



Legacies of the Slave Trade

Week Nine Lectures



What is Curtin's "Plantation Complex"?

1. "Most of the productive labour was forced labour, [and] most people were slaves."
2. "The population was not self-sustaining." There was a high death rate compared to live births.
3. "Agricultural enterprise was organized in large-scale capitalist plantations."
4. "Though capitalist, the plantations also had certain features that can be called feudal."
5. "The plantations were created to supply a distant market with a highly specialized product."
6. "Political Control over the system lay on another continent and in another kind of society."

Slavery, Enslavement, and the Plantation Complex

- What makes the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade so unique is the fact that "enslavement" (the act of capture) is geographically removed from the actual life of a "slave".
 - "Enslavement" occurred on the African continent, while most of the labour performed by slaves happened in the Americas.
- This is because the plantation complex does not have a self-sustaining population. There was a constant need for new slaves, therefore new enslavement.
 - The means of procuring slaves (enslavement) destabilized many West African societies and regions.
- Even once the *Slave Trade* was banned, natural reproduction of existing slaves was still not enough to sustain *slavery as an institution*.
- The plantation complex is therefore a *trans-Atlantic* mode of production involving both the capture of slaves and exploitation of their labour.

Slavery, Enslavement, and the Plantation Complex

- We have established that as the *trans-Atlantic* trade was coming to an end, more and more slaves were utilized for agricultural production in Africa, producing goods for "Legitimate Trade"
- The threat of being sold into the Trans-Atlantic market was also an effective way to control slave resistance on the African continent (i.e. - behave or you'll be sent to Brazil).

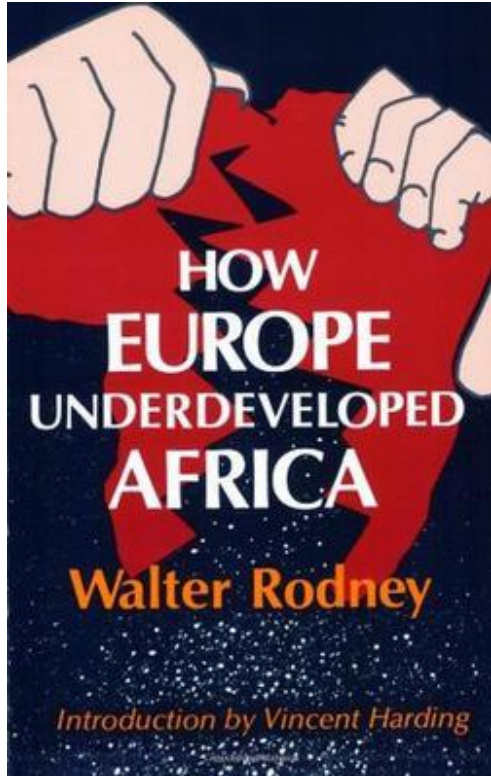
Transformations in Slavery

- Lovejoy's book *Transformations in Slavery* is titled as such for a reason: slavery was not a static institution. Slavery changed to account for more global economic transformations.
- Gradually, the separation of "enslavement" from "exploitation of labour" was diminished. More and more slaves were used to produce on the African continent, gradually facilitating colonial expansion
- Lovejoy: "Thus west-central Africa must be seen in conjunction with the development of plantation slavery in the Americas, where slavery was the basis of production but where the institutions of enslavement were often not present, except with respect to the enslavement of the Amerindian population in different periods. Taken together, this sophisticated slave mode of production was separated into distinct parts – enslavement was mostly confined in Africa, whereas productive slavery was concentrated in the Americas – and a mechanism of slave distribution connected the two sectors. Once the forces of abolition began to sever the link in this intercontinental system, slavery was confined to an African context". (274).

Slavery & Capitalism

- According to Lovejoy (and Mintz, and others), slavery and capitalism often went hand-in-hand.
 - "This process of intensified slave use and then the collapse of slavery reveals a wider phenomenon: the articulation of a slave mode of production with capitalism. This articulation began with the incorporation of the Guinea coast into the southern Atlantic system of slave supply for the Americas. Africa was invariably tied to the Americas until this supply function was terminated in the nineteenth century; hence developments in slavery along the Guinea coast were subordinate to the emergence of productive slavery in the Americas. Commercial links with Europe and India demonstrate the extent of this involvement, but the nature of the exchange in itself served as a barrier to the transfer of capitalism to Africa. At the height of the slave trade in the eighteenth century, Europe, the Americas, and Africa formed three distinct sectors of the world economy; capitalism emerged triumphant only in Europe, whereas the Americas and Africa remained subordinate partners" (275).

Walter Rodney, b.1942 - d.1980



Rodney's Main roots of African Underdevelopment

- Loss of West Africa's healthy, male labour force, reducing the ability of the societies to compete with the rest of the world.
 - He thinks the existing estimate of 10 million slaves brought to the new world is incomplete
- Rodney argues that most of the goods imported into Africa in exchange of slaves were economically useless goods: jewellery, liquor, guns, etc.
 - This is not fully accurate, as we have seen in previous readings
- Rodney notes that the export of finished products to the African continent for slaves crippled some of these key African industries, like textiles.
 - Note modern correlations and historical contradictions.
- These slaves were brought to the new world to allow for more profits and more capitalist expansion there. Furthermore, additional profits from slave labour allowed and enabled European colonisation in Africa.
- Under colonialism, many African societies were forced by European rulers to grow certain crops, the Europeans would then buy the crops at poor prices.

Issues with Rodney's Book

- Some scholars have complained that Rodney's insistent Pan-African and politicized rhetoric leads to him misleading how slavery actually occurred in pre-colonial Africa.
- Rodney seems to imply that slavery was just an "accidental by-product" before the Europeans started buying slaves.
 - This is simply not true, but it does contain within it some insight into African-Diasporic Identity
- Rodney also holds that the goods imported were useless, we have seen that this wasn't fully true.
- Some critics believe that Rodney's treatment of the history removes Africans of their Agency in historical change