CHAPTER III

Africa's Contribution to European Capitalist Development—The Pre-Colonial Period

• How Europe Became the Dominant Section of a World-Wide Trade System • Africa's Contribution to the Economy and Beliefs of Early Capitalist Europe

British trade is a magnificent superstructure of American commerce and naval power on an African foundation.

—Malachi Postlethwayt, *The African Trade, the Great Pillar and Support of the British Plantation Trade in North America, 1745.*

If you were to lose each year more than 200 million livres that you now get from your colonies: if you had not the exclusive trade with your colonies to feed your manufactures, to maintain your navy, to keep your agriculture going, to repay for your imports, to provide for your luxury needs, to advantageously balance your trade with Europe and Asia, then I say it clearly, the kingdom would be irretrievably lost.

—Bishop Maury (of France): *Argument against France's ending the slave trade and giving freedom to its slave colonies.* Presented in the French National Assembly, 1791.

How Europe Became the Dominant Section of a World-Wide Trade System

Because of the superficiality of many of the approaches to "underdevelopment," and because of resulting misconceptions, it is necessary to re-emphasize that development and underdevelopment are not only comparative terms, but that they also have a dialectical relationship one to the other: that is to say, the two help produce each other by interaction. Western Europe and Africa had a relationship which insured the transfer of wealth from Africa to Europe. The transfer was possible only after trade became truly international; and that takes one back to the late fifteenth century when Africa and Europe were drawn into common relations for the first time—along with Asia and the Americas. The developed and underdeveloped parts of the present capitalist section of the world have been in continuous contact for four and a half centuries. The contention here is that over that period Africa helped to develop Western Europe in the same proportion as Western Europe helped to underdevelop Africa.

The first significant thing about the internationalization of trade in the fifteenth century was that Europeans took the initiative and went to other parts of the world. No Chinese boats reached Europe, and if any African canoes reached the Americas (as is sometimes maintained) they did not establish two-way links. What was called international trade was nothing but the extension overseas of European interests. The strategy behind international trade and the production that supported it was firmly in European hands, and specifically in the hands of the sea-going nations from the North Sea to the Mediterranean. They owned and directed the great majority of the world's sea-going vessels, and they controlled the financing of the trade between four continents. Africans had little clue as to the tri-continental links between Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Europe had a monopoly of knowledge about the international exchange system seen as a whole, for Western Europe was the only sector capable of viewing the system as a whole.

Europeans used the superiority of their ships and cannon to gain control of all the world's waterways, starting with the western Mediterranean and the Atlantic coast of North Africa. From 1415, when the Portuguese captured Ceuta, near Gibraltar, they maintained the offensive against the Maghreb. Within the next sixty years, they seized ports such as Arzila, El-Ksar-es-Seghir, and Tangier, and fortified them. By the second half of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese controlled the Atlantic coast of Morocco and used its economic and strategic advantages to prepare for further navigations which eventually carried their ships round the Cape of Good Hope in 1495. After reaching the Indian Ocean, the Portuguese sought with some success to replace Arabs as the merchants who tied East Africa to India and the rest of Asia. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Portuguese carried most of the East African ivory which was marketed in India; while Indian cloth and beads were sold in East and West Africa by the Portuguese, Dutch, English, and French. The same applied to cowry shells from the East Indies. Therefore, by control of the seas, Europe took the first steps towards transforming the several parts of Africa and Asia into economic satellites.

When the Portuguese and the Spanish were still in command of a major sector of world trade in the first half of the seventeenth century, they engaged in buying cotton cloth in India to exchange for slaves in Africa to mine gold in Central and South America. Part of the gold in the Americas would then be used to purchase spices and silks from the Far East. The concept of metropole and dependency automatically came into existence when parts of Africa were caught up in the web of international commerce. On the one hand, there were the European countries who decided on the role to be played by the African economy; and on the other hand, Africa formed an extension to the European capitalist market. As far as foreign trade was concerned, Africa was dependent on what Europeans were prepared to buy and sell.

Europe exported to Africa goods which were already being produced and used in Europe itself—Dutch linen, Spanish iron, English pewter, Portuguese wines, French brandy, Venetian glass beads, German muskets. Europeans were also able to unload on the African continent goods which had become unsalable in Europe. Thus, items like old sheets, cast-off uniforms, technologically outdated firearms, and lots of odds and ends found guaranteed markets in Africa. Africans slowly became aware of the possibility of demanding and obtaining better imported goods, and pressure was exerted on the captains of European ships; but the overall range of trade goods which left the European ports of Hamburg, Copenhagen, and Liverpool was determined almost exclusively by the pattern of production and consumption within Europe.

From the beginning, Europe assumed the power to make decisions within the international trading system. An excellent illustration of that is the fact that the so-called international law which governed the conduct of nations on the high seas was nothing else but European law. Africans did not participate in its making, and in many instances, African people were simply the victims, for the law recognized them only as transportable merchandise. If the African slave was thrown overboard at sea, the only legal problem that arose was whether or not the slave ship could claim compensation from the insurers! Above all, European decision-making power was exercised in selecting what Africa should export—in accordance with European needs.

The ships of the Portuguese gave the search for gold the highest priority, partly on the basis of well-known information that West African gold reached Europe across the Sahara and partly on the basis of guesswork. The Portuguese were successful in obtaining gold in parts of West Africa and in eastern Central Africa; and it was the Gold Coast which attracted the greatest attention from Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The number of forts built there was proof to that effect, and the nations involved included the Scandinavians and the Prussians (Germans) apart from other colonial stalwarts like the British, Dutch, and Portuguese.

Europeans were anxious to acquire gold in Africa because there was a pressing need for gold coin within the growing capitalist money economy. Since gold was limited to very small areas of Africa, as far as Europeans were then aware, the principal export was human beings. Only in a very few places at given times was the export of another commodity of equal or greater importance. For instance, in the Senegal there was gum, in Sierra Leone camwood, and in Mozambique ivory. However, even after taking those things into account, one can say that Europe allocated to Africa the role of supplier of human captives to be used as slaves in various parts of the world.

When Europeans reached the Americas, they recognized its enormous potential in gold and silver and tropical produce. But that potential could not be made a reality without adequate labor supplies. The indigenous Indian population could not withstand new European diseases such as smallpox, nor could they bear the organized toil of slave plantations and slave mines, having barely emerged from the hunting stage. That is why in islands like Cuba and Hispaniola, the local Indian population was virtually wiped out by the white invaders. At the same time, Europe itself had a very small population and could not afford to release the labor required to tap the wealth of the Americas. Therefore, they turned to the nearest continent, Africa, which incidentally had a population accustomed to settled agriculture and disciplined labor in many spheres. Those were the objective conditions lying behind the start of the European slave trade, and those are the reasons why the capitalist class in Europe used their control of international trade to insure that Africa specialized in exporting captives.

Obviously, if Europe could tell Africans what to export, that was an expression of European power. However, it would be a mistake to believe that it was an overwhelming military power. Europeans found it impossible to conquer Africans during the early centuries of trade, except in isolated spots on the coast. European power resided in their system of production which was at a somewhat higher level than Africa's at that time. European society was leaving feudalism and was moving towards capitalism; African society was then entering a phase comparable to feudalism.

The fact that Europe was the first part of the world to move from feudalism towards capitalism gave Europeans a headstart over humanity elsewhere in the scientific understanding of the universe, the making of tools, and the efficient organization of labor. *European technical superiority did not apply to all aspects of production, but the advantage which they possessed in a few key areas proved decisive.* For example, African canoes on the river Nile and the Senegal coast were of a high standard, but the relevant sphere of operations was the ocean, where European ships could take command. West Africans had developed metal casting to a fine artistic perfection in many parts of Nigeria, but when it came to the meeting with Europe, beautiful bronzes were far less relevant than the crudest cannon. African wooden utensils were sometimes works of great beauty, but Europe produced pots and pans that had many practical advantages. Literacy, organizational experience, and the capacity to produce on an ever expanding scale also counted in the European favor.

European manufactures in the early years of trade with Africa were often of poor quality, but they were of new varieties and were found attractive. Estaban Montejo, an African who ran away from a Cuban slave plantation in the nineteenth century, recalled that his people were enticed into slavery by the color red. He said:

> It was the scarlet which did for the Africans; both the kings and the rest surrendered without a struggle. When the kings saw that the whites were taking out these scarlet handkerchiefs as if they were waving, they told the blacks, "Go on then, go and get a scarlet handkerchief" and the blacks were so excited by the scarlet they ran down to the ships like sheep and there they were captured.

That version by one of the victims of slavery is very poetic. What it means is that some African rulers found European goods sufficiently desirable to hand over captives which they had taken in warfare. Soon, war began to be fought between one community and another for the sole purpose of getting prisoners for sale to Europeans, and even inside a given community a ruler might be tempted to exploit his own subjects and capture them for sale. A chain reaction was started by European demand for slaves (and only slaves) and by their offer of consumer goods—this process being connected with divisions within African society.

It is often said for the colonial period that vertical political divisions in Africa made conquest easy. This is even truer of the way that Africa succumbed to the slave trade. National unification was a product of mature feudalism and of capitalism. Inside Europe, there were far fewer political divisions than in Africa where communalism meant political fragmentation with the family as the nucleus, and there were only a few states that had real territorial solidity. Furthermore, when one European nation challenged another to obtain captives from an African ruler, Europe benefited from whichever of the two nations won the conflict. Any European trader could arrive on the coast of West Africa and exploit the political differences which he found there. For example, in the small territory that the Portuguese later claimed as Guinea-Bissau, there were more than a dozen ethnic groups. It was so easy to set one off against another that Europeans called it a "slave trader's paradise."

Although class divisions were not pronounced in African society, they too contributed to the ease with which Europe imposed itself commercially on large parts of the African continent. The rulers had a certain status and authority, and when bamboozled by European goods they began to use that position to raid outside their societies as well as to exploit internally by victimizing some of their own subjects. In the simplest of societies where there were no kings, it proved impossible for Europeans to strike up the alliance which was necessary to carry on a trade in captives on the coast. In those societies with ruling groups, the association with

Europeans was easily established; and afterwards Europe hardened the existing internal class divisions and created new ones.

In effect, particular aspects of African society became weaknesses when Europeans arrived as representatives of a different phase of development. And yet the subjugation of the African economy through slave trade was a slow process at the outset, and in some instances African opposition or disinterest had to be overcome. In the Congo, the slave trade did not get under way without grave doubts and opposition from the king of the state of Kongo at the beginning of the sixteenth century. He asked for masons, priests, clerks, physicians; but instead he was overwhelmed by slave ships sent from Portugal, and a vicious trade was opened up by playing off one part of the Kongo kingdom against another. The king of the Kongo had conceived of possibilities of mutually beneficial interchange between his people and the European state, but the latter forced him to specialize in the export of human cargo. It is also interesting to note that while the *Oba* (king) of Benin was willing to sell a few female captives, it took a great deal of persuasion and pressure from Europeans to get him to sell male African prisoners of war, who would otherwise have been brought into the ranks of Benin society.

Once trade in slaves had been started in any given part of Africa, it soon became clear that it was beyond the capacity of any single African state to change the situation. In Angola, the Portuguese employed an unusual number of their own troops and tried to seize political power from Africans. The Angolan state of Matamba on the river Kwango was founded around 1630 as a direct reaction against the Portuguese. With Queen Nzinga at its head, Matamba tried to coordinate resistance against the Portuguese in Angola. However, Portugal gained the upper hand in 1648, and this left Matamba isolated. Matamba could not forever stand aside. So long as it opposed trade with the Portuguese, it was an object of hostility from neighboring African states which had compromised with Europeans and slave trading. So in 1656, Queen Nzinga resumed business with the Portuguese—a major concession to the decision-making role of Europeans within the Angolan economy.

Another example of African resistance during the course of the slave trade comes from the Baga people in what is now the Republic of Guinea. The Baga lived in small states, and in about 1720 one of their leaders (Tomba by name) aimed at securing an alliance to stop the slave traffic. He was defeated by local European resident-traders, mulattos, and other slave trading Africans. It is not difficult to understand why Europeans should have taken immediate steps to see that Tomba and his Baga followers did not opt out of the role allocated to them by Europe. A parallel which presents itself is the manner in which Europeans got together to wage the "Opium War" against China in the nineteenth century to insure that Western capitalists would make profit while the Chinese were turned into dope addicts.

Of course, it is only as a last resort that the capitalist metropoles need to use armed force to insure the pursuit of favorable policies in the dependent areas. Normally, economic weapons are sufficient. In the 1720s, Dahomey opposed European slave traders, and was deprived of European imports—some of which had become necessary by that time. Agaja Trudo, Dahomey's greatest king, appreciated that European demand for slaves and the pursuit of slaving in and around Dahomey was in conflict with Dahomey's development. Between 1724 and 1726, he looted and burned European forts and slave camps; and he reduced the trade from the "Slave Coast" to a mere trickle, by blocking the paths leading to sources of supply in the interior. European slave dealers were very bitter, and they tried to sponsor some African collaborators against Agaja Trudo. They failed to unseat him or to crush the Dahomean state, but in turn Agaja failed to persuade them to develop new lines of economic activity, such as local plantation agriculture; and, being anxious to acquire firearms and cowries through the Europeans, he had to agree to the resumption of slave trading in 1730.

After 1730, Dahomean slaving was placed under royal control and was much more restricted than previously. Yet, the failure of this determined effort demonstrated that a single African state at that time could not emancipate itself from European control. The small size of African states and the numerous political divisions made it so much easier for Europe to make the decisions as to Africa's role in world production and trade.

Many guilty consciences have been created by the slave trade. Europeans know that they carried on the slave trade, and Africans are aware that the trade would have been impossible if certain Africans did not cooperate with the slave ships. To ease their guilty consciences, Europeans try to throw the major responsibility for the slave trade on to the Africans. One European author of a book on the slave trade (appropriately entitled *Sins of Our Fathers*) explained how many other white people urged him to state that the trade was the responsibility of African chiefs, and that Europeans merely turned up to buy the captives—as though without European demand there would have been captives sitting on the beach by the millions! Issues such as those are not the principal concern of this study, but they can be correctly approached only after understanding that Europe became the center of a world-wide system and that it was European capitalism which set slavery and the Atlantic slave trade in motion.

The trade in human beings from Africa was a response to *externa* factors. At first, the labor was needed in Portugal, Spain, and in Atlantic islands such as São Tomé, Cape Verde, and the Canaries; then came the period when the Greater Antilles and the Spanish-American mainland needed replacements for the Indians who were victims of genocide; and then the demands of Caribbean and mainland plantation societies had to be met. The records show direct connections between levels of exports from Africa and European demand for slave labor in some part of the American plantation economy. When the Dutch took Pernambuco in Brazil in 1634, the director of the Dutch West Indian Company immediately informed their agents on the Gold Coast that they were to take the necessary steps to pursue the trade in slaves on the adjacent coast east of the Volta—thus creating for that area the infamous name of the "Slave Coast." When the British West Indian islands took to growing sugar cane, Gambia was one of the first places to respond. Examples of this kind of external control can be cited right up to the end of the trade, and this embraces Eastern Africa also, since European markets in the Indian Ocean islands became important in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and since demand in places like Brazil caused Mozambicans to be shipped around the Cape of Good Hope.

Africa's Contribution to the Economy and Beliefs of Early Capitalist Europe

The kinds of benefits which Europe derived from its control of world commerce are fairly well known, although it is curious that the recognition of Africa's major contribution to European development is usually made in works devoted specifically to that subject; while European scholars of Europe often treat the European economy as if it were entirely independent. European economists of the nineteenth century certainly had no illusions about the interconnections between their national economies and the world at large. J. S. Mill, as spokesman for British capitalism, said that as far as England was concerned, "the trade of the West Indies is hardly to be considered as external trade, but more resembles the traffic between town and country." By the phrase "trade of the West Indies" Mill meant the commerce between Africa, England, and the West Indies, because without African labor the West Indies were valueless. Karl Marx also commented on the way that European capitalists tied Africa, the

West Indies, and Latin America into the capitalist system; and (being the most bitter critic of capitalism) Marx went on to point out that what was good for Europeans was obtained at the expense of untold suffering by Africans and American Indians. Marx noted that "the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the turning of Africa into a commercial warren for the hunting of black skins signalized the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production."

Some attempts have been made to quantify the actual monetary profits made by Europeans from engaging in the slave trade. The actual dimensions are not easy to fix, but the profits were fabulous. John Hawkins made three trips to West Africa in the 1560s, and stole Africans whom he sold to the Spanish in America. On returning to England after the first trip, his profit was so handsome that Queen Elizabeth I became interested in directly participating in his next venture; and she provided for that purpose a ship named the *Jesus*. Hawkins left with the *Jesus* to steal some more Africans, and he returned to England with such dividends that Queen Elizabeth made him a knight. Hawkins chose as his coat of arms the representation of an African in chains.

Of course, there were inevitably voyages that failed, slave ships that were lost at sea. Sometimes trade in Africa did well, while at other times it was the profit in the Americas that was really substantial. When all the ups and downs are ironed out, the level of profit had to be enough to justify continued participation in that particular form of trade for centuries. A few bourgeois scholars have tried to suggest that the trade in slaves did not have worthwhile monetary returns. They would have us believe that the same entrepreneurs whom they praise in other contexts as the heroes of capitalist development were so dumb with regard to slavery and slave trade that for centuries they absorbed themselves in a non-profit venture! This kind of argument is worth noting more as an example of the distortions of which white bourgeois scholarship is capable than as something requiring serious consideration. Besides, quite apart from capital accumulation, Europe's trade with Africa gave numerous stimuli to Europe's growth.

Central and South American gold and silver—mined by Africans—played a crucial role in meeting the need for coin in the expanding capitalist money economy of Western Europe, while African gold helped the Portuguese to finance further navigations around the Cape of Good Hope and into Asia from the fifteenth century on. African gold was also the main source for the mintage of Dutch gold coin in the seventeenth century, helping Amsterdam to become the financial capital of Europe in that period; and further it was no coincidence that when the English struck a new gold coin in 1663, they called it the "guinea." The Encyclopaedia Britannica explains that the guinea was "a gold coin at one time current in the United Kingdom. It was first coined in 1663, in the reign of Charles II, from gold imported from the Guinea Coast of West Africa by a company of merchants trading under charter from the British crown—hence the name."

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and for most of the nineteenth century, the exploitation of Africa and African labor continued to be a source for the accumulation of capital to be reinvested in Western Europe. The African contribution to European capitalist growth extended over such vital sectors as shipping, insurance, the formation of companies, capitalist agriculture, technology, and the manufacture of machinery. The effects were so wide-ranging that many are seldom brought to the notice of the reading public. For instance, the French Saint-Malo fishing industry was revived by the opening up of markets in the French slave plantations; while the Portuguese in Europe depended heavily on dyes like indigo, camwood, Brazil wood, and cochineal brought from Africa and the Americas. Gum from Africa also played a part in the textile industry, which is acknowledged as having been one of the most powerful engines of growth within the European economy. Then there was the export of ivory from Africa, enriching many merchants in London's Mincing Lane, and providing the raw material for industries in England, France, Germany, Switzerland, and North America—producing items ranging from knife handles to piano keys.

Africa's being drawn into the orbit of Western Europe speeded up the latter's technological development. For example, the evolution of European shipbuilding from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century was a logical consequence of their monopoly of sea commerce in that period. During that time, the North Africans were bottled up in the Mediterranean, and although it was from them that Europeans initially borrowed a great deal of nautical instrumentation, the North Africans made no further worthwhile advances. Where the original European advantage was not sufficient to assure supremacy, they deliberately undermined other people's efforts. The Indian navy, for instance, suffered from the rigid enforcement of the English Navigation Laws. Yet, the expenses involved in building new and better European ships were met from the profits of overseas trade with India and Africa. The Dutch were pioneers in improving upon the caravels which took the Spanish and Portuguese out across the Atlantic, and the successive Dutch trading companies operating in Asia, Africa, and America were the ones responsible for experimentation. By the eighteenth century, the British were using Dutch know-how as a basis for surpassing the Dutch themselves, and the Atlantic was their laboratory. It used to be said that the slave trade was a training ground for British seamen. It is probably more significant to note that the Atlantic trade was the stimulator of consistent advances in naval technology.

The most spectacular feature in Europe which was connected with African trade was the rise of seaport towns—notably, Bristol, Liverpool, Nantes, Bordeaux, and Seville. Directly or indirectly connected to those ports, there often emerged the manufacturing centers which gave rise to the Industrial Revolution. In England, it was the county of Lancashire which was the first center of the Industrial Revolution, and the economic advance in Lancashire depended first of all on the growth of the port of Liverpool through slave trading.

The connections between slavery and capitalism in the growth of England is adequately documented by Eric Williams in his well-known book *Capitalism and Slavery*. Williams gives a clear picture of the numerous benefits which England derived from trading and exploiting slaves, and he identified by name several of the personalities and capitalist firms who were the beneficiaries. Outstanding examples are provided in the persons of David and Alexander Barclay, who were engaging in slave trade in 1756 and who later used the loot to set up Barclays Bank. There was a similar progression in the case of Lloyds—from being a small London coffee house to being one of the world's largest banking and insurance houses, after dipping into profits from slave trade and slavery. Then there was James Watt, expressing eternal gratitude to the West Indian slave owners who directly financed his famous steam engine, and took it from the drawing board to the factory.

A similar picture would emerge from any detailed study of French capitalism and slavery, given the fact that during the eighteenth century the West Indies accounted for 20 per cent of France's external trade—much more than the whole of Africa in the present century. Of course, benefits were not always directly proportionate to the amount of involvement of a given European state in the Atlantic trade. The enormous profits of Portuguese overseas enterprise passed rapidly out of the Portuguese economy into the hands of the more developed Western European capitalist nations who supplied Portugal with capital, ships, and trade goods. Germany was included in this category, along with England, Holland, and France.

Commerce deriving from Africa helped a great deal to strengthen transnational links within the Western European economy, bearing in mind that American produce was the consequence of African labor. Brazilian dyewoods, for example, were re-exported from Portugal into the Mediterranean, the North Sea, and the Baltic, and passed into the continental cloth industry of the seventeenth century. Sugar from the Caribbean was re-exported from England and France to other parts of Europe to such an extent that Hamburg in Germany was the biggest sugar-refining center in Europe in the first half of the eighteenth century. Germany supplied manufactures to Scandinavia, Holland, England, France, and Portugal for resale in Africa. England, France, and Holland found it necessary to exchange various classes of goods the better to deal with Africans for gold, slaves, and ivory. The financiers and merchants of Genoa were the powers behind the markets of Lisbon and Seville; while Dutch bankers played a similar role with respect to Scandinavia and England.

Western Europe was that part of Europe in which by the fifteenth century the trend was most visible that feudalism was giving way to capitalism. (In Eastern Europe, feudalism was still strong in the nineteenth century.) The peasants were being driven off the land in England, and agriculture was becoming technologically more advanced—producing food and fibers to support a larger population and to provide a more effective basis for the woolen and linen industries in particular. The technological base of industry, as well as its social and economic organization, was being transformed. African trade speeded up several aspects, including the integration of Western Europe, as noted above. That is why the African connection contributed not merely to economic growth (which relates to quantitative dimensions) but also to real development in the sense of increased capacity for further growth and independence.

In speaking of the European slave trade, mention must be made of the U.S.A., not only because its dominant population was European but also because Europe transferred its capitalist institutions more completely to North America than to any other part of the globe, and established a powerful form of capitalism—after eliminating the indigenous inhabitants and exploiting the labor of millions of Africans. Like other parts of the New World, the American colonies of the British crown were used as means of accumulating primary capital for re-export to Europe. But the Northern colonies also had direct access to benefits from slavery in the American South and in the British and French West Indies. As in Europe, the profits made from slavery and slave trade went firstly to commercial ports and industrial areas, which meant mainly the northeastern seaboard district known as New England and the state of New York. The Pan-Africanist, W. E. B. Du Bois, in a study of the American slave trade, quoted a report of 1862 as follows:

> The number of persons engaged in the slave trade and the amount of capital embarked in it exceed our powers of calculation. The city of New York has been until of late (1862) the principal port of the world for this infamous commerce; although the cities of Portland and Boston are only second to her in that distribution.

American economic development up to mid-nineteenth century rested squarely on foreign commerce, of which slavery was a pivot. In the 1830s, slave-grown cotton accounted for about half the value of all exports from the United States of America. Furthermore, in the case of the American colonies of the eighteenth century, it can again be observed that Africa contributed in a variety of ways—one thing leading to another. For instance, in New England, trade with Africa, Europe, and the West Indies in slaves and slave-grown products supplied cargo for their merchant marine, stimulated the growth of their shipbuilding industry, built up their towns and their cities, and enabled them to utilize their forests, fisheries, and soil more effectively. Finally, it was the carrying trade between the West Indian slave colonies and Europe which lay behind the emancipation of the American colonies from British rule, and it was no accident that the struggle for American independence started in the leading New England town of Boston. In the nineteenth century, the connection with Africa continued to play an indirect role in American political growth. In the first place, profits from the slave activities went into the coffers of political parties, and even more important the African stimulation and black labor played a vital role in extending European control over the present territory of the United States—notably in the South, but including also the "Wild West," where black cowboys were active.

Slavery is useful for early accumulation of capital, but it is too rigid for industrial development. Slaves had to be given crude non-breakable tools which held back the capitalist development of agriculture and industry. That explains the fact that the northern portions of the U.S.A. gained far more industrial benefits from slavery than the South, which actually had slave institutions on its soil; and ultimately the stage was reached during the American Civil War when the Northern capitalists fought to end slavery within the boundaries of the U.S.A. so that the country as a whole could advance to a higher level of capitalism.

In effect, one can say that within the U.S.A. the slave relations in the South had by the second half of the nineteenth century come into conflict with the further expansion of the productive base inside the U.S.A. as a whole, and a violent clash ensued before the capitalist relations of legally free labor became generalized. Europe maintained slavery in places that were physically remote from European society; and therefore inside Europe itself, capitalist relations were elaborated without being adversely affected by slavery in the Americas. However, even in Europe there came a moment when the leading capitalist states found that the trade in slaves and the use of slave labor in the Americas was no longer in the interest of their further development. Britain made this decision early in the nineteenth century, to be followed later by France.

Since capitalism, like any other mode of production, is a total system which involves an ideological aspect, it is also necessary to focus on the effects of the ties with Africa on the development of ideas within the superstructure of European capitalist society. In that sphere, the most striking feature is undoubtedly the rise of racism as a widespread and deeply rooted element in European thought. The role of slavery in promoting racist prejudice and ideology has been carefully studied in certain situations, especially in the U.S.A. The simple fact is that no people can enslave another for centuries without coming out with a notion of superiority, and when the color and other physical traits of those peoples were quite different it was inevitable that the prejudice should take a racist form. Within Africa itself, the same can be said for the situation in the Cape Province of South Africa where white men have been establishing military and social superiority over non-whites since 1650.

It would be much too sweeping a statement to say that all racial and color prejudice in Europe derived from the enslavement of Africans and the exploitation of non-white peoples in the early centuries of international trade. There was also anti-Semitism at an even earlier date inside Europe and there is always an element of suspicion and incomprehension when peoples of different cultures come together. However, it can be affirmed without reservations that the white racism which came to pervade the world was an integral part of the capitalist mode of production. Nor was it merely a question of how the individual white person treated a black person. The racism of Europe was a set of generalizations and assumptions, which had no scientific basis, but were rationalized in every sphere from theology to biology.

Occasionally, it is mistakenly held that Europeans enslaved Africans for racist reasons. European planters and miners enslaved Africans for *economic* reasons, so that their labor power could be exploited. Indeed, it would have been impossible to open up the New World and to use it as a constant generator of wealth, had it not been for African labor. There were no other alternatives: the American (Indian) population was virtually wiped out and Europe's population was too small for settlement overseas at that time. Then, having become utterly dependent on African labor, Europeans at home and abroad found it necessary to rationalize that exploitation in racist terms as well. Oppression follows logically from exploitation, so as to guarantee the latter. Oppression of African people on purely racial grounds accompanied, strengthened, and became indistinguishable from oppression for economic reasons.

C. L. R. James, noted Pan-Africanist *and* Marxist, once remarked that:

> The race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental.

It can further be argued that by the nineteenth century white racism had become so institutionalized in the capitalist world (and notably in the U.S.A.) that it sometimes ranked above the maximization of profit as a motive for oppressing black people.

In the short run, European racism seemed to have done Europeans no harm, and they used those erroneous ideas to justify their further domination of non-European peoples in the colonial epoch. But the international proliferation of bigoted and unscientific racist ideas was bound to have its negative consequences in the long run. When Europeans put millions of their brothers (Jews) into ovens under the Nazis, the chickens were coming home to roost. Such behavior inside of "democratic" Europe was not as strange as it is sometimes made out to be. There was always a contradiction between the elaboration of democratic ideas inside Europe and the elaboration of authoritarian and thuggish practices by Europeans with respect to Africans. When the French Revolution was made in the name of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," it did not extend to black Africans who were enslaved by France in the West Indies and the Indian Ocean. Indeed, France fought against the efforts of those people to emancipate themselves, and the leaders of their bourgeois revolution said plainly that they did not make it on behalf of black humanity.

It is not even true to say that capitalism developed democracy at home in Europe and not abroad. At home, it was responsible for a talk or certain rhetoric of freedom, but it was never extended from the bourgeoisie to the oppressed workers; and the treatment of Africans must surely have made such hypocrisy a habit of European life, especially within the ruling class. How else can one explain the fact that the Christian church participated fully in the maintenance of slavery and still talked about saving souls! The hypocrisy reached its highest levels inside the U.S.A. The first martyr in the American national war of liberation against the British colonialists in the eighteenth century was an African descendant, Crispus Attucks; and both slave and free Africans played a key role in Washington's armies. And yet, the American Constitution sanctioned the continued enslavement of Africans. In recent times, it has become an object of concern to some liberals that the U.S.A. is capable of war crimes of the order of My Lai in Vietnam. But the fact of the matter is that the My Lais began with the enslavement of Africans and American Indians. Racism, violence, and brutality were the concomitants of the capitalist system when it extended itself abroad in the early centuries of international trade.

Brief Guide to Reading

The subject of Africa's contribution to European development reveals several of the factors which limit a writer's representation of reality. Language and nationality, for instance, are effective barriers to communication. Works in English seldom take account of the effect brought about in France, Holland, or Portugal by participation in slaving and other forms of commerce which exploited Africa in the pre-colonial period. The ideological gulf is responsible for the fact that most bourgeois scholars write about phenomena such as the Industrial Revolution in England without once mentioning the European slave trade as a factor in primary accumulation of capital. Marx himself had laid great emphasis on sources of overseas capital accumulation. But even Marxists (as prominent as Maurice Dobb and E. J. Hobsbawm) for many years concentrated on examining the evolution of capitalism out of feudalism inside Europe, with only marginal reference to the massive exploitation of Africans, Asians, and American Indians.

ERIC WILLIAMS, *Capitalism and Slavery.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944.

OLIVER COX, *Capitalism as a System.* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964.

Cox, an African American, makes the basic point that capitalism has from very early times been an international system. Eric Williams, a West Indian, is very precise and very detailed in illustrating the connection between British capitalism and the enslavement of Africans.

W. E. B. DU BOIS, *The Suppression of the Atlantic Slave-Trade to the United States of America—1638–1870.* New York: Social Science Press, 1954.

RICHARD PARES, *Yankees and Creoles: the Trade between North America and the West Indies before the American Revolution.* London: Longmans Green, 1956.

Both of these provide data on the contribution of African labor to the development of capitalism in the U.S.A. in the epoch of slavery.

LEO HUBERMAN, *Man's Worldly Goods: The Story of the Wealth of Nations.* New York and London: Harper Bros., 1936.

F. Clairemonte, *Economic Liberalism and Underdevelopment.*

Huberman's book is an excellent overall treatment of the development of capitalism out of feudalism in Europe. It includes a section in which the role of slavery is highlighted. Clairemonte's study accords recognition to the role played by the subcontinent of India in building Europe.

Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964.

Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes towards the Negro.* Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, 1968.

These two texts are relevant to the question of the rise of white racism, although neither of the two makes sufficiently explicit the connection between racism and capitalism.