

Week 3: The Slave Trade & British Industrialization

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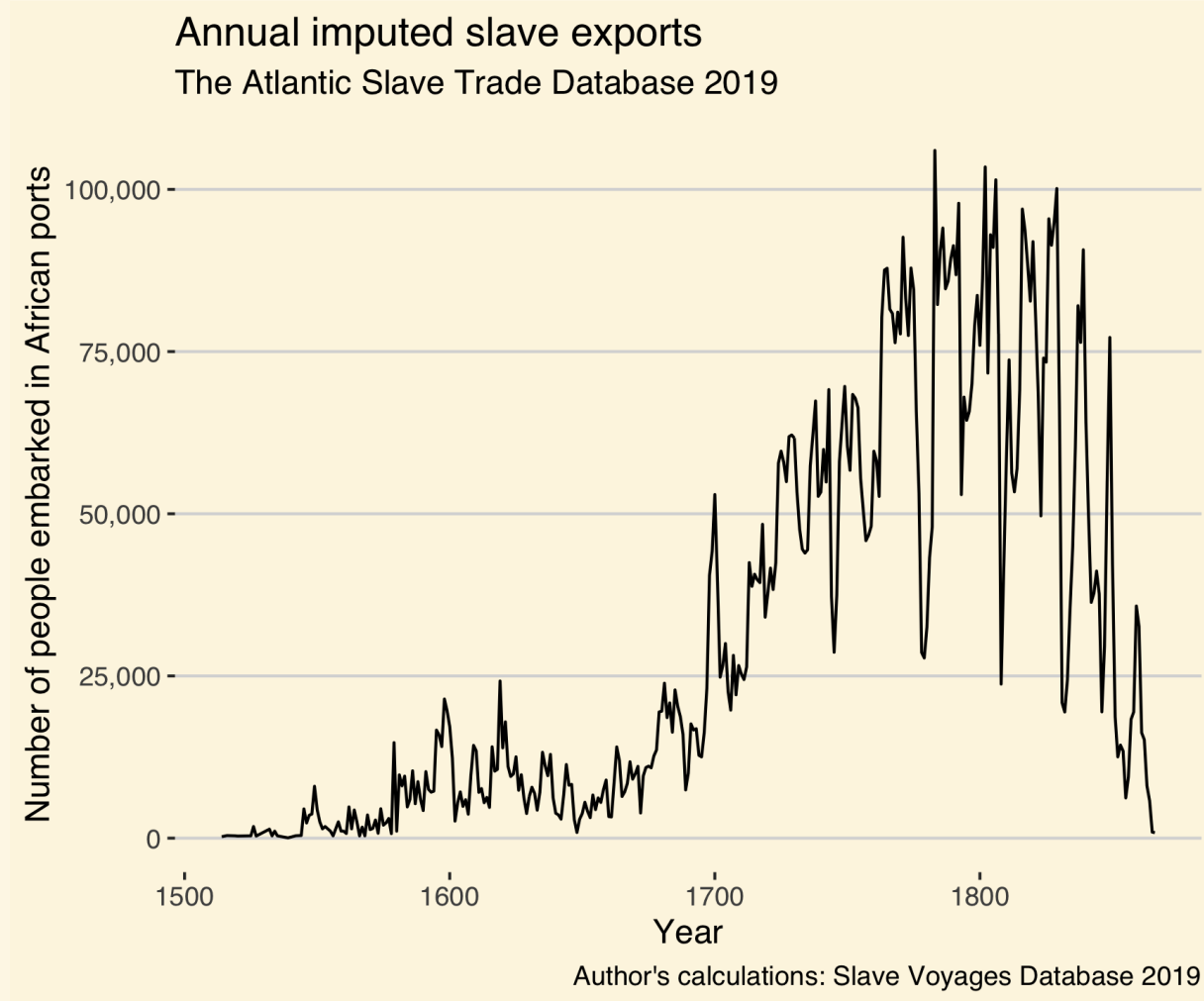
Today's Goals

1. Give a brief introduction to the atlantic slave trade -- in particular its scale
2. Introduce a long-running historical dispute over the role of the Atlantic slave trade in British industrialization
 - We will follow some of the debate over *how* the slave trade and slaveholder wealth contributed to industrialization
3. Introduce some large database sources and how historians use them
 - These are important in their own right, and interesting examples of large-scale data-intensive historical projects

The Scale of the Atlantic Slave Trade

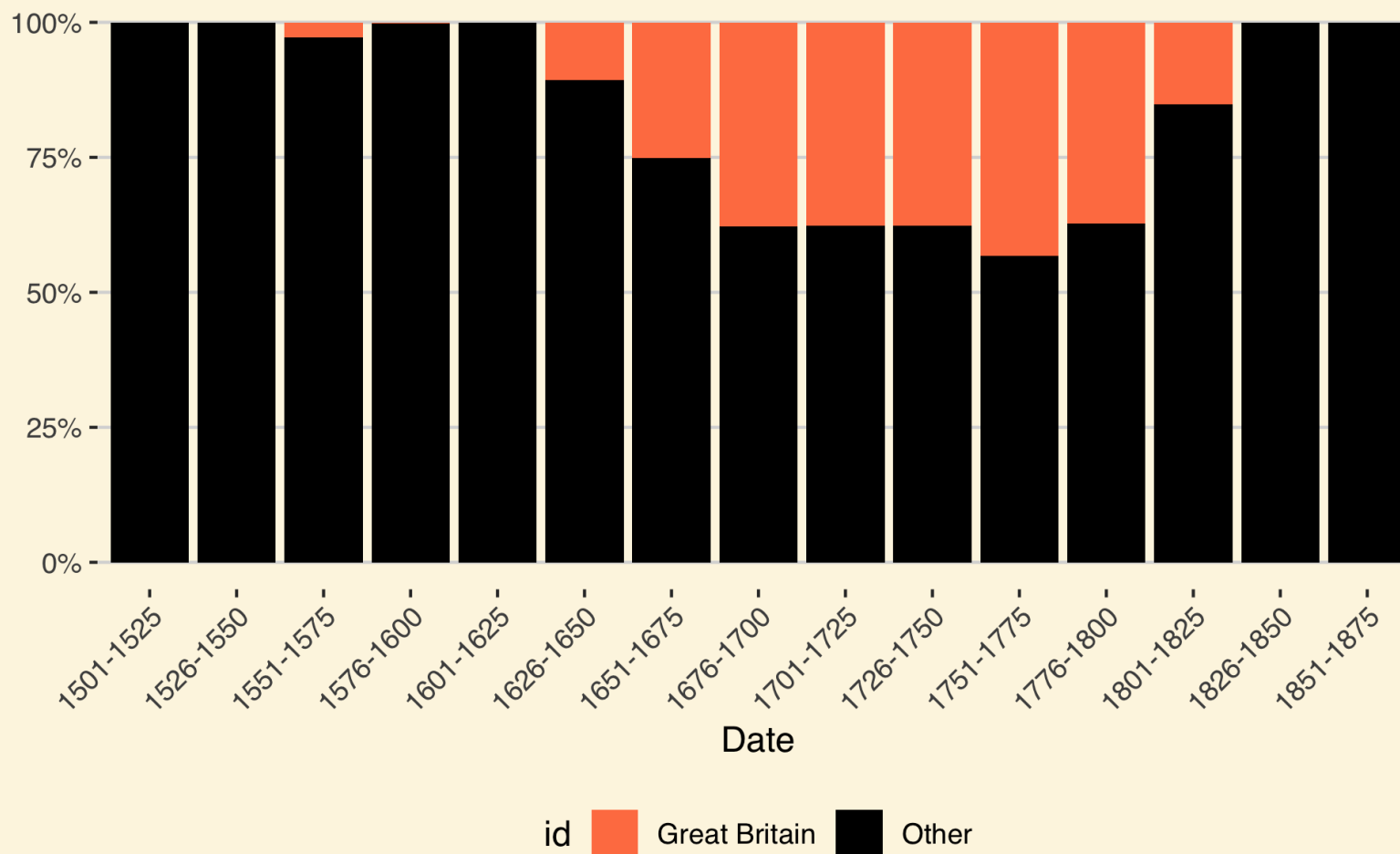
"...in every year ... to 1831, more Africans than Europeans quite likely came to the Americas, and not until ... the 1880s did the sum of net European immigration start to match and then exceed the cumulative influx from Africa."

— Eltis, "Free and Corced Transatlantic Migrations: Some Comparisons," *American Historical Review*, p. 255.



Britain's Share of the Global Slave Trade

25 year bins



Author's calculations: Slave Voyages Database 2019

"Historical statistics, their display and manipulation, are similar to prose-based evidence in narrative or rhetorical argument: **both are only ever as valid or reliable as the people or institutions that produced them, on the one hand, and the historian herself who manipulates and judges them, on the other.**

—Hudson & Ishizu, *History by Numbers*, p. 12-13

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Good questions to ask

1. Where do these numbers come from?
2. How are they recorded?
3. How complete are they?
4. Do they measure the same thing over time?



Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Database

Year range ▾

Ship, nation, owner ▾

Itinerary ▾

Enslaved people ▾

Dates ▾

Captain and crew ▾

Outcome ▾

Source ▾



Results

Summary statistics

Tables

Data visualization

Timeline

Maps

Timelapse

Showing 1 to 15 of 36,071 entries

Configure columns ▾

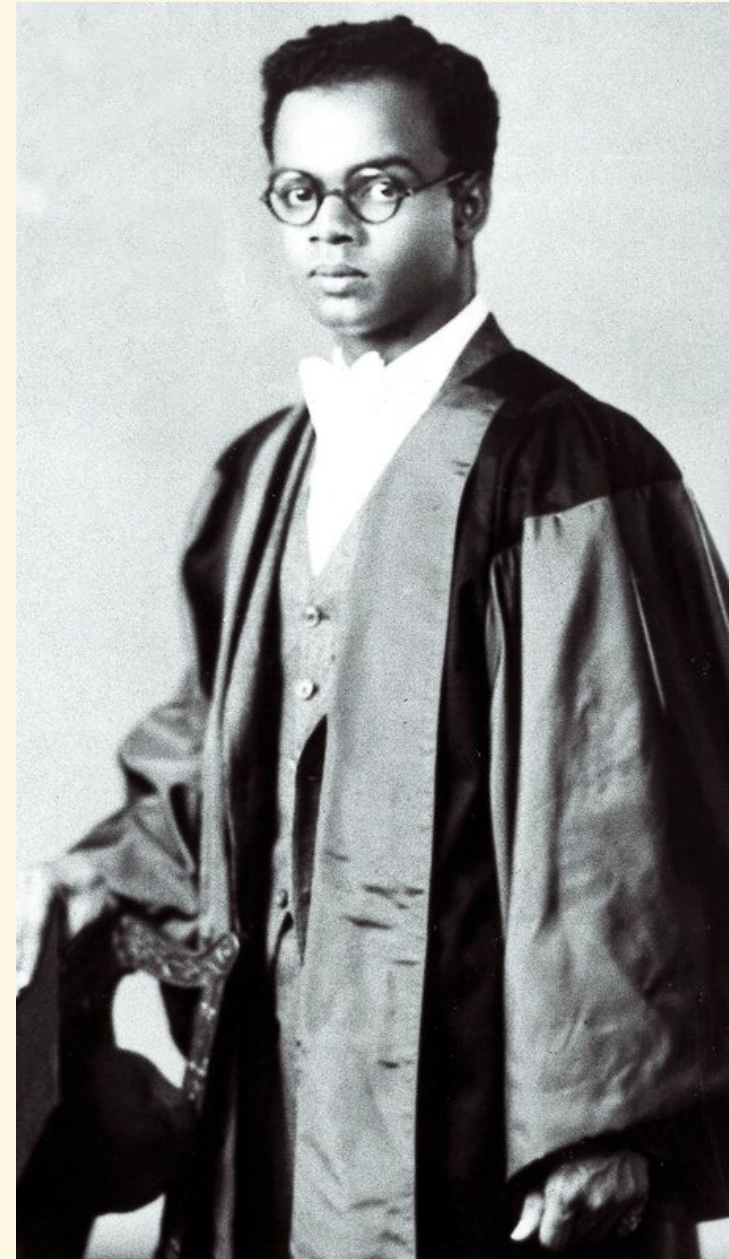
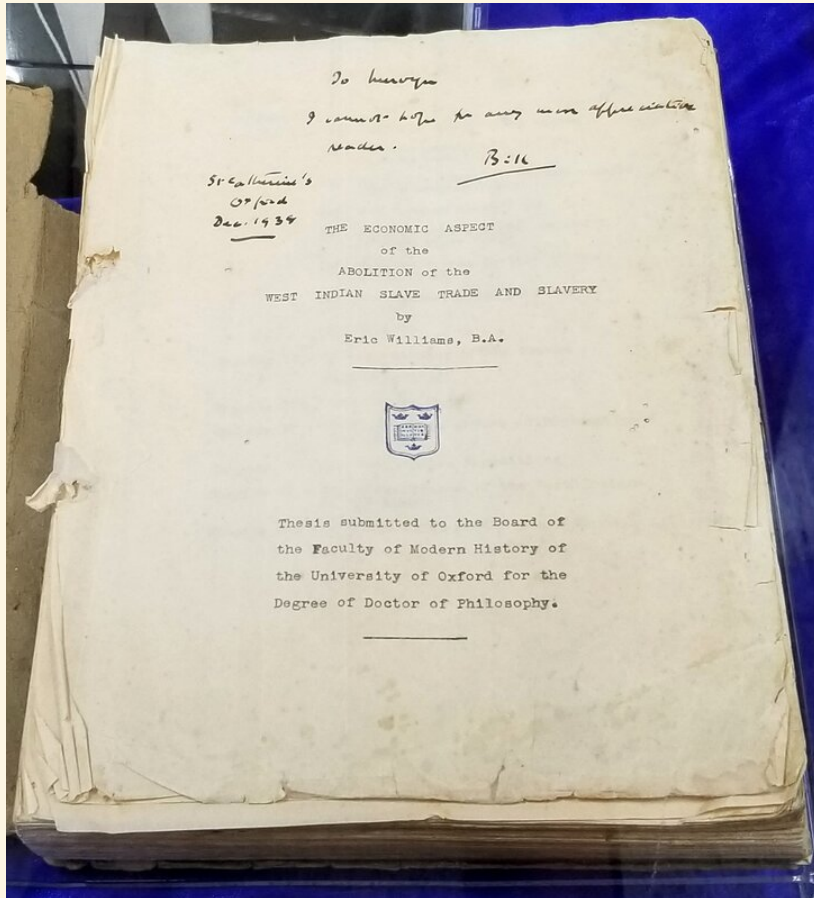
Show 15 rows ▾

Download ▾

Voyage ID	Vessel name	Place where voyage began IMP	Principal place of purchase IMP	Principal place of slave landing IMP	Year arrived with slaves IMP	Slaves arrived 1st port	Captain's name
↑↓	↑↓	↑↓	↑↓	↑↓	IMP ↑↓	↑↓	↑↓
1	Pastora de Lima	Rio de Janeiro	Mozambique	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	290	Dias, Manoel José
2	Tibério	Bahia, port unspecified	Mozambique	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	223	Mata, José Maria da
3	Paquete Real	Bahia, port unspecified	Cabinda	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	350	Ferreira, José dos Santos
4	Bom Caminho	Bahia, port unspecified	Quilimane	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	342	Dias, Domingos Francisco
5	Benigretta	Bahia, port unspecified	Cabinda	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	516	
6	Voador	Bahia, port unspecified	Mozambique	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	515	
7	Formiga	Bahia, port unspecified	Malembo	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	204	Viana, Isidoro Antônio
8	Vigilante Africano	Pernambuco, port unspecified	Luanda	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	374	Amorim, José Gomes de
9	Constante	Bahia, port unspecified	Cabinda	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	345	Narciso, Antônio
10	Comerciante	Bahia, port unspecified	Cabinda	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	478	Braga, Isidoro Martins
11	Diligente	Bahia, port unspecified	Cabinda	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	180	
12	Bonfim	Bahia, port unspecified	Cabinda	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	542	Coelho, João Batista
13	Triunfo	Bahia, port unspecified	Luanda	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	503	
14	S Lourenço	Bahia, port unspecified	Cabinda	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	471	Vilasboas, João da Silveira
15	Paquete da Bahia	Bahia, port unspecified	Cabinda	Bahia, port unspecified	1817	478	Almeida, Manoel Joaquim de

Slavery and Industrialization: the Williams thesis

The 'Williams Thesis': slavery and British industrialization



The profits of the slave trade and industrialization

The triangular trade thereby gave a triple stimulus to British industry. The Negroes were purchased with British manufactures; transported to the plantations, they produced sugar, cotton, indigo, molasses and other tropical products, the processing of which created new industries in England; while the maintenance of the Negroes and their owners on the plantations provided another market for British industry, New England agriculture and the Newfoundland fisheries. ...**The profits obtained provided one of the main streams of that accumulation of capital in England which financed the Industrial Revolution.**

—Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery*, p. 52

- Williams points to the links between the broader Atlantic system and British prosperity
- "one of the main streams": important but vague

Critiques: The 'small ratios' debate

- Engerman's critique : "of some followers of Eric Williams":

"...to what extent was the over-all level of investment in society raised by the profits of the slave trade?"

—Engerman, "The Slave Trade and British Capital Formation", *Business History Review*, p. 433

- Under very generous assumptions about profits in the slave trade these profits make up 2.4% to 10.8% of British total investment

"...even under some implausible assumptions, the aggregate contribution of slave trade profits ... could not be so large as to bear weight as *the*, or *a*, major contributing factor."

— Ibid. p. 441

The slave trade and backward linkages

Areas that benefitted

1. Ship-building
2. wool trade
3. Cotton trade
4. sugar refining
5. Rum distilling
6. pacotille
7. Metallurgy
8. Port-towns

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"Early critics focused discussion on the profits of the slave trade but his [Williams'] thesis was broader, and more sophisticated, than they acknowledged. It left room for linkages of many kinds and it is now time to take a broader look at the connections between the rise of merchant capitalism, in which slavery played a central role, and British economic growth."

— Zahedieh, "Eric Williams and William Forbes," *Economic History Review*, p. 784

Slaves as a sources of *wealth*

- The partial abolition of slavery (1833) was accompanied by the *Slave Compensation Act 1837* which compensated slave **owners** for losing their slaves
- These payments were financed by the British state (paid for by taxpayers) and amounted to roughly 20 million GBP
- Slave-holders needed to claim these payments and their claims form the basis for our understanding of slave *ownership* in 1833

The ubiquity of slave wealth

"...'slave property' permeated certain sections of British society, and it appears important to be as precise as possible about the interweaving of that property with other forms of wealth in Britain."

— Draper, "Possessing Slaves", *History Workshop Journal*, p. 97



Colonial slavery shaped modern Britain and we all still live with its legacies. The slave-owners were one very important means by which the fruits of slavery were transmitted to metropolitan Britain. We believe that research and analysis of this group are key to understanding the extent and the limits of slavery's role in shaping British history and leaving lasting legacies that reach into the present. We are now moving in the direction of more focused research on the lives of enslaved people in the Caribbean. This is a natural development from our work

Individuals ▾ [Advanced Search](#)

Explore the ownership of plantations and estates in the British Caribbean.

Where possible, the addresses of British slave-owners and of estates in Jamaica, Barbados and Grenada have been located and mapped.