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David Eltis. *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. xvii + 353 pp. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-65231-5.

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David Eltis of Queen's University, Canada, has produced an ambitious explanatory survey on the emergence of African slavery in the Americas. Why, he asks, should a slave system have arisen in the New World under western European auspices when the countries involved were in so many other ways leaders in developing political and economic freedoms?

Eltis explores the issue in a lengthy, densely-written volume that serves to highlight three decades of advance in the study of American slavery and the Atlantic slave trade, an intellectual progress in which he has been a major player. A significant innovation in this book is the way it integrates analyses of labor and commodity markets in Africa, Europe, and the Americas with transport costs to arrive at conclusions based broadly on demand and supply. Any attempt to achieve such breadth is a daunting task with the danger that the thread of the argument will be lost, but Eltis has succeeded in making his story plausible and coherent – though not an easy read.

The first analytical chapter (Chapter 2) undertakes to show the relationship between the rise of the Atlantic slave trade and the development of a free labor market and modern labor force in Europe. Here the focus is on how the competing demands for labor on both sides of the Atlantic together with improvement in the position of labor in Europe put limits on the labor supply in the Americas, giving the necessary opening for African slavery to emerge in that area.

In Chapter 3, "Europeans and African Slavery in the Americas," Eltis turns to the question of why European slaves were not an adequate substitute for Africans in bondage. He notes that military captives and criminals were available in quantity and reminds us (in interesting

detail) of the long tradition of galley slaves at the oars of Mediterranean shipping. But in this case the implicit debate on who was eligible for slavery, who an insider and who an outsider, the balance went against the use of European slaves – a decision made the easier by the availability of African slaves. He continues the analysis into issues of gender, probing why women were far more important in the African slave trade than they were among other migrant flows of labor indentured and free. The position of European women in the eyes of the Europeans themselves was a cultural norm that kept them from plantation gang labor but such norms did not protect African women.

These basically cultural explanations become more explicitly economic in Chapter 5, on productivity in the slave trade. In his treatment Eltis emphasizes the role of transport costs. The focus is apt because as he points out the high cost of organization, financing, shipping, handling, and insurance together with the long delays often experienced in trading on the African coasts raised the price of both imports of goods to Africa and slaves exported from that continent to about double their respective prices at the source. The slave trade was "possibly the most international activity of the pre-industrial era" (p. 136), with huge transport bills for the assembly of the goods shipped from Europe and Asia (with textiles from India a major method of paying for slaves), for transporting these goods to Africa, and then for the movement of slaves to the New World.

At about the halfway point of the book, the focus shifts to Africa and the supply side. The first question of Chapter 6 is why European enterprise resulted in a movement of labor to the Americas when the same commodities could have been produced by Europeans

in Africa itself. An interesting review of European attempts to establish farms and plantations on or near the African coast leads to analysis of technical and ecological constraints but concludes that the main barriers were political and military, with Europeans generally unable at this stage to penetrate any significant distance inland from their ships' guns. So with commodity production in Africa foreclosed but possible across the Atlantic, the most profitable alternative was to deal with African suppliers of slaves. The establishment of these contacts and their productivity-enhancing improvement concludes this chapter. An absorbing thread of this discussion and that of the following chapter, "The African Impact on the Transatlantic Slave Trade," is how the trans-Atlantic shippers had to confront resistance by slaves who, particularly at or near the coast, often attempted to seize their floating prisons and escape. Eltis concludes that in spite of the many productivity-increasing improvements in transport, one economic fact of life was that costs of policing this risk were much higher than otherwise. The main impact was on labor costs, where, he estimates, outlays were higher by about two-thirds compared to a situation where policing was not necessary. The effect of these higher costs was to reduce the quantity of slaves exported by nearly ten percent, or about half a million people, between 1700 and 1800, but as he notes, the extent of such resistance was very different from one coastal location to another.

Another feature of the chapter on the "African Impact" is the description of the complicated task facing European shippers of wares that had to be tailored to the variegated demand patterns along the coast. The differences in demand were striking, certainly not indicative

of homogenized tastes. For example, in 1662-1703 according to Royal African Company records, imports of textiles to the Bight of Biafra were 1 percent of all RAC shipments compared to 77 percent along the Gold Coast; while for the same two areas metals were respectively 80 percent and 6 percent of total shipments. Almost all of the RAC's cowries went to the Slave Coast, with few arriving at any other destination. By commodity, rarely did the average percentage share for the coast as a whole reflect the percentage for any single one of the five regions shown in the data.

The volume concludes with chapters providing a comparative perspective on the English plantations in America, on ethnicity in the trade, on the ultimate impact of the trade on Europe, and with three appendices (on age and sex of the Africans shipped to American bondage, on slave prices, and on the merchandise imports to West Africa that served to purchase slaves).

Overall, Eltis's impressive book does good work in two different arenas. Specialists in research on the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in Africa and the Americas will see better than before the integration among markets and regions that characterized this trade. Economists and historians who are not specialists will see this as well, but they will also find the book a proficient and well-sourced overview of a massive subject.

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