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The Making of an Atlantic Slave Society, 1775–1807

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Acknowledgments

This book traces the historical trajectory of the men, women, and children forcibly transported to Jamaica in the last thirty-two years of the British slave trade. It looks at the dynamics that shaped their lives as well as how they interpreted and sometimes even forced change on the Atlantic system that wrenched them from Africa. I find it a bitter irony that as I have reached the final stages of this work, the world has recently lost two pioneers in the study of slavery: Philip D. Curtin and John Hope Franklin. Both these men have now gone the way of other great minds who have shaped my work, namely, Eric E. Williams, C.L.R. James, and Walter Rodney. My own study would not have been possible without the advances of these and other exceptional scholars. As such, this book rests on the foundation laid by those trailblazers whose work in this field has stood the test of time.

The idea for this study was conceived in Toronto about ten years ago. It was a wonderful place to be as I explored my ideas. I was fortunate to be surrounded by peers and mentors who were passionate students of Africa and its diasporas. We were all enthusiastic to share ideas and rethink the traditional questions that shaped the scholarship. In Toronto, my very first intellectual home, I was safely cushioned with support from both the Department of History at the University of Toronto and the Harriet Tubman Institute at York University. I owe many debts to colleagues, friends, and colleagues-turned-friends at both these institutions.

I am especially grateful to Martin A. Klein, who not only taught me African history but also taught me that the best research projects have "small topics but ask big questions." Those are words I carry with me every day in my role as historian and educator, from archive to classroom. Thank you for everything, Marty, but most of all thank you for supporting me as I completed this project on my own terms. It has been many years, and I have learned much from you. To Paul E. Lovejoy, I also owe much thanks. Over the years, Paul has been incredibly supportive and generous with his

comments and critiques. His scholarship has played an important role in shaping my own research. His energy, vision, and belief in the possibilities for this field are matched by few. He has been an inspiration for the generation of scholars who have sprung up behind him. To David V. Trotman, my debts are quite simply incalculable. As an undergraduate student, I fell in love with history under his tutelage. I would not be a historian today without his influence; I would not have made it this far without his advice and support. David was usually the first person on whom I would test my ideas for this project. With the biblical patience of Job, he has listened to me ramble as I worked out many of the ideas with which I was struggling. He has also been the sage who has kept me calm, put things in perspective, and helped me maneuver past the many landmines in this profession. I am forever indebted.

There are many others who have helped me advance this project over the years. Michael Wayne, Rick Halpern, Gad Heuman, and Verene Shepherd have all read earlier drafts of this study. They were generous with their comments and pushed the boundaries of the study with their questions. Wilma King has heard me present parts of this study at various conferences over the years. She has always been supportive and offered solid critiques. When the project was in its earlier stages, as I undertook research in Jamaica and the United Kingdom, many scholars were generous with their advice and recommendations about documents and research strategy. These include Emma Christopher, Robin Law, David Richardson, and Mary Turner. My peers at the University of Toronto, Tracey Thompson and Chima Korieh, were with me in the trenches and have proven to be fiercely loyal in their support over the years.

At conferences and by invitation I presented many of the themes and arguments in this study. I learned immensely from the comments I received from colleagues involved with the Harriet Tubman Seminar series at York University. I also benefited greatly from the discussion at the 2004 conference L'Enfant dans l'esclavage held in Avignon and organized by Gwyn Campbell, the Diaspora Paradigms conference held at Michigan State University in 2001, the thirtieth annual conference of the Society for Caribbean Studies conference hosted at Kew Gardens in 2006, the 2001 North American Conference on British Studies in Toronto, the Southern Historical Association meetings held at Memphis in 2004, and the 2005 annual conference of the American Historical Association hosted in Seattle.

I spent eight months undertaking research in London. While there I

was fortunate enough to be part of a diverse and multidisciplinary research community at Goodenough College at Mecklenburgh Square. As fellow researchers, we would congregate at breakfast and dinner to eagerly discuss our projects and exchange ideas. This setting played an important role as I formulated my ideas. In Jamaica, my experience was quite different, but there also I was lucky to be in a supportive environment. At the University of the West Indies, Verene Shepherd and Swithin Wilmot were generous with their assistance as I began my research at the university library. My good friend and colleague Colleen Vasconcellos and I coordinated our research trips to the island. We shared an apartment and worked in the national archive and at the University of the West Indies together for four months. She was wonderfully supportive during that time, and together we have countless stories that involve research, curried goat, and good Jamaican rum. I have also lost a friend who helped while I was in Jamaica: my fiery old friend Alison Delgado has since passed away. She was generous and kind but also had no inhibitions about speaking frankly and honestly. She was fearless, tough as nails, and a survivor.

At Carleton University, I received generous advice and moral support as I came closer to the end of this project. In particular, my colleagues (and fellow islanders) James Miller, Roderick Phillips, and Steve Wilson have been very supportive and have kept me positive over the last few years. Also, David Dean and Jim Opp have been kind with their advice and support.

My research took me to many libraries, archives, and research centers. I would be remiss if I did not thank and acknowledge the people at these institutions, who often went above and beyond the call of duty to help me complete my research. In the United Kingdom, I worked at the National Archives in Kew Gardens, the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, the British Library, the Bodleian in Oxford, and the National Library of Scotland. In the Caribbean, my research led me to the Jamaican National Archives and the University of the West Indies (Mona). I also worked at the John Hope Franklin Research Center at Duke University. In Toronto, I had ready access to the Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library and Government Publications at the University of Toronto. Staffs at the National Maritime Museum in London and the National Museums Liverpool were also very helpful in handling my pleas for assistance by phone and email. In addition, I owe special thanks to Joël Rivard at the Maps, Data, and Government Information Centre (MADGIC) at Carleton University, as he was incredibly helpful

as I navigated the world of digital mapping. I must also thank Stephanie Shoobert, who on short notice drew the maps included in this book. Anthony Kofi Arthiabah has also been very kind in helping me work through the computing challenges I faced as I worked with software for this project.

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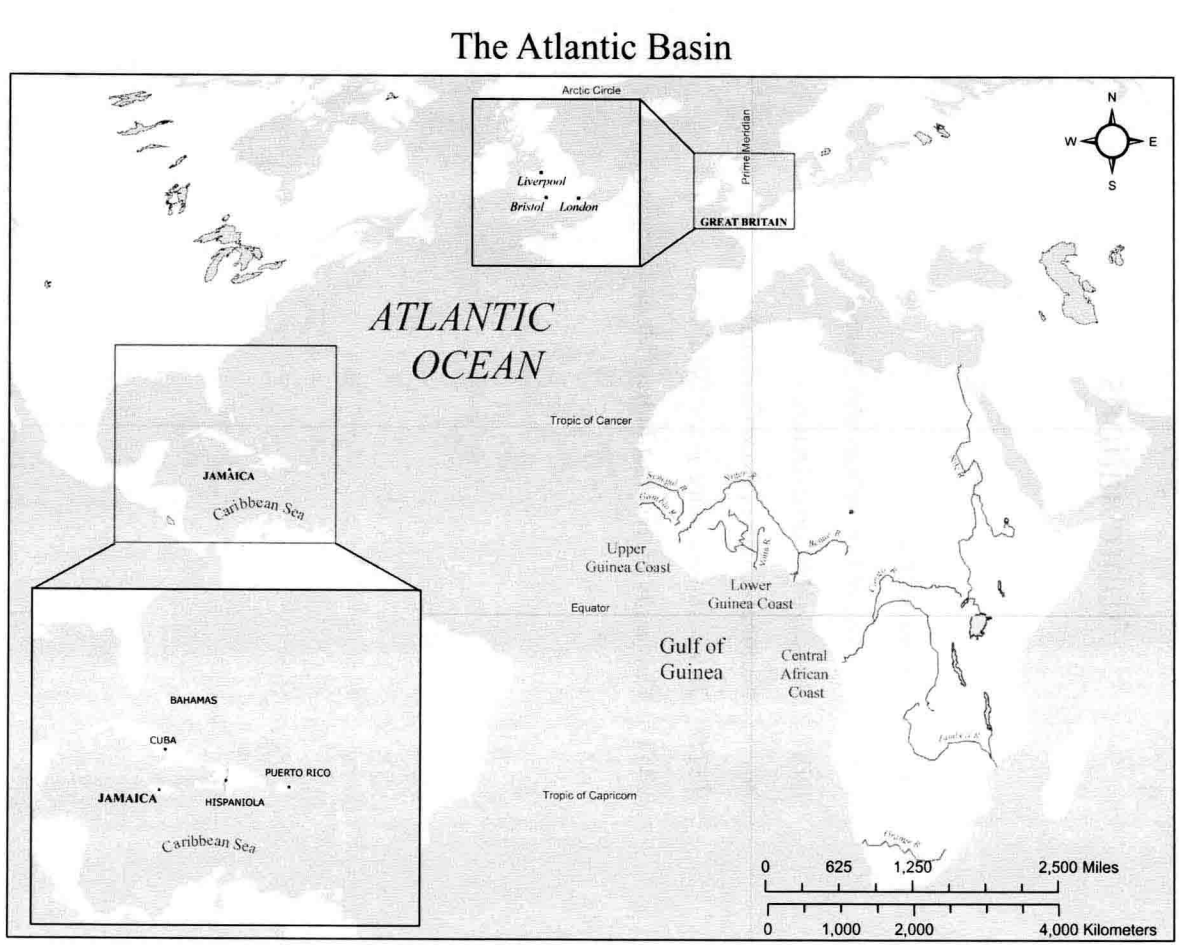
Finally, to family, friends, and loved ones who have kept me grounded and held me steady, as inadequate as it might be, I offer my thanks for years of unwavering support.

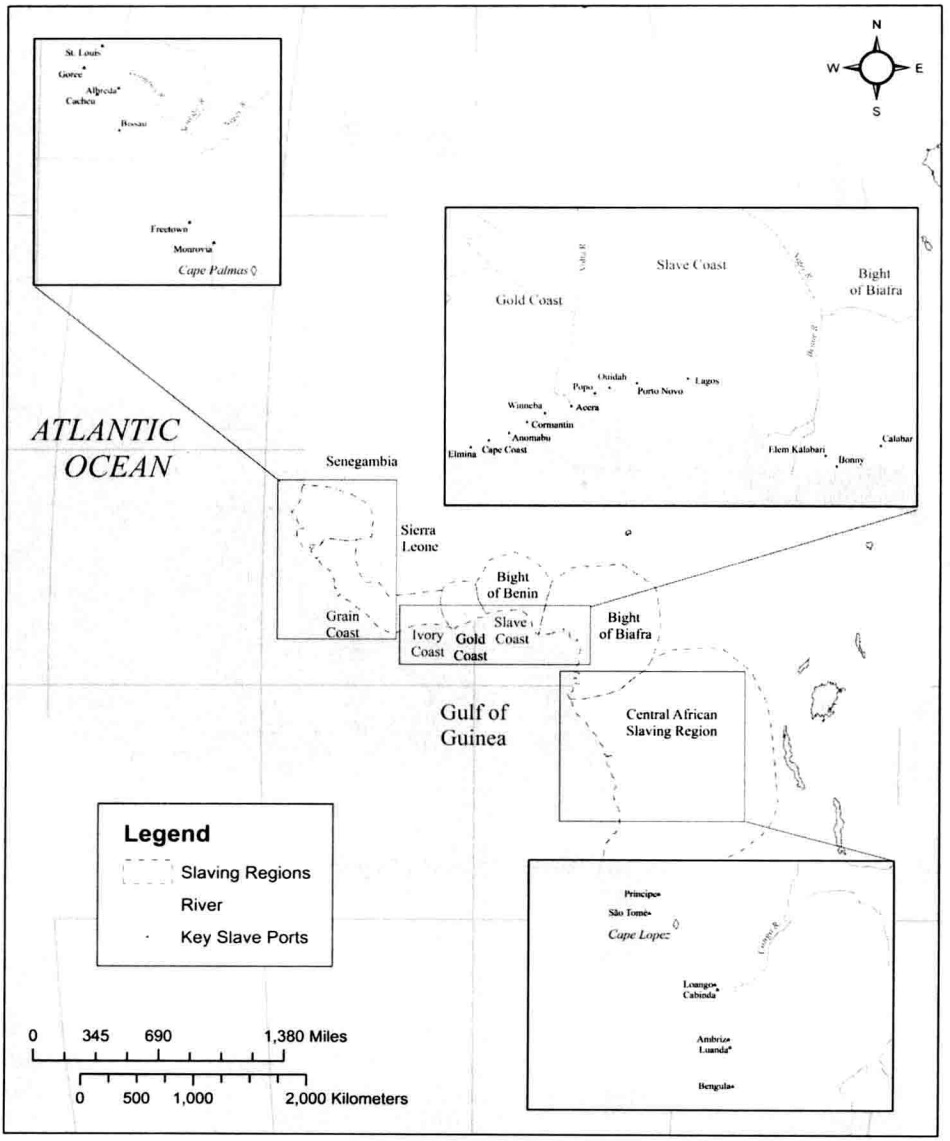
Abbreviations

CO	Colonial Office
ICS	Institute of Commonwealth Studies
JNA	Jamaican National Archives
NA	National Archives (Kew Gardens)
TSTD	*Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*
UWI	University of the West Indies (Mona Campus)

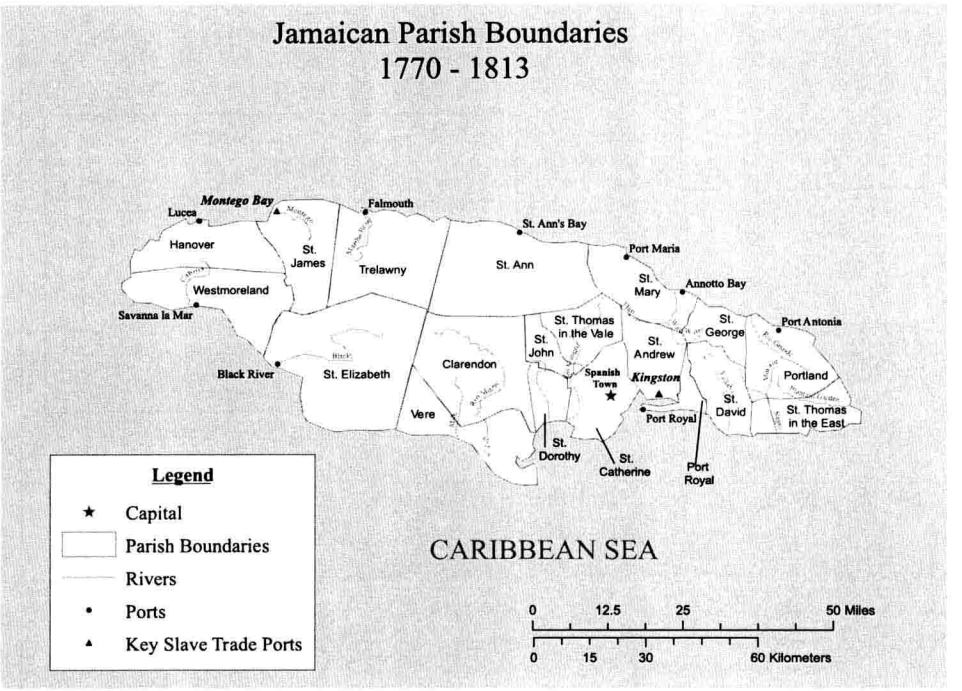


Map 1. The Atlantic Basin. Drawn by Stephanie Shoobert.

Key Slaving Regions in Africa



Map 2. Key slaving regions in Africa. Drawn by Stephanie Shoobert.



Map 3. Jamaican parish boundaries, 1770–1813. Drawn by Stephanie Shoobert.

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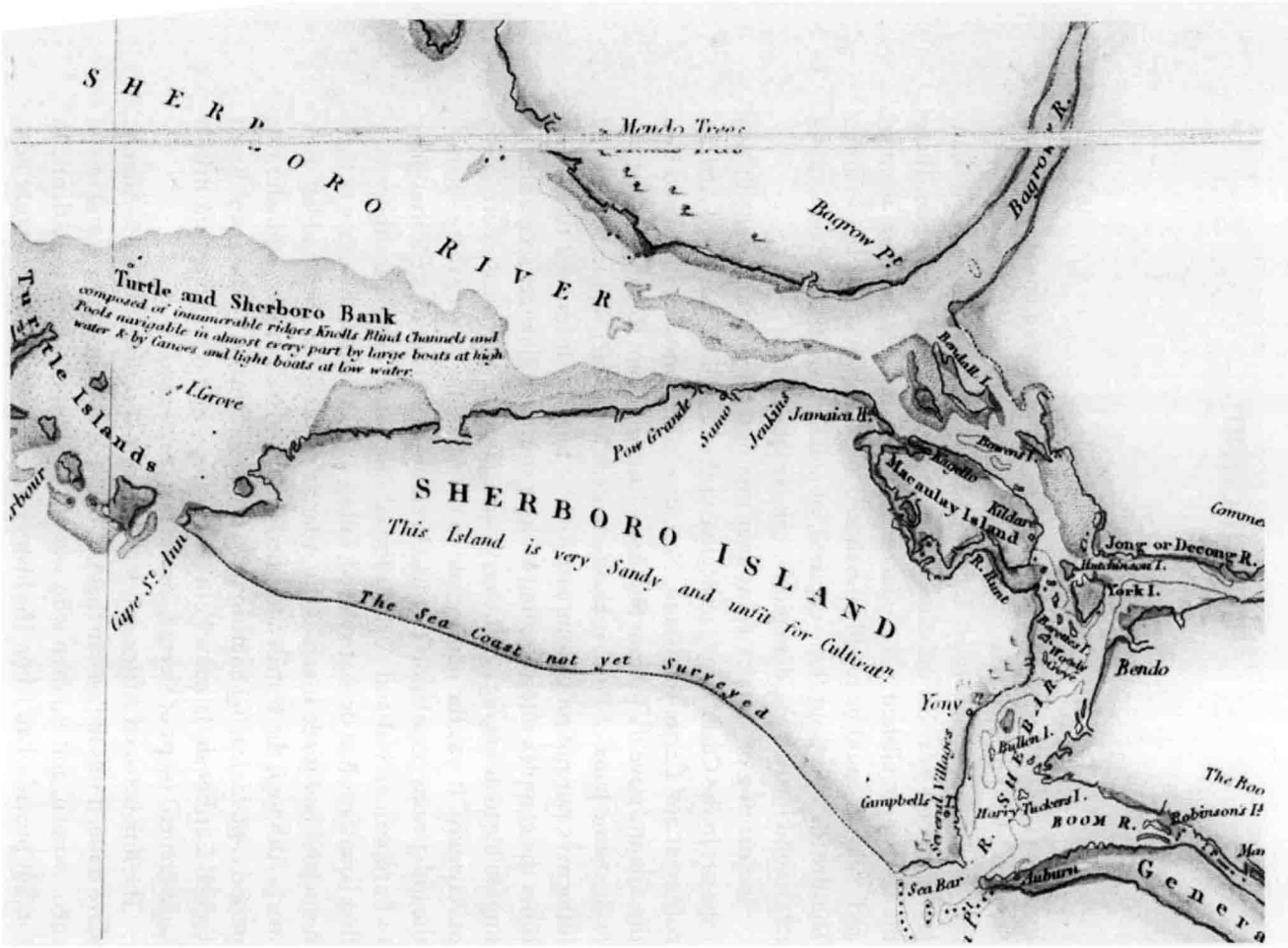
Introduction

In the seventeenth century, there was a settlement called Jamaica Point on Sherbro Island off the coast of Sierra Leone (see map 4). It was an important, well-fortified port town. Like the island of Jamaica in the Caribbean, Jamaica Point was also intimately bound to the Atlantic slave trade. There the British established a "slave factory" from which captive men, women, and children could be readily purchased and shipped across the Atlantic. The British were sold these captives, of course, by African slave traders catering to the Atlantic demand for captive labor.[1]

The naming of Jamaica Point after one of the most important British colonies in the Caribbean is indicative of the links that connected African continent and Caribbean island. Not surprisingly, most captives sold into the Atlantic slave trade from Sherbro Island were sent to Jamaica. The use of the name Jamaica Point is also testament to the fact that trans-Atlantic influences ran not only from east to west but also from west to east. At times the complex intermingling of these shifting influences seems almost impossible to disaggregate. The very name *Jamaica,* after all, is a corruption of *Xaymaca.* It was the name given to the island by its very first settlers—the indigenous population that had been resident there for centuries prior to European arrival and African forced migration. Long after those very first Jamaicans had been displaced, killed, and alienated, the name of their homeland had made it across the Atlantic so that even they had left their mark. Although the British abolished the slave trade in 1807, and after this period captives leaving Sherbro were shipped primarily to the Spanish and French Caribbean, Jamaica Point continued to be represented on British (and French) maps of Sierra Leone at least until 1840.[2]

The link between Africa and Jamaica was, of course, the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It was the system that facilitated the killing, capture, and sale of men, women, and children who were to be shipped across the Atlantic to forcibly provide their labor. The history of this system is, first and foremost,



Map 4. Jamaica Point, Sherbro Island (Sierra Leone). Cartographer, James Wyld Jr. First published in London in 1840. Image used with the permission of Afriterra Library, www.afriterra.org.

then, about lives lived and lives lost. The history of these lives has been told many times, in many ways; with each retelling, efforts have been made to move one step further from "silencing the past."[3]

This study adds to a growing body of scholarship on the Atlantic slave trade. In so doing, it offers a historical narrative of captives on a forced journey from Africa to Jamaica in the late eighteenth century. It uses the American Revolution, the ramifications of which were felt throughout the Caribbean, as its starting point and ends with the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807. An analysis of the men, women, and children forcibly transported to Jamaica during this thirty-two-year period offers important insights about Atlantic slave societies in general and Jamaica in particular. As the last group of captives legally transported on British slave ships, they were among the last of the enslaved to put an African stamp on Jamaican slave society. During this period, captive Africans arrived to the island in larger numbers and were part of a process of intense Africanization.

The scholarship in this area is rich and varied. The arguments made in this study would have been impossible without the groundbreaking developments in slave trade studies of recent years. Perhaps the most influential of these developments is the 2009 publication of the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*. The first edition of this database was published about a decade earlier, and even then it revolutionized slave trade studies as it allowed for nuanced demographic analyses that, prior to its publication, were rarely attempted. Two of the more notable exceptions to this are the pioneering demographic analyses completed by Philip Curtin and Barry Higman.[4] *From Africa to Jamaica* uses the 2009 revised edition of the database to reassess the demographic contours of the Atlantic slave trade to Jamaica. Yet as this study makes clear, the database is at best a starting point for any demographic analysis of the slave trade. The intra-American forced migration of captives and illegal slave-trading activities are but two factors that also shed light on the number of captives transported to any particular port.[5] Furthermore, any quantitative data derived from the database must be contextualized by a thorough use of qualitative source material. Only then can historians problematize the very categories used to make demographic assessments or develop insights on the key forces that shaped the patterns of forced migration among captive men, women, and children.

There have also been other important developments in the field. The resurgence of Atlantic history and its continued institutionalization in the academy has facilitated conversations between Africanists and specialists