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Africa and Africans in the making of the Atlantic world, 1400–1800

Second edition

JOHN THORNTON



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Africans in colonial Atlantic societies

In the first part of this book, we saw how African political and institutional structures and African economic developments made the trade in slaves possible. This internal dynamic was far more responsible for the development of the African trade with the Atlantic than any pressure that European merchants or political authorities could exert, directly or indirectly. Africa was therefore a full partner in the development of the Atlantic world, and that development cannot be understood without appreciating African history and culture.

In the second part of the book, the emphasis shifts from the dynamic, independent African societies to Africans outside Africa, residents in the new Atlantic world that began in the offshore islands of São Tomé or the Cape Verdes a few miles from the African coast and extended to the vast American continents (see Map 4). Although a few Africans migrated to the Atlantic world voluntarily (mostly high-status diplomats or students and occasional settlers and sailors),¹ the majority came as slaves. The role they played in the formation of the Atlantic world was perhaps just as profound as that of the people who remained in Africa, but it was quite different.

The impact of the African slaves was twofold. On the one hand they came into the Atlantic to work and serve, and by their efforts and numbers made a significant contribution to the economy. On the other hand, Africans brought with them a cultural heritage in language, aesthetics, and philosophy that helped to form the newly developing culture of the Atlantic world. The elements of this twofold contribution of Africans were also related to each other. In many ways the nature of the role of Africans as workers and their place in the economy and societies of the colonial Atlantic also helped to shape their role as cultural actors by

¹ For a description of some of these early high-status Africans, see Thornton, "Kongo-Portuguese Relations," pp. 183-203.

permitting or denying them access to time, raw materials, and supervision of production.

The chapters that follow will analyze these two contributions, with a particular emphasis on how the African role as workers and servants shaped and conditioned their role as transmitters of African culture to the Americas and developers of a new Afro-Atlantic culture, which they shared to some degree with Native Americans and Euro-Americans. This chapter will explain how the African role as laborers and servants came to be defined for the Atlantic world and particularly how their economic centrality for European settlers increased their impact even in areas where they were a minority of the population. Chapter 6 will then show how the labor conditions of Africans in the Atlantic world varied and how African communities developed and sustained themselves throughout the Atlantic world.

In Chapter 7 the emphasis shifts from labor to culture; this chapter examines the process by which African culture developed and changed after it crossed into the Atlantic world, shaped as it was by the conditions of the slave trade and laboring life. Chapter 8 will continue the same theme by examining African religion in detail as a case study in the development and transformation of African ideas in the Atlantic world. In the final chapter the themes of cultural transition and labor reunite in an examination of the special world of the rebels and runaways, viewing them in their role as workers (or as rebel workers) and in their role as cultural and political actors in the Atlantic world.

Africans' role as a labor force was crucial in shaping the ways in which they influenced the Atlantic world. In some areas, such as the Spanish colonies, they provided a dependent group of colonists, who might serve the European colonial society in certain specified ways in a world where most of the basic labor was performed by the conquered Native American population. In other areas, such as the offshore African islands, Brazil, and the colonies of the northern Europeans in the Caribbean, they were the only labor force available in thinly inhabited or uninhabited areas. In still other areas, such as North America, they served the wealthier colonists as a labor force that supplemented the indentured and free labor of European immigrants. In each of these areas, the African worker played a different but, as we shall see, central role in both economy and society.

Africans and Native Americans in the Iberian colonies

Both the Spanish and the Portuguese made extensive use of Native American labor in their Atlantic empires. Sometimes this labor was available through existing Native American states that fell under the control

of invading Europeans; in other cases Native American slaves provided the labor force. In both situations, African slaves were used and came to play a more central role than the often more numerous Native Americans in shaping the culture of the Atlantic world.

The earliest Spanish conquerors in the Atlantic world (and all major conquests of the indigenous people were made by the Spanish) used existing Native American systems of tax and tribute to draw labor supplies and finished goods from the local laboring population. This was because the nature of the conquest allowed the Spanish to take over and rule existing American states, complete with their fiscal apparatus, and use them for their own purposes, simply replacing some of the Native American administrators with Spanish colonial officials. The institutional arrangements by which the Spanish converted native political systems to accommodate their own government were complex and varied from region to region, depending on the exact nature of indigenous fiscal arrangements, but Latin Americanists have normally discussed them under the Spanish terms *encomienda* (grant of tribute payers to a Spanish recipient) and *repartimiento* (division of lands or tribute payers among Spanish recipients).

Most Native American fiscal systems provided both for taxation in kind and money and for unpaid public labor to be performed for aristocracies or the state, although like African systems, they did not have landed private property.² When the Spanish acquired the rights of the state, either through alliance, blood brotherhood, and inheritance as in parts of Hispaniola³ and in some fringe areas such as Venezuela⁴ or through conquest of the state itself as in Mexico and Peru, they immediately adopted this fiscal system. Although Spaniards were interested in tribute payments in kind, they were ultimately much more interested in the labor tribute. They needed people to work in mines, produce non-American crops such as wheat or sugar, and raise livestock of European origin. The Crown provided Spanish settlers with uncultivated and uninhabited land through land grants and allowed them to use their rights over the Native American peasant class to recruit workers.

However, the Crown was also mindful of its own rights and opted ultimately to remove Native American political authorities from private control and place the Native American communities directly under its

² For a useful summary of Native American labor arrangements, see James Lockhart and Stuart Schwartz, *Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 37–44.

³ On these alliances, see Juan Pérez de Tudela Bueso, "La quiebra de la factoría y el nuevo poblamiento de la Española," *Revista de Indias* 15 (1955): 208–10; Floyd, *Columbus Dynasty*, pp. 22–3, 35–7.

⁴ Such arrangements are reported in the sixteenth-century account of Venezuela in Enrique Otto, ed., *Cédulas reales relativas a Venezuela, 1550–1650* (Caracas, 1963), pp. 244–52.

own rule. Private exercise of the right to recruit labor was replaced by Crown distributions of labor to needy settlers. This system in turn eventually evolved into a system of semifree labor in which Native Americans paid taxes to the Crown with money earned as wage workers for European settlers. Although the process was fairly long, and was never completely realized in some places, the end result was that Spanish immigrants and *indios* (Native Americans) were placed under separate jurisdictions, with the Spanish obtaining private land tenure on vacant lands that they made economically useful, and the Native Americans remaining on their traditional land (normally without rights of private property in land) often under their own rulers, *caciques*, but typically under the supervision of missionary orders. Tax obligations and wage receipts defined the mature Spanish colonial economy, although occasional state-sponsored forced labor remained, especially in the Peruvian mining economy.⁵

The development of the Spanish colonies was shaped by political and economic forces. The legal separation of Native American workers from Spanish landowners and mine owners was intended to prevent European-style serfdom and its accompanying noble privileges, but the nature of debt bondage (peonage), wage labor, and economic development in each region was the product of economic forces. Africans, arriving as slaves, played an important interstitial role in these economies as a result of this pattern of development.

The laws of Spanish America made it impossible for Spanish settlers to enjoy full-time labor from the vast majority of the Native American population. The requirements for separate residence, "just wages," and often limitations on the length of time that native workers could serve (sometimes determined by the Crown and at other times by the competition of the religious orders for the same workers) made the Native American into a perpetual migrant worker. Such workers often worked poorly and were not always available when they were most needed, especially in the agricultural economy. Consequently, the earliest Spanish settlers turned to slavery as a source of permanent labor, sometimes evolving into free wage labor, other times remaining as slave labor.

Slaves made up a permanent work force and thus were especially useful for the continuous activities required by some agriculture and most stock raising as well as the majority of artisanal, skilled, and domestic employment. Their condition of servitude limited their ability to participate politically in the process of government. In Iberian America,

⁵ An immense literature is summarized in Lockhart and Schwartz, *Early Latin America*, pp. 68–73, 92–6, 113–18.

where most European settlers received political rights and did not hesitate to return to Europe if they found they could not become well off, there was a great need for a permanently dispossessed and politically powerless class. Legislation had limited the free Native American labor force; opportunity, the European one. Slaves and their descendants could fill the gap.

Many of the slaves, especially in the earliest periods of colonization, were Native Americans, but over time circumstances combined to favor ever larger number of slaves drawn from Africa. Many Native American societies had the institution of slavery, and the earliest permanent workers and servants on Spanish American estates were Native American slaves, sometimes drawn from the slave groups of the conquered societies but often drawn from Spanish raiding or trading. Spanish estates in the Caribbean in the sixteenth century engaged in voracious raiding of the entire basin in search of slaves, sometimes tapping local Native American sources (such as the joint raiding in modern Venezuela),⁶ sometimes proceeding on their own.⁷ Although the conquest of Mexico yielded substantial numbers of local slaves for use throughout their possessions, the Spaniards still obtained thousands from Central America before the mid-sixteenth century.⁸ In Peru the situation duplicated that of Mexico, and in other areas, such as New Granada (modern Colombia), a permanent state of war and rebellion kept a continuous supply of slaves available for Spanish owners.⁹ Spanish settlers on the northern coast of South America tapped a long-standing slave trade from the Orinoco for longer than many of the other sources lasted.¹⁰

The Portuguese conquests in Brazil bear some similarities to the Spanish New World conquest. Although the Tupinambá of Brazil, with whom the Portuguese first came into contact, did not have the elaborate state systems of the Mexicans or Peruvians or even the larger Caribbean islands, they were a settled agricultural people. When the Portuguese succeeded in conquering some of the Tupinambá in Bahia after 1549, they created a fiscal system based on villages of "surrendered" or conquered Native Americans.

⁶ For a firsthand account, see Girolamo Benzoni, *History of the New World*, trans. W. H. Smyth (London, 1858), chap. 2, passim.

⁷ For a general account, see Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*.

⁸ Murdo MacLeod, *Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520–1720* (Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1973), pp. 50–5.

⁹ Monique Lepage, "La gobernación de Popoyán et le nouveau royaume de Grenade entre 1536 et 1573," *Caravelle: Cahiers du monde hispanique et luso-brésilien* 33 (1979): 19–47.

¹⁰ Rodrigo de Navarrete, "Relacion de las provincias y naciones de los indios Arauacas" (1570–75), in Moreno, *Relaciones geográficas de Venezuela*, pp. 84–5.

The Portuguese Crown placed these villages under missionary control, paralleling the Spanish Crown's attempt to exercise regular control over various Native American groups. Subsequently, these Tupinambá became wage workers under conditions that resembled those of the Native Americans in the Spanish areas.¹¹ As in Spanish America, the Portuguese still needed slaves for continuous operations and domestic service, and like their Spanish counterparts, Portuguese forces often raided the numerous still-unconquered people that surrounded their colonies along the Brazilian coast.¹²

In both Spanish and Portuguese America, however, the European rulers took steps to replace this early Native American slavery with African slavery. The reasons for this are complex, involving both demographic and political variables. Native American populations were not numerous or accessible enough to meet all the demands of the settlers for slaves, and moreover, economic and political policies of the Iberian monarchs favored the replacement of Native American slaves by ones from Africa.

Most of pre-Columbian America, outside the core areas of the Andean and Mesoamerican empires, was fairly sparsely populated, and the introduction of Old World diseases reduced that population even more.¹³ Furthermore, the majority of the Native American societies that were not conquered in the earliest wave of Spanish activity were militarily strong and not easy to raid. In areas such as the Guyanas or the Amazon many slaves were obtained not by direct European attack but through commerce or through assisting Native American allies in their own wars.¹⁴ Therefore, ultimately the number of Native Americans who could be purchased as slaves or enslaved directly was insufficient to meet the demand for slaves.

For example, the fairly large number of Native American slaves in Brazil helped to fuel Bahia's sugar economy, but their numbers were diminishing already in the 1570s, and by the early seventeenth century

¹¹ Lockhart and Schwartz, *Early Latin America*, pp. 196–8; for more detail, see Stuart Schwartz, "Indian Labor for New World Plantations," *American Historical Review* 83 (1978): 43–79; and Urs Hörner, *Die Versklavung der brasilianische Indianer: Der Arbeitsmarkt in portugiesisch Amerika im XVI. Jahrhundert* (Zurich, 1980).

¹² For a thorough survey of this activity, see John Hemming, *Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians, 1500–1750* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978).

¹³ For a recent discussion on the size of the pre-Columbian population and its decline, see William Denevan, ed., *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492* (Madison, 1976). For a dissenting view of the type of calculations typically used for assessing population decline, see David Henige, "On the Contact Population of Hispaniola: History as Higher Mathematics," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 58 (1978): 217–37.

¹⁴ For operations within Brazil, see Hemming, *Red Gold*. For the Guyanas and Orinoco valley, see Marc de Civrieux, "Los Caribes y la conquista de la Guayana Española," *Montalban* 5 (1976): 875–1021.

virtually all the slaves in Bahian estates were Africans.¹⁵ Similarly, in New Granada, a survey of the mines in 1573 shows that in spite of the very substantial numbers of Chibchans captured during the wars and rebellions of the period, African slaves were already passing them in numbers in mine work.¹⁶ Such examples could be multiplied everywhere that Native American and African slaves were imported.

The particular skills that African slaves possessed favored African as opposed to Native American slavery. In the early days of the conquests, Native Americans, who owned no large domestic animals, would be unsuitable for raising cattle or riding horses, although obviously, in time many Native Americans learned to deal with these animals, eventually becoming feared as cavalry. But in early times such tasks might fall to African slaves. It is perhaps no wonder that all the *vaqueros* and *ganaderos* (cowboys) on the mid-sixteenth-century Hispaniola estates were not only Africans but from Wolof, Fula, and Mandinga areas, where there was a strong equestrian and cattle-raising tradition.¹⁷ The value of Africans from these regions did not diminish as Native Americans learned the skills, though; in the mid-seventeenth century the Cape Verdian sailor Lemos Coelho noted the demand for slaves from the Senegambian area because of their skills with horses and cattle.¹⁸ Angolans also possessed cattle-raising (though not equestrian) skills; the cattle raisers of Venezuela in the mid-seventeenth century were from Mbundu groups.¹⁹

Africans from the Gold Coast were skilled divers. Pieter de Marees, who observed them swimming and diving there, also noted that masters from the "Pearl Coast" (Venezuela and Trinidad) purchased them to fish pearls in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.²⁰ Although Native American slaves may well have possessed these skills, the ones who did have them may not have been available in sufficient numbers, for certainly the entire pearl-fishing industry was conducted by African slaves, up to and including the supervisory tasks.²¹ Similar dynamics may

¹⁵ For the evolution of Native American slavery in Bahia, see Stuart Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550–1835* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 28–70.

¹⁶ Lepage, "Gobernación de Popoyán."

¹⁷ "Escriptura de Licenciado Cerrato," in Incháustegui Cabral, *Reales cédulas*.

¹⁸ Francisco de Lemos Coelho, "Description of the Coast of Guinea (1684)," trans. P. E. H. Hair (Liverpool, 1985), fol. 7 (original MS, 1684).

¹⁹ Empadrimiento de los negros de estancia de la valle del Chama (1656), Ermillia Trochis de Veracoechea, *Documentos para el estudio de los esclavos negros en Venezuela* (Caracas, 1977), pp. 193–5.

²⁰ De Marees, *Beschrijvinge*, p. 94a. See also Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (Seville, 1590), bk. 5, chap. 15.

²¹ Antonio Vázquez de Espinosa, *Compendio y descripción de las Indias Occidentales* (c. 1634; modern ed. and trans., Charles Upson Clark [Washington, 1942 (English); 1948 (Spanish)], nos. 127–30, 936). A modernized Spanish edition was published by B. Velasco Bayón in Madrid in 1969. The paragraphs are numbered the same in all editions.

have been behind African involvement in the coastal and riverine trade of Brazil (where they dominated offshore fishing)²² and Cartagena.²³

A third reason that Africans often filled the need for slave labor was that Crown policies favored it. Although the formal reasons for favoring African over Native American slaves were often couched in humanitarian terms (Africans could stand the work better than the Native Americans), fiscal concerns were also important. By ensuring that slaves were acquired only from outside, the Crown could control, rent, and tax the trade, which would have been more difficult for local trade.

Ever since the early sixteenth century, Spanish memorials had argued that Native Americans could not stand the heavy labor required by many forms of work in mines and plantations while contending that Africans ought to be imported for the task. The most vociferous champion of these ideas was Bartolomé de las Casas, the indomitable defender of Native Americans from slavery and outspoken opponent of slave raiding within the Americas. Yet it was not slavery itself he opposed, only the slavery of Native Americans. This is clearly seen in his plans to establish a model colony on the Venezuelan coast, which would allow maximum freedom for the Native Americans. In this colony, 10,000 Cumanagotos, organized in three towns under their own missionary-supervised government, would have perpetual rights to land. But if the Cumanagotos were to be free, this did not mean there would be no slavery, for he also anticipated that the Spanish settlers, in addition to tapping Cumanagoto wage labor, would each have three African slaves for their service, a number that could increase to seven with clerical permission.²⁴ This plan was to serve as a model for many others to follow, like the sixteenth-century suggestion that the mines of Potosí be worked entirely by African slaves in order to protect the Native Americans.²⁵

Thus, it was not slavery or the slave trade that the Spanish Crown opposed, but rather slave raiding and trading among Native Americans. The Crown not only wished to limit the use of Native Americans as slaves but to end the Native American slave trade. From 1503 onward, the Crown sought to limit the areas from which slaves could be captured, typically to more distant and remote regions.²⁶ This may have been to force slave raiding into large and easily taxed ventures under Crown control.

Equally or even more important, however, by insisting that such wars

²² Dierick Ruyters, *Toortse der zee-vaert* (Vlissinghen, 1623) p. 140. The original pagination is given in the modern edition of S. P. L'Honoré Naber (The Hague, 1913).

²³ Nicholas del Castillo Mathieu, *La Llave de las Indias* (Bogotá, 1981), pp. 201–2.

²⁴ Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, 3 vols. (Mexico City, 1951), bk. 3, chap. 34.

²⁵ Memorial cited in Alberto Crespo R., *Esclavos negros en Bolivia* (La Paz, 1977), pp. 101–7.

²⁶ MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*, pp. 50–5, for a review of relevant legislation up to the 1540s.

be conducted for just reasons (typically to capture cannibals), the Crown required that only its officers could lead them, thus securing the potential revenues to be gained by the raids and ensuring that taxes would be collected, taxes that might not be forthcoming from private campaigns.

The Portuguese monarchs seem to have adopted a similar policy in Brazil. Legislation from the 1570s onward argued that Native American slaves in Brazil, like those of their Spanish counterparts, could be taken only in “just wars” against people who were alleged to be cannibals or practitioners of human sacrifice, typically in remote areas.²⁷ Thus, the Crown could protect its own subjects or potential subjects in nearby areas while ensuring that the revenues from the slave trade remained in royal hands or the hands of their appointed agents. Yet in Brazil there was surely no attempt to abolish slavery or the slave trade, for this was an area that would receive thousands of Africans annually as slaves.

The Brazilian historian Fernando Novais has argued that the Crown also had fiscal considerations in mind when it supported the import of African slaves, for it could draw income, at the planters' expense, from its monopoly of the African slave trade.²⁸ The ability to control, tax, or otherwise extract revenue from the slave trade clearly played an important role in Spanish legislation as well. It was probably for reasons of financial gain and control rather than simply a desire to protect Native Americans as a people weaker than Africans that led to the policies.

Nowhere is this more strongly suggested than by Portuguese policy in Angola. Because the slave trade from the colony in Angola involved Africans, attempts to limit it could not be framed in terms of racial protection as they were in the Americas. Furthermore, Angola was a preferred source of slaves for the Atlantic, by all accounts. Yet Angolan policy exactly mirrored the policies of Brazil. In the earliest phases of the conquest (1579–1602) individual Portuguese soldiers received the obedience of African rulers (*sobas*) and collected revenue and labor from them or their subjects.²⁹ In 1607, however, the monarchy removed all conquered African groups in Angola from private jurisdiction and placed them under its own control or that of its representatives, just as the Spanish had done earlier in Hispaniola. Furthermore, the same legislation required all slaves to be secured in “just war” and limited commercial acquisition to specified markets under royal supervision.³⁰

Finally, beyond these fiscal matters, African slaves, even when freed,

²⁷ Fully discussed in Hemming, *Red Gold*, pp. 72–3, 147–55.

²⁸ See his argument in *Portugal e Brasil na crise da antiga sistema colonial, 1777–1808* (São Paulo, 1979).

²⁹ This system is described in Andrew Battel, *Strange Adventures of Andrew Battel in Angola and Adjoining Regions*, edited by E. G. Ravenstein (London, 1901), pp. 64–5.

³⁰ Regimento do Manuel Pereira Forjaz, 26 March 1607, MMA 5:268–9, 269–70, 274.

formed a readily identifiable part of the population that was typically dependent and lacked opportunities that other groups often had. The average manumission contract in most of Iberian America often stipulated continued service and dependency. Several studies of manumission practices show that most freed slaves continued in closely bound dependency, freedom amounting to little more than a reduction of the master's responsibility.³¹ Even when free of their former masters, ex-slaves had fewer political rights than other free people, for legislation routinely barred them from political participation and the holding of public office.³² In the Americas, this legislation tended to be racial in outlook, specifying the color (*negro* or *pardo*) as an identifying characteristic, but the spirit of the law was probably based more on the issue of legitimate birth (which was held against mestizos or mulattos, who were all assumed to be illegitimate) or former servitude.³³ Thus, in São Tomé, people of African ancestry routinely held office, generally claiming ancient privileges or noble and free African birth.³⁴

The combined pressure of Native American demography, the terms of conquest and its legislation set down by the Iberian royal authorities, and the fiscal policies of the monarchs all contributed to make African slaves the main providers of long-term labor, whether it was in agriculture, mining, crafts, or domestic service, in the areas of America where there were large and conquered populations of Native Americans. In many of the areas where Spanish conquest had brought a large Native American population under their control (which was proportionately large even after the early colonial epidemics reduced the numbers of Native Americans considerably) African slaves might still be the majority of the settler population.

Thus, for example, the Mexican Inquisition conducted a census in 1595 listing the population of many of the towns where Europeans lived. This census is unusual in that it gives the numbers of people of African

³¹ Frederick Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524-1650* (Stanford, 1974), pp. 298-300; Colin Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976).

³² For a survey and overview, see Rout, *African Experience*, pp. 126-61, and Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *To Be a Slave in Brazil, 1550-1888*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New Brunswick, N.J., 1986 [original French ed., 1979]), pp. 151-212.

³³ In this book I use "mulatto" to mean a person of mixed African and European descent and "mestizo" to mean a person of mixed Native American and European ancestry.

³⁴ For a telling discussion of this point in a primary source, see Manuel Rosário Pinto, "Relação do descobrimento da Ilha da San Thome . . . (1734) (modern ed., António Ambrósio, "Manuel Rosário Pinto [a sua vida]," 3/31 [1970]: 205-329), fol. 60, in which an attempt on the part of the settlers of partial European ancestry (*mestiços*) to disenfranchise the wealthier of those of pure African ancestry (*pretos*) on racial grounds was firmly defeated at the Portuguese court by relying on birth and service.

descent, and it clearly shows that such people were the most common element in every Spanish town in Mexico, even outnumbering the mestizos (among whom were usually included many people who had only Native American ancestry but found legal advantage in claiming partial European descent).³⁵ In Mexico, Peru, and most of Central America, persons of African descent were greatly outnumbered in the population as a whole by Native Americans and mestizos.

Records of mines and plantations also clearly show that the majority of the population that resided on such establishments permanently were also of African descent. Some mines, such as those of Mexico and Peru, employed numerous Native American wage earners (and occasionally slaves and forced workers, depending on the location); in most American mines the majority of the underground work was actually done by Native Americans.³⁶ But even in these mines, such as Potosí, slaves of African descent often filled supervisory, skilled, and administrative positions, as well as dominating domestic service among the owners and Spanish workers, and were more likely to be permanent residents than the Native Americans.³⁷ In other mines, such as those of New Granada, slaves of African descent might make up virtually the entire population, from the miners to all the support personnel, or share jobs with Native American slaves and tributary or wage workers.³⁸ The copper mines of Venezuela also employed both types of labor, with Afro-Venezuelans making up a major portion of the work force, especially in the skilled positions.³⁹

In sugar milling, the other great agro-industrial establishment of Iberian America, slaves were the permanent work force from almost the beginning. Ward Barnett's detailed study of the sugar haciendas of the Cortés family estates in the Marquisado de la Valle in Mexico, which covers the entire colonial period, makes it clear that Native American labor was employed only seasonally and much of the year-round work

³⁵ Dr. Lobo Guerrero and Licenciado Alonso de Peralta to Inquisition, 29 November 1595, fols. 54-57, in Georges Baudot, "La population des villes du Mexique en 1595 selon une enquête de l'Inquisition," *Caravelle: Cahiers du monde hispanique et luso-brésilien* 37 (1981): 5-18.

³⁶ D. A. Brading and Harry Cross, "Colonial Silver Mining: Mexico and Peru," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 52 (1972): 545-79; on mines in Central America, see MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*, pp. 58-60; 257-8.

³⁷ For Potosí, see Crespo R., *Esclavos Negros*, pp. 25-31.

³⁸ For the New Granada mines, see Vázquez de Espinosa, *Compendio*, nos. 964 (*cuadrillas de negros y indios*), 980 (*negros y indios*), and 1047 (mine located in area of considerable tributary population of Native Americans), all suggesting both groups working in all phases. For a detailed study of one mine employing mostly Afro-New Granadian labor, see Robert C. West, *Colonial Placer Mining in Colombia* (Baton Rouge, 1952), pp. 83-90.

³⁹ Miguel Acosta Saigonz, *Vida de los esclavos negros en Venezuela* (Caracas, 1967), p. 157.

(skilled labor, household service, and support labor) was performed by a slave staff on several of the estates.⁴⁰

What was true on most Spanish American sugar estates was also true for Brazilian sugar mills, the most important revenue earner for Portugal in America. Stuart Schwartz has studied the many mills of Bahia during this period and come to the same conclusions. Tupinambá labor was critical in the early formative stages, and late sixteenth-century slaves were mostly Tupinambá, though even then, smaller numbers of African slaves were employed in the house and as skilled labor. By the early seventeenth century, African slaves had more or less completely replaced them in domestic service, skilled labor, and even fieldwork. Tupinambá workers, now working for wages and recruited from nearby Jesuit-run villages (*aldeas*) provided only seasonal labor at the peak of the harvesting and milling season or for general maintenance.⁴¹

African slaves were therefore at the center of the conquered part of the emerging new Atlantic world. Their importance in the towns where most European immigrants and their descendants made their homes, in domestic service, and as year-round residents on mines and estates ensured their proximity to the centers of power and wealth, even if they did not share in that wealth and power. For many Europeans and Euro-Americans (any persons of European ancestry born in the Americas), it was the African presence in towns, farms, mines, and estates that was their only contact with Atlantic people who were not of European descent, the Native Americans being sequestered in rural areas and under tight missionary supervision. Thus, the development of Atlantic culture was ultimately a Euro-African phenomenon in many parts of Iberian America, with the Native American presence being felt strongly only in their home areas.

This geographic centrality was reinforced by the African slave role as supporters of the Europeans, sometimes against the Native American inhabitants, sometimes as an intermediary with them. During the earliest phases of the conquest, African slaves augmented the numbers of Europeans and provided assistance in exploration and conquest. Few conquests were accomplished without African participation. Perhaps the

⁴⁰ Ward Barnett, *The Sugar Hacienda of the Marques de la Valle* (Minneapolis, 1970), pp. 74–92.

⁴¹ Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations*, pp. 28–70. These conclusions are also supported by direct examination of one of the most important series of documents used by Schwartz, the various inventories and daybooks of the Engenho Sergipe do Conde in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, published as Instituto de Açúcar e Alcool, *Documentos para a história do Açúcar*, 3 vols. (Rio de Janeiro, 1953–6), vol. 2, *Engenho Sergipe do Conde: Livro do Contas (1662–53)*, and vol. 3, *Engenho Sergipe do Conde: Espólio de Mem de Sá (1569–79)*.

most famous of these early Africans was Juan Valiente, who participated in the conquest of Chile and Peru.⁴²

Frederick Bowser has pointed out the significance of this African presence in his study of the African slave in Peru. Bowser shows that the African slaves were not only economically important to European settlers and their descendants, but they were intermediaries between the Europeans and their Quechua and Aymara subjects as well.⁴³ Slaves augmented the military might of the Iberians whenever there was danger from Native Americans. For example, on early Hispaniola, royal instructions demanded that Spanish settlers arm their most trusted slaves (normally those with a family), called “secure blacks” (*negros seguros*), in case of a revolt by the Tainos,⁴⁴ and later still to protect various colonies against foreign incursions.⁴⁵ Slaves also served in the Portuguese army in Brazil, both against the Tupinambá and Tapuya and against European rivals such as the French and Dutch.⁴⁶

Nowhere is the proximity of the African slaves to the European community more clearly demonstrated than in the relationship of the two subordinate groups to the Spanish Inquisition. Whereas the Native American population was placed under episcopal supervision and their crimes and religious beliefs put under the special purview of the religious orders, the Africans were judged by the same tribunals as the Europeans.⁴⁷ African slaves were subject to European cultural norms, but this allowed the Africans to influence those norms as well.

African slaves in uninhabited or unconquerable areas

If the African slave was likely to be very important even in areas where the majority of the population and work force was Native American, how much more important would they be in areas where there were no indigenous inhabitants or where the local population could not be conquered. These areas can be grouped into two types of settlements: areas

⁴² William F. Sater, “The Black Experience in Chile,” in Robert Brent Toplin, ed., *Slavery and Race Relations in Latin America* (Westport, Conn., 1974), p. 16.

⁴³ Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru*.

⁴⁴ Documents cited in Wright, “History of Sugar.”

⁴⁵ Carlos Esteban Diebe, *La esclavitud del negro en Santo Domingo*, 2 vols. (Santo Domingo, 1980), 1:99. Documentation for Cuba can be found in “Papers Bearing on the Negroes of Cuba in the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of Negro History* 12 (1927): 55–56.

⁴⁶ E.g., the forces of Diogo Dias (Vicente do Salvador, *História*, bk. 3, chap. 22). Also Thales de Azevedo, “Índios, brancos e pretos no Brasil colonial,” *América indígena* 13 (1953): 119–32.

⁴⁷ For an excellent overview see Solange Alberro, “Noirs et mulâtres dans la société coloniale mexicaine, d’après les archives de l’Inquisition,” *Cahiers d’Amérique Latine* 17 (1978): 57–88.

like the offshore islands of Africa (the Cape Verdes, São Tomé, and Príncipe) and Barbados in the Caribbean, where the land was uninhabited before the arrival of the Europeans; and areas like North America or the eastern Caribbean (including the Guyanas), where there were Native American inhabitants, but their conquest proved impossible. In these last areas, Native American slaves (from near or farther away) might be integrated into the laboring and serving population, but for the most part the Native American society was not actually conquered and integrated into the society of the settlers as it was in much of Spanish America or even in sections of Brazil.

These two divisions can be further subdivided into those in which European immigrants were brought to provide some or all of the work force, such as North America and the eastern Caribbean, and those where the climate was judged too harsh or dangerous for Europeans, such as Cape Verde or especially São Tomé. Although the demographic mixture that resulted in all these areas varied widely, African slaves proved to be an important element, at times serving simply as a minority of the labor force coexisting with other workers and at other times gradually becoming virtually the only people who labored or served.

Historians have been divided as to why the African slaves became so important in all these areas. For some, disease and climate have been of great significance. Just as Old World diseases often made it impossible to use Native American workers or slaves because they died off too quickly (at least in the Caribbean Islands and perhaps in lowland mainland regions as well), so too the tropical climate of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Guinea with its hostile disease environment made it impossible for Europeans to labor there.⁴⁸ Indeed, the prevalence of disease in São Tomé is best illustrated by the observation of the papal nuncio in Portugal that in the 1530s the Portuguese government circumvented papal injunctions against civil authorities inflicting capital punishment on clerics by simply exiling them to São Tomé, knowing that within a short time after their arrival on the island they would be dead.⁴⁹

But if the epidemiological argument works fairly well for explaining why not only the entire laboring population but even most of the settler population was of African origin in the Gulf of Guinea, it is somewhat less successful for the Caribbean, where European workers played an important role in colonies of all the northern European nations for the

⁴⁸ A worthwhile analysis is Philip Curtin, "Epidemiology and the Slave Trade," *Political Science Quarterly* 83 (1968): 190–216.

⁴⁹ Marco Vigerio della Rovere to Amborsio Riacalcato, 7 October 1535, in Charles-Martial de Witte, ed., *La correspondance des premiers nonces permanents au Portugal, 1532–1553*, 2 vols. (Lisbon, 1980), 2:156.

first fifty years of colonization.⁵⁰ Furthermore, it does not work at all well in North America, where, by all accounts, the climate was fully suitable for European workers, though the first generation found it difficult.⁵¹

Other historians have focused on the issue of race and national origin as a means of supplementing or supplanting arguments based on epidemiology. Following the lead of Winthrop Jordan, numerous historians have suggested that deep-seated European prejudices against non-Christian and dark-skinned people have predisposed them to selecting their labor force, especially the most oppressed and vulnerable segment of the labor force, from among this group rather than from among Europeans. Thus, because Europeans were valued more, they tended to hold the skilled laboring positions or set themselves up on small farms, whereas Africans and to a lesser extent Native American slaves were consigned to the dirty, difficult, and dangerous work.⁵²

More recent scholarship has placed heavier emphasis on economic factors. African slaves and European indentured servants bore different costs to their masters and were available for immigration depending on a number of factors. European immigration especially was governed by the ability of the immigrants to obtain legal freedom and rights in the future, by the wages and land available in Europe, and by opportunities in the Americas. In Africa, as well, local conditions determined the price of slaves, and shipping and mortality factors affected their price and utility in the Americas. Then, depending on characteristics of the colony – its choice of exports, the agronomy of export crops, the profitability of one or another export, and the degree of concentration of capital – the economic decision makers would determine what sort of work force was preferable: slave or free, European or African.⁵³

At the very beginning of colonization, when Europe still had feudal relationships, at least in some areas, European immigration might not have

⁵⁰ For a good survey of this era in the British Empire, see John J. McCusker and Russel Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607–1789* (Chapel Hill and London, 1985), pp. 211–57.

⁵¹ See *ibid.* and the careful study of the situation in Virginia by Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680–1800* (Chapel Hill and London, 1986), pp. 30–44, 54–63, 167–203.

⁵² Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes towards the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968), esp. pp. 71–82. Also Leon Higginbotham, *In a Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process: The Colonial Period* (New York, 1978), esp. pp. 7–14. For the English Caribbean, see Gary Puckrein, *Little England: Plantation Society and Anglo Barbadian Politics, 1627–1700* (New York, 1984), pp. 146–69. For an extension to Native Americans, see Aulden T. Vaughn, "From White Man to Redskin: Changing Perceptions of the American Indian," *American Historical Review* 87 (1982): 917–53.

⁵³ See also McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, pp. 35–70. A recent comprehensive attempt to analyze the choices between various types of labor is in David Galenson, *Traders, Planters and Slaves: Market Behavior in Early English America* (Cambridge, 1986).

been different from that of Africans. For example, a mid-fifteenth-century contract for workers for the Azores tendered by a German specifies that the contractor will deliver workers, perhaps from his own estates.⁵⁴ Similarly, some of the workers in the Spanish Canaries who had emigrated from Portuguese Madeira in the early sixteenth century seem to have been day laborers working for a wage, suggesting that a European-style labor force had developed there.⁵⁵ Similarly, Portugal frequently deported criminals and other elements deemed undesirable (Gypsies and Jews, for example) to their overseas colonies to serve as common workers.⁵⁶ But these relationships were relatively insignificant, and in any case, were not available to the northern European settlers in the Americas, for whom the choice between European and African labor forces was posed.

Rather, for northern Europeans, it was a choice between European workers, recruited through a contract of indenture, or African slaves, acquired by purchase on the African coast or from another part of the Americas. The indenture contract typically gave the holder the right to full use of the workers' labor in exchange for paying the workers' passage and food, minimum clothing, and a grant of land plus sufficient capital to begin life as a petty agricultural producer at the end of the contract term (three to seven years). Such terms were often glowingly set out, along with equally impressive descriptions of the colony to be settled, in advertisements for workers.⁵⁷

These contracts were generally beneficial to the workers, if they could survive the rigors of travel, the change in climate, disease, the difficult work, and the illegal attempts on the part of the holders of the contracts to withhold pay, freedom, or other stipulated items. This beneficial contract, framed to attract the landless or marginal European peasant or town dweller, was not at all to the liking of many of the colonists, who wished to use the American colonies to make their own fortunes, often as quickly as possible. Such people preferred slave labor, because it involved no legal restrictions on the master, was indefinite, and was inheritable.

For example, in 1631, a young English squire, Henry Colt, complained that planters in Barbados (wealthy settlers hoping for quick profits) could not adequately control an indentured labor force under conditions that allowed the workers easy access to freedom.⁵⁸ Some years later, in

⁵⁴ Contract of 29 March 1457, *Monumenta Henricina*, 13:93–4.

⁵⁵ Armesto-Fernández, *Canary Islands*, pp. 16–21.

⁵⁶ Serrão, *História de Portugal*, 2:

⁵⁷ E.g., *A Publication of Guiana's Plantation* (London, 1632) (sample contract, pp. 19–21), or the Dutch announcement, *Pertinent Beschrijvinge van Guiana, gelegen aen de vaste Kust van America* (Amsterdam, 1676), sample contract, pp. 5–11.

⁵⁸ Henry Colt, "The Voyage of Sir Henry Colt" (1631), in Vincent Harlow, ed., *Colonising Expeditions to the West Indies and Guiana, 1623–67* (London, 1924; reprint, Lichtenstein, 1967), pp. 65–6.

1647–50, Richard Ligon found the same complaint echoed by the larger Barbados planters, who were now becoming wealthy from newly introduced sugar production.⁵⁹ These complaints were not limited to Englishmen, for the Jesuit priest Jacques Bouton, among the pioneer settlers in the French Caribbean, made exactly the same complaints in 1640, noting that the main problem with indentured servants was that one "lost them every three years" (the term of service in the French indenture contracts).⁶⁰ These sentiments were expressed in similar terms by his successors in the 1650s and 1660s, as the French islands turned to sugar production as their main crop and needed larger labor forces.⁶¹ Dutch settlers in New Netherlands (modern New York) also complained, for a much poorer settlement in the temperate regions of North America, that "farm servants must be bribed to go thither with a great deal of money and promises"⁶² and hoped to replace them with slaves.

Given these complaints, one should not be surprised that the wealthier sought by whatever means to limit and revoke the contracts that they had made to obtain European labor. When the Dutch pirate Esquemeling came to the Caribbean in the 1660s as an indentured servant himself, he met in his own experience and in the tales of other pirates with similar backgrounds many examples of contracts being extended, broken, or abused by the wealthy, who sought to maximize the labor they received from their indentured workers.⁶³ These tactics were often resisted by the workers not just by running away and joining pirate gangs but by work stoppages, revolts, petitions, and labor action.⁶⁴ The situation had reached such a point when Ligon visited Barbados that he believed that the potential for violent confrontation was greater every day.⁶⁵ The problems of the indentured servants, seeking legal redress in often hostile courts (which were controlled for the most part by holders of indentured labor), and competition over land between freed indentured laborers

⁵⁹ Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London, 1657), pp. 43–5.

⁶⁰ Jacques Bouton, *Relation de l'établissement des François depuis l'an 1635 en l'isle de la Martinique* (Paris, 1640), pp. 98–9.

⁶¹ Charles de Rochefort, *Histoire naturelle et morale des Iles Antilles de l'Amérique* (Rotterdam, 1658), pp. 319–21; Jean-Baptiste du Tertre, *Histoire generale des Antilles habitées par les François*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1667), 2:545–7.

⁶² Report of Board of Accounts on New Netherlands, 1644, in E. B. O'Callaghan and Berthold Fernow, eds. and trans., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 15 vols. (Albany, 1856–87), 1:154.

⁶³ John Esquemeling, *The Buccaneers of America*, 2d ed. (London, 1684; reprint, New York, 1987), pp. 52–4.

⁶⁴ See the overview by Hilary Beckles, "Rebels and Reactionaries: The Political Response of White Laborers to Planter-Class Hegemony in Seventeenth Century Barbados," *Journal of Caribbean History* 15 (1981): 1–19; also Jill Sheppard, *The "Redlegs" of Barbados* (New York, 1977).

⁶⁵ Ligon, *History of Barbados*, pp. 43–5.

and wealthier proprietors shaped Barbados politics for much of the mid-seventeenth century.⁶⁶

Although the competition was less acute in North America, the contests between indentured servants and the holders of their contracts were important there as well. Even those former indentured servants who had acquired land found that pressure on them by their wealthier neighbors threatened their position. Bacon's rebellion in 1676 can rightly be viewed as a major expression of these political tensions.⁶⁷ All in all, this situation made the use of European indentured labor difficult for those who wished to employ it, especially on larger estates.

There were, therefore, some institutional reasons that made slave labor more attractive, at least to those wealthier planters who could afford the higher initial cost of purchasing slaves rather than importing contract labor. Slaves had no way of automatically obtaining liberty, and the owner was not bound by a contract to give them anything, though obviously owners had to provide subsistence if they expected them to work effectively.

Some historians, largely using data from Virginia, have argued that northern European law, unlike that of southern Europe, had no provision for slavery, and that originally African slaves were simply seen as bondsmen and bondswomen, to be freed after a specified period of time. In this scenario, some see racial attitudes as creating the conditions both for the development of a slave law and for imposing this on the Africans.⁶⁸

But a wider view of the colonies of the northern Europeans does not support these ideas as a whole. Although the English and Dutch may not have held slaves at home in any numbers, most English and Dutch merchant companies and colony founders had concrete experience in the Spanish and Portuguese colonial world long before setting out to the Americas. Furthermore, the laws of these countries were not codified (as was, for example, Spanish law) and thus tended to grow somewhat haphazardly in all cases. However, canon law and biblical literature included discussions of slavery that may well have substituted for a more specific set of legal precedents.

⁶⁶ Puckrein, *Little England*, pp. 25–31. For a detailed outline of these issues, which shows in how many respects indentured laborers were like slaves, see Beckles, "Rebels and Reactionaries."

⁶⁷ Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Governor and the Rebel: A History of Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 1957); and more recently, Edmund S. Morgan, "Slavery and Freedom: An American Paradox," *Journal of American History* 59 (1972–3): 20–4.

⁶⁸ This long debate originates with Oscar Handlin and Mary Handlin, "Origins of the Southern Labor System," *William and Mary Quarterly* 7 (1950): 199–222; for a more recent view and survey see Russel Menard, "From Servants to Slaves," *Southern Studies* 16 (1977): 355–90. The emphasis on racial attitudes in the shift is found in Carl Degler, "Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2 (1959): 49–66, and Jordan, *White over Black*.

Whatever the legal case, the earliest settlers certainly understood that the Africans they purchased were legally different from the indentured servants they brought from Europe, long before the first slave codes were promulgated in Virginia or the West Indies. The Dutch settlers in New Netherlands insisted on the right to import slaves from the very start of their settlement in 1626⁶⁹ and were upset that they were having to use indentured servants rather than slaves in 1644, precisely because they recognized the legal impediments to the fullest long-term use of the labor of their indentured servants.⁷⁰ In 1631 the English settler Colt realized that slaves could be held for their lives, and their descendants for theirs,⁷¹ as did the French colonists who informed Bouton in 1635 and later.⁷²

These choices were made concerning the legal status of their workers and show a clear understanding that there was a crucial difference between a European indentured servant and an African slave. Ultimately, too, legal status rather than race determined the choice of slaves over indentured servants for many colonies, as is well illustrated when people of African descent came to America as indentured servants rather than slaves. There were several cases where such persons were wrongly enslaved and sought redress in courts in Virginia⁷³ and, in at least one case, that of Thomas Hagelton in Maryland in 1676, successfully defended their rights as former indentured servants and free people.⁷⁴

But in the end, it may well have been economic conditions rather than simply legal status that determined the choice of labor force. Wages and conditions in Europe went a long way toward determining who would be willing to undertake the task of settling. Adverse publicity concerning conditions for indentured servants in the Americas may also have shaped the decisions, all tending to make indentured servants more expensive.⁷⁵ At the same time, the Dutch expulsion from Brazil in 1644 may have cheapened slaves for North America and the Caribbean as the Dutch sought to dispose of their slaves from African sources more cheaply.⁷⁶ The organization of the French and English slave-trading companies in the 1670s and 1680s also ensured a certain supply of slaves at

⁶⁹ E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Voyage of the Slavers St. John and Arms of Amsterdam* (Albany, 1967), p. xiii.

⁷⁰ Remonstrance of 1644, *ibid.*, pp. 200–1; and remonstrance of 1649, in O'Callaghan and Fernow, *Documents* 2:213–14.

⁷¹ Colt, "Voyage," pp. 65–6.

⁷² Bouton, *Relation*, pp. 98–9.

⁷³ Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, p. 360.

⁷⁴ Decision of 24 May 1676, William Hand Browne, ed., *Archives of Maryland*, 72 vol. (Baltimore, 1883–1972), 66:291.

⁷⁵ See the discussion in Galenson, *Traders, Planters and Slaves*.

⁷⁶ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, pp. 60–6.

low cost.⁷⁷ Thus, the two tendencies of more expensive European labor and cheaper African labor when combined with the advantages of slave labor over indentured labor for a long-term work force contributed to the gradual replacement of one by the other.

Other economic factors of significance also concerned the development of profitable export crops. In Barbados, for example, once sugar took off as an export crop, it made fortunes for those who invested in it, allowing them to replace their indentured work forces with the more expensive but more satisfactory slaves, and then to buy up suitable land from the remaining free farmers, gradually transforming the demography of the island from one of European settlement to one of African slaves and European owners.⁷⁸ In general, the same sort of cycle took place in Virginia with the tobacco farmers, where the wealthier farmers reinvested their incomes in slaves and replaced their indentured servants, even though they were not as capable as their West Indian counterparts in driving out the competition from small holdings.⁷⁹

In all the areas of settlement without Native American workers, the conditions favored the placement of African slaves in crucial positions, thus enhancing their ability to make a cultural impact. Obviously, in the uninhabited islands of the Gulf of Guinea and the Caribbean, they formed virtually the entire labor force (especially after the sugar cycle forced the indentured workers out, after about 1660) and the majority of the population. But even in the areas where they were not the largest demographic element, they tended to be well placed in the society.

In North America, for example, slaves were most likely to be found in the largest estates and wealthiest households. William Byrd, living in Virginia in the 1680s, in land occupied by his estate and the smaller farms of former indentured servants, still felt that he was living in a "great family of Negro's [sic]."⁸⁰ Byrd's slaves not only worked fields but provided domestic service, in close proximity to the European master. This same situation prevailed in New Netherlands. The wealthiest had large estates of slaves, where everywhere else European indentured

⁷⁷ For the English case, see Davies, *Royal African Company*, and Galenson, *Traders, Planters and Slaves*.

⁷⁸ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, outlines the process. See also Robert Carlyle Batie, "Why Sugar? Economic Cycles and the Changing of Staples in the English and French Antilles, 1624-54," *Journal of Caribbean History* 8 (1976): 1-41; and for a slightly different perspective, Matthew Edels, "The Brazilian Sugar Cycle of the Seventeenth Century and the Rise of the West Indian Competition," *Caribbean Studies* 9 (1969): 24-44.

⁷⁹ Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, pp. 30-44.

⁸⁰ William Byrd to Warham Horsmandon, 31 March 1685, in William Tinling, ed., *The Correspondence of the Three William Byrds of Westover, Virginia, 1684-1776*, 2 vols. (Charlottesville, Va., 1977), 1:32.

servants prevailed. Thus, only West India Company officials and the governors had as many as forty slaves each in New Netherlands.⁸¹ Slaves also provided most of the domestic service in the homes of the elite, even though some visitors may have preferred Europeans, believing that "Angolan slave women are thievish, lazy and useless trash."⁸² But whatever the overall Dutch opinion of them, they were virtually ubiquitous in domestic service among the better households.

Owners of slaves could also engage in large-scale nonagricultural enterprises without the problems contingent upon using indentured servants, especially in some skilled tasks, where the loss of a trained servant might be hard to make up. This might explain why one Virginia master, Samuel Matthews, was reported in 1648 to have some forty slaves whom he "brought up to trades" so that he could hire them out as skilled workers and, moreover, enjoy that right perpetually.⁸³ Such strategies often had the effect of undercutting free workers, and not surprisingly, free workers in both Boston and New York complained of the practice of masters employing skilled slaves and hiring them out.⁸⁴ Even where the slaves were less skilled, a master might hire them more cheaply than a free person would be willing to work, undercutting free labor even in unskilled tasks. Certainly this practice was undertaken in Dutch New Netherlands, though the documents do not reveal the attitudes of free workers to it.⁸⁵

As in Spanish and Portuguese America, the earliest settlers found African slaves valuable military allies, especially in those colonies where hostile Native American groups were constant threats. French accounts of the settlement of Cayenne (French Guiana) mention frequent use of *nègres* to fight the local Carib inhabitants.⁸⁶ The Dutch governor of New Amsterdam told the heads of settler families in 1641 that he would use

⁸¹ Stuyvesant letter, in O'Callaghan and Fernow, *Documents* 2:474, 504; Esther Singleton, *Dutch New York* (New York, 1909; reprint, 1968), p. 152.

⁸² Michaelus to Smoutius, in J. Franklin Jameson, ed., *Narratives of New Netherlands, 1609-64* (New York, 1909), p. 129.

⁸³ *A Perfect Description of Virginia . . . Being Sent from Virginia at the Request of a Gentleman of Worthy Note* (London, 1648).

⁸⁴ Town meeting minutes, in *A Report of the Records of Commissioners of the City of Boston*, 13 vols. (Boston, 1881-1909), 7:5; Minutes in *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1675-76*, 8 vols. (New York, 1905), 1:179.

⁸⁵ Dutch documents on the case of a certain Bastian Jansen in the 1670s reveal the dynamics of the process, which might be complicated; see sessions of 1 February 1670 and 2 May 1671 in Peter Christopher, Kenneth Scott, Kenneth Stryker-Rodda, eds. and trans., *New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch: Kingston Papers*, 2 vols. (Baltimore, 1976), 2:459, 465. For more evidence, though from a later period, see Edgar J. MacManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse, 1973), pp. 45-7.

⁸⁶ Antoine Biet, *Voyage de la France Equinoxiale en l'isle de Cayenne* (Paris, 1654), p. 103; du Tertre, *Histoire* 2:498.

the "strongest and fleetest Negroes" to fight the Native Americans with hatchets and the half-pike,⁸⁷ and Pieter Stuyvesant requested in 1658 that the Dutch West India Company send "clever and strong Negroes" to work and to fight Native Americans, either directly or as adjuncts in carrying supplies.⁸⁸ Likewise, in 1652 the Massachusetts assembly ordered that all the inhabitants of the colony, including "Scots and Negroes," be armed and trained for war.⁸⁹

The problem of having adequate soldiers was an acute one as more and more slaves arrived, however. When the slaves were not numerous and there were relatively few Europeans as well, arming slaves to stand and fight side by side against Native American or European rivals might be practical. But as slaves gradually replaced indentured servants as a labor force, and fears of slave revolt rose, most colonial legislatures decided to end slave military service, as happened in Barbados. In Barbados, however, the colony had to accept (at a cost in local self-government) the protection of the royal army and navy because the elimination of poor Europeans and slaves from the military left it defenseless.⁹⁰ Alternatively, when European indentured servants or their free descendants were sufficiently numerous to fill the militia, slaves were phased out so that the militia could police slaves as well as defend the colony. This took place fairly rapidly in Massachusetts, which banned slaves from militia service in 1656,⁹¹ but a bit more slowly in Virginia, which did the same in 1680.⁹²

In the Atlantic colonies of the northern Europeans, as in the Spanish colonies, freed slaves and their descendants could also form a permanently dependent group. Their owners could grant them freedom without necessarily losing control over them, because the owners could control exactly how they wished freedom to be given. The Dutch West India Company granted many of its slaves freedom but in exchange for payment of perpetual dues, and it retained the right to reenslave the children of the original slaves. Several such slaves appeared in a legal inquest of 1644,⁹³ and the

⁸⁷ Director to Heads of Families, New Amsterdam, 1 November 1641, in van Laer, *New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch*, 4 vols. (Baltimore, 1974), 4: fols. 104-5.

⁸⁸ Stuyvesant to Curacao, 1658, in O'Callaghan and Fernow, *Documents* 13:142-3.

⁸⁹ Ordinance of 27 May 1652 in Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 1628-74*, 5 vols. (Boston, 1853-4), 3:268.

⁹⁰ For the complexities of this situation in seventeenth-century Barbados, see Puckrein, *Little England*, pp. 118-20, 175-80.

⁹¹ Ordinance of May 1656 in Shurtleff, *Records* 3:420.

⁹² For a detailed discussion of armed slaves and legislation in Virginia, see T. H. Breen and Stephen Innis, "Myne Owne Ground": *Race and Freedom on Virginia's Eastern Shore, 1640-1676* (New York and Oxford, 1980), pp. 24-8.

⁹³ Hearing of 25 February 1644 in van Laer, *Historical Manuscripts* 4: fols. 183-4.

practice was condemned as being "contrary to all humanity" in a remonstrance of 1649.⁹⁴

As in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, legislation also tended to retain the former slaves as a dependent and powerless group, though this may have been fairly slow to develop in some areas. T. H. Breen and Stephen Innis, for example, have recently shown that former slaves in Virginia enjoyed considerable political rights in the early and mid-seventeenth century,⁹⁵ although eventually laws restricting the political liberty and rights of people of servile and African descent predominated.⁹⁶ Certainly, these restrictions caused former slaves on French St. Christopher to complain to the Jesuit priest Jean Mongin of their condition as being little better and perhaps even worse than that of the slaves in 1682.⁹⁷

Thus, African slaves even in North America, where they made up a small minority of the overall population, were placed near the center of visibility and power in settler society. They were not marginalized or banished to backwoods areas. Indeed, the marginal areas were the places they were least likely to be found, for only the wealthiest owned them in any numbers, though of course, a large percentage of the African slaves lived in rural areas, and most worked all day in the fields rather than in the houses of the rich.

⁹⁴ Remonstrance of 1649 in O'Callaghan and Fernow, *Documents* 1:343. For more such cases, see Singleton, *Dutch New York*, pp. 154-5.

⁹⁵ Breen and Innis, "Myne Owne Ground."

⁹⁶ Higgenbotham, *Matter of Color* (for North America); Jerome S. Handler, *The Unappropriated People: Freedom in the Slave Society of Barbados* (Baltimore, 1974) (for Barbados).

⁹⁷ Jean Mongin à une personne de condition du Languedoc, St. Christophe, May 1682, in Marcel Chatillon, "L'évangélisation des esclaves au XVII^e siècle, lettres du R. P. Jean Mongin," *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe* 60-2 (1984): 77.