

Sugar and Slavery:

Diagramming the Triangle Trade

Between 1505 and 1888, approximately 12 million Africans were enslaved and transported to the New World for profit. Plantation agriculture—and sugar in particular—drove the African Diaspora. Slaves of Caribbean sugar plantations produced molasses that was transported to New England for distillation into rum that was shipped to Africa in exchange for the slaves who would endure the final leg of the triangle, the Middle Passage to the sugar islands. It was a cycle that knit together different parts of the world.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Great Britain's North American colonies struggled from Jamestown onward with profitability. Sugar processing in the colonial era required large quantities of wood, a resource scarce on the islands of the Caribbean but abundant in New England. New Englanders began to trade wood for sugar and molasses. Around 1700, sugar refineries were erected in Baltimore and New York (sugar refining would be New York City's most profitable industry 1870-1917). However, European refiners dominated the market, so manufacturers of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic looked to molasses, sugar's by-product, for greater opportunities. Specifically, they distilled molasses into rum.

As early as 1664, the Dutch distilled rum on Staten Island in New York; Boston's first rum distillery is recorded as operating in 1667. By the 1700s, New England distilleries were producing millions of gallons of cheap rum to supply traders that could be exchanged for slaves. Once the slave ships arrived in Africa, merchants could buy adults for 110-130 gallons of rum or children for about 80 gallons. Rum cost as little to produce as five and a half pence per gallon; in 1746, a slave could be purchased for about £5 and auctioned in the West Indies for £30-80. Rhode Island alone dominated between 60-90 percent of the exchange rum trade with its Guinea rum. Slave traders owned and operated 30 rum distilleries in Newport whose casks they loaded onto over 150 slave ships. It is estimated that the slave traders of the single city of Newport, Rhode Island, exchanged rum for over 106,000 Africans. Once brought to the islands, the enslaved would produce sugar, yielding molasses to distill into rum to exchange for more slaves, in a vicious cycle of profit.

THEMES: plantation agriculture, sugar industry, molasses industry, rum industry slavery, triangle trade

OBJECTIVES

Students, following the lesson's activity, will:

- 1) Recreate a trade simulation based on values for slaves, sugar, wood, molasses, and rum around the year 1700.

- 2) Understand the economic factors surrounding the Triangle Trade.
- 3) Explore then experience of Africans who were brought to the Americas as a part of the Triangle Trade.
- 4) Gauge the risks of various parties involved in the Triangle Trade: planters, merchants, slaver traders, and slaves.

MATERIALS (printed and copied for each student; for food items, ask cafeteria manager or see baking section of grocery store)

- “Sugar and Slavery” essay
- *1776* lyrics
- Bag of hard candy (optional)
- Samples of white and brown sugar in clear containers (ask school cafeteria manager)
- Bottle of molasses
- Bottle of rum extract
- Sugar cane (optional; or image of sugar cane)
- Fake money (monopoly money works fine, or create money in denominations of £1, £5, and £10 notes)
- Black construction paper strips 1" x 8" (approximately 60 strips), stapler
- Wooden tongue depressors or popsicle-style sticks (100 pieces)
- Packets of white sugar (approximately 75 packets)

ACTIVITY: THE TRIANGULAR TRADE

Part 1: The Price of Sugar (20 min.):

Collect samples of sugar cane, brown sugar, white sugar, molasses, and rum extract (to represent rum). Put the objects in random order on a desk or table in front of the classroom.

Ask students if they recognize all five items and what the items have in common. If they do not realize that they all come from the sugar cane plant, inform them that they do and explain where each lies in the processing cycle.

Ask students to list the five items in order of their expense, beginning with the item they think is probably the most expensive and ending with the least expensive item. Provide a piece of hard candy as a reward (if you decide to purchase it) or call on volunteers to encourage students to share their lists and their reasoning for putting the items in the order they did. In today’s market the order is: rum, molasses, brown sugar, white sugar, piece of sugar cane. In the early eighteenth century, the order would have looked very different. Rum and molasses were the byproducts of sugar refining—waste products, in other words—and brown sugar considered less desirable than refined white sugar.

Explain that Americans presently consume an average of 100 pounds of sugar per year. Ask students if they know whether sugar cane is harvested with machinery or by hand; explain that

much of the world's sugar continues to be hand-cultivated and -harvested. Compare the current price of a pound of granulated sugar with the current minimum wage.

Discuss with students if there is a relationship between the price of the items and the amount of work needed to produce it. They may wish to consider not only sugar products but, for example, u-pick-it strawberries or produce and home-grown tomatoes.

Finally, ask students whether the profits in the sugar industry would be greater if it was not necessary to pay people to raise and refine sugar. Explain that, for over 350 years, slave labor was used to raise sugar cane and refine it.

Part 2: Establishing the Cost of Sugar (15 min.)

Ask students to read the essay "Sugar and Slavery." Share the lyrics of the musical *1776* with students and ask why South Carolina's delegate to the Continental Congress, Edward Rutledge, accused Rhode Island delegate Stephen Hopkins of hypocrisy over the slave trade.

Divide the class into three groups: Sugar Plantation Owners, New England Merchants, and African Traders. The teacher or a designated student will serve as simulation coordinator, making sure that each group gets the goods and cash it is due. All rounds begin with the Sugar Plantation Owners. Before the preparatory round, provide the groups with material as follows:

Sugar Plantation Owners with ten strips of black construction paper and 50 packets of sugar.

New England Merchants with 100 tongue depressors and £550.

African Traders with 50 strips of black construction paper.

Part 3: Tracking the Trade (30-50 min. depending on the number of rounds)

Sugar Plantation Owners begin the simulation. They have ten slaves, represented by ten black strips of construction paper linked into a paper chain.

Round One

Sugar Plantation Owners: Sell 50 packets (representing 50 hogsheads or roughly 80,000 pounds of sugar) for £200 and 50 popsicle sticks (tons of wood) to New England Merchants.

New England Merchants: 5 packets (hogsheads) are damaged by water and rats during the trip. 5 more hogsheads remain in your city to be sold to people who live in North America. Take those 10 away. Send the remaining 40 packets, now processed into rum to the African Trader.

African Trader: Trade slaves for rum at the rate of 3 sugar packets (or puncheons of rum) for a man, 2 for a woman, and 1 for a child. Provide New England merchants with a strip of black paper for each slave traded (there are many possible combinations: if you have students with stronger math skills, let them calculate what they should buy if 50% of the slaves are men and

the remaining 50% divided between women and children. Have younger students or short on time? Suggest: 8 men (24 packets), 5 women (10 packets), and 6 children (6 packets).

New England Merchants: Take the slaves you just purchased, staple the strips of black paper into links of a chain. Sail to the West Indies—also known as the “Sugar Islands.” Before landing, remove two links; these slaves died on the voyage as 10-20 percent of the slaves routinely did.

Sugar Plantation Owners: Remove three links from your existing chain (that leaves 7). You need to replace at least three slaves who have died this year due to illness, exhaustion, and a deadly accident at the mill. Also remove your wood; this isn’t a resource you use for trade, it is used up in producing sugar. If you purchase more slaves, you will be able to produce more sugar and molasses. You have £200. Buy slaves from New England Merchants at the rate of £30 for a man, £20 for a woman, and £10 for a child (suggested scenario: 3 male slaves, 2 female slaves, and 2 child slaves), leaving £50 in cash.

This is the end of Round One. Each group should count its cash, total it, and report it to the simulation coordinator. If you use the recommended calculations above, each group should have:

Sugar Planter Owners: 14 slaves (most of wood has been used, and all money spent to purchase more slaves) and £50 in cash.

New England Merchants: 100 popsicle sticks (tons of wood), 10 slaves, and £150 from the slave sales just transacted.

African Slave Traders: 31 slaves and 40 packets of sugar (though by now most of this sugar has been converted to rum and consumed; it’s not a resource that stays for long).

Have students answer the following: Which group made the most cash? Which group made the least cash?

Round Two

Sugar Plantation Owners: 2 of your slaves have run away; your remaining 12 slaves have produced an average of 1 hogshead of sugar each (give the sugar planters 12 packets of sugar to trade). Trade all 12 of your hogsheads of sugar to the New England Merchants for 25 tongue depressors (25 tons of wood) to produce more sugar and 3 more slaves.

Sugar Plantation Owners: Stop the presses! One of the two ships carrying sugar to New England has been attacked by privateers and the sugar lost. Now only 6 hogsheads of sugar make it to New England. You can no longer buy any slaves, but can only afford 12 tons of wood (move 12 popsicle sticks to the sugar planters).

New England Merchants: You refine the 6 hogsheads of sugar you receive into puncheons of rum and sell it to the African Traders. Because so much sugar was lost and rum is scarce, less rum is needed to buy each slave. You can purchase a slave for 1 puncheon this time around.

African Trader: Trade slaves for rum at the rate of one puncheon (sugar packet turned rum) to slave. You receive 6 sugar packets. New England merchants with a strip of black paper for each slave traded.

New England Merchants: Staple the strips of black paper into links of a chain. Sail to the “Sugar Islands.” You decided to pack more slaves into the ship, but more of them died (typically 30-50 percent death-rates occurred on “tight-pack” slave ships). Remove three links: they died en route.

Sugar Plantation Owners: Remove two links from your chain. You need to replace at least two slaves who have died this year. If you purchase more than two slaves, you will be able to produce more sugar and molasses. Buy slaves from New England Merchants at the rate of £30 for a man, £20 for a woman, and £10 for a child (again, students can decide based on their own reasoning, or the moderator may suggest an option. Suggested scenario: you’re trying to calculate for the long term so buy two women, hoping they will have children to provide more slaves, and 1 child—or 3 slaves total purchased).

This is the end of Round Two. Each group should count its cash, total it, and report it to the simulation coordinator.

Sugar Planter Owners: 15 slaves and no remaining cash.

New England Merchants: 63 popsicle sticks (tons of wood), 10 slaves, and £200 from the slave sales just transacted in both rounds.

African Slave Traders: 25 slaves and more rum, but it is being consumed quickly.

Have students answer the following: Which group made the most cash? Which group made the least cash? What resources last the longest, which the least? Which are, as a result, more valuable in the short term or long term?

Round Three

Sugar Plantation Owners: A drought shriveled the sugar cane crop. You have no sugar to trade but still need supplies; sell four slaves to the New England Merchants for 13 popsicle sticks of wood to produce sugar with your remaining slaves.

Sugar Plantation Owners: Each remaining slave produces, on average, half a hogshead of sugar (you have more women and children in this round than last round!) for a total crop of 5 hogsheads of sugar (receive 5 sugar packets). Sell to the New England Merchants for 1 slave and 5 more popsicle sticks (tons of wood).

New England Merchants: Refine your 5 new hogsheads of sugar into rum. You can also spend £50 and buy additional rum (10 more sugar packets) from other colonies (Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania—just give your money to the game moderator and receive your 10 more sugar packets). Then ship all your rum—15 manufactured and purchased packets combined—to African Trader.

African Trader: Trade slaves at the rate of 3 sugar packets (or puncheons of rum) per man, 2 per woman, and 1 per child. For 15 puncheons of rum, you can sell 3 men, 2 women and 3 children.

New England Merchants: Staple the strips of black paper into links of a chain. Sail to the Sugar Islands. You decided to purchase fewer slaves and provide them with slightly more space and exercise; historically this reduced death rates to between five-ten percent; remove one link; this slave died on the voyage.

Sugar Plantation Owners: Remove two links from the chain. You need to replace at least two slaves who have died this year. If you purchase more than two slaves, you will be able to produce more sugar. This year, your slaves (the remaining 9) produced 2 hogsheads of sugar each (the moderator should give the planters 18 sugar packets. You don't have any cash, so need to buy slaves from New England Merchants in produce (sugar) at the rate of 3 packets for a man, 2 for a woman, and 1 for a child. With 18 packets you can buy 4 men and 3 women.

This is the end of Round Three. Each group should count its cash, total it, and report it to the simulation coordinator.

Sugar Planter Owners: 16 slaves and no remaining cash.

New England Merchants: 45 popsicle sticks (tons of wood), 9 slaves, and £150 from the slave sales just transacted in previous rounds.

African Slave Traders: 17 slaves and a little rum, but it is being consumed quickly.

Have students answer the following: Which group made the most cash? Which group made the least cash? Will it be possible to continue this simulation, or has any group gone bankrupt? What other possible risks, natural disasters, good luck, or good planning could factor into the success or failure of these various groups?

Based on the essay and the simulation, discuss as a class who profited the most from the Triangle Trade. Did the southern slaveholders have a valid criticism when they called northern slave traders hypocritical about abolition? Consider whether it was possible for the colonial sugar industry to survive without slave labor and whether it was possible for the Triangle Trade to survive without sugar. Speculate on the impact of the abolitionist sugar boycott on the Triangle Trade; encourage students to identify contemporary boycotts and their effectiveness.

Credits and Resources:

This lesson plan is adapted from <http://www.slaveryinamerica.org>. For more information about sugar and the slave trade see: Sydney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Penguin, 1986), Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the British West Indies, 1624-1713* (UNC Press, recent ed., 2000), and Roderick A. McDonald, *The Economy and Material Culture of Slaves: Goods and Chattels on the Sugar Plantations of Jamaica and Louisiana* (Louisiana State University Press, 1994).

Sugar and Slavery: Molasses to Rum to Slaves

Written by Jean M. West as part of “Slavery in America’s” free educational web resources.

On the average, modern Americans consume 100 pounds of sugar per year. It’s sweet, and it gives a big energy boost. Well, yes, there are calories, cavities, and diabetes, but, in moderation, sugar is harmless ... right? In 1700, English consumption empire-wide was about four pounds of sugar per person per year. That certainly seems moderate. Yet in 1700 alone, approximately 25,000 Africans were enslaved and transported across the Atlantic Ocean. Up to two-thirds of these slaves were bound for sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Brazil to produce “White Gold.” Over the course of the 380 years of the Atlantic slave trade, millions of Africans were enslaved to satisfy the world’s sweet tooth. A sugar by-product, molasses, was distilled into rum and sent to Africa to purchase more slaves--this is the infamous Triangle Trade in the history books. Sugar’s most bitter legacy is that the labor of slaves fueled the enslavement of even more Africans.

Sugar Comes to the New World

Ironically, sugar cane is not a plant native to the Americas. It is a perennial grass whose tropical species seems to have originated in New Guinea, and subtropical species in India. During the invasion of India in 326 B.C., Alexander the Great’s soldiers became the first Europeans to see sugar cane; honey was the primary sweetener of the Western world at the time. Arab traders and Moorish conquerors spread the plant throughout the Mediterranean region, introducing it in Spain around 714 A.D.

Centuries later, under Spanish sponsorship, Christopher Columbus is believed to have carried sugar cane stem cuttings from the Canary Islands to Hispaniola on his second voyage, planting the seed-cane in Santo Domingo by December 1493. Subsequent Spanish colonizers spread the crop to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica. The Portuguese introduced sugar cane to Brazil and received shipments of sugar from Pernambuco by 1526. Sugar was introduced in the 17th century by the Dutch to the Guyanas, the British to Barbados, the French to Martinique and Saint-Domingue (Haiti), and the Swedes and Danes to other islands of the Antilles. Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, the first governor of French Louisiana, and French Jesuits both introduced sugar cane from Saint-Domingue to New Orleans in the 1700s; however, the first commercially successful sugar planter in Louisiana was Etienne de Boré, who produced around 100,000 pounds of sugar in 1795.

European settlers also brought with them the methods for growing and harvesting sugar cane. Cane was planted by plowing furrows spaced about a yard’s width apart and then placing seed-cane stems flat in the furrows at one-yard intervals. In some cases, seed-cane stems were planted in holes to a depth of six inches. The first crop took from 9-24 months to mature, depending on the climate (sugar can be killed by freezing temperatures), but produced crops for three to six years before declining production yield made it necessary to replant the crop. Yield varied widely depending on climate, from 25 to 100 tons of sugar cane per acre. Jamaican planters might expect a hogshead (around 1600 pounds) of refined sugar to be produced per acre; a typical plantation was around 750 acres in size. The mature sugar cane plant ranges from 4-12

feet in height; its soft interior contains the juice with the highest calorie content of the plant world.

Along with seed-cane and cultivation techniques, Spanish colonists brought the technology to produce sugar. Cane must be cut when it is fully ripened. To release the cane syrup (juice) from the sugar cane, it must be immediately ground in mills, usually located near the cane fields. The earliest mills were probably round millstones, set upright, pushed by humans or animals. The first shipment of milled sugar from the Hispaniola occurred around 1516. Four years later, a water-powered mill that ground the cane between two horizontal rollers was built in Hispaniola. In South America around 1600, a new type of sugar mill was invented that used three vertical rollers; this was the typical mill used on sugar plantations throughout the New World during the colonial period. Modern mills can produce 50 pounds of juice from 100 pounds of cane.

The extraction of sucrose from the juice and its crystallization into solid sugar required that the juice be cleaned by adding lime and straining the impurities from juice. The clarified sugar syrup was boiled in a series of kettles until it crystallized, producing granular sugar and molasses. Modern refining techniques produce roughly ten pounds of raw sugar (brown sugar), or 9.5 pounds of refined sugar from 100 pounds of cane. Molasses is the left-over syrup out of which no more sugar crystals can be refined; the same 100 pounds of cane that produce ten pounds of sugar will also produce 2.7 pounds of molasses.

Slavery and Sugar

Sugar planting, harvesting, and processing is tiring, hot, dangerous work and requires a large number of workers whose work habits must be intensely coordinated and controlled. From the very beginning of sugar cultivation in the New World, there were not enough European settlers to satisfy the labor requirements for profitable sugar plantations. Native Americans were enslaved to work on the earliest sugar plantations, especially in Brazil. Those who could, escaped from the fields, but many more died due to European diseases, such as smallpox and scarlet fever, and the harsh working conditions on the sugar plantations. A Catholic priest named Bartolomé de las Casas asked King Ferdinand of Spain to protect the Taino Indians of the Caribbean by importing African slaves instead. So, around 1505, enslaved Africans were first brought to the New World. For the next three and a half centuries, slaves of African origin provided most of the labor for the sugar industry in the Americas.

A healthy, adult slave was expected to be able to plow, plant, and harvest five acres of sugar. Sugar planting was back-breaking work. Lines of slaves, men, women and children, moved across the fields, row by row, hand-planting thousands of seed-cane stems. Between 5,000 and 8,000 pieces had to be planted to produce one acre of sugar cane. Workdays in the fields typically lasted from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. with a noon-time break of perhaps two hours.

During harvest, field slaves worked even longer hours, especially in Louisiana where workers raced against the weather to collect the harvest before the first frost and attacks by insects. Mature sugar cane's exterior skin is so hard that workers had to cut through the stem with cutlasses or machetes. They also had to stoop to cut the cane at ground level because the most sugary section of the cane is the lower stem. Harvesting cane was as backbreaking work as

planting cane, and cuts from the sharp tools were common. Once the cane stalk was cut, slaves stripped any remaining leaves and stacked the cane. It then would be tied into bundles and loaded onto donkeys, wagons, or two-wheeled carts to be carried to the sugar mill. Throughout their work, overseers with whips supervised the field slaves.

Once the harvest began, it was essential to process the cane immediately. Slaves ran the sugar mills, feeding the stalks between giant rollers. Up to a dozen boys and men typically worked around the clock to process sugar, working with the stench of rotting cane in intense heat. As machinery grew more complex, with conveyor belts, sugar processing evaporators and centrifuges, the slaves working the sugar houses became increasingly skilled mechanics. Yet, it was not unusual for slaves to be injured or crushed when trapped and pulled into the rollers as they fed stalks into the mill or tried to untangle stalks from flywheels and gears.

Slaves also boiled the cane juice, ladling scum from the surface of the scalding liquid and then transferring it from kettle to kettle, reducing the syrup to crystals. Slaves routinely suffered burns during this process, often referred to as the "Jamaica Train," and the heat in the sugar houses was so intense that slaves were rotated out after four hours, their limbs swollen from the heat and humidity. Once the crystals formed, there was still heavy labor ahead. The harder the solid cakes of sugar were, the better the sugar quality, but the pieces had to be broken up with shovels, picks and crowbars. Finally, sugar was shoveled into hogsheads (wooden barrels) and packed solidly before the barrel holes were plugged with a piece of sugarcane. The sugarcane plug helped to siphon out the remaining molasses from the sugar in the hogshead; the molasses dripped onto a floor angled so it would drain into a trough or cistern. Then, the slaves would scoop molasses into barrels by hand. By the 1850s, the expected yield from each slave's labor was five hogsheads of sugar and 250 gallons of molasses.

During harvest, slaves worked day and night, especially in the mills and sugarhouses, so that there would be no bottlenecks in production. Shifts lasted up to 18 hours. Sugar production paused only as slaves cleaned out fireboxes or other equipment. Although some planters provided extra food and drink during the harvest and others encouraged competitions to boost production, sugar production was the result of coercion. Slaves in the sugar fields and mills were controlled by both the threat and use of deadly force.

The Triangle Trade

Sugar stands at the center of the Triangle Trade; it was the engine that drove the African Diaspora. Slaves of the Caribbean sugar plantations produced molasses that was transported to New England for distillation into rum that was shipped to Africa in exchange for the slaves who would endure the final leg of the triangle, the horrific Middle Passage to the sugar islands.

The origins of the word "rum," may come from sugar via the Latin word for sugar, "saccharum." Although the Spanish and Portuguese probably began distilling alcoholic beverages on their sugar plantations at an early date, the British in Barbados were producing rum by 1627. They fermented a gallon and a half of sugar cane molasses with yeast to create a "wash" that was distilled into a gallon of rum. An acre of sugar cane generated enough molasses by-product during the sugar-refining process to produce an average of 200 gallons of rum. However, owners

of sugar plantations considered distilling to be too wasteful of labor and wood, which could be better used towards producing "white gold," sugar. A sugar house inventory from Bristol, England, in 1690 indicates a hogshead of raw sugar to be worth about £11 and a cask of molasses to be worth £3.

Great Britain's North American colonies had struggled from Jamestown onward with profitability. Sugar processing in the colonial era required large quantities of wood, a resource scarce on the islands of the Caribbean but abundant in New England. New Englanders began to trade wood for sugar and molasses. Around 1700, sugar refineries were erected in Baltimore and New York (sugar refining would be New York City's most profitable industry 1870-1917). However, European refiners dominated the market, so the manufacturers of the Northeast looked at molasses, sugar's by-product, for greater opportunities. Specifically, they distilled molasses into rum.

As early as 1664, the Dutch were distilling rum on Staten Island in New York; Boston's first rum distillery is recorded as operating in 1667. By the 1700s, New England distilleries were producing millions of gallons of cheap rum to supply traders with rum that could be exchanged for slaves. Once the slave ships arrived in Africa, merchants could buy adults for 110-130 gallons of rum or children for about 80 gallons. Rum cost as little to produce as five and a half pence per gallon; in 1746, a slave could be purchased for about £5 and auctioned in the West Indies for £30-80. Rhode Island alone dominated between 60-90 percent of the exchange rum trade with its Guinea Rum. Slave traders owned and operated 30 rum distilleries in Newport whose casks they loaded onto over 150 slave ships. It is estimated that the slave traders of the single city of Newport, Rhode Island, exchanged rum for over 106,000 Africans. Once brought to the islands, the enslaved would produce sugar, yielding molasses to distill into rum to exchange for more slaves, in a vicious cycle of profit.

Separating Sugar and Slavery

By the end of the 1700s, slaves were so synonymous with sugar that abolitionist groups attempted to convince people to stop using sugar to help end slavery. British abolitionist poet William Cowper was inspired in 1788 to write "The Negro's Complaint," in which he specifically condemns the sugar trade:

Why did all-creating Nature
Make the plant for which we toil?
Sighs must fan it, Tears must water,
Sweat of ours must dress the soil.
Think ye Masters, iron-hearted,
Lolling at your jovial Boards,
Think how many Backs have smarted
For the Sweets your Cane affords!

The East India Company promoted its sugar as an alternative to slave-produced West Indies sugar. In advertising, a company distributor "respectfully informs the Friends of Africa that she has on Sale an Assortment of Sugar Basins, handsomely labeled in Gold Letters: "East India

Sugar not made by Slaves." The advertisements neglected to mention that the company used poorly paid, overworked Javanese and Indian laborers in the Far East to produce sugar.

By the late 1700s, expansion of Caribbean sugar plantations resulted in the flooding of the marketplace with sugar. Prices fell, reducing the profitability of the plantations. Profits shrank further as French sugar producers undercut the prices of British sugar producers and drove them out of business. In Africa, the devastating depopulation of the continent resulted in a shortage in the supply of slaves, forcing slave traders to pay more for slaves. Although sugar would not be as profitable for sugar cultivators in the New World as it had been before 1800, it would continue to be cultivated by African slaves until Brazil's emancipation of slaves in 1888.

The exception would be Haiti. In the late 1700s, the French colony of Saint-Domingue was one of the most important sugar producers in the world. It sent most of its raw brown sugar to France to be refined to meet the rising demand of French consumers; in doing so it became the wealthiest colony in the New World, wealthier than the 13 British colonies of North America combined. Substantial amounts of sugar, rum, and molasses went to non-French markets as well, sometimes as smuggled goods. Saint-Domingue's prosperity rested on slave labor, over 500,000 slaves by 1789. With the examples of the American and French Revolutions fresh in their minds, the slaves of Saint-Domingue rebelled against the colony's French planters in 1791. Rebel leader Toussaint Louverture, along with other generals and groups of rebel slaves, destroyed many of the sugar plantations.

One observer recalled, "The most striking feature of this terrible spectacle was a rain of fire composed of burning cane-straw." In 1801, Toussaint proclaimed the abolition of slavery in Saint-Domingue, but he knew he needed to restore sugar production, which had fallen 80 percent over the decade of rebellion. He implemented the system of *fermage*, leasing abandoned plantations to senior army officers and government workers who would employ sharecroppers to perform the agricultural work. Napoleon Bonaparte sent an army of 33,000 troops to reestablish control over the colony. Although Toussaint Louverture was betrayed and died in a French prison in 1803, nearly 30,000 French soldiers perished from yellow fever and the French army withdrew. Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henry Christophe declared independence from France on January 1, 1804, and the Republic of Haiti, the first black republic in the world born of a slave revolt, was established.

General Dessalines tore out the white section from the French flag to symbolize the end of white European domination of Haiti. Yet, white is also the color of refined sugar, the sweet, chemically-pure granules produced at such a great price by enslaved Africans, beginning four centuries ago on the island of Hispaniola, which Haiti shares with the Dominican Republic. In tearing out the sugary white center of the French tricolor, Dessalines symbolically began the process of separating sugar from slavery.

This essay was written by Jean M. West, a social studies education consultant in Port Orange, Florida.

1776, lyrics by Sherman Edwards

Molasses to Rum

Rutledge

Mr. Jefferson, to us in South Carolina, black slavery is our peculiar institution and a cherished way of life.

Jefferson

Nevertheless, we must abolish it. Nothing is more certainly written in the Book of Fate than that this people shall be free.

Rutledge

I'm not concerned with the Book of Fate right now, sir. Slavery is the basis of our economy.

Adams

Economy. Always economy. There's more to this than a filthy purse-string, Rutledge. It's an offense against man and God.

Hopkins

It's a stinking business, Mr. Rutledge--a stinking business.

Rutledge

Is it really, Mr. Hopkins? Then what's that I smell? Floatin' down from the North--could it be the aroma of *hy*-pocrisy? For who holds the other end of that filthy purse-string, Mr. Adams? Our Northern brethren are feelin' a bit tender toward our slaves. They don't approve of slaves, no-o, but they're willin' to be considerable carriers of slaves--to others! They are willin', for the shillin' or haven't y'heard, Mr. Adams? Clink! clink!

Molasses to

Rum to

Slaves!

Oh, what a beautiful waltz!

You dance with us,

We dance with you, in

molasses and

Rum and

Slaves

Who sail the ships out of Boston,

Laden with Bibles and Rum?

Who drinks a toast

To the Ivory Coast,

"Hail, Africa! The slavers have come."
New England, with Bibles and Rum!

Then,
It's off with the Rum and the Bibles
Take on the Slaves, clink! clink!
Then,
Hail and farewell!
To the smell of the African
Coast!

Molasses to
Rum to
Slaves!
'Tisn't morals, 'tis money that saves!
Shall we dance to the sound
Of the profitable pound, in
Molasses and
Rum and
Slaves!

Who sail the ships out of Guinea,
Laden with Bibles and Slaves?
'Tis Boston can boast
To the West Indies coast:
"Jamaica! We brung what y'craves!
Antigua! Barbados!
We brung Bibles
And Slaves!"

Gentlemen! You mustn't think our Northern friends merely see our slaves as figures on a ledger. Oh, no, sir! They see them as figures on the block! Notice the faces at the auctions, gentlemen--white faces on the African wharves--New England faces, seafaring faces: "Put them in the ships, cram them in the ships, *stuff* them in the ships!" Hurry, gentlemen, let the auction begin!

Ya ha...
Ya ha...ha-ma-ha-cundahhh!

Gentlemen, y'hear?
That's the cry of the auctioneer!

Ya ha...
Ya ha...ha-ma-ha-cundahhh!

Slaves, gentlemen! Black gold! Livin' gold--gold!
From:

Annn-go-laah!
Guinea-Guinea-Guinea!
Blackbirds for sale!

Aaa-shan-tiiii!
Ibo! Ibo! Ibo! Ibo!

Blackbirds for sale!
Handle them!
Fondle them!
But don't finger them!
They're prime, they're prime!

Ya ha...
Ya ha...ha-ma-ha-cundahhh!

Bartlett

For the love of God, Mr. Rutledge, *please!*

Rutledge

Molasses to
Rum to
Slaves

Who sail the ships back to Boston,
Laden with gold, see it gleam?
Whose fortunes are made
In the triangle trade?
Hail, Slavery, the New England
Dream!

Mr. Adams, I give you a toast!
Hail Boston!
Hail Charleston!
Who *stinketh* the most?!