, harsher punishments were also commonly seen. On one slave voyage
captained by John Atkins, a slave called Tomba was whipped as punishment for
insurrection, while the female slave who had provided him with tools for his revolt
was “hoisted up by the Thumbs, whipp’d, and slashed...with Knives, before the other
slaves till she died.”^68 Henry Ellison, who worked in the slave trade from 1758 to
1770, reported that he had seen a slave burned alive for rebelling.^69

An unnamed seaman gave the following account of a slave revolt onboard his
ship, the *Nassau*, and the way in which it was suppressed. The captives having
revolted one day while they were being fed, they chased the majority of the crew up
the rigging. However, the storyteller, the captain and another sick seamen were all
down below, and “each took a loaded piece and fired at the slaves as often as we
could, by which means many lay dead about the companion [deck], so that those
fettered with them could not get away, of course they also, attempting to get down,
soon shared the same fate.” After most of the Africans had retreated back below
decks to escape the firing, the doctor was ordered to search out the wounded, who, as
they would not fetch a good price at market, were made to jump overboard. The
supposed ringleader was “secured alone with irons on his feet and hands, his feet thus
seized to the ring bolt on deck, and the burton tackle from the mainstay hook’d to the
bolt of his manacles, and with that purchase so stretched or distended in a
perpendicular posture, as nearly to dislocate every joint in his body; in this inhuman
manner he was exposed naked to all the crew, and each at liberty to scourge him as he
pleased.” Even the seaman involved was prepared to attribute these actions to “a
disposition stain’d with blood, and a spirit blackened by revenge.”^70

The point is not that such events occurred on every slave ship, for clearly these
cases were uncommon enough to make it into letters home, newspapers, or even the
courts. But the trade did inculcate cruelty by its nature, and in so doing created a
setting in which such events would occur all too frequently. The subjugation of man
and woman to slave entailed a certain amount of physical suppression, but the ships
that operated the transatlantic slaving route created a form of inhuman oppression in
which evil could thrive. As John Newton put it, “the real or supposed necessity of
treating the Negroes with rigour gradually brings a numbness upon the heart, and

^68 Donnan, *Documents II* 266.
^70 *Pennsylvania Gazette* 21 May 1788.
renders most of those who are engaged in [the slave trade] too indifferent to the sufferings of their fellow created.”

In so doing, seamen’s actions to some extent ran counter to the economic motivations of the slaving merchant, as in their suppression of revolts, or punishment of rebelliousness, numbers of captives were frequently killed and wounded over and above what was required to quell the insurrection. For example, one hundred and ten captives died onboard a Rhode Island ship during a revolt; eighty were "forced overboard" during a rebellion on the Sally; onboard the Blakeney after a rebellion the doctor was said to be occupied taking “out the Balls from the Slaves.” As slave importer Munro MacFarlane wrote to shipowner James Rogers about the cargo onboard his ship Mermaid, “a good many of the Slaves lost their lives [in the revolt], & many of those who lived to be brought to Market had wounds in this bodies which gave an unfavourable impression.” Each scar, every wound, represented lost revenue to the merchant, and with every slave killed in quelling a revolt, their profit margins shrank.

A similar contradiction appeared in the treatment of slave women, for sailors hardly needed the authorisation of their employment to mistreat their female captives. It was partly because of their captors’ overtly masculine character that slave women simply had different experiences of the transatlantic crossing than their male equivalents. Demarked by their gender from the start, they were commonly left unshackled because they were considered good-natured or docile, and because it left them more at the mercy of the crew. Many of their experiences were wholly female. They conceived children, had miscarriages, gave birth, and had their children taken from them. The rhythms of life continued onboard a slave ship, set surreally against the looming spectre of death. Let the distress and sorrow of many be represented by the known few. Onboard the Liberty a woman died in childbirth, and the child surviving its mother was fed on flour and died two days later. A woman onboard the Hudibras had “an abortion” after being severely beaten. Another lost her nine-month-old child, who was flogged and burned to death, and then she herself was

---

71 ZHC 1/184 140.
72 Pennsylvania Gazette 28 May 1794, possibly the Ascuncion, Eltis CD-ROM 36570; HCA 15/55.
73 C 107/6.
74 House of Lords, Papers 1979; Riland, Memoirs 52.
75 William Butterworth, Three Years Adventures of a Minor in England, Africa, the West Indies, South-Carolina, and Georgia (Leeds: Edward Baines, 1822) 83.
beaten when she refused to throw the body overboard. Onboard the *Neptune* the boatswain requested permission to throw a six week old baby overboard because its crying disturbed him. The suffering was endless.

The sexual exploitation of women slaves subtly differed, in theory if not in nature, from the many other forms of abuse inflicted on the captive Africans transported across the Atlantic because it could in no way be said to have constituted part of the job for which seamen had been hired. It contributed towards the women’s degradation—certainly a central aspect of slavery—but did so outside of the prevailing necessity of providing unmarred commodities for market. The sexual abuse of women on slave ships was more a demanded perquisite of the job of seafaring than a depredation impelled by the fiscal drive of a merchant in his counting house.

The slave trade institutionalised violence, but this abased attitude towards women was part of all seafaring culture. It did not need the violence of the middle passage to legitimise it. Seaborne society—black and white, ruler and ruled—was devastatingly masculine in character. That the debasement of captive women on

---

76 ZHC 1/84 122-3: Evidence of Isaac Parker.
77 ZHC 1/85 558: Evidence of John Ashley Hall.
78 The women victims of these crimes undoubtedly suffered tremendously as a result of them, and the lack of evidence from the women themselves is not an excuse for falling back on the old adage that the rape of slave women was offensive to their male counterparts, who, unable to help, suffered a blow to their masculinity. Without doubting the horror and helplessness felt by male captives who could hear but not assist, such claims nevertheless remain woefully wrongheaded. It is a claim refuted by Catherine Clinton for the slave South, and can be safely extended to the Atlantic crossing. See Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress* (New York: Pantheon, 1982) 201. Nell Irvin Painter’s exploration of ‘Soul Murder’ is useful in understanding that whatever the men involved in the trade considered about the inevitability of such things, they also played an enormous role in the suffering of slave women. Painter lists a range of psychological effects that abused women today are known to suffer, including revictimisation, depression, feelings of isolation, poor self-esteem, and self-contempt, and poignantly notes that “it is doubtful that slaves possessed an immunity that victims lack today.” Nell Irvin Painter, “Soul Murder and Slavery: Towards a Fully Loaded Cost Accounting” in Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris and Kathryn Kish Sklar (eds.) *U.S. History as Women’s History: New Feminist Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995) 138; also Deborah Gray White, “Revisiting Ar’n’t I a Woman?” in *Ar’n’t I a Woman?* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999) 1-13. Many fewer women than men were transported as slaves to the Americas, chiefly, it would seem, because they were more in demand as domestic slaves within Africa, and therefore were sold to transatlantic captains in smaller numbers than men. This factor varied along the coast and over time, however. In the 1790s the Bight of Biafra supplied a high percentage of women to English slave ships. Herbert S. Klein, “African Women in the Atlantic Slave Trade” in Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein (eds.) *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983) 29-38.
79 It is an interesting comment on the gender stratification of the era that when two hundred and thirty-seven British and Irish women convicts were shipped to Australia in 1789, the *Times* of London announced that each sailor of the ship on which they were to travel was “allowed to select a mate” from among them to be his sexual partner for the duration of the voyage. In anticipation of the outcome, the government sent out sixty sets of baby clothes with the ship. Siân Rees, *The Floating Brothel* 103; *Times* 4 August 1789.
slave ships cannot be separated from their African origin is self-evident of course—
their racial designation accounted for their presence. What is equally clear, though, is
that the sons of Neptune generally appallingly treated women of all races and
ethnicities, and that such treatment was acceptable, even regularised, in maritime
culture. Certain deference might be distantly offered to the captain’s wife and
daughters, but common to eighteenth-century shore-based society, even this was not
founded in any notion of equality.80

As the evidence of sailors on shore in Africa also suggests, the abuse of
women was simply the norm. When coupled with the denigration that black skin
came to be associated with in the Atlantic setting, it was clearly considered even less
deplorable to violate African women than others. They were doubly damned, being
both female and dark skinned. Or perhaps they were thrice damned, for those who
had undergone excision of the clitoris or infibulation (the most common forms of
‘female genital mutilation’) before their sale doubtless suffered immense physical
pain if brutally forced to submit to sex, quite apart from the mental torment. That
seamen were frequently infected with venereal diseases that could cause infertility in
women just adds to the cataclysm that befell female captives.

It is notable that among men who have left their accounts of the slave trade,
even those who were among the most humane, unified by their having completely
opposed the trade after their preliminary involvement, reveal appalling ambiguity in
the treatment of women. Alexander Falconbridge claimed that “common sailors”
were only “allowed to have intercourse with such of the black women whose consent
they can procure” while “the officers were permitted to indulge their passions among
them at pleasure.” They were “sometimes guilty of such brutal excesses, as disgrace
human nature” he added.81 Pious John Newton, thought odd by his fellow mariners

The reactions to the few women who dressed as men and went to sea onboard slaving vessels are also
pertinent. When Hugh Crow discovered that one of his seamen was really a woman named Jane
Roberts, he declared her to be “a very beautiful young woman... landed with all possible gentleness.”
Although he was amazed that before her discovery she had drunk alcohol, chewed tobacco and sung
songs with the other sailors, he did not censure her behaviour. Hugh Crow, Memoirs of the late
Captain Hugh Crow, of Liverpool: comprising a narrative of his life, together with descriptive sketches
of the western coast of Africa: particularly of Bonny (London: Frank Cass, 1970) 60. The same cannot
be said, however, of Captain Potter of the Neptune, who, upon finding a woman amongst his crew
declared her to be “a scandal to her sex... and a wretch of the most abandoned morals.” Williamson’s
Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligencer 20 January 1769.

80 For an example of a slaver captain having his wife onboard, see Gentleman’s Magazine July 1737.
For this subject in general see Suzanne J. Stark, Female Tars: Women Aboard Ship in the Age of Sail
(Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996).
81 Falconbridge, Account 24.
for his sensibilities and fastidiousness, and who spent his time writing ardent letters back to his future wife Mary, wrote in his diary, “William Cooney seduced a woman slave down into the room and lay with her brutelike in view of the whole quarter deck.” He continued, “if anything happens to the woman I shall impute it to him, for she was big with child. Her number is 83.” Thus was the horror of a viciously raped pregnant woman reduced to the potential economic loss of a nameless number.

Well within the captain’s omnipresent power was the ability to sexually exploit the women he had purchased as his cargo. The captain of the Ruby apparently made a “general practice” of calling all newly purchased slave women to his cabin to sexually assault them. One young slave girl was chosen to stay in his cabin with him, but later he “whipped her so severely with the cat, and beat her so unmercifully with his fists, that she threw herself against the pumps.” She died three days later, at which time, “she had then been living with him as his mistress for five or six months.”

On the Scipio Captain Roach apparently “purchased a black girl for his own use.” Captain Evans of the Hudibras had two “favourites” among the women slaves, one of whom he named ‘Sarah’. Ottobah Cugoano wrote that a revolt onboard his ship was betrayed “by one of our own countrywomen, who slept with some of the head men of the ship” “It was common,” he remembered, “for the dirty filthy sailors to take the African women and lie upon their bodies.” Other fragments of historical record survive. The chief of the mutineers onboard the Polly, for example, “asked the Captain’s Girl for the Key of the Chest & Cask & took some Liquor out”. He used the alcohol to make the men swear allegiance to him. On the infamous ship the Brookes one night in the 1780s “a woman who lived in the cabin” supplied the male slaves with a knife so they could cut themselves out of irons. Embedded in the last two cases is evidence that women slaves were sometimes able to use their powerlessness to their own advantage.

---

83 BT 6/11; Dow, Slave Ships and Slaving 174.
85 Butterworth, Three Years Adventures 80.
87 HCA 1/58 ff. 107-8.
88 ZHC 1/84 86.
Common seamen did not of course wield the captain’s range of authority onboard. If Falconbridge’s comment above is considered to have any truth, then their sexual exploitation of the women was restricted, if for financial rather than humanitarian reasons. As John Newton’s diary entry infers, seamen were allegedly not supposed to have sexual relations with the slave women, not out of any concern for their well-being, but because it could detrimentally affect the price they would fetch at market. This, however, runs contrary to most of the evidence of the reality rather than the theory. That the sailors would consider the women to be sexually available was considered inevitable—a sop involving no financial outlay to keep these infamously rebellious men placid. Divisions of class origin separated the captain and his officers from his men, but in this they appear to have been united: slave women were ‘fair game’. Whether free black sailors had more scruples than their white counterparts is unknown.89

When seamen were prevented from reaching the slave women by the barricades designed to prevent rebellion they simply broke them down. Onboard the ship Mary in 1796 it was noted that “This morning found our women Slave Appartments had been attempted to have been opened by some of the Ships crew, the locks being Spoild or sunderd.” They did not all use such brute force though, some had more gentle means of persuasion. When the Antelope’s crew mutinied, for example, among their crimes was tearing up some of the Indian cloth in the cargo and distributing it “among the Woman Slaves on board the said Ship.” Access to slave women may even have presented a reason to try and ascend the power structure of the ship, by legal means or otherwise. When John Wynne “turned Pyrate” and took command of the Polly he mimicked the actions of a captain in ways other than dressing in his clothes, for by the time he went ashore at Prampram to try to trade, he took with him “his Girl.”92 That mixed in with this degradation were fragments of the same kind of lurid appreciation for black women that they had displayed on the

90 Donnan, Documents III 374.
91 HCA 1/58.
92 HCA 1/58 f.109-110.
African coast is suggested by the fact that on the *Recovery* the crew named one girl ‘Venus’.  

The complexities of such interaction, however, are illustrated by the fact that it was not only for sexual purposes that seamen sought individual relationships with female slaves. On occasion sailors also called upon the surmised gentleness and empathy of the women slaves. In times of sickness particularly, seamen sought tender nursing from the women. Young sailor William Butterworth was sent to the female slaves when he was sick, and likewise the chief mate of the *Ruby* “became sick and went to the steerage, among the women, for shelter.” Slaves were also used to ease the men’s workload. All seamen were expected to be able to make and mend their own clothes while at sea, opposing the usual on-shore designation of needlework as women’s labour. At least two men who had worked on slaving vessels testified to the Houses of Parliament that slaves had sewn clothing for them. Ali Eisami, who was sold to a slaving vessel after the British and Americans had legally abolished the trade, confirmed this. He later remembered “one of the white men...liked me, and would give me his shirts to mend, and then gave me food, he being a benefactor.” In a similar way female slaves were sometimes used in the preparation and serving of food.

********

The general picture regarding a seaman’s views of, and actions towards, those he was paid to transport to the Americas is therefore complex and enigmatic. In the overall scheme directed by merchants in London, Liverpool, Bristol and Rhode Island, slave trade seamen were employed not just to ensure that the ship sailed successfully across the seas, but also as central participants in the creation of slavery. Their non-seafaring tasks were laden with this reality. Removing the captives’ clothing, shaving their heads, and shackling them were rituals through which the outward display of their identity and personality was stripped away in preparation for the transformation to slave. When they were whipped into dancing or singing, forced

93 HCA 1/61.
94 Butterworth, *Three Years Adventures* 90; Dow, *Slave Ships and Slaving* 175.
95 ZHC 1/85 45: Evidence of James Fraser; ZHC 1/85 582: Evidence of Alexander Falconbridge.
to eat or beaten for rebelling, the seamen who performed this work had authority over those who personal power and honour was to be replaced by the state of slavery.

Also inherent to many of sailors’ tasks was the truth that violent subjugation was central to the process of commodifying human beings. This was true of other forms of enforced bondage too, but in its transatlantic variant it coupled particularly uneasily with the pent up frustrations of those hired to oversee this transformation. Slave trade seamen were anyway accustomed to outright force in their working lives. The cat-o’-nine-tails was a perpetual presence onboard ship, governing their behaviour as much as the wages they would receive. Many slave ships went out equipped with a Letter of Marque that entitled them to capture enemy ships as prizes during war, which normally meant a deadly battle. Impressment into the Royal Navy, known as “uncle” to the men, was an omnipresent threat, and one which meant that they had to be ready to fight for their country. Tellingly, those who sought to defend the trade before the British Parliament in the late eighteenth-century argued that it was necessary because it was “a nursery for seamen” for the Navy. In other words—although clearly this is not what was meant—not only did it teach men the business of working a ship, it also brutalised them to prepare them for combat. Maritime society was harsh, and the men often ready to resort to physical violence. Within the demands of the slave trade was the opportunity to inflict pain on others, and to root their own lack of freedom in their allotted superiority over those even lowlier, or, to put it another way, for the flogged to flog. It was an opportunity many took.

Although the slave trade institutionalised violence, it should therefore be explicitly stated that despite the setting the actors remain culpable. We may ask how men tolerated such levels of depravity towards their fellow humans, and the answer to such a question may reveal something fearful in the human psyche, but nothing can excuse the individual acts that comprised the whole. Brutality and cruelty pervaded seamen’s lives anyway—these were men who were always swift to fight—and as in so many other cases and settings those who are cruelly treated became actively cruel. Economic expediency and the resort to abject cruelty found common cause somewhere in a Guinea seaman’s paid employ.

98 For example, ZHC 1/85 410: Evidence of Marriott Arbuthnot.
Yet the involvement of sailors in the 'production' of slaves for sale at market, or, to put it another way, in the commodification of human beings, caused them to value intensely their own notional freedom. It equated, what is more, to a feeling that their own brutal treatment at the hands of captains and mates was intolerable not only in itself, but because it symbolised slavery. Likewise, their poor conditions were hated because they represented a lack of the fruits of liberty. It is hardly surprising that sailors were at the forefront of battles for freedom around the Atlantic in the era when slave trading reached its peak, for they had seen up close what this asset, or rather the lack of it, represented in real terms. As Edmund S. Morgan argues in a different setting, men "may have had a special appreciation of ... freedom... because they saw every day what life without it could be like."99

********

For seamen life went on during the voyage to the Americas. Or at least it did for those fortunate enough not to succumb to pestilence and disease and be thrown overboard stitched into their hammocks. The journey was another part of their working lives, and the rituals of seafaring were not forgotten. On numerous slave ships sailors who had not before crossed the equator, or the Tropic of Cancer, were made to pay the usual penalty. This, according to Samuel Robinson of the Lady Nelson, was to "be shaven by Neptune's barber" because "the old god of the sea is constantly on the lookout for greenhorns, so that none can or dare pass till he undergoes the operation."100 William Butterworth on the Hudibras underwent a similar drama.101 Unsurprisingly, alcohol was also central to the process. Onboard the Florida, for example, the payment to Neptune was "a Bottle of Brandy, & a Pound of Sugar."102 We can only surmise that, as on the slaver Suffolk, this payment was "merrily drunk by all the rest that had been there before."103 The "8 new men" on the Duke of Argyle, by contrast, "reeved a rope at the main-yard arm in complyance with the customary form observed in crossing the tropicks."104 The middle passage was a

100 Robinson, Sailor Boy 25-6.
101 Butterworth, Three Years 14.
102 British Library Add Mss 39946.
103 Earle, Sailors 96-7.
crime against humanity, but those who were its humble, abused employees, sought to secure some degree of normality by keeping their maritime traditions afloat.
When they first sighted Barbados the sailors onboard the vessel carrying Olaudah Equiano into exile “gave a great shout, and made many signs of joy”. They had doubtless been eagerly awaiting the first indications of landfall for some time, all eyes staring excitedly to the horizon, impatient to spy the land that would bring the end of the danger-ridden middle passage. The ship’s officers shared this anxious expectation of land. After he had been sailing westward for around five weeks, Captain John Newton noted in his diary every day that he was avidly looking out for flying fish and sargasso as signs that land was near. Newton, like all others sailing before the 1760s, could calculate only inaccurately his longitudinal position and, in desperate anticipation, wrote that he “began to think long for the land” when it did not appear on the horizon at the moment he had predicted. Similar sentiments were shared by the slave ship surgeon who had written upon leaving Africa that he wished “never to think of these dread voyages more”, and now noted the “joyful sight of the Long wish’d for Land” as he glimpsed New York in the distance.

Common seamen had many reasons to be high-spirited as they approached the Americas, and not only because the treacherous voyage from Africa was almost completed. Contained in the whoops of glee was not just celebration of having

---

1 George Pinkard, Notes on the West Indies (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1806) III 356.
survived slave revolt, disease and shipwreck, but also the sailors’ delight at the
imminent arrival of their ‘liberty’. Soon they would be paid part of the wages owed
them, and would be free to spend this money on drink, food, prostitutes and general
rabble-rousing. They eagerly anticipated these times. During the transatlantic
passage, while the captives had fretted below decks as to their fate, sailors had dreamt
of the licence and licentiousness of the Americas as a way of enduring their own
privations.\(^5\) As they carried out the hated tasks of slave commodification, thoughts of
their own liberty sustained them.

The spatial and situational separation invoked in these actions was not,
however, consistent with the ongoing reality. By the late eighteenth century, the
islands where most British slave ships disgorged their human cargo were places where
dockside communities of free blacks, runaway slaves, soldiers who had deserted,
seamen, small-time merchants and dealers, and any number of other transient
characters lived side by side, ready to welcome the latest influx of rowdy tars with
money to spend.\(^6\) And the wild, giddy multiracialism of this world had a dark
underside. The willingness of sailors to interact with black men and women in the
Caribbean was not just a part of their wider cosmopolitan egalitarianism, but often
also a matter of necessity. Capitalist enterprise demanded an unassailable division
between slave and free—and certainly there was a profound difference in these two
states—but at the point at which sailors’ work to commodify Africans was deemed to
be completed, their own service to the trade was found to be rather in excess.
Whereas in pre-capitalist times a man was important in himself because he could not
be separated from his toil, many a sailor found that after the slaves had been sold his
contribution to the trade, his labour, was no longer needed. In the slave societies of
the American continent Africans were reduced to commodities, but at the same time
seamen faced the harsh reality of the commoditization of their own labour.

Of course the seamen’s position overall was far superior to the slaves they had
transported aboard their ships. The desperation of slave men to escape to sea and
work as sailors is more than ample evidence of that. A seaman benefited from
infinitely more opportunities and advantages than a slave. Nonetheless, sailors were

\(^5\) Samuel Robinson, \textit{A Sailor Boy's Experience Aboard a Slave Ship} (Wigtown: G.C. Book Publishers,
1996) 60.

\(^6\) Between 1776 and 1800 43.3% of the total slaves disembarking from British slave ships did so in
Jamaica (this figure includes those whose disembarkation place is unknown.) The next largest group
often in desperate situations if abandoned in the Caribbean, and in their time of need patronised slave markets and African health care workers, as well as living among the dockside community of countless runaway, manumitted and hired out bondsmen and women. Freedom hinged on the possession of white skin in the Atlantic plantation societies, but as seamen were increasingly finding in their homelands too, it also depended upon the possession of material wealth. This was something of which the average tar had very little. In fighting for freedom and justice, moreover, seamen sometimes found common cause with slaves, allying their campaign with those they had originally been paid to subjugate.

*******

If any single event symbolised chattel slavery it was not the long days toiling in the fields with no pay, nor even the scores of a whip upon a slave’s flesh, but the act of selling men, women, and children as if they were simply merchandise. Selling slaves cut to the very heart of slavery as an institution, for it illustrated their dual economic role as both capital investment and worker, and in reducing slaves to their value in these terms it took no account of them as people with personalities, families, religious beliefs and cultures. In many ways sale marked the nadir of the slave experience, so that when the institution of slavery had developed a whole ideology of justifying rhetoric in the antebellum American South, the paternalism of the slaveowners allowed no place for slave sale, even though it remained quintessentially important to their economy and society. The buying and selling of the slaves that arrived on British and American slave ships at the end of the eighteenth century made no pretence towards paternalistic notions, but instead in the impenitent manner of Caribbean slavery rested purely on economic reckoning. It was the ultimate estrangement for which the actions of the middle passage had aimed to prepare them.

As the islands that would be the scene of the Africans’ eternal exile hove into view, final attempts were therefore made to prime them for market. This did not, predictably, mean that any effort was made to reconcile them mentally to their fate, much less to try and ameliorate their suffering. Rather, these last minute preparations arrived in Grenada, at which 9.95 of the total number transported on British ships arrived. Eltis, CD-ROM.
revolved around ensuring the best possible price for them. More food was commonly given to slaves at this time, and as much water as could be spared. Some captains handed out rum, sugar and tobacco. While the captain and the surgeon advised, seamen primped and polished their goods so that they would fetch a good return for the investors. One observer, upon going onboard a Liverpool slave ship that had arrived in Barbados, noted “her cargo had been made up, for market, by having their skins dressed over three or four times with a compound of gun-powder, lime-juice, and oil.” This was done not only to make them look “sleek and fine”, but also to cover up their scars from “cra-cra” [yaws].

Such tactics were not rare. Slaves were prepared for sale just as a market trader might shine apples. When the two hundred and fifty surviving slaves of the Hudibras arrived in Grenada in February 1787, not only were they washed and rubbed with palm oil to make their skin gleam, the seamen were also engaged in outright trickery. As the cabin boy put it, “Those whom age or grief had rendered grey were selected, when, with a well-primed blacking brush, the silvery hairs were made to assume a jetty hue.” Others were employed in similar acts of deception, such as closely shaving and buffing the faces of the men to make them appear younger than they really were. One Liverpool captain boasted of having cheated planters over the sale of his “refuse slaves” who were suffering from dysentery by ordering the men to “stop the anus of each of them with oakum.” This deception was discovered soon after their sale, “the excruciating pain which the prevention of a discharge of such an acrimonious nature occasioned, not being borne by the poor wretches, the temporary obstruction was removed.”

Slaves who died during this period had to be disposed of as quickly and inconspicuously as possible, so that their death would not frighten off possible purchasers, fearing that disease would wrack their newly purchased possessions. Two young boys onboard one ship were put to work “under very arbitrary authority; and the quickest and simplest plan” was the one they favoured to do this work. Their

---

8 Silas Told, The Life of Mr. Silas Told, Written by Himself (London: G. Whitfield, 1796) 19.
9 Pinckard, Notes 1238.
10 William Butterworth, Three Years Adventures of a Minor in England, Africa, the West Indies, South-Carolina, and Georgia (Leeds: Edward Baines, 1822)132-3; Eltis, CD-ROM 81890.
11 ZHC 1/87 95.
scheme was to “fasten a rope round the body, lower the body into the water, fasten the rope around the stern of the boat, tow it ashore and bury it in the sand.” They justified this by the “disgusting” nature of touching a “naked mass” that had died from smallpox, and “the state of the subject to be disposed of.” Some tasks were more innocuous. When he was Fourth Mate of the Spy, William Richardson was sent onshore with a hundred of the healthiest male slaves “to give them an airing, but more with the intent of letting the planters see what fine slaves we had.” The slaves were so pleased to be free of their confinement that they “jumped with wild enthusiasm and pleasure into a pond so that they could wash.” Other seamen were involved in scrubbing down the ship, which was especially important if slaves were to be sold directly from the deck rather than being taken on land for viewing.

These final acts of commodification not only embraced the hopes and desires of merchants waiting anxiously for news of their investments, they also manifested a fundamental part of eighteenth century Atlantic slavery. Planters distanced themselves from the ugly, disreputable process of enslavement by considering the men, women and children they purchased in the American slave markets as previously commodified. In the rhetoric of the plantation economy, Africans were already separated from their humanity by the time they stood on the auction block. This was essential in the late eighteenth century markets not only because, as commodities, slaves’ bodies incorporated the fetishist desires of planters, but also because capitalism “recognizes no extra-economic differences among human beings.” Thus when sailors were involved in the final acts of Atlantic commodification, they were enacting part of the process which not only turned human being into commodity, but which rendered him or her less than human. It was a final act of shaping Africans into the particular kind of victims that were devoured by transatlantic capitalism and modern, racial slavery.

There was much about the arrival of ships at the slave markets, accompanied as this time was by the final acts of slave commodification, that revealed the ultimate difference in the condition of captive slave and ‘galley slave’, whatever the seaman’s

---

13 Robinson, Sailor Boy 102-3.
skin colour. In the slave markets of the Americas could be found an ultimate, irreparable nay-say to the seamen’s comparison of their own situation to slavery. The markets embodied the culminating crescendo of racism that the slave trade’s injustices endowed. No matter how much seamen may have suffered onboard ship, and more importantly how much they perceived they had suffered in comparison to the captives, the overwhelming majority of sailors would not be sold at market. Instead, when planters and merchants arrived to survey the newly disembarked chattels, sailors were on the side of free men, a final part of their current employment often being the guarding of slaves for inspection by prospective purchasers.

The divergence between slave and sailor upon reaching the Americas is evidenced by the terminology: one was sold into eternal chattel slavery, while the other regained his liberty. In contrast to the sailors who cheered with joy upon reaching Barbados, Olaudah Equiano wrote that he and his fellow captives were “all put under the deck again, [so] there was much dread and trembling among us, and nothing but bitter cries to be heard all night from these apprehensions.”16 They were right to feel such foreboding. Indeed, their suffering was not over when they were finally able to leave behind the disease-infested stinking slave rooms and escape the endless pitching and rolling of the ship, but rather entering a whole new phase. If the middle passage had been captivity, the time after sale was unqualified, backbreaking, murderous, demeaning slavery. Put another way, if the transatlantic crossing had been ‘purgatory’ for them, the islands they were about to be delivered to were the scenes of sheer ‘hell’.17

For sailors, by contrast, arrival often proved well worth the wait, at least initially. Samuel Robinson wrote that for him and his crewmates this time “was a turn of fortune we durst hardly dream of.” Robinson was rhapsodic about the fresh food available when his ship reached Carlisle Bay, Barbados, writing that “no language…can at all describe the luxury of the feast, no one can feel it till he has been for many weeks under a vertical sun fed on salt junk and mouldy biscuits, and stinking blue water to drink” [emphasis in original]. “To have fresh meat, with an

16 Equiano, *Interesting Narrative* 222.
17 This phraseology was used by Father Laurent de Lucques, who travelled on a Portuguese slave ship and wrote, “I don’t know if we should characterize that ship as hell or purgatory.” He decided on the latter, as “Hell, apparently, would begin for the slaves after the ship reached Brazil.” Robert Harms, *The Diligent: A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) 314.
unlimited supply of sweet wholesome water” he recalled, was all he could have wished for.18

Such benefits, however, often proved ephemeral. While a sailor’s position as a free man was immeasurably better than a slave’s in the larger picture, there was certainly not much to envy in many seamen’s circumstances after they arrived in the Caribbean. This is not to compare the sufferings of slaves with those of sailors—certainly a dubious venture if viewed with retrospection—but to place in context the different kind of scourges inflicted on the two groups by this particular branch of Atlantic commerce. Slaves were required to be less than human commodities, who could be “pent up together like so many sheep in a fold” at market, where they would be “obliged to go through every sort of motion” by the prospective purchasers “to try their flesh and soundness.”19 Sailors, by contrast, were neither considered to be bodily commodities, nor less than human. What the slave trade did do to seamen, however, was to wilfully display in its fiscal rationale that their labour was purely a commodity. After the middle passage, their toil no longer required, seamen were “turned adrift to get, steal or starve” after the slaves had disembarked.20

Thus the tragedy for those who had been sold as slaves was that they were now an investment, an economic reckoning. The (albeit gravely lesser) tragedy for seamen was that they, or rather their labour, no longer were part of this calculus. Some of the men who had been employed to commodify captive Africans found that the commodification of their own labour, which they fought so boldly against, literally left them marooned once the job of shipping slaves to the Americas was completed. Sailors had been fighting against this all around the Atlantic rim since at least the early eighteen hundreds, but by the last decades of the century the battle was practically lost, and many of the negative consequences of this caught up with men who were abandoned from slave ships after the middle passage.21 Scores of seamen had outlived their usefulness to their employers, and could be hastily discarded.

---

18 Robinson, Sailor Boy 96.
Unlike under pre-capitalist working relationships, in late eighteenth century long
distance trade a person was only useful because of the labour he provided, the
employer acknowledging no greater responsibility to the actual person performing the
toil.

There were a number of reasons for captains to divest the ship of some of its
crew in the Caribbean. Just as in Africa, some ships were wrecked, damaged, or
condemned as unseaworthy upon arrival in the Americas. Other vessels were sold
purely because they had succeeded in making the voyage the merchants had desired,
and with the slaves sold they preferred to convert the ship into ready cash. At other
times the ship let the seamen go because it would be so long before it was ready to
sail homeward. The captain of the Florida, for example, “discharg’d most of his
hands” after arriving in St. Johns, Antigua, “because he could not get his Cargo of
Sugar onboard till the ensuing Crop.”\(^{22}\) Letting one crew go and hiring a new, smaller
one when the ship was ready to sail again meant that only a skeleton force had to be
paid while the ship was docked, when few hands were needed. In addition ships that
had been taken by an enemy privateer sometimes took their captive seamen to the
nearest Caribbean isle. For all these reasons, seamen often found themselves in the
West Indies without an organised passage home, and often with little means of
support.

On many other occasions, however, seamen were discharged from their ships
quite simply because far fewer crewmembers were needed for the journey back across
the Atlantic than for the middle passage. With a cargo of slaves safely delivered to
the Americas, it no longer mattered to the merchants in their offices in Liverpool or
Rhode Island whether some of those they had shipped as crew lived or died. The
work they had been employed to do had been concluded. Just as Liverpool merchant
Thomas Leyland was pleased that his ship the Enterprize was wrecked at Annatto
Bay, Jamaica after arriving with its human cargo, once the middle passage was over
seamen too had accomplished what they were required to do. Merchants like Leyland
spared no thought for their future.\(^{23}\)

Logically the economic principles of the trade suggested that the men no
longer needed, were simply paid off so that they could look for a new employer

\(^{21}\) Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (London: Cambridge University Press,
1987) 75.
\(^{22}\) British Library Add Mss 39946.
onboard another ship. But in the disreputable, squalid world of slave trading, the end of a seaman’s economic usefulness often took on an altogether darker hue. There was considerable incentive not to pay seamen off in the recognised manner, but to abandon as many excess men as possible after the slaves had been sold. This is reinforced by evidence that some officers were abandoned against their will in the West Indies, so firmly challenging the image of seamen who had been legitimately paid off, and were forced into destitution after squandering their wages. Officers who were abandoned in this manner wrote to their employing merchant to protest at having been forsaken, and if this was their fate it was surely one far more commonly suffered by Jack Tar. William Linley, the surgeon of the Fame wrote a letter to merchant James Rogers protesting that he had been left on shore in Kingston, and pleading that he did not know the reason. “I am certain I did more than my Duty as surgeon on board,” he plaintively beseeched. He was not without resources however, for he succeeded in getting the chief mate of his ship to witness before an attorney that he had been cast aside with no support. It would seem that the merchant’s influence could often be brought to bear in cases where officers had been abandoned. In 1731, slave merchant Humphrey Morice wrote to Captain Keate, chastising him that his “Conduct in turning yr Chief Mate ashore in an Island beyond the Seas, is obvious & notorious to the whole world, & cannot be justified.”

For common seamen clearly there was no chance of winning the merchant’s sympathy if they were ejected from the ship in the West Indies. On the contrary, this was an accepted, even demanded, part of a slaving voyage. Liverpool slave merchant David Tuohy specifically told Captain Alexander Speers to get rid of any men that he found unacceptable, but not until after the slaves had been sold. In 1761 the investors in the voyage of the Tyrrell told Captain William Hindle, “By the time you get to the West Indies you’ll know who and which of your men are worth keeping, and who are not.” The implication, of course, was that they were not expecting all of the men who left with the ship to return with her, quite apart from the high mortality that normally ensued among seamen onboard slave ships. William Richardson’s description of events after his ship arrived in Jamaica is telling.

21 Liverpool RO 387 MD 59.
24 C107/5.
26 Liverpool RO 380 TUG 4/6: Papers of David Tuohy.
27 Liverpool University Library: David Davenport Papers, MIC 392.
“Having got clear of the slaves,” he wrote, “our captain now began to get clear of those of the ship’s company that he did not like.”

This fiscal dividend consequently intersected with other facets of a sailor’s woes—his maltreatment onboard ship, and particularly the poor health many seamen were in by the time they reached the slave disembarkation ports. Those who were sick might be retained aboard at the African coast because they were still needed for the westward journey across the Atlantic, but ruthless captains saw little reason to keep them when that voyage was completed. Seamen often were put off the ship not so much for their own recovery, but simply to dispatch them from the muster roll. Men being abandoned from slave ships became the rule. It “was not uncommon for the masters of Guinea ships, a few hours previous to their sailing, to send on shore their lame, ulcerated, and sick seamen, and leave them behind, where they must have perished but for the humanity of the community of Kingston” remembered one observer. It was, in fact, such a common practice that it became “a very great nuisance to the community at Kingston”, to the extent that a law was passed stopping captains from doing this, or making them liable for the costs of keeping their seamen so left behind.

Many of those who travelled to the Caribbean islands during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries related that seamen congregated around the docks in an appalling state of health, often having previously been employed onboard slaving vessels. Commonly called ‘wharfingers’ or ‘scowbankers’, these men were a visible section of Caribbean society. They loitered around the waterfront in all the major disembarkation points, “sick on the harbours with legs swelled” as one observer recalled. Another man told of seeing such men at Roseau, Dominica, and again while his own vessel was in careenage at Grenada. At the latter, he stated, “there were seven men from onboard a Guineaman that was lying there, they were exceedingly emaciated and full of sores.” Sailor James Morley reported yet another name for such indigent men that existed around the Caribbean’s ports. They were also known as ‘beach homers’ he related. A man named Thomas Clappeson claimed before the parliamentary committee investigating the slave trade that he had been a

28 Richardson, Mariner of England 65.
29 ZHC 1/87 259.
30 ZHC 1/84 134-5.
31 ZHC 1/87 134.
32 ZHC 1/84 162-6.
wharfinger in Jamaica for many years stretching between the 1760s and 1780s, earning a sporadic income by working as a pilot for arriving ships.33

Certainly many slave trade sailors were suffering awfully by the time they arrived in the islands. John Ashley Hall, who worked as a mate on the *Neptune*, described the seamen disembarking from slave ships after their transatlantic voyages as “the most miserable objects I have ever met with in any country in my life.” He recalled that he had “frequently seen them with their toes rotted off, their legs swelled to the size of their thighs, and an ulcerated state all over.”34 It was the same story for those who arrived on the American mainland. George Baillie, a merchant and planter in South Carolina and Georgia reported that seamen arriving on slave ships had often “received great injury in their health; as might be seen from their squalid countenances, and ulcerated limbs.”35 Even the Royal Navy, notorious for being extremely avaricious in its endless demand for workers, sometimes refused to take men arriving on slave ships. One naval captain stated that often they were simply unemployable, and described them by saying, “besides their cadaverous looks, they were the most filthy vagabonds I ever saw.”36

Such sentiments are backed up by statistics from West Indian hospitals. In Kingston, Jamaica, where 60.1 per cent of British slave ships delivered their captives in 1790, sailors constituted eighty four per cent of hospital in-patients the following year.37 The treatment in such hospitals was rather rudimentary, and lives were lost there as often as saved. Those suffering from malaria and yellow fever found that little could be done for them, and indeed these two diseases were not distinguished as separate conditions in this time period. Chinoma bark, from which quinine is derived, was known to be a relatively effective treatment for malaria, but when it was mistakenly used to treat a yellow fever outbreak in Grenada in the 1790s, with obvious failure, opposition to its use grew. Doctors fell back on the old practice of

32 ZHC 1/87 207.
33 ZHC 1/85 521.
34 ZHC 1/84 182.
35 ZHC 1/84 12.
36 Eltis, CD-ROM; Julius S. Scott III, “The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the era of the Haitian Revolution” (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 1986) 61. There was a total of 301 seamen in the hospital in that year, the next highest proportions being 21 people who worked on plantations, 8 merchants, 7 shopkeepers and 5 blacksmiths. They shared the wards with 1 tavern keeper, 1 sail maker, 3 hairdressers, 1 rat killer, 1 "bird-teacher" and 2 tailors. Interestingly, only one soldiers appears on the list, so presumably there was a military hospital elsewhere on the island. Royal Gazette 19-26 January 1793.

180
bleeding, which was actually extremely harmful as malaria causes anaemia.\textsuperscript{38} The treatment for those suffering from dysentery was also woefully inadequate. Many who had hoped for freely flowing alcohol and female company instead endured fevers and bloodletting.

Countless other seamen arrived with the lacerations from their gashes and abrasions needing urgent care. A sailor onboard one American slaver bound to Savannah, Georgia, showed George Pinckard “three desperate wounds” he had received during a slave revolt, inflicted by a rebel slave swinging an axe which previously had been used to decapitate the captain.\textsuperscript{39} Presumably seaman Thomas Davis was in critical need of treatment after losing a leg in a shark attack while he was employed on the slaver Nancy, which arrived in Antigua in 1775.\textsuperscript{40} In the same way, after a battle with another ship “in the latitude of Tobago” in December 1806, Captain Hugh Crow had his “wounded whites...carefully conveyed to the hospital” upon reaching Port Royal, Jamaica. Despite the care, some of them “prematurely paid the debt of nature” he wrote.\textsuperscript{41} Those who had been wounded in shipboard accidents or slave revolt, injured during privateer or pirate attack, or bore the scars of maltreatment, could probably expect less harmful nursing than those afflicted with some unidentified tropical pyrexia, but nevertheless they could still suffer from the frightfully low hygiene standards in hospitals. Although of course it would be ridiculous to claim that only mariners were detrimentally affected by the era’s health care inadequacies, slave trade sailors arriving in the Americas certainly justified the old adage that “Sea men are...to be numbered neither with the living nor the dead.”\textsuperscript{42}

Besides discharging crewmembers because of sickness, other underhand tactics were also used to reduce the wage burden of ships after the captives had been sold. Disenchanted sailor James Field Stanfield claimed that on a slave ship, both death and desertion among the crew were actively “encouraged.”\textsuperscript{43} If the former seems to be overstating the facts, it is clear that not all seamen, quite apart from

\textsuperscript{39} Pinkard, Notes 1236.
\textsuperscript{40} BT 98/35 197.
\textsuperscript{41} Hugh Crow, Memoirs of the late Captain Hugh Crow, of Liverpool: comprising a narrative of his life, together with descriptive sketches of the western coast of Africa; particularly of Bonny (London: Frank Cass, 1970) 105, 118, 128.
\textsuperscript{42} Rediker, Between the Devil 3.
Stansfield himself, perceived it to be so. An Italian sailor who became very sick after
the British slave ship he had sailed on reached Demerara clearly thought he was going
to be drowned. Two thirds of the crew were already dead from an unidentified plague
which, given the descriptions of men covered with mosquito stings, was probably
malaria or yellow fever. When “all those who could get away from the doomed ship
had fled for their lives,” the captain ordered two healthy sailors to take the Italian man
“to the wharf, where the hospital officials would take care of him.” The sick man
obviously feared a far worse fate, however, for when they tried to put him in the boat
he imagined that they had been ordered to drown him. “Never shall I forget the
imploring looks of those large black eyes, and the distracting cry for mercy of the
poor fellow”, remembered one who lived to tell the tale. So great was the fear in this
situation that the educated Samuel Robinson was reminded of Shakespeare’s poignant
description of life as “a tale, Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying
nothing.”

Most seamen realised that their fate was unlikely to be a watery death once the
slaves had been sold, but it is clear that many were “encouraged” to abscond. In fact
some captains speciously claimed that men had run away when in fact they had just
departed temporarily. Many of the notoriously capricious sailors simply ambled
around the harbours of the New World surveying their opportunities, looking for other
possible ships to sign upon, and enjoying all the things they had been deprived of
aboard. If they dallied for too long, however, they could soon be judged to have
deserted from their vessel. Some captains took advantage of a sailor’s desires to
enjoy life ashore, with one man claiming that captains often deemed that any man
who was away on land for more than forty eight hours had deserted, and would not be
let back onboard.

Many seamen undoubtedly did run for positive reasons when their ships
reached the West Indies. Because they commonly had been paid part of the wages
due to them at that point, this was a popular time for seamen to abscond.
Additionally, compared to the west coast of Africa, the islands were appealing and
agreeable to the average tar, and many felt that his life would be improved by staying.
Given the humble background most came from in their homelands, here was a chance

---

44 Robinson, Sailor Boy 60-2.
45 Jonathan Press, The Merchant Seamen of Bristol, 1747-1789 (Bristol: Bristol Branch of the
for a different life. Some sailors desired to stay but found themselves without the means to do so, like the unnamed sailor who spent three months on Antigua after his slaving voyage ended, and wished to settle, but was forced by his "indifferent circumstances" to sign on another ship.⁴⁶ Some had more personal reasons to stay—John Shutter, boatswain’s mate on the Daniel and Henry, married after the ship reached Jamaica.⁴⁷

Many more, however, as in Africa, ran to escape ill-treatment, to avoid being pressed into naval service, or because they feared that disease or slave revolt would afflict them onboard their vessels. Many were desperate enough to run with nothing, despite having “upwards of thirty pounds due” and having to leave everything, including their hammocks, onboard.⁴⁸ Whatever the reasons that caused seamen to desert—and positive and negative reasons were not necessarily exclusive to one another—it is clear that they were vastly less likely to be sought out and returned to their ship if they deserted after the slaves had been sold than if they fled prior to the middle passage. Although catchers sometimes tracked seamen in a similar way to which slaves were hunted down—in Virginia for example, captains offered a premium for seamen deserters—men from slave ships were unlikely to be tracked in this way.⁴⁹ Captains were unlikely to lament the loss of men they no longer needed for the voyage back home, but rather welcomed their desertion.

Because they wished to reduce crew numbers after the middle passage was completed, a ship’s officers, and the captain particularly, had little reason to curb their harsh behaviour toward seamen as they approached the West Indies. On the contrary, they had cause to encourage a terrible level of misery and despair among the hired hands. The excesses of the middle passage grew largely from the necessity of keeping men, women and children enslaved, and from breaking their spirit, but if a side-effect was that seamen were encouraged to run, minus their owed wages, when the ship reached the Caribbean, then evidently that was no negative thing in the eyes of the captain. Seamen, it was reported at St. Vincent, were “frequently so ill treated during the latter Part of their Voyage, that they are induced to run away from their

⁴⁶ British Library Add Mss 39946.
⁴⁸ ZHC 1/82 120; ZHC 1/82 85; Robinson, Sailor Boy 62, 97.
Captains could abuse with impunity, knowing that seamen were unlikely to find an island, or mainland, magistrate willing to listen to their complaints. Many, such as the man who upon arrival in the West Indies, “carried his shirt, stained with blood which had flowed from his wounds, to one of the magistrates on the island” often found little sympathy among the Caribbean’s judiciary.31

Sometimes in fact a captain would use the islands’ magistrates to take yet more sailors off his hands by having them imprisoned for trifling offences, which might have been otherwise overlooked had they not needed to reduce crew numbers. Robert Barker was imprisoned in gaol at Antigua after the first mate, whom allegedly had taken a violent dislike to him during the passage, claimed that he “had been in the rebellion in the North of England.” The gaoler tried to get Barker’s wages from the ship to pay for his keep, but was told that they had already been forfeited because he was guilty of mutiny.32 In 1786 three seamen were imprisoned in St. Vincent for refusing to obey the captain’s orders until they had received “some Refreshment” after completing the long voyage from Africa. This captain not only got rid of part of his crew in gaol, others were so disgusted at the inequity of this, they deserted without either their wages or their sea chests.33

Those who sat in judgement over alleged criminals in the plantation colonies were often themselves planters and slaveowners, or their close associates from the cream of white island society. Like judges in Britain they were predisposed to favour the captain over the common tar. Some men did succeed in having their captain “put into the Admiralty” for “some treatment that appeared to us a little too rough.” Captain Godfrey of the Rhode Island ship Hare, for example, was incarcerated in this way during the 1750s.34 The odds were generally stacked against them however. Those seeking justice for themselves or for their crewmates who they believed had died from mistreatment generally found little backing. Some of the men of the Lilly of Liverpool protested the death of one of their colleagues at the captain’s hands when the ship reached Charleston, South Carolina, but the accused was acquitted for lack of

---

31 Falconbridge, Account 43.
32 Robert Barker, The Unfortunate Shipwright, or Cruel Captain Being a faithful narrative of the unparallel’d sufferings of Robert Barker, late carpenter on board the Thetis Snow, of Bristol, in a voyage to the coast of Guinea and Antigua (London: Printed for, and sold by the Sufferer, 1760) 27-29.
33 Scott, “Common Wind” 140.
34 Elizabeth Donnan (ed.) Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institute, 1931) III 172.
evidence.\textsuperscript{55} When the men of a Liverpool ship also named \textit{Hare} tried to protest the alleged murder of the carpenter, carpenter’s mate, cook, and another seaman when they arrived in Virginia in 1761, their complaint was not even heard. They were “immediately ordered” back onboard, “or else to the whipping post.”\textsuperscript{56}

The truth for many white sailors was that although in some senses their skin colour gave them stature in the Caribbean—most importantly it protected them from enslavement and announced to all the free status of the owner—divisions of class also cut an extremely brutal swath through white society in plantation colonies. The impression fostered by the white minority flexing its (metaphorical and real) whip over the bent backs of enslaved African sugar workers rather concealed the fact that in Caribbean plantation society class cleaved almost as sure a division as race. Planters saw little commonality with poor white sailors—until the time of slave rebellion at least—and held them in contempt. Planters were, or more commonly aspired to be, part of the English gentry, and regarded with acute disapproval these men who so obviously did not live up to the definition of ‘gentlemen’.

This scorn and disapproval cut both ways. For seamen too, there was little identification with the \textit{grand blanc} way of life. In fact, in the very act of enjoying their ‘liberty’ of suffering their abandonment, sailors displayed an alternative moral and ethical code to that of powerful slaveowners, who aspired to be English gentlemen. Seamen were a large and visible part of the “masterless” class of men who roamed the Caribbean islands living their lives in opposition to the ruling class’s ethics. Despite having participated in plantation society through their employment transforming Africans into slaves, soon after arrival sailors quickly reverted to their true maverick, dissident lifestyle, and certainly did not fit quietly into the social structure that planters sought to impose. Sailors did not dwell on vast plantations with servants and riches, but were much more commonly found lying in the dives and dens around the harbour. Jamaican newspapers reported with disgust the “riotous and disorderly” conduct of sailors in the island’s ports, who displayed their anti-authoritarianism in the Caribbean just as they did in North America and Europe.\textsuperscript{57}

In seeking to restrict the excesses of the seamen, slaveowners instituted laws that reveal all too clearly the way in which the ties of class cut across those of race.

\textsuperscript{55} ZHC 1/87 29-30.
\textsuperscript{56} ZHC 1/87 29.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Royal Gazette} 7 July 1792; quoted in Scott, “Common Winds” 62.
As Julius S. Scott phrases it, “in every island colony, town guards, workhouses and other instruments of social control designated primarily to regulate the enslaved majority were used to keep sailors in check.” In Grenada, for example, the 1789 Police Act aimed to control the entertainment of male slaves, free blacks and sailors, who, if “found in gaming houses could be imprisoned for two to fifteen days, and such individuals who were found on the streets between 9:00 P.M. and 4:00 A.M. without a lighted lantern risked being taken to the guardhouse until the following morning.” The militia in Kingston, Jamaica, whose main purpose was slave control, frequently had to be used to restrain rowdy sailors in the town.

Planters’ difficulty with seamen was not just that, in their view, they disgraced the image of white men, but more importantly that they interacted with slaves and free blacks in ways that they considered to be far too free. Although his comments were made with no sense of censure, the words of small time Irish merchant James Kelly are instructive. He wrote “Sailors and Negroes are ever on the most amicable terms,” enjoying “mutual confidence and familiarity.” They had, he said, a “feeling of independence in their intercourse”, leading him to the oft quoted declaration, “in the presence of the sailor, the Negro feels as a man.” This was clearly anathema to the plantation aristocracy, who lived by a set of values based directly on notions of racial supremacy. As Kelly’s words reveal, this was simply not replicated among the poorer, itinerant population in the urban areas around the ports. The near-absolute division of black as slave and white as free, rendered by the slave markets, was part of the fiction of the planters’ delusive worldview, just like the conception of slave as uncomplicated commodity. The reality was that all around the harbours of the West Indies runaway slaves, free blacks, sailors, soldiers, and a host of other indigents of indeterminate legal freedom lived side by side with a degree of equality that dismayed slaveowners.

It is hardly surprising that the sailors from slave ships, despite having taken part in the process of enslavement through their employment, would joyfully embrace this subversive culture. Most would have recognised its code of beliefs and the make-up of its population as a variant of that in Britain’s port cities. Further, far from living lives separate from Africans other than as coerced sexual partners and domestic servants, as planters did, sailors in the slave trade worked alongside men (and sometimes women) with black skin at every stage of their journey. Just as in Africa and less frequently during the middle passage, the circumstances that prevailed when slave ships docked in their New World disembarkation ports brooked no absolute divide between black and white. Personal acquaintance between European slaver seamen and black maritime workers continued in the West Indian ports of call just as it had in Africa. Soon after arrival in the Americas additional workers were hired from the dockside community to assist with the work onboard slaving vessels.

Men were needed in exactly the same roles as free Africans had been hired before the ship crossed the ocean. When the Lady Nelson arrived at Jamaica in 1803 she hired a pilot to see them through the “sandbanks [that] lie along the coast” and guide them safely into Port Royal. Samuel Robinson later wrote of this man that he “could not help taking stock of the face of the black beauty...his nose as flat as a pancake...high cheek bones and a long chin; ears like saucers, but with lovely eyes and teeth.” Later the ship also engaged two black men who looked after the sick slaves, and buried the dead. At least six further men were also hired to do general ship duty. Likewise the Liverpool slaver Fortune which arrived in New Providence, Bahamas in 1805 with a cargo of 343 slaves, hired a number of local men to supplement the already huge number of seamen onboard. The man named “Doctor O Rourke” who was paid “for his attendance on Slaves from 28 April to 31 July and taking care of Slave Yard and Slaves from 31 Mar to 20 May 50 days” was almost certainly European or of European descent, but those paid to do more menial and less prestigious work were listed in the account book simply under the heading “Negro hire” or “Negroes on shore.”

The slaver Sally, under the command of Captain John Mortimer, was forced to hire additional carpenters in the Caribbean to make the ship seaworthy for the journey home. It proved rather a wasted effort as a Spanish privateer captured her before

---

62 Robinson, Sailor Boy 100, 104, 114-5.
reaching Liverpool. Another ship of the same name that had sailed from the same port a year earlier recorded “Two Negroes employed scraping” on 14 November, and then “Got 6 Negroes to work on board” on the 24th of that month. Although all these examples come from the final five years of legal trading, the hiring of black men in the West Indies to assist the crewmembers was not a new practice. The Anne, which arrived in 1725 hired a carpenter for eight and a half days because their own was too sick to work, then hired a canoe and some black men for two days, plus another four Afro-Caribbean men six and a half days to help with unloading and reloading the ship. They were all paid standard wage rates.

Evidence as to how European seamen directly interacted with such latterly hired men is scanty, not least because after departing from their ships, seamen left, temporarily at least, the larger capitalist world, and so tend to also leave the historical record. We can surmise that Afro-Caribbean maritime workers were treated with the same kind of rough and ready, caustic egalitarianism with which humble seagoing men generally dealt with their black fellow travellers. Certainly many of the notions that had led seamen to conceive their African co-workers as rather outlandish people were tempered by the fact that most Caribbean blacks knew at least a smattering of English. As in Britain, witnesses noted the multiracial disposition of the seafaring community. One European observer in the West Indies noted that the good relations between sailors and slaves “were proverbial.”

There was certainly much interaction between sailors and slaves, both those who were directly involved with arriving crews and those who were not. One seaman, when employed on a merchant vessel named the Cotton Planter, [not a slave ship], took beef and ships’ biscuits to slaves on plantations while the vessel was in harbour at Grenada. In return they invited him and some of his fellow tars to join in their entertainments. “I never in my life was happier” wrote the seaman, “I esteemed them in my heart.” On the other hand, sailors seeking extra food provided an important market for the produce that slaves cultivated on their own private provision

---

64 Liverpool RO 387 MD 44: Accounts of the Lottery; Eltis, CD-ROM 81497.
65 Merseyside Maritime Museum, DX 1150.
grounds. They were happy to attend slave markets and barter for these foodstuffs in a way that rich white planters would certainly not have condescended to do. Every culinary exchange between sailor and slave was part of a much bigger saga in which, as a direct result of the trade in slaves, crops, fruits, vegetables, and knowledge of cultivation were transferred and popularised around the Atlantic rim.69

Besides conveying foodstuffs, seamen also tested traditional medicine in their various ports of call, and occasionally even sought respite and nursing among the female slaves during the middle passage. In keeping with this belief that black women could be trusted to show them care and tenderness, some sailors who arrived sick on slave ships entrusted themselves to local health care. Samuel Robinson, who had injured his ankle during his voyage, was put “under the care of an old lady, in a street called Rum Lane”. This woman worked as a kind of makeshift doctor who also had an income from her daughter, “a very pretty, handsome young woman” who lived as a ‘temporary wife’ to visiting planters, naval men and soldiers.70 Another man who had injured his leg during the passage across the Atlantic first of all arranged care with “a black woman, who ranked as a doctress” before cajoling his captain to arrange for hospital treatment for him, where he was kept company by twelve other sailors.71 It is of course entirely possible that such women provided care equal too, or greater than, that of the island hospitals. Contemporary western medicine frequently may have proved inferior to traditional cures.

Occasional evidence remains of how individual relationships between black men and slave trade sailors developed: yet again, they grew out of, as well as in spite of, the trade in human cargo. One of the slaves onboard William Butterworth’s ship had been used as an interpreter between the captives and the crew and had informed on a slave insurrection. This man, who was known as Bristol, was expecting to continue on with the vessel and crew to England, but instead was duplicitously sold when the ship reached Grenada. When Butterworth subsequently visited the island on

69 Richard B. Sheridan, “Captain Bligh, the Breadfruit, and the Botanic Gardens of Jamaica” Journal of Caribbean History 23:1 (1989) 28-50. Robert C.-H. Shell paints a similar picture of Cape Town in the decades after 1770, when market gardens manned by African slaves provided produce for passing seamen. “While the male slaves around the port labored outside to produce and deliver vitamin C for the sick seafarers, the female slaves in the ubiquitous boarding houses ministered to the needs of the revitalized sailors and officers. Again, the result was to concentrate young slaves in and around the port.” Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1838 (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994) 168.
70 Robinson, Sailor Boy 110-3.
71 Butterworth, Three Years 144-5, 148, 152, 157.
another journey, he tried in vain to find out why Bristol had been sold at Grenada, perhaps in memory of the assistance Bristol had given the seamen on the earlier voyage. He also met up with Bristol and another of the Hudibras's slaves while on the tiny nearby island of Carriacou. They apparently wished to talk with him for a little while, having “come from Africa in the same ship.” Although he failed to help Bristol right the wrong done to him, it would seem nonetheless that Butterworth’s loyalty to the man they called Bristol lasted far beyond the transatlantic crossing. Perhaps he could identify with the fact that the ship’s officers had tricked the African, because it was a fate—if with a different consequence—that all seamen feared.72

Furthermore this affinity between seamen and slaves apparently was reciprocal. Several commentators claimed that when the destitute seamen known as ‘wharfingers’ or ‘scowbankers’ died, slaves took care of their final worldly affairs by carrying their bodies off for burial. Henry Ellison, who had worked onboard a slave ship, reported that he had seen dead seamen being carried away by blacks while in the West Indies, to be buried at a site he named only as “Spring Park.”73 Ninian Jeffreys, who had resided in Jamaica, also recounted that when wharfingers died they were carried away and buried by slave men. The slaves simply termed these sad, broken sailors “poor Buchra” men, he related, and he insisted that they performed the interments of their own accord, not at the biding of their masters.74 This is debatable, and cannot be verified, but nonetheless it is probable that some men who had worked on slave ships as sailors, at the end of their lives, had words spoken over their graves that had their origins in the African continent.

Of course seamen’s collective identity stereotypically involved looking for ‘women in every port’, and along with alcohol and entertainment, they certainly sought female company among the Afro-Caribbean dockside communities around the West Indies. Sailors’ demands created a fringe industry, as some slaveowners allowed or forced their female slaves, especially young, attractive, light-skinned ones, to work as prostitutes, and sometimes sent them out to ships to earn money in this way.75 In Barbados several taverns run by free black women became famous among sailors. They provided alcohol and lodgings for common seamen, as well as being “houses of debauchery, a number of young women of colour being always procurable

72 Butterworth, Three Years 109-110, 425-7.
73 ZHC 1/84 372.
74 ZHC 1/84 244.
in them for the purposes of prostitution.” Often these women were slaves of the tavern owner. These female publicans, furthermore, were certainly not without power and authority, and it should not be assumed that the seamen were necessarily in the dominant position.

Unquestionably this was one area in which seamen’s ideas of leisure were not very different to that of the Caribbean’s white slaveowners and merchants, the vast majority of whom were male. Planters too appropriated, with various degrees of coercion, the sexual favours of slave women. Yet even while sharing this same tendency, the gap between seamen and slaveowner was still apparent. Planters exercised a different level of public admittance and disparity of influence than the seamen did in their dalliances. The former tried to keep their sexual activities with black women somewhat covert, hidden at least from polite society. Jack Tar bellowed about his to all who would listen, bragging about his sexual prowess with women of African origin just as he did with women of all other ethnic backgrounds. Such encounters in port were a part of his identity. Moreover, while sex was undoubtedly a commodity to sailors, black women themselves were not bodily commodities in the same way that they were to merchants and planters. Egalitarianism towards females, and especially black females, is not part of this picture, but what is clear is that sailors’ interaction with slave and free black women was of a different nature than planters’ sexual encounters with such women. It probably included relatively settled relationships with women of colour. It is possible, for example, that John Shutter’s Jamaican wife was of African descent. Certainly on that island “coloured births were most common among slaves employed on wharves.”

So, mingling freely with blacks in taverns around the harbour, Jack enjoyed his liberty just as he did in all other ports of call. He procured the company of women, drank to excess, and not infrequently got into alcohol-fuelled brawls. Basically, he lived up to—or rather down to—the common, stereotypical image of the drunken sailor with a woman in every port. But while the average sailor did not

78 Tattersfield, The Forgotten Trade 57.
79 Quoted in Rediker and Linebaugh, Many-Headed Hydra 321.
modify his usual onshore behaviour while in the Caribbean, the implications of his actions cut deeper there than elsewhere because authorities in the Caribbean had graver reason to fear seamen’s disobedient nature than most. Plantation society’s rule was rather tenuous, and depended precarious on hard line definitions of racial superiority. Numerically far weaker than those they ruled over, planters needed to believe that sailors would bolster their rule in times of need, most significantly in the event of slave rebellion.

In fact sailors occupied an unpredictable role in eighteenth century Caribbean history, for they vacillated between bolstering the minority white power on the islands, and themselves being a feared force of subversion. They were, to use a suitable combat metaphor, rather loose cannons. In 1733 it was reported in the English news that rebel slaves had been “driven into the Mountains by a Body of Sailors sent after them”. Forty slaves and eleven sailors were killed in the fight.® In all likelihood seamen often supported white control of slaves in many unrecorded, extemporized ways.

Yet they also sometimes showed ambivalence towards slave rebellion. Although the rumour that circulated during Tacky’s Revolt in Jamaica in 1760 was that the captain of a slave ship had first spotted the symbol of insurrection—a “wooden sword adorned with parrot’s feathers” which he surmised was “the signal of union [in] some part of Guinea”—common seamen were less diligent.® They were forced into the militia to put down the revolt, but, as a slave rebel declared, “As for the sailors, you see they do not oppose us, they care not who is in possession of the country, Black or White, it is the same to them.”® Certainly Thomas Thistlewood’s comments in his diary seem to suggest that most of the sailors who passed by his plantation as part of the militia were more interested in drinking and occasionally pillaging than in suppressing rebellion. On 26 May 1760, for example, Thistlewood recorded that while soldiers went after the rebel slaves, sailors stopped at his plantation to drink and “in the hurry” took a silver spoon.®

® Gentleman’s Magazine November 1733.
A similarly ambiguous picture emerges of seamen’s part in the Haitian Revolution. The *Gentleman's Magazine* reported that “about fifty” British seamen had joined some Americans who had gone to try and subdue the rebellious slaves in St. Domingue. Clearly some sailors were prepared to support the slaveowners. But this was a tiny percentage of all the seamen who potentially could have volunteered to go and fight the rebel slaves. Most chose to stay away. Julius S. Scott in fact claims that seamen working onboard slave ships were sources of information for blacks about the spread of revolutionary thinking in France, and abolitionism in Britain. A Frenchman who had lived in St. Domingue stated that merchant seamen were “the agents of the negrophiles” in France and, in keeping with their English counterparts, were “always together” with the local slaves, making the harbour a “cauldron of insurrection.” It seems likely that some English seamen also got caught up in this seditious exchange of information, especially as the French sailors, temporarily escaping the fighting across the sea, drank away their troubles in Jamaica’s waterfront taverns.

On a smaller scale too seamen showed ambivalent feelings towards individual slaves in the West Indies. Their relationship was one where they supported the weaker slave as the underdog, but also did not hesitate to brutally beat slaves if a fellow seaman, ‘honour’, or money was at stake. When a black sailor went on a bloody rampage in the late 1750s in St. Eustatius, he first stabbed a white man with whom he was working, then killed an English sailor he met walking around the harbour, whom he “instantly cut across the belly, so that his bowels appeared.” Following the stabbing of a man in a nearby draper’s shop, he ran back out onto the street and wounded “one or two others.” Clearly the man’s murderous rage fully incorporated, and was even triggered by, white seamen. Likewise, when the governor offered a reward for anyone who would take the man alive or dead, it was an English sailor who undertook the challenge, doubtless interested both in avenging the death of two of his fellow tars, and in the reward that was offered. The black seaman was captured and hanged the next day “upon a gibbet, in irons, alive, where he continued

84 *Gentleman’s Magazine* 62 (1792) 270.
85 Félix Carteau, *Soirées Bermudiennes, ou entretiens sur les événements qui ont opéré la ruine de la partie Française de L’isle Saint Domingue* (Bordeaux, 1802) 75-78; quoted in Scott, “Common Wind” 170.
86 Ibid 182.
in the greatest agonies, and shrieking in the most terrible manner, for near three
days."*

Yet sailors could undoubtedly also react in hot-headed ways to protect those
who were the 'underdog', which could quite easily incorporate slaves and free blacks.
These actions may not have been sustained by any larger ideological regard for those
being protected, and were more a sport, and a part of their collective impetuous, fiery
identity, than any dedication to multiracialism. The sailors onboard *HMS Proteus* for
example, defended a sick female slave who had come onboard their vessel to sell fruit
and was flogged by a slave driver arriving to collect her. A body of the men on the
ship “knocked him overboard” and he “sunk like a stone”, at which the sailors “gave a
hurra!” reported the ship’s cooper.*® Later this sailor reported that one of his
shipmates beat a slave driver who was thrashing a woman slave.*®

On other occasions still, sailors and slaves fed off each other’s rebelliousness
to oppose the authorities. The approximately twenty-one thousand sailors who
arrived in the Caribbean during the 1780s—of whom around sixty per cent arrived on
slave ships—formed a large part of the “Caribbean underground.”*®° Perhaps few went
as far as the Liverpool seaman Robert “Runwell” Barrow who fifty years earlier had
deserted from his slave ship in Antigua and gone to live among the maroons.®
But it is overstating to suggest that his case was unique. Bryan Edwards wrote of sailors in
Old Harbour, Jamaica, rescuing a runaway slave who was being pursued.*® Clearly
there were angles of both sailors’ and slaves’ protests against authority that could, and
did, converge.

The line between the two groups was most blurred, however, when slaves ran
away to sea to work as sailors. Ex-slave seamen bodily crossed the lines between
sailor and slave. This was perhaps the ultimate aspect of the paradox by which
interracial understanding was fostered by the slave trade on an individual level, while
its overall result was one of grossly exaggerated racial disharmony. Jeffrey Bolster
notes that all captive Africans who were transported across the Atlantic “came face to

* Gentlemen's Magazine February 1759.
*® Nicol, Life and Adventures 37.
*®° Scott, “Common Winds” 60, 135.
®® Bryan Edwards, British Library Add Mss 12413; quoted also in Morgan, “Encounters” 195.
"face" with seafaring skills. Olaudah Equiano who was free to wander the deck and "first saw the use of the quadrant", did not witness the secrets of European seafaring, but were cunning enough to learn the occasional word of a shanty, terminology or some seafaring colloquialism that would later allow them to talk their way into a shipboard position. Some of the ships they joined, moreover, were slaving vessels. That they indeed had been involved in the trade in Africans was something of a moot point by this time, for laden with rum and sugar, they were no more morally offensive to runaways than any other merchant vessel, and provided an important escape route.

So those who had been transported across the sea as captives to be sold as commodities, and their descendents, sometimes escaped to sea by using the knowledge they had picked up during the hellish crossing, and employing ships that had been employed in the repugnant trade in African flesh as the craft of their freedom. The irony did not end there, however, as in these acts black men incorporated themselves into the relatively unified body of mariners, and so increased the egalitarian tolerance of Europe’s tars through close contact. What is more, given white seamen’s willingness to help those at the bottom of society, their disobedience of authority, and their rebellious tendencies, it is probable that some of the slaves who escaped to sea onboard slave ships did so with the connivance of European tars. Many white crewmembers probably simply ‘turned a blind eye’ to Africans stowing away, or agreed to support a runaway’s claims to be a free man and an experienced sailor. Slaves who had not encountered maritime skills while being transported as captives from Africa could nonetheless easily learn enough applicable words or phrases to pass as a seaman if aided in his subterfuge by a sailor. All around the harbours of the Caribbean, where white sailors and blacks mingled freely, there were ample opportunities for men to build up the kind of affiliations through which such information could be shared. A European seaman’s pride in his nautical skills, his anti-authoritarianism, and his multi-ethnic worldliness—along with some tongue-loosening alcohol to create some drunken boasting—could easily present slaves a glimpse of an escape route.

94 Equiano, Interesting Narrative 221-4.
One of the paradoxes of slave commodification, therefore, was that those who had been employed to enact the process—in this case, seamen—could not see Africans as merchandise. In order to support the social order their economics demanded, planters needed to believe that slaves arrived at the marketplace formed into ready-made commodities, but sailors were not fooled by this fiction. Nineteenth century legal arguments questioning whether a slave had a will of his or her own would have been thoroughly nonsensical to those whose employment hinged on the possibility of slave insurrection. The notion that a slave would have no social capacity, but live solely through his or her owner were not appropriate in the hold of a slave ship, where there were no slave masters. While planters had yet to address the fact that a slave was a person with an individual will, and who could use it to reject their status as a thing, seamen had dealt with this since African captives were first loaded onto their vessels. It was what they had been hired to prevent, for each slave insurrection was a manifestation of their rejection of the status of slave, and a refutation of their reduction to commodity.

Over and above not engaging with the idea of an African as a commodity, after their shipboard duties were completed, seamen lived alongside runaway slaves and free blacks throughout the American disembarkation points. Whilst it is certainly a mistake to see inter-racial contact as necessarily revolutionary or egalitarian—the sending out of female plantation slaves to ships for the sailors’ sexual gratification was clearly neither of these things—nonetheless there was an element of equality to much sailor/slave interaction that both horrified and terrified the ruling planter classes. Like all people, seamen had shifting multi-faceted identities, and this meant that they regularly applauded the rebelliousness of slaves once they were no longer held accountable for any who escaped. Black seamen, as Bolster argues, were “racial go-betweens straddling black and white worlds”, and white sailors too appear on
occasion to have interacted with Africans with surprising parity. Again the example of Olaudah Equiano is pertinent. As a young boy, he had feared the sailors that worked the vessel carrying him into exile, but later was treated “very kindly” by other tars when he joined the crew of the *Industrious Bee* in Virginia after learning to “smatter a little imperfect English.” This experience he wrote, was “quite contrary to what I had seen of white people before; I therefore began to think that they were not all of the same disposition.”

The heady days of Caribbean piracy might have been long gone, but the spirit of rebellion that these men personified had certainly not been totally crushed. In fact many of the causes that sailors agitated for around the Atlantic littoral—better wages and working conditions, freedom and justice for labouring men—played out in extreme ways on the western edge of the ocean. Sailors fought in, and transmitted news about, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, slave revolts, sailor mutinies and innumerable smaller-scale strikes and disputes. They might also have passed on news about the progress of British abolitionism to West Indian slaves. What is more the conditions of, and consequences of, the trade in slaves played a central part in shaping seamen’s protests, and determined those that they took as allies in their fight. In some cases their rebellion found common ground with that of slaves, to the profound dread and revulsion of planters, merchants and all others whose livelihood depended upon the race-based slave system of modern times.

---

100 Scott, “Common Wind” 170.
Afterwards

The Transatlantic Slave Trade in
Global Perspective

Ned Ward, who liked to be known as a “Manly Plain-dealer,” described seamen as, “the chaff of the world, being tossed here and there by every blast that bloweth.” It is an apt metaphor. Sailors were indeed well travelled and international; they could hardly be otherwise, for these features were inherent to their labour. When the wind changed direction, furthermore, and blew the men and their vessels onwards in new directions, it took with it newly gathered men and women, while those who had previously been broadcast were fundamentally changed by their travels. The crews of sailing ships, to use Linebaugh and Rediker’s well-chosen phrase, were thoroughly ‘motley’, in every sense of that term. Seamen’s origins might have been overwhelmingly humble, but their horizons were vast. Their culture, while distinctly plebeian, was garnered from a truly cosmopolitan range of sources.

Studying the sailors of the slave trade does not, therefore, just simply bring a little-studied group of workers to the fore, but rather, by its nature transcends national boundaries in the study of slavery and freedom. Such an approach is rather timely. David Brion Davis recently called for “a global or multinational view of the origins, development, and abolition of racial slavery in the New World...as a way of gaining broader insight into world history and the human costs of ‘modernization.’” Studying sailors does not offer a way to do this, but rather demands it: seamen were the original global citizens. This is primarily what made them more than simply “working men who got wet.” They represented a vitally important communication structure in an era before mass immediate communication.

As Davis suggests, such a perspective offers new clarity to many old issues. The human costs of the slave trade were borne principally by those who made the

---

2 Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000) 27-8. The authors suggest not only the “multicoloured” aspect of the term motley, but also point to “the subversion of power and the poverty of appearance” implicit in its meaning.
Atlantic crossing in shackles and chains, but in some ways that suffering rebounded
on those paid to guard them, and from thence back again, redoubled, onto the original
victims. From their involvement in the process of enslavement, and their suffering as
a consequence, seamen realised the remarkable benefits of work without physical
punishment, fair payment for labour, and personal liberty. What Davis calls “the
great American paradox”: “slavery and democracy marching ahead to the same beat”
could, therefore, also be characterised as ships bobbing on the same seas, moving
forward by harnessing the same winds. Slavery was not a “peculiar” institution in
the United States—a flaw on the nation’s otherwise impeccable freedom—rather
freedom in this period was symbiotically dependent upon slavery. Both advanced
together with sails unfurled.

Understanding those involved in the production of slavery also helps elucidate
the nature of the institution. What were the realities of dishonour and
disempowerment for sailors—men who were proud of the lash marks on their backs,
and who underwent strange shaving rituals as part of their acceptance into the
seafaring brotherhood? What, even more pertinently, was the perception of natal
alienation to those who made their homes in whatever port of call they found
themselves, tempered by long periods in which the cramped forecastle was the only
domicile they knew? In the Americas, as Walter Johnson has recently magnificently
argued, it was the ‘ownership’ aspect to slavery that was the basic, defining premise
of American slavery. Perhaps it is not coincidental that for those whose unspeakably
repugnant post ended with the slaves’ delivery at the auction block, this was the one
aspect of the slave experience that was entirely alien to them.

This touches on a larger point: Africa was not a tangential part of the Atlantic
world, but one of its centrally defining regions. It gave not only millions of non-free
forced migrants to world development, but also fundamentally affected concepts of
slavery and freedom around the edges of the ocean. By re-integrating Africa into
Atlantic studies, moreover, it becomes clear that we should not be afraid to privilege
class over race in some contexts. Even interaction between slave trade seamen and

5 Davis, “Broader Perspectives” 459. Edmund S. Morgan made a similar argument in American
Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia (New York: W.W. Norton and Co.,
1975).
6 Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South (New York: Knopf,
1956).
7 Walter Johnson, Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market (Cambridge: Harvard
University Press, 1999) especially chapter 1.
Africans was shaped by both groups' place in the economic system and power structure as much as by the various colours of their skin. We should be careful not read the racial absolutes of the nineteenth century United States back into the slave trade, where far more complex ideas of race were being made and constantly re-formulated. Conversely, emphasising class rather than race creates new paradigms for the study of Atlantic history that stretch far beyond this work, as Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh have already illustrated so well.

There is a still broader perspective, however, and one that suggests new directions for further study. A maritime focus pertinently reminds us that people were swept all ways around the Atlantic Ocean, taking with them their understandings of the world and their experiences. Africans lived and worked in Britain's ports and some then returned to Africa. Others voyaged across the Atlantic as free men, travelled eastward to Europe, and eventually returned to Africa. Occasionally, those sold as chattel slaves were able to make their way back home. American and Caribbean political economy must have had significant effects upon West African societies prior to the settlements of Sierra Leone and Liberia as colonies. Thus the slave trade might have been overwhelmingly 'transatlantic', but its effects and consequences were distinctly 'circum-atlantic'.

In emphasising the importance of transnational understandings of liberty, slavery, race and class, this viewpoint also demands answers as to whether the Atlantic perspective is too narrow. Many of the seamen who worked onboard slave ships travelled well beyond the Atlantic's confines in the course of their lives and work. A perfunctory look at the Indian and Pacific Oceans suggests that the effects of events in those regions were shaped by the Atlantic, and vice-versa. Janet Ewald has already shown how developments in the Atlantic changed ideas of racial constructions, liberty and fair treatment in the Indian Ocean, especially in the period after 1750. She argues that "ships and ports, as well as plantations, lend themselves to comparative analysis." That may be so, but she also shows direct linkages between

---

8 There is understanding of the two-way connections between Dahomey [Benin], and Brazil, but for other transatlantic routes any such influence remains shrouded. Of importance in examining the Benin-Brazil connections was the conference "Aguda: Aspects of Afro-Brazilian Heritage in the Bight of Bénin" Porto-Novo, Benin (November 26-30 2001).
these two great oceans. "Forces from the Atlantic" for example, created "special contracts for non-European seamen" on Indian Ocean vessels.9

A connection can likewise be found to the Pacific Ocean. Ian Duffield has publicised the fact that numbers of Afro-Caribbean people were shipped to Australia as convicts, where just by their presence they challenged perceptions of race and liberty in that newly colonised landmass. "In Australia their colour was exceptional for their status, not its mark" writes Duffield.10 Blackness came to have a different meaning in that new society 'down under' and its relationship to liberty was vastly different in that land of convict settlers, and dark skinned aboriginals. Many more free Europeans who had been involved in the slave trade must also have sailed to the newly colonised continent. It is known that some of the same merchant companies and vessels were engaged in both slave and convict transportation; the same must be true of seamen. A final twist on the themes of race and liberty comes from the fact that seamen went to Australia as both worker and shackled convict. Robert Hughes claims that sailors were the largest occupational group among convicts on the First Fleet.11

The true consequences and effects of slavery will only be discovered when historians explore these global sea routes, drawing lines across the map showing where concepts of liberty and free waged labour spread as well as where non-free persons were forcibly transported. Peter Linebaugh in some ways set the agenda in his article, "All the Atlantic Mountains Shook".12 The challenge that follows is to find how the aftershocks of those earthquakes were felt, and interpreted, around the globe. Moreover, a larger challenge to historians is to explain how 'shaking mountains' in the Indian or Pacific Ocean, or indeed any other sea, affected the Atlantic basin. History has become truly global only when we accept that communication is a two

10 Ian Duffield, "From Slave Colonies to Penal Colonies: The West Indian Convict Transportees to Australia" Slavery and Abolition 7 (1986) 25-45.
12 Peter Linebaugh, "All the Atlantic Mountains Shook" Labour/Le Travailleur 10 (1982) 87-121.
way process. As all seamen knew, the wind can change direction very quickly, and cause and effect is not always determinable by looking only from one fixed point.
## Appendix 1

### Black Sailors on Liverpool Slave Ships, 1794-1805

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>SHIP</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>PLACE OF ABODE</th>
<th>JOINED SHIP</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RICHARD HARPER</td>
<td>BELL</td>
<td>1794</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R SLATER</td>
<td>ANN</td>
<td>1794</td>
<td>ISLES DE LOS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APRIL CHENIE</td>
<td>ANN</td>
<td>1794</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>IMPRESSED</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHARLES WILLIAMS</td>
<td>HINDE</td>
<td>1794</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HENRY DOUGLAS</td>
<td>HINDE</td>
<td>1794</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PETER HEWITT</td>
<td>MARY ELLEN</td>
<td>1795</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUADGEO</td>
<td>MARY</td>
<td>1795</td>
<td>CAPE COAST</td>
<td>CAPE COAST</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PETER COAST GUINEA</td>
<td>ANN</td>
<td>1795</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOSEPH NOBLE</td>
<td>CRESCENT</td>
<td>1795</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOHN BENDIS</td>
<td>COOK</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>GRENADA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOHN JAMES</td>
<td>3/4 SEAMAN</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLACK TOM</td>
<td>LIGHTENING</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>ANABON</td>
<td>ANABON</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIGG TOM</td>
<td>LIGHTENING</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>ANABON</td>
<td>ANABON</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOHN KELLY</td>
<td>DIANA</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEORGE WILLIAMS</td>
<td>FISHER</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL</td>
<td>BLACK MAN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTHONY DIXON</td>
<td>HAMILTON</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>ST. KITTS</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRANK MULLIN</td>
<td>APPRENTICE?</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PETER ANNABONA</td>
<td>KINGSMILL</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOBIAS BROWN</td>
<td>INFANT ANN</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEN JOHNSON</td>
<td>APPRENTICE</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PETER PARKER</td>
<td>NEPTUNE</td>
<td>1797</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Fate</td>
<td>Reference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOHN LIVERPOOL</td>
<td>GOODRICH</td>
<td>1799</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILLIAM GREY</td>
<td>GOODRICH</td>
<td>1799</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOHN SABALLY</td>
<td>GOODRICH</td>
<td>1799</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIMON GOLD</td>
<td>HENRIETTA</td>
<td>1799</td>
<td>ANTIGUA</td>
<td>FREE BLACK MAN</td>
<td>BT 98/60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOHN COCK</td>
<td>CHIEF MATE</td>
<td>1799</td>
<td>WEST INDIES</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(NAME UNKNOWN)</td>
<td>WILLY TOM ROBIN</td>
<td>1799</td>
<td>GORÉE</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOHN BROWN</td>
<td>LORD NELSON</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEM ANABONA</td>
<td>POLLY</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>ANNOBON</td>
<td>ANNOBON</td>
<td>BT 98/61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAT ANABONA</td>
<td>POLLY</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>ANNOBON</td>
<td>ANNOBON</td>
<td>BT 98/61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMBREE</td>
<td>TWO SISTERS</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAGGY</td>
<td>TWO SISTERS</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASSANTA</td>
<td>TWO SISTERS</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOHN DIDO</td>
<td>MERCURY</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL</td>
<td>BT 98/61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Caroll</td>
<td>COMMERCE</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>SENEGAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Anderson</td>
<td>COMMERCE</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>BARBADOS</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Johnson</td>
<td>BLANCHE</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>MARTINIQUE</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Slater</td>
<td>ELIZABETH</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Sargeant</td>
<td>ELIZABETH</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>JAMAICA</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tusker Bridge</td>
<td>WILLIAM</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>DESERTED IN SURINAME</td>
<td>BT 98/62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Amacre</td>
<td>AMAZON</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL</td>
<td>BT 98/62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward King</td>
<td>EARL OF LIVERPOOL</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>JAMAICA</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Kelly</td>
<td>EARL OF LIVERPOOL</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mich Gray</td>
<td>JOHN</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>GAMBIA</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Witby</td>
<td>ALEXANDER</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Samuel</td>
<td>ELIZABETH</td>
<td>1802</td>
<td>ISLAND PRINCES</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL</td>
<td>BT 98/63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Blue</td>
<td>RUNAWAY SLAVE</td>
<td>BLANCHE</td>
<td>BARBADOS</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL</td>
<td>BT 98/63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dick Sam</td>
<td>ECLIPSE</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Haynes</td>
<td>COOK</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>WEST INDIES</td>
<td>WEST INDIES</td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Williams</td>
<td>COOK</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>WEST INDIES</td>
<td>SENT ASHORE IN AFRICA</td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Vessel</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Fate</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cato Johnson</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>Mars</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>A black</td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Tittle</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>Hibernia</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Black Seaman</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Tittle</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>Hibernia</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Black Seaman</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Cacandra</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>Hibernia</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Black Seaman</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Caffir</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>Hibernia</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Black Seaman</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Curtes</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>Hibernia</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Black Seaman</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Banks</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>Hibernia</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Black Seaman</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham Newland</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>Hibernia</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Black Seaman</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Thomas</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>Agnes</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Bonney</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Governor Dowsdwell</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>Minerva</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caulow</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>Minera</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>1/2 Seaman</td>
<td>Minerva</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Slater</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Princess Royal</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William MckNeil</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>Roehampton</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Lowes</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>Frances</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Bailley</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Lewis</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuel</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wooton</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>Annabon</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>BT 98/66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Lorentz</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Princess Royal</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>Sao Tome</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Joseph</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Diana John</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John William</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Retrieve</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>BT 98/66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Black</td>
<td>1/2 Seaman</td>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>Annabon</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>BT 98/66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOHN IRVING</td>
<td>FRANCES</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>BLACKMAN</td>
<td>BT 98/66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANUEL IRVING</td>
<td>FRANCES</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>BLACKMAN</td>
<td>BT 98/66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 2

**Black Sailors on Rhode Island Slave Ships, 1803-1807**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>SHIP</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>RESIDENCE</th>
<th>BIRTHPLACE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QUASH BRIGGS</td>
<td>COOK</td>
<td>POLLY</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THOMAS PRICE</td>
<td>SEAMEN</td>
<td>EAGLE</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>BROWN</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PETER LOUIS</td>
<td>COOK</td>
<td>EAGLE</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WARREN GARDNES</td>
<td>SEAMAN</td>
<td>SEMIRAMIS</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>MASSACHUSETTS</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEORGE ROGERS</td>
<td>COOK</td>
<td>SEMIRAMIS</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>CONNECTICUT</td>
<td>YELLOW</td>
<td>DROWNED</td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRINCE CENTER</td>
<td>STEWARD</td>
<td>SEMIRAMIS</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td>DROWNED</td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOHN MITI</td>
<td>SEAMAN*</td>
<td>SEMIRAMIS</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td></td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HENRY SPENCER</td>
<td>SEAMAN</td>
<td>RISING SUN</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>KINGSTON</td>
<td>RHODE ISLAND</td>
<td>BROWN</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PETER LEWIS</td>
<td>COOK</td>
<td>RISING SUN</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>GADELOUPE</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEPHEN GARDNER</td>
<td>SEAMAN</td>
<td>RISING SUN</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>KINGSTON</td>
<td>RHODE ISLAND</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOHN CLARKE</td>
<td>COOK</td>
<td>BRAYARD</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>PROVIDENCE</td>
<td>RHODE ISLAND</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAMES CAIN</td>
<td>SEAMAN</td>
<td>ONEIDA</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td></td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>RHODE ISLAND</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILLIAM WRIGHT</td>
<td>COOK</td>
<td>BAYARD</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>NEW YORK</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PETER LEWIS</td>
<td>COOK</td>
<td>EAGLE</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HERCULES HUDER</td>
<td>SEAMAN</td>
<td>JOHN</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>RHODE ISLAND</td>
<td>RHODE ISLAND</td>
<td>YELLOW</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAMES THOMPSON</td>
<td>COOK</td>
<td>JOHN</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>ST. CROIX</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEREMIAH CRAWFORD</td>
<td>COOK</td>
<td>MARIAN</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>NEW JERSEY</td>
<td>YELLOW</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TITUS SHEFFIELD</td>
<td>SEAMAN*</td>
<td>HOPE</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>RHODE ISLAND</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEPHEN GARDNER</td>
<td>SEAMAN*</td>
<td>HOPE</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>KINGSTON</td>
<td>RHODE ISLAND</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOHN OXFORD</td>
<td>SEAMAN</td>
<td>HOPE</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>BOSTON</td>
<td>MASSACHUSETTS</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBENEZER UNDERWOOD</td>
<td>COOK*</td>
<td>HOPE</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>NEWPORT</td>
<td>MASSACHUSETTS</td>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td></td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Birthplace</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Wright</td>
<td>Cook*</td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Newport, Virginia</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Minss</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>1807</td>
<td>Boston, Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Mulatto</td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Hazard</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>1807</td>
<td>Newport, Rhode Island</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Jackson</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>1807</td>
<td>Newport, Rhode Island</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>NARA 36.3.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Watson</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>1807</td>
<td>Newport, Rhode Island</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah Howland</td>
<td></td>
<td>1804</td>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Name Unknown)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Lippitt</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Taylor</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>Very Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Harrison</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Tiverton</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin Carr</td>
<td></td>
<td>1804</td>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham Rinewall</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Jones</td>
<td></td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Bristol, Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Pitt</td>
<td></td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Munro</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Bristol, Rhode Island</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samual Lippitt</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Harrison</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Tiverton</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin Carr</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham Rinewall</td>
<td>Seaman</td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Jones</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Bristol, Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Pitt</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Munro</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Bristol, Rhode Island</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Cummings</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Bristol, Rhode Island</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caesar Freeman</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nassar Ballard</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Africa Boy</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Howland</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Jamestown</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pero Morse</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco Gomez</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Staple</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caesar Ebow</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coggeshall Chase</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caesar Miller</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Young</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Taylor</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Northrup</td>
<td></td>
<td>1806</td>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>RIHS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Men who were also apprentices
BIBLIOGRAPHY

MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

I. United Kingdom

Public Record Office, Kew, London

Board of Trade Papers

- BT 6/1-12: Evidence on the African Slave Trade, 1788
- BT 98/33-86: Crew Lists, Liverpool Port of Registry, 1772-1808

Chancery Records

- C 107/1-15: Papers of James Rogers, 1771-1793
- C 108/212-214: Letterbooks of John Leigh and Co. of Liverpool, 1803-8

High Court of the Admiralty Records

- HCA 1/20-27 and 1/58-64: Oyer and Terminer Records, 1744-1809
- HCA 15/55: Log of the Lyon Frigate, 1761/Log of the Blakeney, 1763
- HCA 16/59/18: Log of the George, 1770

Treasury Records

- T 70/29-34: Correspondence of the Royal African Company, 1750-1806

Publications of the Houses of Commons and Lords

- ZHC 1/82, 84-5, 87: Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the House of Commons, 1789-91
- ZHC 1/90: Minutes of Evidence Taken at the Bar of the House of Lords, 1992-3


- Log/M/21: Log of the Sandown
- File 19: Records of the Zong

British Library

- Add Mss 15741: Accompt Book of the Mongovo George, 1785-6
- Add Mss 39946: A Voyage to Guinea, Antego, Bay of Campeachy, Cuba, Barbadoes, &c., 1753-4

209
Add Mss 43841: Observations of the Master of the *St. Ann*

**Bank of England**

Humphrey Morice Papers - correspondence and accounts of a slave trader

**House of Lords Record Office**

5/J/11/2: Slave Trade Papers, 1799

House of Lords Papers: Certificates of Slaves Taken on Board Ships (undated)

Miscellaneous Papers, 1797-1799

**Liverpool Record Office**

387 MD 54: Robert Bostock Letterbooks, 1787-1792

380 MD 34-36: Case and Southworth Papers

387 MD 41-5, 59: Thomas Leyland Papers, 1786-1811

920 MD 409: Letters from John Newton to Rev. D. Jennings, 1750-60

387 MD 62/1: Ships’ Logs, 1784

380 TUO 2/1-4, 4/6: Correspondence of David Tuohy, 1772-6

380 TUO 4/2: Log of the *Ranger*, 1790

380 TUO 4/3: Papers of the *Sally*

380 TUO 4/4: Papers of the *Corsican Hero*, 1771

380 TUO 4/5: Papers of the *Tom*, 1771

380 TUO 4/7: Papers of the brig *Nancy*

380 TUO 4/9: Papers of the ship *Bladys*

380 TUO 4/10: Papers of the ship *Ingram*, 1784
Merseyside Maritime Museum

Earle Papers - Papers of the Earle family, major Liverpool slave traders

Papers of the Sally

Invoice Books and Papers
Eadith, 1760-1
Calveley, 1759
Kitty's Amelia, 1804-5
Liverpool Hero, 1783
Enterprise, 1794

Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool

MIC 740: Archibald Dalzel's Letters [microfilm, originals at Edinburgh University Library]

MIC 392-4: Davis-Davenport Papers [microfilm, originals at Keele University Library]

MS.10.47: Records of the Madam Pookata, 1783

Bristol Record Office

Bright Family Papers, the snow Molly, 1750-2

Lancashire Record Office, Preston

DDO 11/57: Letter from Thomas Harrison onboard the Elizabeth, 1752

Journal of James Irving, 1789-1790 - slave ship captain

Correspondence of James Irving, 1789-1809 - ditto

Birmingham City Archives

564: Galton Papers

James Watt Papers

II. United States

National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C. [NARA]
South Carolina Vice-Admiralty Court Records, 1716-1789
36.3.1: Crew Lists for Newport, Rhode Island 1803-7

Rhode Island Historical Society [RIHS]

MSS 9003 volume 16: Letters of Samuel Freebody

Crew Lists for Providence, Rhode Island, 1803-1807

Microfilm HA 730 P9 A6: Seamen’s Protection Certificates

New York Historical Society

Slavery Collection, Box 2

III. Caribbean

National Archives, Black Rock, Barbados

Agents’ Letterbooks

NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

I. United Kingdom

Gentleman’s Magazine 1730-1807

Gore’s General Advertiser [Liverpool] 1800-1805

Williamson’s Liverpool Advertiser and Marine Intelligencer 1756-92

Manchester Mercury 1789

Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal 1753

II. United States

Pennsylvania Gazette 1743-1800

III. Caribbean

Barbados Mercury 1783-84, 1787-89

212
Barbados Gazette and General Intelligencer 1787-89

Barbados Gazette and Bridgetown Gazette 1805-6

Royal Gazette [Kingston, Jamaica] 1780-81, 1792-4

PUBLISHED PRIMARY SOURCES

I. Collections and CD-ROMs


Donnan, E. ed., Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institute, 1931) [4 volumes].


II. Books and Essays


Anon., An Account of the Evidence Delivered before a Select Committee of the House of Commons in the years 1790-1791 (Edinburgh, 1791).


Aubrey, T., The Sea Surgeon, or the Guinea Man's Vade Mecum: In which is laid down, the method of curing such diseases as usually happen abroad, especially on the
coast of Guinea; with the best way of treating negroes, both in health and sickness (London: John Clarke, 1729).


Barker, R., The Unfortunate Shipwright, or Cruel Captain: Being a faithful narrative of the unparallel'd sufferings of Robert Barker, late carpenter on board the Thetis Snow, of Bristol, in a voyage to the coast of Guinea and Antigua (London: Printed for, and sold by the Sufferer, 1760).


Clarkson, T., Grievances of our Mercantile Seamen: A National and Crying Evil (Ipswich, 1845).

Corry, J., Observations upon the Windward Coast of Africa: with notes on the religion, character, customs, &c. of the natives ... With an appendix, containing a letter ... on the ... means of abolishing the slave trade (London: James Aspeme, 1807).


Crow, H., Memoirs of the late Captain Hugh Crow, of Liverpool; comprising a narrative of his life, together with descriptive sketches of the western coast of Africa; particularly of Bonny (London: Frank Cass, 1970; 1st published 1830).


Howe, G., “The Last Slave-Ship” Scribner’s Magazine (July, 1890).


Matthews, J., A Voyage to the River Sierra-Leone, on the Coast of Africa (London: B. White and Sons, 1788).

McLeod (or M’Leod) J., A Voyage to Africa: with some account of the manners and customs of the Dahomian People (London: John Murray, 1820).


Norris, R., A Short Account of the African Slave Trade, collected from local knowledge, from the evidence given at the bar of both Houses of Parliament, and from tracts written upon that subject (Liverpool: Printed at Ann Smith's Navigation Shop, 1798).
Norris, R., Memoirs of the Reign of Bossa Ahádee, King of Dahomy ... To which are added, the author's journey to Abomey, the capital, and a short account of the African Slave Trade (London: W. Lowndes, 1789).


Pinkard, G., Notes on the West Indies (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1806) [3 vols.]


Russell, W.C., The Turnpike Sailor: or, Rhymes on the Road, recited by Buccaneers, Privateers, Slavers and Sailors of all Degrees (London: Skeffington and Son, 1907).

Scattergood, J., An Antidote to Popular Frenzy, Particularly of the Present Rage for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade, with a view to the probable consequences, both present and remote (London, 1792).


Smith, W., A New Voyage to Guinea: Describing the customs, manners, soil, climate, habits, buildings, education, manual arts, agriculture, trade, employments, languages, ranks of distinction, habitations, diversions, marriages, and whatever else is memorable among the inhabitants (London, 1744).


Thompson, E., *Sailor's Letters: Written to his select friends in England, during his voyages and travels in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, from the year 1754 to 1759* (Dublin: J. Hoey and J. Potts, 1766).


SECONDARY SOURCES

I. Books


Brooke, R., Liverpool as it was During the Last Quarter of the Eighteenth Century, 1775-1800 (Liverpool: J. Mawdsley and sons, 1853).


James, C.L.R., Mariners, Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In (London: Allison and Busby, 1985).


Patterson, O., *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).


**II. Articles and Essays**


Duffield, I., “From Slave Colonies to Penal Colonies: The West Indian Convict Transportees to Australia” Slavery and Abolition 7 (1986).


Ford, A.C., “An 18th Century Letter from a Sea Captain to his Owner” *New England Quarterly* 3 (1930).


Hall, N.A.T., “Maritime Maroons: Grand Maroonage from the Danish West Indies” *William and Mary Quarterly* 42 (1985).


Laughton, L.G.C., “Shantying and Shanties” The Mariner’s Mirror 9 (1923).


Law, R., “‘Here is No Resisting the Country’: The Realities of Power in Afro-European Relations on the West African ‘Slave Coast’” Itinerario 18 (1994).


Linebaugh, P., “All the Atlantic Mountains Shook” Labour/Le Travailleur 10 (1982).


Lovejoy, P.E. and Richardson, D., “‘Pawns will live when Slaves is apt to dye’: Credit, Slaving, and Pawnship at Old Calabar in the era of the Slave Trade” London School of Economics Working Papers in Economic History 38 (1997).


Rogers, N., “Liberty Road: Opposition to Impressment in Britain during the American War of Independence” in C. Twomey and C. Howell (eds.) Jack Tar in History:


Ross, H., “Some Notes on the Pirates and Slavers around Sierra Leone and the West Coast of Africa, 1680-1723” Sierra Leone Studies 2 (1928).


White, D.G., “’Yes’, There is a Black Atlantic” *Itinerario* 2 (1999).


### III. Unpublished Secondary Sources


