

Jews and the Early Slave Trade

The Continuity of the International Slave Trade and Slave System

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Blacks and Jews FAQ

By Charshee McIntyre (1990)

Audio

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More institutional continuity between ancient and modern slavery existed than generally has been suggested. While some scholars recognize that American slavery had much in common with that of the Greek and Roman classical form, many scholars prefer to accept the rumor of chattel slavery's disappearance during Europe's Middle Ages. This acceptance tends to preclude any theory of direct influence and linkages. However, the evidence of continuity remains. This paper offers a brief overview of the connections between the slave system and slave trade of the Old World and that of the so-called New World by highlighting the role of Jews in this oppressive commercial enterprise and social system.

The continual expulsion of Jews from different nations throughout Europe and the Mediterranean arena forced this religious group to develop particular skills that these same hostile nations at various times wanted and needed. The individual European nations' intermittent expulsion of Jews caused them to live in many countries, to adopt many "national" identities and names, and to be able to speak many languages. They represent probably the first truly international people, establishing residences in many different countries and interlinking and interlocking with relatives and co-religionists throughout the world.

What is a Jew and who is a Jew become significant and complex questions. In old countries, a person would say, "I am Russian of the Jewish faith." In America, the term Jew means other than follower of a faith, for many identify themselves as Jewish but adhere to no or a different faith, such as a Christian Jew. Through intermarriage, many prominent families have some Jewish ancestry. Stephen Birmingham discusses a book written by Malcolm H. Stern, *Americans of Jewish Descent*. This text lists over 25,000 entries, including "the Rockefellers ... the De Lanceys, the Livingstons, the Goodwins, the Stevensons, the Ingersolls, the Lodges, the Ten Eycks, the Tiffanys, the Van Rensselaers, the Hopkinses, the Baltimore Blairs ... and the Vanderbilts" to highlight a few.¹

A brief overview such as this essay cannot provide sufficient illumination regarding this very complex pattern of Jewish identity. However, when discussing their involvement in any commercial enterprises, we must remember the heinous mistreatment they underwent from many nations that legally offered them sometimes no, and often few, alternatives. The Christian nations reserved activities they believed to be sinful, like money lending, for Jews and then defined these endeavors negatively. Max Weber explains the pattern:

To the English Puritans, the Jews of their time were representatives of capitalism which was involved in war, government contracts, state monopolies, speculative promotions, and the construction and financial projects of princes, which they themselves condemned. In fact, the difference may, in general with the necessary qualifications, be formulated that Jewish capitalism was speculative pariah-capitalism, while the Puritan was bourgeois organization of labor.²

Despite the biased characterization of their activities, Jews remained major players in international commercial endeavors when the mercantilist age and, later, the industrial revolution, developed. As the merchant class gained power and respectability, Jews proved tremendously competitive. In some cases, they gained friends; in other cases, they acquired powerful enemies.³

The Jewish involvement in and sanctioning of slavery can be traced to the teachings of Moses, who was informed (by Yahweh) that "the Hebrews should buy their slaves from neighboring nations." The restrictions for Jews involved the enslavement of their own people—which was not prohibited, but set within certain parameters: "No Hebrew bondsman was to serve, without his consent, for longer than 50 years."⁴ Both the Christian and Judaic text identified servitude with Canaan.⁵ But the justification for the enslavement of Black people came from the Jewish interpretation of the Hamitic Myth from "the Talmudic and Midrashic sources," which included: "Ham was smitten in his skin"; that Noah told Ham, "Your seed will be ugly and dark-skinned"; and that Ham was father "of Canaan who brought curses into the world, of Canaan who was cursed, of Canaan who darkened the faces of mankind, of Canaan the notorious world darkener."⁶

This interpretation came from the *Babylonian Talmud*, not the *Jerusalem Talmud*. The distinction is important, according to St. Clair Drake, who hypothesizes that "special conditions in Mesopotamia generated rabbinic stories associating Negroidness with excessive and aberrant sexuality and Noah's curse." Drake argues that the Mesopotamia Jews negatively

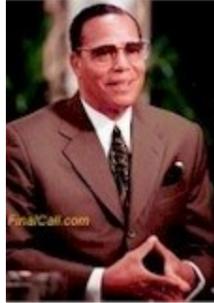
encountered significant numbers of Africans called the Zanj. In fact, Drake insists that "some Jews had a stake in maintaining slavery. They were not just supervisors of slave labor; eventually, they became slave owners and dealers in the slave grade. A Diaspora Jewish culture with values quite different from those in Palestine developed."⁷ He explains as follows.

Audio

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Min. Farrakhan & the Jews



During the first century A.D....among Babylonian Jewry was a class of native born aristocrats....Under these circumstances, parts of the Jewish community became involved in the importation and exploitation of "Zanj" labor in southern Mesopotamia. Insofar as the landed upper class followed the ancient Babylonian pattern, it would have been a slaveholding class. And it is likely that some of the farmers and tradesmen held slaves as well. The Jewish people were also represented in commerce, in manufacturing, and in the ownership of vessels that traded in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, where they were in direct contact with the "Zanj."⁸

Of course, the enslavement of all captives from wars and other means indicated some form of human progress. Since before slavery, these poor souls would have been murdered. Therefore, during ancient and biblical times, the buying and selling of slaves occurred. By the fifth century and up to the 15th century, and international slave trade flourished in the Black and Mediterranean seas.⁹

Jews & the Black Holocaust

As early as A.D. 472, Bishop of Clermont, Appolaris Sidonius, praised Jewish merchants for "conducting honest business," while he scolded Christians as usurers. After the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, the rapid spread of Christianity to some slight degree may have ameliorated the conditions of enslaved Europeans such as to affect the trade, but the church made no effort to abolish the institution.¹⁰ Greeks, Bulgars, Italians, Syrians and Jews shared the European court. At first, Syrians dominated the trade, but by the seventh century, Jews took the lead.

Jews in the Sugar Trade

Ships owned by Jews sailed the Mediterranean, and Jewish traders trafficked by cart up and down the valleys of and by raft up and down the rivers Rhone, Danube and Rhine. Venice, Passau, Cologne and the city fairs of Champagne became the chief ports of entry for spices, silks, ivory and other luxuries of the East. Merchants sold these goods to princes, peddled them at convent doors, and displayed them in Episcopal halls. In return, these traders received Western furs, weapons and enslaved humans to take to Moslem Spain and the East.

List of Jews in Black Slavery

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As Islam rose in the seventh century, it shattered for many years the free commerce of Europe with Africa and Asia. The Mediterranean ceased to be a Roman lake; it became a foreign sea. The same reasons—their common faith, their common social habits, and the community of blood underlying their group—that kept Jews from entering and becoming part of the Christian European world made the Jews the obvious channels for the trading community. These factors allowed the Jewish merchants to serve as international traders; allowed them to connect with other traders in far-off lands and across vast seas "to ship, in short, a bale of silk from Constantinople to Cologne."

The Jewish 'Slave trains moved across Europe from Germany to Verdun and finally to Moslem Spain' with enslaved humans that originated in "Bohemia, Moravia and remoter Slavic lands." They carried "slaves, furs and swords to the Jewish-Khazar kingdom on the Volga" when they traveled eastward to China. The "slaves and furs, much prized in Moslem lands, were picked up for little more than nothing in the great Slavic reservoirs of men and beast." When moving westward toward the palace of the King of all Franks, these merchants carried "spices, silks and tapestries." Along the way, they would meet Italian Jews, probably in Worms and Mayence, selling Byzantine items from Venice. Many reaped substantial profits that became the basis for Jewish wealth and their money-lending activities.¹¹

The Jewish presence permeated throughout; and around A.D. 794, the Synod of Frankfort in Central Germany, attempted to break the Jewish trade monopoly. Custom collectors levied taxes "on Jews and other merchants" for "slaves and other wares." Even Charlemagne attempted to stop the Jewish traffic to no avail—for the demand for stalwart enslaved humans, good spices and furs outweighed the laws against Jewish trading.

By the ninth century, the words "merchant" and "Jew" had become almost synonymous. "Judaei vei ceter; negotiatores sive Judaei, mercatores ei Judaei—Jews or other traders, traders or Jews, merchants and Jews—so ran the usual phrases in [European] chronicles, legal codes and tariff bills."¹²

By A.D. 887, some German cities made Jewish merchants pay "an extra 10-cents tax," primarily to give the Christian competitors an advantage. And, in A.D. 888, the Synod of Metz "forbade Christians" to eat or to drink with Jews. Most of these negative laws and punitive taxation toward the Jews occurred because of the church trying to expel the Jews from their areas. The church, having to compete with them in selling wine and grain, desired their removal; but "above all, the church objected to the Jewish slave trade" not because the church had compunctions about having and selling enslaved humans. Rather, it resented the Jews proselytizing the captives.¹³ The church passed laws that forbade Jews owning enslaved Christians and laws forbidding Jews converting heathens to Judaism.

Of course, most of these laws were broken, for the army, along with others, tended to look favorably upon the Jewish merchants.¹⁴ When Germans opened up frontier towns along their eastern border about A.D. 965, Otto the Great placed "the Jews and all other merchants" under the rule of the local bishop. Jews owned a salt mine there, and Jewish merchants brought in "Byzantine wares and coins" with which to buy "slaves, tin and lead."

In the 10th century, a Jewish minister of state to the Caliph of Cordova employed another German Jew as a messenger "through Slavic lands to the

Khazar Kingdom.” In the 10th and 11th centuries, Swedish merchants also established contact with the Caliphate of Baghdad and the Byzantine Empire. They traded wax, furs and enslaved Russians for the spices and silks of the East. The merchants and princes of Kiev, Russian, considered the export of enslaved humans one of their principal sources of wealth.¹⁵

By the end of 11th century, German Jews had entered Rhineland, Saxony and the Reich “and the threads of their trade united them with far places.” Jewish merchants often served as “the instruments by which the most distant nations conversed with one another.” As stated earlier, this Jewish international trade network became strong primarily due to the social proscriptions levied upon them in their home nations. They could not become citizens or engage in agriculture—which left them commerce and money lending pursuits.

As Western Europeans developed many new towns during the 11th and 12th centuries, Jewish merchants first prospered then met fierce competition. In “Venice, Bari and Amalfi, Italian merchants began to dominate commerce with the East.” The “doge of Venice urged the Church to outlaw Jews’ trading in coins, textiles” of anything related to Christian commerce. Venetian ships first could not carry Jewish merchants, then Jewish goods.

Jews continued to trade wherever they could, taking the position that to counter these oppressive acts, persuasion wouldn’t work but providing money and luxury items would. One scholar argued that Jews “did not cling to Judaism in order to become merchants—they became merchants in order to remain Jews.”¹⁶

Throughout the Middle Ages, a regular trade in slaves and a form of slavery existed that included Blacks from Central Africa, Mongols and whites from the Balkans, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.¹⁷ The Christian, Jewish and Islamic traders of Southern Europe and Northern Africa found steady sources. Italy, Spain, Portugal and the Byzantine Empire received Moslem slaves. North Africans received Christian slaves.¹⁸

Once kept alive by the Moslems’ demand for enslaved whites, the European demand for enslaved humans gradually decreased. Depots existed in Lyons, Verdun, Civitavecchia and elsewhere. An eastern route carried Slaves from Kiev and the Crimea by way of Byzantine to the Mediterranean. Using the non-European route over the Caucasus Mountains, merchants carried the captive Slavs and Circassians to the Abbasid Caliphate. The North and East African routes provided enslaved Blacks for the Ottoman Empire, which the Moslems controlled exclusively. Italian cities played a very large role in this trade.¹⁹

In the 13th century, *scavus*, meaning slave, reappeared in Italy and spread over Europe. At this time, Italians established a new trade route that particularly served the Mediterranean world.²⁰ Enslaved Slavs from Southeastern Europe and the shores of the Black Sea began to be imported into Italy. Refugees and captives multiplied with the new Asiatic invasions of Eastern Europe and the Near East. Venetian and Genoese (many Jewish) traders bought Circassians, Armenians, Syrians, Bulgarians and Serbians from the Turks to resell principally in the Mediterranean countries.²¹

During this time, Venetians transported enslaved humans to the harems of Syria and Egypt/Kemet. This trade proved vital to Venetian prosperity. Venetian merchants invented the institution later applied to the African trade. On the coasts of the Black Sea in the 13th century, they established bases of factories, which became thriving markets for the purchase of enslaved humans. These Italian merchants created joint stock companies, commercial or *fondachi*, along with a highly organized slave trade, securing enslaved humans from the Tartars. They established plantations in Cyprus to cultivate sugarcane. Later, colonizing nations looked to these Italians for commercial theory and practices.

The enslavement of humans served as a strong source of income to all Mediterranean ports in the Middle Ages. Crusaders had brought back many Nubian captives as their personal servants, and almost every king in Europe displayed enslaved Blacks in court. Merchants raided Africa and Asia Minor to seize suitable captives. The Turks raided the coasts and the Balkan states, capturing Christian boys to train them for government positions and to fight in the Turkish armies. In 1330, the Janissaries organized 1,000 Christian men to be soldiers.²²

The city of Rome, down the 16th century, patronized the enslavement of humans. Naturally, the rest of Italy followed the example of the metropolis of Christianity. The popes issued edicts of enslavement against whole towns and provinces. Boniface VIII issued one against the retainers of Colonna; Clement V against the Venetians (1294-1348); Sixtus against the Florentines (1375-1378); Julius against the Bolognes and Venetians; and the laws obligated anyone who could succeed in capturing any of the condemned people to enslave them. The examples of Rome encouraged the whole of Italy, especially Venice, to carry on a brisk foreign trade, especially in the enslavement of females.²³

The Turks’ conquest failed to affect the Iberian Peninsula and slaves densely populated parts of Spain. Catalonia-Aragon and Majorca, by the 13th century, possessed African bondsmen. Their numbers increased significantly by the end of the 14th century. The exchange occurred both ways, for the Genoese provided the Saracen traders with ships and enslaved Christians. Significant trading existed.

Bondsmen formed a significant portion of Tuscany’s population. Even nuns, priests and shopkeepers in Florence commonly owned enslaved people. The church occasionally denounced the sale of Christians, but the merchants disregarded all attempts at regulation. Thus, during the late Middle Ages, flourishing societies of enslaved humans existed alongside the main routes of commerce from Russia and Egypt/Kemet to Venice and the south of France.

The military success of the Ottoman Turks encouraged the revival of human enslavement. Standard accounts assert that at least 50,000 people were sold into enslavement after the fall of Constantinople.²⁴ But the Turks eventually sealed off slave markets of the Black Sea, and Florence's trade all but disappeared from the Mediterranean basin. As the Turks gradually extinguished the trade of Genoese and Venetian merchants (Christian and Jewish), Portuguese navigators nosed along the coast of Africa.

Throughout the Middle Ages and in 1501, after the fall of Capua, merchants sold enslaved women in Rome. A century and a quarter before that date, Pope Gregory XXI excommunicated the Florentines and ordered them enslaved wherever taken. In 1488, King Ferdinand, the Catholic, sent a gift of 100 enslaved Moors to Pope Innocent VIII. The pope distributed them to cardinals and church notables.²⁵

While many scholars point out that serfdom replaced slavery by the time of the European invasion of the Americas, some slavery remained in many European places. In Rome, for a time, a privilege existed that allowed an enslaved person to become free by taking refuge in the capital. But in 1548, through a presentation to the Senate, Paul VII abolished this privilege. Of all the great powers in Europe, Rome and the Catholic Church retained the enslavement of humans the longest.²⁶

Europeans slowly shifted the slave trade from the Mediterranean basin to the coast and islands of Portugal and West Africa.²⁷ Uncovering a number of these African islands renewed the Europeans' search for people to enslave. Portugal and Spain captured and enslaved, in addition to other Africans—the Guanaches, a Canary Island people. They are now extinct. For a time, the traders transported these African captives over Moslem territory into Southern Europe. Then during the 14th century, they opened a special caravan route from Sudan through the Sahara to the Peninsula in Cyrenaica.²⁸

The Portuguese owned many vessels used exclusively in the buying and selling of humans for enslavement. Some scholars suggest that the introduction of large numbers of these enslaved persons led to Portugal's decay.²⁹ Following wars on the Iberian Peninsula, Christians commonly enslaved Moslems. When victorious at sea, the Spaniards sent the Moslems to slave markets in North Africa. In Central Spain, the struggle with the Moors lasted until the conquest of Granada in 1491. When the re-conquest concluded, leaving no Moors in the Iberian Peninsula, the citizens needed to secure enslaved people outside the boundaries of the kingdoms.³⁰

[end of part 1--part 2 below]

Footnotes

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2. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner, 1958), p. 271n.
3. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* vol. II, p. 727.
4. David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 1966), pp. 64-66.
5. Davis, *ibid.*
6. Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 17-19.
7. St. Clair Drake, *Black Folk Here and There* (Los Angeles, California: Center for Afro American Studies, UCLA, 1990), pp. 28-30.
8. Drake, p. 319n.
9. Davis, pl. 31.
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12. Lowenthal, p. 1.
13. Chaim Potok, *Wanderings: Chaim Potok's History of the Jews*; (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1978), p. 395.
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16. Lowenthal, pp. 20-32.
17. John Codman Hurd, *The Laws of Freedom and Bondage in the United States* (1858 reprint, New York: Negro University Press, 1966), 2 vols., p. 163.
18. Davis, p. 4.
19. "Slavery," *Chambers Encyclopedia*, vol. 12 (1969), p. 601.
20. Drake, p. 228, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. XIII, p. 284.
21. "Slavery," *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, vol. 14 (1969), p. 78.
22. *The New Learned History*, vol. IX (1968).
23. *The New Learned History*, vol. IX.
24. *The New Learned History*, vol. IX.
25. Drake, pp. 227ff. Also see *Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. I., p. 88b.
26. Braudel, vol. II, pp. 754-755.
27. Davis, p. 31.
28. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. XIII, p. 284.
29. *The New Learned History*, vol. IX.
30. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. XIII, p. 284.

Part 2

The Continuity of the International Slave Trade and Slave System

By Charshee McIntyre (1990)

An Overview, Second of Two Parts

Just as the trading of humans did not end with the fall of the Western Roman Empire but continued to supply the highly developed system of enslaved people in Visigothic Spain as well as medieval France, and the Moslem conquest of the Iberian Peninsula failed to abate the demand for enslaved humans among Christians in Spain and Portugal, the re-conquest of the Iberian Peninsula did not bring to a conclusion this nefarious system. The Christian (mostly Italian and Portuguese) and Jewish merchants, shippers and financiers who dominated this trade simply moved to new arenas.³¹

Christian money lending was still banned by the church, and Europeans still needed the Jews for their financial resources and abilities. Consequently,

despite the eras of aggressive oppression and repression, many Jews remained in Europe, where they had endured the flagellations during the Plague, the inquisitions in Spain, and other tremendously hard times. An interesting quirk about the inquisitions is the role of Thomas de Torquemada, the first Inquisitor General of the Inquisition, who was himself of Jewish descent. He was among those who urged Ferdinand and Isabella to establish the Inquisition in the first place.³²

This most horrifying practice, which accounts for the torturous death of so many Jews and the constant migrations of countless others, continued well into the 18th century. But the Inquisition never fully removed all people practicing Judaism from the Iberian Peninsula. Under the labels of *Converso*, *Marrano* and *Anusim* ("the Forced Ones"), Jews "kept the faith," despite the terror imposed through the doctrine of *limpieza*, or "purity of blood." Under this doctrine, all people remained terrorized that one might accuse them of having Jewish or Moorish blood, which would imply heresy. They would be hauled off to prison and forced to engage in *auto-dafe*, literally, an "act of the faith." Being burnt to death equaled the most severe punishments imposed if considered having sinned too badly or too often.

Jews from North Africa prospered to some extent. However, as the Spanish became more aggressive, they secured Jewish slaves, sent them back to Spain, where they were required "to deny the Eternal God of Israel."³³

In addition to the expulsions from Spain because of the Inquisitions, the "Lombards overran the banking field in the beginning of the Fifteenth Century," and the Jewish emigration increased. Seeing themselves exiled in their homeland, relegated to owning only the ghetto areas, German Jews moved to Poland and Italy; other Jews journeyed to Salonika, which the Turks had captured, providing a place where all religions would be tolerated. Still others turned to Atlantic Ocean possibilities in Africa and the [missing portion].

The European nations trafficked in the buying and selling of humans in the 15th century with the Arabs of North Africa at first. They assigned caravans to the Gold Coast and collected gold from the Dahomey district, palm oil from the Lower Niger, ivory and African captives sold by other Africans from many places in Central and West Africa.³⁴

At first the Europeans concentrated their slave trading on those ports of the Guinea coast where earlier traders in gold, ivory, rum, pepper and other items already had created a demand for European exports, such as cloth, hardware, raw materials, spirits, arms and ammunition, and where indigenous trading systems remained highly developed.³⁵

During this same century, Central Genoese and Jewish merchants who owned enslaved people on Cyprus played important roles in developing commerce in the Atlantic while their capital continued to finance the production of sugar in the Canary Islands, Sao Tome, Sicily and the Madeiras. Tracing this one crop provides some insight into the interconnectedness of the "Old World" and "New World" slave systems:

Sugarcane, which was brought from India to Egypt, passed from Egypt to Cyprus, becoming established there in the tenth century; from Cyprus it soon reached Sicily in the eleventh century; from Sicily it was taken west; Henry the Navigator had some brought to Sicily to send to Madeira, which was the first "sugar island" of the Atlantic; from Madeira, sugar growing quickly moved to the Azores, the Canaries, the Cape Verde islands and beyond to America.³⁶

Braudel further argues that, "The islands of the 'Mediterranean Atlantic': Madeira, the Canaries, Sao Tome, were all literally ravaged by the monoculture of cane sugar, as colonial northeast Brazil was to be later." He destroys the claim that the system here did not directly grow out of the system in the Mediterranean and off the coast of Africa:

In the Canaries, sugar was almost certainly as responsible as the brutalities of the first conquerors for the disappearance of the indigenous natives, the Guanches. And it was the sugar plantations which generalized the use of slave labor, leading to the enslavement of the Berbers of the African coast, whom Christian pirates from the Canaries would carry off in their raids, and particularly to the slave trade in Negroes for Guinea and Angola which, in the middle of the century, again because of sugar, reached the shores of the American continent.³⁷

The Levantians, Sicilians, Normans and Italians extended the plantations worked by enslaved humans from the Mediterranean to the archipelagoes and islands off the African coast and to the Antilles and Brazil.³⁸ The trade along the African coast assisted the transition from historic Old World to New World enslavement of humans. In other words, the Europeans Atlantic slave trade and system grew directly out of their ancient Black and Mediterranean seas trade in which the Jews historically played so dominant a role.³⁹

Christopher Columbus connected the forcing out of the Jews from Spain and the triumph of the Moors in Granada with the discovery of the Americas. The estimates for those expelled range from 165,000 to 400,000 while for those Jews who stayed in the Iberian Peninsula, the figure is usually put at about 50,000. He along with many other mariners familiar with the Black and Eastern Mediterranean seas traffic entered the first Spanish and Portuguese ventures of Atlantic exploration.⁴⁰

In the Madeiras, a knight of Italian origin, Bartolomeo Paestrello, served as captain of Porto Santo in the year 1446. His daughter later married Cristobal Colon (Christopher Columbus). Despite the prevailing rumor that Queen Isabella pawned her jewelry to finance Columbus' adventures, the truth is that Jews assisted the voyages in several ways.

First, the Jewish property confiscated from them in Spain filled the royal treasury. Second, Columbus enlisted the assistance of Don Isaac Abravenal, “a prominent Jewish banker,” to underwrite the historic trip, who, in turn, enlisted the help of three other Jewish bankers, Luis de Santangel, Gabriel Sanchez and Abraham Senior. Professor H.P Adams of Johns Hopkins claimed that “not jewels, but Jews were the real financial basis of the first expedition of Columbus.”⁴¹ Third, Colon’s crew included *Conversos* (Jews who converted to Christianity, usually by having been tortured into doing so) and *Marranos* (secret Jews). The man who charted the course, Judah Cresques, was “known as ‘the map Jew’ head of the Portuguese School of Navigation in Lisbon,” and provided for Colon. “Abraham ben Zacuto, a Jewish professor at the University of Salamanca,” provided “almanacs and astronomical tables.” Both the ship’s physician, Mestre Bernal, and Marco, the surgeon, were Jews. Luis de Torres, “the official interpreter for the expedition,” also was Jewish and probably stepped on the Caribbean islands first.⁴²

This close association with so many Jews and his own obscure background, coupled with his inability to speak Italian well but Spanish very proficiently, have led to the speculation that Columbus probably was a Sephardic Jew. In fact, Portugal finally admitted some connection to him, acknowledging his Portuguese wife and erecting a small statue on the island of Madeira.

Coming from the Canary islands in 1493, quite predictably, Columbus’ first commercial ventures involved sugar and the enslavement of the indigenous people of the Americas. Columbus introduced sugarcane into Hispaniola (now Haiti/Dominican Republic); and by 1498, he shipped 500 Amerindians to Spain to be sold.

Following the lead of this *father of chattel slavery and racism in Americas Christopher Columbus or Cristobal Colon*, the Portuguese and Spanish *conquistadors* enslaved the indigenous Americans and used them as field hands and miners of the gold, silver and quarry stone for fortress construction. The high mortality rate of enslaved Amerindians led the priest, Bartolome de Las Casas, to plead for the Amerindians’ lives and to suggest the enslavement of Africans instead.

To give the reader some idea of the rate of destruction de Las Casas witnessed of these indigenous Americans, let me cite some approximate figures agreed upon by contemporary scholars: “In 1500, the world population [was] approximately 400 million, of whom 80 million inhabited the Americas. By the middle of the 16th century, out of these 80 million, there remain[ed] 10 [million]. Or, limiting ourselves to Mexico: On the eve of the conquest, its population [was] about 25 million; in 1600, [it was] 1 million.”⁴³ Certainly, the loss of 24 million people in about 100 years represents genocide so horrific that none of us should ever forget it.

With the “discovery” of America and the exploration and exploitation of Africa, the Europeans built up vast new empires, and for generations solved the labor problem in them by introducing various forms of enslavement. The buying and selling of humans by Europeans and Moslems flourished on a greater scale than before.

At the turn of the 17th century, “a few Portuguese Jews (Crypto-Jews or Marranos)” posing as Christians entered Hamburg having previously arrived in Amsterdam. They possessed trade connections with Lisbon and the Indies and held significant capital with them and in Portugal. Although the Hanseatic Hamburg senate set stringent limits on their behavior and worship, it allowed them to “subscribe money to the founding of the Hamburg Bank.” Soon followed by German Jews, the newcomers developed commerce with “Sweden, Poland, the Barbary States, the Indies, and made Hamburg a chief world port.”

Because of the ravages of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), the Christians found themselves depending upon the Jews in terms of trade and finance. Not able to serve in the military, these Jews fared well despite being subject to social proscriptions because their capital increased significantly. Eventually certain Jews gained positions of influence.

Court Jews “under the direct protection of a princely court and freed from the medieval chains burdening their race” came into being. These people, and their families, could trade, travel, dress and live as they wished. They lent money to rulers and oversaw the royal personages’ financial transactions, including the supplies for armies. Eventually, these royal functionaries established a new scale of banking and brokering. Among those best known were the Rothschilds. Many of these European Jews, and their money and influence, moved across the ocean.⁴⁴

The Dutch captured Brazil and offered the Jews safe haven there. Directly after 1631(?) [date not clear], a rather large Jewish population formed a community in Recife. They held considerable wealth and continued to dominate the trading from their new residence, bringing profit to both Holland and themselves. By 1640, a traveler stated that, “The Jews have a vast traffic beyond the rest; they purchased Sugar Mills and bought stately Houses in Recife.”⁴⁵ Of course, the bulk of their commercial enterprise from Brazil involved trading Africans for enslavement. By 1642, some additional 600 Spanish and Portuguese Jews joined the Holland emigres.

Unfortunately, for these expatriated Jews, the Portuguese defeated the Dutch and gained “Recife, Mauritestad, Parayba, Itamarica, Seara,” and wherever else the Dutch had colonized. The Portuguese brought the Inquisition to Brazil, forcing 5,000 Jews out of Recife alone. Many returned to Holland; some went to London; others dispersed throughout the American colonies.

New Amsterdam appeared a good choice for a few, but turned out to be hostile. The stern Calvinists requested the removal of the “non-believers,” but the Dutch West Indies Co. sent an order to Gov. Peter Stuyvesant granting the Jews permission to stay. The order cited the significant proportion of

Jewish investors in the Dutch West Indies Co. as a strong reason for accepting the Jews in New Amsterdam. In the interim between the Dutch West Indies Co.'s order to allow the Jews full participation in New Amsterdam and the Calvinists' request for their removal, some Jews chose to move to a less unsettling place.⁴⁶

As early as 1655, Barbados' population figures included Spanish Jews; and by 1680, the island reported 54 Jewish out of 351 households. Colonizers never counted enslaved families (African or Amerindian) within their household numbers. So these numbers miss the total human population. These Barbados Jews held no servants but owned 13 enslaved people, averaging three per person.⁴⁷

About the same time, "In 1658, Mordecai Campanall, Moses Pacheco, and other Jews from Curacao began to settle" in Newport, R. I. They even purchased burial grounds. In addition to Philadelphia, Newport became the home of many Quakers, another despised religious group who had become experts in the banking and commercial fields and in the selling of slaves.

The Quakers arrived in Newport by 1657 and by 1690 equaled one-half of that city's population. Led by these two groups, trading, including the buying and selling of humans, became the dominant mode of that New England community. In 1708, Col. Robert Quay told the Board of Trade that Rhode Island's "chief trade is to ye West Indies (particularly to Curacao and Surinam)."⁴⁸

Using the rum secured through the molasses trade with the Caribbean as an article of exchange, Newport mariners began the buying and selling of Africans quite early. The Jewish involvement and presence there and in the Caribbean islands dated from the very beginning. We already have mentioned Jews in Barbados, Curacao and Surinam during that time. Jamaica also documented their presence by 1693. In fact, the Jamaican colonial powers levied an additional 750-pound tax on the Jews to raise money to finance sloops for use against the French. At that time, American money didn't exist, but historically a pound has been worth almost twice our dollar, so this levy appears to be no slight amount.

The Jews in Jamaica, of course, petitioned against this discriminatory practice. The colony replied that the conditions for individuals to settle there required their becoming planters; since the Jews chose to engage in "keeping of shoppes and Merchandizing," which undersell the English; and since their "infidel" faith precluded having English trained by them; and since the gains of their trading went directly to their communities and not to the benefit of the English, the Jews, therefore, presented an unfair market competition and had to pay additional taxes.

The English also accused the Jews of encouraging "Negroes" to steal anything, particularly food, for the Jews to buy and then sell at very cheap prices. The Jamaican colonists claimed that this practice caused the English double trouble: One, it made the "Negroes steal more"; and two, it cost the English dearly to buy back their own items.

The Jews' answer "pointed out with pride how much the island had benefited by the trade they had brought to it, for they 'before the present Warr with Spain, by their industry & interest had procured the Assiento of Negroes to be Established at Jamaica; which very much promoted the Trade between the said Island & the Spanish West Indies to the great profit of England.'" This Jamaican document records the Jews using their involvement in the European trade of buying and selling Africans as the reason England had benefited in Jamaica from the Jews having settled there. In fact, their participation in this trading of humans served as the basis for their achieving citizenship status in Jamaica.⁴⁹

The Jewish pattern of developing international commercial connections continued in this hemisphere. In Newport, a dozen or so merchants built the Jewish community and aided in making that city commercially important in world trade before the American Revolution. Isaac Elizer, a Newport merchant-shipper like many of his friends and associates, engaged in the slave traffic among New England, Africa, and the Caribbean islands, particularly Guadeloupe.⁵⁰

Newport's commercial importance equaled that of Boston and Philadelphia, and surpassed New York and Charleston (S. C.). By 1750, Newport sent many more ships into international and coasting trade than New York or Boston. Up to 18 vessels from the West Indies arrived in Newport in one day. In fact, Max J. Kohler argues, "The Jewish Merchants were not merely the capitalists who furnished the wherewithal for this trade, but their enterprise created the trade itself, introduced new arts and industries involved, and furnished the trade connections through their co-religionists in different foreign ports with which the relations were formed." Jewish merchants were so prosperous and successful in these endeavors that when they left Newport, the prosperity of that city left with them.⁵¹

Jews reached Newport about 1658; the records conflict but most scholars accept that year. Mordecai Campbell, Moses Packechoe (Pacheco), Levi and others making up about 15 families, including three first-degree Masons, resided about that time in that city. They created the House of Campannall, which some writers claim to be the introductions of the Masonic order in this country.⁵² These first Jewish families consisted of money-brokers, merchants and traders: Isaac Isaacs, money-broker; Isaac Benjamin, Isaac Moses, merchants; and Jacob Frannc (or Franci) and Abraham Benjamin, traders. Some had commercial relations with New York in the 17th century, according to a letter that stated, "Lara had shipped certain goods from Rhode Island to New York that were seized by a pirate vessel."⁵³

The most famous of these early Newport Jews included the Lopez and Rivera families. The Lopez family came from Portugal and fled the Inquisition. The Riveras came from Spain. Both Marranos (or secret Jews) in Europe, they

arrived in the Americas separately at different times. In order to trade in the English colonies, they had to be naturalized. Abraham Rivera, Moses Lopez and Solomon Hart, Jr. secured their naturalization in New York between 1740 and 1741, and Jacob Frannc about 1746. Lopez developed an improved method for manufacturing potash and received a patent for 10 years from Rhode Island. Newport refused Aaron Lopez naturalization, but he gained it in Massachusetts.⁵⁴

From as early as 1764, Rivera and Aaron Lopez were active in the slave trade. They always had at least one ship a year in the trade. In 1767, Lopez focused on the Jamaica trade with hopes of bringing in molasses, enslaved Africans, coffee, rum and sugar. He sent his son, Moses, to work in Jamaica. Rivera, Lopez's father-in-law, built and owned the *Cleopatra*, which Lopez eventually used as a slave ship.

Lopez also worked with other Jewish Newport merchants, especially Myer Pollack, in the Triangular Trade. They bought molasses in the West Indies to make it rum in Newport, to export it to Africa and to return to the West Indies with slaves. The Custom House records list the volume of molasses coming into Newport on Oct. 10, 1769 for Lopez's industry from Jamaica, and for Pollack's *Hope* from Hispaniola and the *Nancy* from St. Eustatius.⁵⁵

As a Newport merchant-shipper, Lopez attempted to sell lumber, oil and vessels in the English market, but mostly he engaged himself heavily in the trade of capturing, buying and selling Africans. In fact, he "was active in contracting for the building of ships which he used for himself or sold to Europe or in the West Indies when the market was right." In 1772, he contracted with a Capt. Peleg Clarke to provide the latter a slave ship; and in 1772 and 177? [date unclear] they had four "slavers" to Africa each year.

Like many other Newport Jews who held residences in other places like Portugal, the West Indies, Boston, Leicester (Mass.), Providence, Richmond, Wilmington, Savannah, Charleston, North Carolina and New Orleans, Lopez also owned significant property in Jamaica. A particularly important point should be emphasized here. Intercolonial trade during the colonial and revolutionary times existed very sparsely because, with the exception of the Jews, people from the different colonies remained strangers. For millennia, the Jews had engaged in and, at times in certain places, had dominated international trade. They continued to do so in this hemisphere. When "the intercolonial 'trust' or combine formed in 1761," it was "composed largely of American Jewish Merchants."⁵⁶

At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, Aaron Lopez owned many vessels engaged in European and West Indian trade in addition to the whaling industry. At this time Lopez was considered the pre-eminent merchant in all of New England.⁵⁷ He developed Newport for a quarter of a century, eventually owning 30 vessels engaged in international trade and many more in the coasting market.⁵⁸

The case of the Newport merchant-shippers is instructive because these Jewish merchants not only engaged in the actual trade of capturing, buying and selling Africans but also profited from other industries ancillary to it. The shipbuilding industry in Newport, partially financed by Jewish moneylenders and owned by many Jewish shipbuilders, profited handsomely from the transporting of enslaved Africans. These Jews also gained from insuring the slave ships and their cargoes.⁵⁹

Newport was not the only seat of Jewish activity in the buying and selling of humans to make them slaves. One Samuel Jacobs, a troubled son of a well-to-do Jewish merchant in Quebec, also journeyed in 1785 to Jamaica to become "a man" by taking up the life of a merchant. Bertram Wallace Korn, in *Jews and Negro Slavery*, claims that "Jewish Settlers in the West Indies Colonies were at least as influential as those on the North American mainland."⁶⁰ Benjamin Monsanto from the Hague and his wife, Clara, from Curacao were Marranos (Christianized Jews). They lived in Natchez, Miss., and engaged in the international and domestic slave trade.⁶¹

Writers who discuss Jews and slavery and/or the slave trade tend to give the impression that no Southern Jews engaged in the practice. But Korn dispels this myth and documents the Southern involvement, particularly after the American Revolution. He picked the 18th and 19th centuries because "the colonial period was the heyday of slave importation from Africa, and Northern Jews were far more active in this aspect of the slave trade than Southern Jews."⁶²

Korn used figures from "An Estimate and Analysis of the Jewish Population of the United States in 1790." Georgia and Virginia census analyses were destroyed, but he compiled the following:

| | Jewish Population | Jewish Slaveowners | Africans Enslaved | Averages | |
|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------|----------|
| 1790 | | | | | |
| New England | 23 | 5 | 21 | 22% | â€“ 4.2 |
| New York | 60 | 20 | 43 | 33% | â€“ 2.15 |
| Philadelphia | 31 | 3 | 6 | 10% | â€“ 2 |
| Maryland | 8 | 3 | 3 | 38% | â€“ 1 |
| 1820 | | | | | |
| New Orleans | 6 | 6 | 23 | 100% | â€“ 3.8 |
| 1830 | | | | | |

When we reconcile the numbers in the tables to find how many enslaved Africans each family was likely to hold, we arrived at Jewish slave-owning families averaging 2.5 enslaved Africans in the North and 5 enslaved Africans in the South, with an overall total for both North and South of +4.5 enslaved Africans per family. If we average the percentage of the entire Jewish community holding enslaved people (particularly Africans) in this table, we find 40 percent, a figure much higher than the percentage of slave-owners in the rest of the country.

However, if we check that ±40 percent against 129 wills of Southern Jews, 33 disposed or discussed slaves, giving up a 25-percent ownership among the Jews, equaling the rest of the U.S. census in 1860, which cites 75 percent of whites not owning slaves at all. One other factor must be considered: the residences of both Africans and Jews during slavery. A small minority (one-seventh) of Africans but the majority of Jews resided in urban areas. Yet Jews' percentages of ownership equaled the rest of America. Therefore, within the urban environment, they took a larger percentage of the fewer numbers since the rest of white American slave-owners used their enslaved Africans primarily in the rural areas.⁶⁴

Additionally, the enslaved Africans in the urban areas tended to be younger and more skilled than their rural kin. Korn includes a sampling of this with a bill of sale in which B. Mordecai, an auctioneer, describes 35 adults, ages between 16 and 30, two age 40 and one woman with two children. Of these, 13 or 40 percent possessed skills and the rest were deemed field hands.⁶⁵

Since no Southern area held a large Jewish population, the above figures are small but demonstrate that when able, Southern Jews fully participated in the American practice of trading in and enslaving humans, particularly Africans. More important, well-known Southern Jews owned enslaved Africans. Judah P. Benjamin, a brilliant New Orleans attorney, in 1844 owned a plantation with 140 enslaved Africans, managed by Theodore Parkwood. Maj. Raphael Moses, a chief commissary officer of Columbus, Ga., owned 47 enslaved Africans. Nathan Nathan, president of Beth Elohim Congregation of Charleston, S.C., owned a large number. Isaiah Moses held 35 in St. James of Goose Creek County, S.C. Mordecai Cohen of St. Andres, S.C., owned at least 27 and both his sons held Africans as well. Even rabbis in several areas owned enslaved Africans. The Rev. George Jacobs held an African woman, and "A. J. Marks, acting rabbi of New Orleans in the 1830's listed 11 slaves in his household." Other rabbis are cited as well.⁶⁶

In order to buy these Africans, someone had to sell them. While not the dominant segment of the activity, Jewish auctioneers and commission merchants existed throughout the Deep South. Being an auctioneer and commission merchant represented a respectable occupation throughout the South, and one can find much documentation regarding which Jews engaged in such activities. Many of these traders/auctioneers held prominent positions within the Jewish community. L.T. Levin served Columbia as a rabbi and Benevolent Society of that city as secretary and treasurer. He fared as well among Christians, becoming Illustrious Grand Master of the Masonic Temple. His listing in the City Directory of 1850 reads, "auctioneer and commission merchant for the sale of Real Estate, stocks and bonds, Negroes, cotton, flout and corn."

The respectability of this occupation is reflected in the newspapers and city directories that covered the civic activities and occupations of the populations. For example, we find D. Mayer Jacobs & Co., mentioned in the Atlanta, Ga., *Daily Register*, April 30, 1863; Jacob Cohen, the 10th largest dealer in that city, in the Charleston, S.C. *Daily Courier*, April 26, 1857; Myer Moses in the *Charleston Southern Patriot*, April 14, 18115; Ottolengue in the *Charleston Daily Courier*, Jan. 1, 1857; J. & I. T. Levin in the *Daily South Carolinian*, Nov. 15, Dec. 2, Dec. 9, Dec. 17 and Dec. 19, 1852; Isaac Joseph

in the Knoxville, Tenn., *Daily Register*, June 19, 1832; George Davis in the Mobile, Ala., city directories for 1839 and 1842; S.I. and I.I. Jones, in Mobile's *Daily Advertiser & Chronicle*, Feb. 6, 1841; Jacob Hart in the *New Orleans Louisiana Gazette*, July 8, 1808; Jacob Levy and Lewis Florence in the *New Orleans City Directory* of 1832; and E.J. Hart & Co., Levy & Summers, and Hemmingway, Freidlander Co. in the New Orleans City Directory of 1855. This list gives the reader a sampling.⁶⁷

Besides the auctioneers and commission merchants, full-time Jewish slave traders worked throughout the South, such as Solomon Cohen in Atlanta and Augusta, Ga.; B. Mordecai in Charleston, S.C., who was so successful he owned slave pens alongside his warehouses; J. F. Moses in Lumpkin, Ga.; Philip Goldsmith in Mobile, Ala.; Benjamin and Jacob Monsanto in Natchez, Miss., and New Orleans; Levy Jacobs in New Orleans; Abraham Smith in Richmond, Va.; and Ansley, Benjamin, George and Solomon Davis in Perersburg and Richmond, Va. The largest group apparently became the Davises. Harriet Beecher Stowe mentioned them in her *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*.⁶⁸

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Jacob Barrett, storekeeper, speculator, carried all items of trade and at one time claimed 1,000 enslaved Africans working his rice plantation near the Savannah River. Levy made money manufacturing servants' clothing, and Moses bragged he had sold over 200 in one county alone.⁶⁹ Despite being a small proportion of this terrible activity, Southern Jews involved themselves on all levels.

We have covered a very slight bit of the history of the continuity between ancient and modern slavery and slave trade. We have mentioned Catholic, Islamic (Moslem and Moor), Protestant (Quaker) contributions to this continuity, but have focused most particularly on the historical role of the Jews in the enslaving and selling of Africans and African Americans to maintain this heinous system--the dehumanizing of humanity through commerce and trade.

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Jews & the Black Holocaust

Jews in the Sugar Trade

List of Jews in Black Slavery

Prof. Tony Martin's Jewish Onslaught

Contact

Footnotes

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