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# Free and coerced migrations: the Atlantic in global perspective*

DAVID ELTIS

Department of History, Emory University, Atlanta GA 30322, USA. E-mail: deltis@emory.edu

What distinguished the mass transatlantic migration that occurred between Columbian contact and the early nineteenth century from the movements of peoples around the globe that occurred both before and after this phenomenon? Two central distinguishing features were the large element of coercion in the movements across the early modern Atlantic world, and the central importance of identity in shaping both the direction of migration and its composition. On the first of these, coercion was a sine qua non, not only of the well-known slave trade, but also of the much smaller migrations of convicts and – given the temporary, if voluntary, signing away of the migrants' freedom – indentured servants and contract labourers. On the second, the question of who became slaves was determined by the refusal of Europeans to enslave other Europeans.

The trans-global movement of human beings, initially perhaps by land out of Africa, and eventually via the Bering land bridge and the Indonesian archipelago to the farthest terra firma, began many millennia ago. Against the broad backdrop of this apparently constant swarming of people, transatlantic migration from the sixteenth down to the middle of the nineteenth century, was strikingly unusual in three ways. First, prior to this era, whether it was the initial peopling of the Americas, millennia ago, the central Europeans who are thought to have settled in Asia three thousand years ago, or the Chinese who visited Africa in the fifteenth century, movement and settlement had not been accompanied by continuing and intensive contact between the source society and the migrant society. The migration of peoples normally changed the immigrant more than the emigrant society, and unless the number of migrants was large, the region of departure would be completely unaffected. The Vikings who went to Skraeland and the Maoris who went to New Zealand could have left no measurable impact on the

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lands they left behind. In the early modern Atlantic region, however, for the first time in human history there appeared a hemispheric 'community'. Community, in the sense used here, means that everyone living in it had values which, if they were not shared around the Atlantic area, were certainly reshaped in some way by others living in different parts of the Atlantic basins, and, as this suggests, where events in one small geographic area had the potential to stimulate a reaction – and not necessarily just economic – thousands of miles away. Second, the migration was both ocean borne and part of a larger expansion movement, which saw Europeans and, to a lesser extent Africans, move east as well as west, in the European case by land. Third, and most important for the present essay, more than half the migrants were patently unwilling to relocate – probably the first time in human history that this had happened. Of those who were not forced, a very large number travelled under obligations to others that meant the migrant effectively abandoned some basic freedoms for several years after arrival. In the eastern manifestation of European expansion a sizeable proportion of those who moved were serfs whose influence over whether or not they migrated was probably not much different from that of a slave.[1]

Recent scholarship, represented in Figure 1, demonstrates the huge (and, before 1850, majority) presence of either unwilling migrants, or migrants who arrived under impersonal and long term obligations to others, an aspect that sets this population movement apart from all other pre-modern shifts. Figure 1 gives the absolute numbers by types of migrants over time. The three groupings are total migrants, bound migrants – defined as indentured servants, contract labourers, slaves, convicts and prisoners – and coerced migrants, which includes only slaves, prisoners and convicts, respectively. This form of grouping bypasses the national and racial categorizations, which dominate the literature. The bound category, for example, includes Europeans and Africans of many nations, as well as Asians, both Indian and Chinese. The coerced category includes Europeans and Africans, and while the latter were the overwhelming majority, grouping in this form provides a basis, taken up below, for explaining this numerical dominance. It also points to the intermediate status of indentured and contract migrants who obtained a free transoceanic passage in exchange for control over three to seven years of their labour. Because they entered into a contract more or less voluntarily, they were like free migrants, and because they could be bought and sold and did not have much control over this process, or the work they were required to perform during the indenture, they were like slaves. The data and sources for these figures are matters of some complexity and are explained in a separate publication.[2]

Free migration predominated for the first century and for the last half century, and subsequently. For two centuries in between – from say 1630 to 1830 – coerced migration and migration undertaken under a labour debt to others was by far the most dominant regime under which population movements occurred. Overall,

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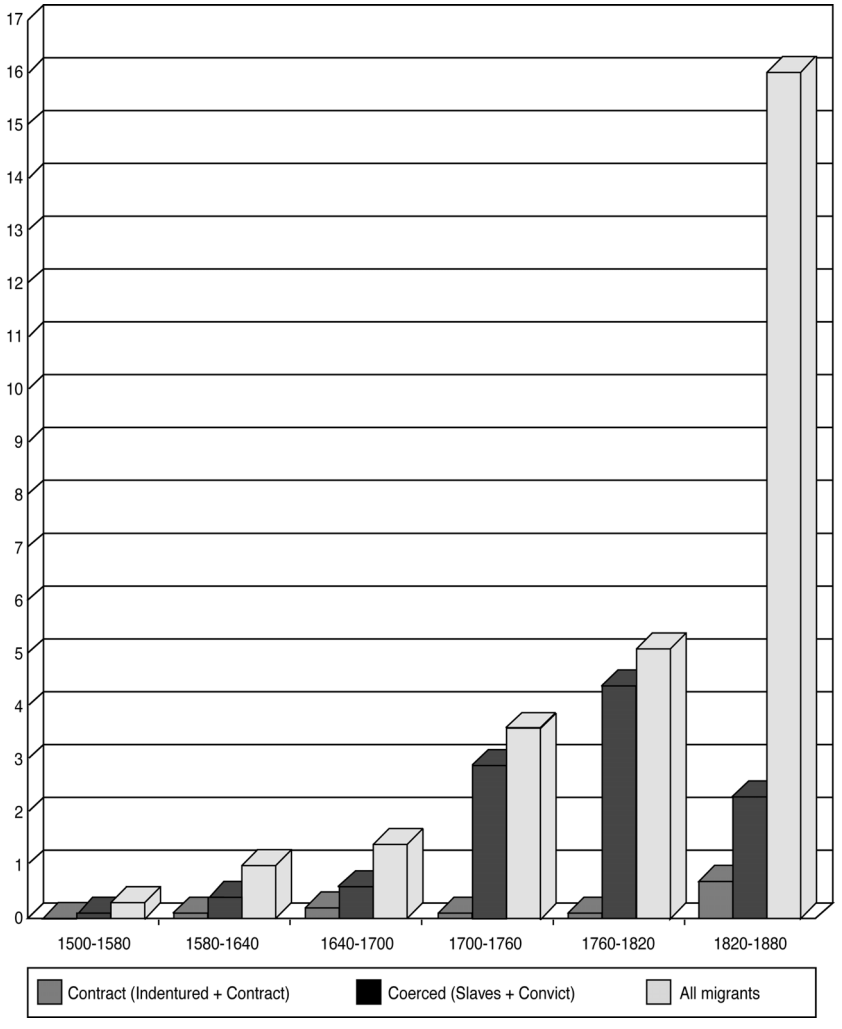



**Figure 1.** Volume of emigrants to the Americas by status.

migrants travelling without a labour debt, or fully enslaved to others, were in a minority. Coincidentally, this raises intriguing questions of how transatlantic migration was for so long associated in the minds of both specialist scholars and the general public with freedom. More substantively, it points to the need to explore the nature of freedom in the context of the large-scale movement of peoples. What did the fact that most early modern transatlantic migrants were not free mean for conceptions of freedom, and the patterns and character of the migration as well as its impact on societies at either end of the migrant route? As the rest of this paper argues, the nature of Atlantic migration is such that we cannot begin to answer these questions without first taking into account those who did have some control over whether or not they moved – both those who migrated

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and those who did not. And Africans and Europeans belong to both these categories. The western branch of Old World migration, and perhaps both eastern and western branches together, although the scholarship is scarcely up to the task at the moment, need to be treated as a unit, even though the former originated on two Old World continents.

It is striking that transatlantic migration can be grouped according to the labour regimes under which migrants travelled. It would not occur to historians or demographers to try this kind of grouping for long-distance population movements before 1500 and after 1900. Indeed, it would not be necessary, in that migrants before and after this period travelled within a common legal framework. The fact that the vast majority of migrants, between 1500 and 1850, worked for others at the end of their journey, unlike earlier migrants, helps account for the uniqueness of this period and also points to the centrality of the demand and supply of labour that formed the basis of the migration. At one level, the direction and composition of the re-peopling of the Americas is a function of the relative price of labour, with the relative distribution of free and enslaved peoples (or the proportion of migrants coming from Europe and Africa) settled by wages and prices of slaves.

Although transatlantic migration was the movement of labour from one area to another, economic analysis will not tell us who became slaves and who became indentured servants. Even within labour regimes, huge numbers of individuals were excluded from entry into a country and region (a practice that continues today) on non-economic grounds. Some efforts to halt or shape migrant flows stem from the attempts of particular interest groups to benefit themselves at the expense of society as a whole, in which case the behaviour is economically motivated, though at the level of private rather than public interest. Of considerable interest in seeking out the fundamental explanations of long-distance population movements are the cultural values and ideologies, or parameters, within which economic behaviour occurs. By their nature these are so entrenched that migrants, and perhaps historians who interpret the records they leave, tend to take them for granted. Examples of such shared assumptions underpinning social existence are conceptions of morality, principles of social organization, and issues of identity. It follows that to understand migration, and more particularly the interaction between the flows of free and coerced labour which formed the basis of the re-peopling of the Americas, we need to take into account the different values of societies around the Atlantic and, more particularly, the way groups of people involved in creating a transatlantic community saw themselves in relation to others.[3] The patterns displayed in Figure 1 may well make more sense if we view them through a cultural rather than an economic lens.

European expansion both eastwards and westwards put settlers into environments with which the labour regimes under which the migrants had worked before

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they became migrants, and which they carried with them, could not easily cope, although adjustment within the framework of what was familiar occurred more smoothly in the east than in the west. The difference was ultimately perhaps climatic – not primarily in its epidemiological manifestation, but rather in the kinds of produce the climate, and more generally the environment, made possible. In the east, migration pushed the settlement frontier toward colder, or at least more continental climates, but before the nineteenth century not to non-temperate zones. Because Euro-Asia was a single landmass with a long history of internal exchange and migration, expansion brought on stream no unfamiliar products or hugely different production techniques. In the west, by contrast, expansion brought the European frontier to tropical and semi-tropical as well as temperate areas. Several products that were either unknown to Europeans (such as tobacco), or occupied a luxury niche in pre-expansion European tastes (such as gold or sugar), now fell within the capacity of Europeans to produce. But while Europeans could now control the production of such exotic goods, it became apparent in the first two centuries after Columbian contact that they did not wish to supply the labour that would make such output possible. This is not meant to imply that a free market labour system existed in Europe in the late fifteenth century such that those working for others could choose among many employers and tasks and thus avoid unpleasant working conditions. Free labour in the modern sense of equal legal (as opposed to economic) standing of employer and employee did not exist before the middle of the nineteenth century.[4] A range of dependent relations existed between the propertied and the non-propertied before this point, including serfdom, but none that coped with conditions in the semi-tropical Americas and none, despite much of the recent literature, that came close to chattel slavery.

Ocean-going technology brought Europeans into large-scale face-to-face contact with three groups of peoples who were culturally and physically more different from themselves than any other remote peoples with whom they had interacted in the previous millennium. Two of them, Asians and Africans, they were already aware of, but the third, American aboriginals, were completely unknown to them. For the first of these groups contact meant little originally. Transoceanic mercantile and imperial connections by Asians pre-dated European expansion, and the ability of Europeans to establish land-based empires in Asia, albeit using indirect rule, did not emerge until the second half of the eighteenth century. For the second, Africans, neither the initial Chinese contacts in the east, nor the much more extended and intensive European counterparts, mainly in the west, led to loss of territorial control prior to late in the nineteenth century – with the single and limited exception of western Angola. Indeed, African capacity to resist ocean-borne invaders was probably one of the two key factors that determined that the sugar complex moved across the Atlantic to the Americas after seemingly island-hopping down the West African coast during the late fifteenth

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and early sixteenth centuries.[5] The other factor was the willingness of some Africans to sell slaves to Europeans. In effect African strength – the capacity to retain territorial integrity – helped foster the slave trade as Europeans established their plantations in the Americas instead of Africa with an elastic supply of coerced African labour. As this suggests, and as is well known, European domination of the third group of transoceanic peoples was complete. Indeed, from the European perspective, it was much too complete. The epidemiological impact of the Old World destroyed not only native American societies, but also a potential labour supply.

Figure 1 indicates that most of the early migration to the Americas can be very loosely categorized as free, at least in the sense that it was neither coerced nor bound. We know about the numbers and the geographical distribution of early Iberian migration, but surprisingly little about the terms under which ordinary Castilians and Portuguese came to the Americas prior to the nineteenth century. Given that Spain, at least, conquered and then administered an existing Empire, the main export of which was precious metals (first looted and then mined), it is to be expected that a high incidence of early migrants were soldiers, professionals and artisans.[6] Spain and, to a lesser degree, Portugal moved into the areas of the New World with the highest population densities. Spain was not as heavily involved in producing exports – certainly not commodity exports – as later European regimes. It is unlikely that the few native textiles, hides and plantation products that crossed the Atlantic in the sixteenth century from Spanish America could have justified their transportation costs without piggy-backing on the very high value-to-weight ratios of bullion exports – the latter ensuring cheap space for lower value items. In Brazil, most of the slaves on the early sugar plantations were Amerindian and the greater share of African slaves shown in the figures for the 1500–1580 period arrived at the very end of the period when the demographic disaster triggered the switch from Indian to African labour. Thus, neither Spain nor Portugal felt the need, initially, for highly elastic supplies of unskilled labour from the Old World. With *corvee* or *mita* labour supplying most of the needs of the Spanish-American mining sector, overall levels of migration were small before 1600 and both the coerced and bound components of that migration were lower than at any point before the middle of the nineteenth century.

Perhaps the most important developments for migration in the Atlantic world (certainly for Africans), and more broadly in the saga of European expansion, came in the seventeenth century, rather than with Columbian contact or the Spanish conquests of the sixteenth century. Three factors reshaped the migrant flow after 1640. First, the Amerindian population reached its nadir.[7] At the same time, more intensive production techniques came to be introduced on plantations, specifically gang-labour on Caribbean sugar islands, particularly those occupied by the English. Given the prevalence of small cane farmers and decentralized

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sugar-growing (as opposed to milling) in early Brazil, the gang-labour system likely did not appear until sugar had been in the Americas for over a century.[8] Before 1800, American plantations were almost synonymous with sugar. The work was unpleasant, it was carried out in low-lying unhealthy environments, and, above all, it involved loss of control over the pace at which one worked. All these characteristics ensured that wages would have to be very high to attract voluntary labour. The Portuguese and Spanish who migrated in the early period were not likely of the type to work on sugar plantations. Indeed, no one – from any continent – would work voluntarily for long periods of time under the kinds of work regimes that evolved in the eastern Caribbean in the mid-seventeenth century. For one and a half centuries, sugar and sugar-products formed by far the most valuable of products exported from the Americas. And neither black nor white, free nor bound, could at first sustain a positive rate of natural population growth in the regions most suitable for sugar cultivation. The third development to shape migration was the growing intensity, efficiency – and presumably falling costs – of transatlantic contact.[9] The frequency and cost of transatlantic travel was such that by the second half of the seventeenth century, for the first time in human history there appeared a hemispheric 'community'.

The above developments facilitated several possible responses to what was, from the European perspective, a labour problem. If Europeans had simply extended the labour regimes that were prevalent in their own part of the Old World to the New – relied in other words on predominantly non-coerced labour – then labour costs would have risen to the point where sugar would not have become a common consumer item as quickly as it did, and the plantation sector of the New World would have grown much more slowly. A second possible resolution was the employment of forced labour wherever it could be obtained most cheaply – a solution consistent with what many scholars see as the dominant ethos of the merchants at the helm of early modern European expansion. A third possibility, quite different from the second, was to tap what Europeans (and some Africans) came to see as a reserve of coerced labour thousands of miles away from where that labour was to be used and from where consumers of plantation output and organizers of the plantation complex lived. There were modest attempts to implement the first and second solutions. In 1624, William Usselinx argued that the Swedish colonies should not use coerced labour, and Georgia prohibited slave holding in 1749.[10] More generally, as we shall see, several European countries sent convicts and prisoners against their will to the plantation colonies where most of them helped produce sugar and tobacco. But there was no serious debate over adopting the third option, anymore than there would be today about using free labour as opposed to, say, a slave trade and chattel slavery to improve company profits, even though there is no reason to doubt the efficiency of the latter. The total absence of serious debate points to the existence then, as now, of values so

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widely and deeply held in a community that no discussion of them is deemed necessary. Such values, as well as profit-maximizing behaviour, have determined the form of migration (and most other social phenomena).

Forcing people to move thousands of miles from their homes and then work under conditions to which they would never be subjected at home was a drastic step. It was rare for any society to subject its own members to the extreme imbalance of rights and the weakness or absence of reciprocation implied by such a step. Most societies generated potential candidates for such a move from wars with neighbouring peoples, and from judicial processes. The latter in particular, arising from the breaking of laws, implies violation of community standards determined to a large extent culturally rather than on an economic basis. Convicts were one of the major groups to cross the Atlantic (and eventually other oceans) both from Africa and from Europe. The greater the transgression against community standards, the more likely the perpetrator was to be forced to do things against his/her will and indeed, the longer the term of banishment. The theoretical basis of transportation and forced labour for prisoners of war and convicts appeared very similar to the basis of slavery in many societies, in that the status of all three was seen as an alternative to death – judicial execution in the case of convicts. In both Africa and Europe then (sale into the slave trade in the former and transportation in the latter), banishment was reserved for the most serious of offences. Some scholars argue that laws and judicial processes were adjusted in order to enlarge the flow of convicts to the New World but, in general, the offences deemed worthy of transportation (or sale) were sufficiently severe that the number of deportees, as Figure 1 suggests, remained small in relation to total flows, and more importantly small in relation to the potential pool of such migrants.[11] Communities in both Africa and Europe did not exploit this pool very thoroughly, although again, as there was little debate, it may be classed as yet another 'unthinking decision'.

When the demand for transatlantic coerced labour first became acute in the middle of the seventeenth century, it was prisoners of war rather than convicts that formed the majority of European deportees. Typically, however, these were prisoners taken in civil wars rather than wars with other nations. Slavery frequently emerged as an alternative to death for surviving losers during or immediately after battle – a pattern that might almost be described as universal in human history. There was somewhat of an interruption in the European case in the early middle ages, when the practice appears to have ceased, at least when the conflict was among Europeans, and there may have been similar breaks for other cultures of which I am not aware. Interestingly, in Western Europe, it broke down first in wars between the western continental European powers, including England, and lingered longest in conflicts between these powers and the Celtic and Scandinavian fringes. This was, perhaps, a function, in part, of the relatively

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equal strengths of mainstream European powers. One would treat prisoners with a little more circumspection if one were uncertain of being the victorious power in the next conflict. Or perhaps it was a function of how 'European' (as opposed to 'barbaric') one might be considered. Those defeated in civil wars and internal religious struggles, however, continued to be treated with great cruelty. In the English case, Dutch prisoners from naval battles were put to work draining the fens before being freed at the end of the conflict. Royalists and Irish prisoners from the same mid-seventeenth-century era on the other hand were sent for much longer terms to Barbados to be sold as servants. The Boulonnais rebels of 1672 and the Monmouth prisoners 16 years later were killed, dismembered or removed from society. Prisoners of civil wars ceased to be sent to the colonies in the eighteenth century, by which time all deportees were the products of the judicial system, although the practice of enslaving one's foes continued in the struggle between Christendom and Islam in the guise of ransoming. These developments suggest further shifts in values and provide further evidence of a non-economic interpretation of migration. Just as the price of coerced labour in the plantation colonies experienced its most dramatic rise – more or less continuous for two centuries after the 1680s – European nations perversely turned away from potential sources of that coerced labour. Although Figure 1 does not separate out convict and prisoner migration from slave migration, it should be noted that for the transatlantic routes (and probably for the world as a whole), the flow of convicts and prisoners peaked in both absolute and relative terms in the seventeenth century, before declining to insignificance at the end of the eighteenth century and to zero with the closing of France's Devil's Island in 1946.

The most clearly identifiable Western European labour regime (from the perspective of the early sixteenth century) to evolve as a solution to the labour problem in the Americas was indentured and contract migration. Closely related, in England at least, to the standard annual contract by which agricultural labourers were hired, its terms varied by skill level of migrant, age and sex; but, typically for an unskilled young adult male, it involved an exchange of four years of work for a free transatlantic passage and freedom dues which initially at least might include some land.[12] None of these arrangements permitted employers to force workers to labour in gangs on plantations for a whole lifetime without any reciprocal employer obligations, or provided for the sale of an employee into a lifetime of labour for someone else. Of course, none ensured that the offspring of the worker would have to live under exactly the same set of employer rights in perpetuity as his or her parents.

Figure 1 shows, however, that the size and relative importance of indentured/contract labour was never great. It was most important in the mid-seventeenth century when it accounted for perhaps one quarter of all transatlantic migrants, but as Figure 1 demonstrates, it reached its greatest absolute volume at the end

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of the nineteenth century. All this migration, indeed virtually all prisoner, convict, slave and indentured/contract migration, was to the *plantation* Americas. The bimodal distribution of indentured/contract labour in Figure 1 is very significant in that the first peak is entirely European in origin while the second is almost entirely Asian. The few Africans in this category travelled in the 1840s, before Asian arrivals became significant. If the trend line were continued after 1880, it would reach zero during the First World War. A profit-maximizing approach is useful for explaining the initial rise and then at least part of the temporary decline in indentured servitude as plantation owners were first able to attract temporary servants to the Americas and then found they could not compete with rising wages in England. At the same time (after 1660 that is) plantation owners were able to tap into the more elastic supply of African labour that became available in the second half of the seventeenth century.[13] But the disappearance of all Europeans from the bound migrant flow in the 1820s, the dramatic revival of the system with an exclusively Asian component, then the end of that system, first by the Chinese government in the 1870s and then the Indian government in 1917, all demand explanations which are in part ideological.[14] The refusal of US courts to continue to recognize indentures in the 1820s, the rise of Asian flow after 1837 – a clear substitute for slave labour – and the intervention of the Chinese and Indian governments cannot be easily explained in economic terms. Even when the system was of greatest relative importance, in the early stages of the mid-seventeenth century, there is a strong sense of a non-economic component in its rise to prominence. If European governments had been prepared to countenance the full mobilization of the judicial system in the interests of supplying labour to their rapidly expanding American plantation possessions, or if, more unlikely again, community values had allowed slave traders to go to Ireland for their slaves instead of Africa, it is hard to believe that any European (or later, Asian) contract labourers would have crossed the Atlantic. The market for servants would simply not have existed. Whatever the explanation for the rise and fall of indentured/contract labour, it is clear that, whether Asian or European, it never came close to solving the overall labour problem that Europeans faced in the Americas.

Because it was so rare for people to subject others in their own community to slave conditions, perhaps large scale and continuous coerced migration could not begin until one society had the technological and institutional ability to get continuous access to another and move its members against their will over very long distances. European development of ocean-going capabilities in the early modern period clearly fulfilled this requirement. However, the larger and much more important question for which every society in history has provided at least an unthinking answer, is which groups are to be considered eligible for enslavement and how does this change over time? Here, too, there is no very strong economic basis to the answers. As I have argued elsewhere, it was much cheaper

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to obtain slaves in Europe than to send a vessel to an epidemiological hostile coast in Africa without proper harbours and remote from European political financial and military power. If, after Africans had turned the plantation complex away from Africa, it was to be located in the Americas, the answer of who would provide the labour for that complex clearly emerged from a European inability to enslave other Europeans, and an African ability to see other African societies as ineligible for enslavement and sale into the Atlantic economy. Neither Africans nor Europeans would enslave members of their own societies but, in the early modern period, Africans had a somewhat narrower conception of who was eligible for enslavement than had Europeans. It was this difference in definitions in eligibility for enslavement that explains the dramatic post 1640 rise of the coerced component of transatlantic migration in Figure 1. Slavery, which had disappeared from north-west Europe long before this point, exploded into a far greater significance and intensity than it had possessed at any point in human history. The major cause was a dissonance in African and European attitudes toward slavery, at the root of which lies culture, not economics. Without this dissonance, given European attitudes, there would have been no slavery in the Americas.

The rapid disappearance of the slave trade – more rapid even than its rise – both in terms relative to non-coerced migration, and absolutely, is also very hard to explain using conventional notions of profit and loss and economic self-interest. In 1860, it was possible to buy a prime male slave for $30 in the River Congo and sell the same individual for over $1000 in Cuba, when the cost of ferrying a steerage passenger (always assigned more space than a slave, anyway) across the Atlantic had fallen to less than $20. Scholars who argue that the plantation sector was in decline and therefore slavery died because it was no longer profitable, have generally not examined profits in the slave trade very closely. The slave trade was a bulwark of labour supply for planters, outside the US at least, and it continued to be profitable throughout the nineteenth century until, in fact, it was prevented from continuing. The slave trade was suppressed. It did not die a natural economic death. Nor, except possibly in the US, did it die because slave purchasers acquiesced in, much less actively sought, its termination. If it had not been suppressed, the dominance of Africa in transatlantic migration streams would probably have continued. It would certainly not have been eroded completely. With slave prices at historic highs in the US, Brazil and Cuba alike in the mid nineteenth century, and steamship technology evolving rapidly, it is hard to believe that the transatlantic slave trade would not have far surpassed its late eighteenth century peaks before 1900 and perhaps beyond. It was, in fact, suppressed just as the system of contract labour and the system of transporting convicts, both of which survived it by half a century, were suppressed, although with rather more difficulty. Government fiat was responsible in all three cases, but behind the intervention lay a profound

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shift in values. Where for four centuries there had been four different labour regimes vying with each other in the re-peopling of the Americas, only one was left by the time the US raised the immigration drawbridge. Free labour became the norm in the western world some time before it became the norm in transatlantic migration, but the first certainly led to the second. From this point on, the coercion would be of a different and – despite its rapid escalation in the twentieth century – a rather more benign variety; that of denying entry on the basis of skill level, health, race, income level and political beliefs. The impact now became to change the direction of the migration, but not to alter the terms under which it occurred.

A hemispheric and very long run perspective suggests fundamental shifts in values behind these migration patterns. It is beyond the scope of this essay to explain these shifts, the aim being merely to note that they happened and to draw some implications for one small field of human endeavour. Legislative reflections of community morality shaped the flow of convicts across the Atlantic from both Europe and Africa. These not only ensured that the flow would be small, and that the pressure on other flows (e.g. slaves) would accordingly become larger, but that the convict trade would die out altogether over time, along with public executions and other more public manifestations of human cruelty, such as the 'burning of the cats' festival in eighteenth century France. For transatlantic migration, the most important shift in values, however, was not in the definition and treatment of criminal behaviour, but rather in conceptions of how individuals or groups define themselves in relation to others – what in the modern literature is called 'identity'. As late as the tenth century, European conceptions of the larger society – a grouping of people that as a minimum could be counted on not to enslave each other – encompassed a much smaller geographic area than was to be the norm later. An internal slave trade still flourished as people from the North were captured by other Europeans and carried for sale in the South, many ultimately to the prosperous Islamic areas. This situation was little different from that which existed in Africa when written records become sufficiently detailed to be reliable. In one sense, the story of transatlantic migration (and eventually abolition of the slave trade and slavery) is a coda to the expansion of this sense of identity to incorporate ever-larger geographic and cultural areas. In a profound sense, the massive and unprecedented flow of coerced labour across the Atlantic is perhaps the result of the differential pace in the evolution of pan-Europeanness on the one hand, and a pan-Africanism on the other. An interlude of two or three centuries between the former and the latter provided a window of opportunity in which the slave trade rose and fell dramatically. Europeans, for a time, were not prepared to enslave each other, but were prepared to buy Africans. Given that 'Africa' scarcely existed as a concept for Africans before the nineteenth century, there were always some people living in the sub-continent south of the Sahara who were

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prepared to enslave others from adjacent or distant societies. 'Pan-' in this formulation refers to conceptions of who might be considered eligible for enslavement, not political and economic cohesion. There were other cultural values central to migration such as constructions of gender.[15] The intention here is not to make an exhaustive list of cultural determinants, but rather to point to the need to go beyond the narrowly economic in the attempt to understand migration. The economic impulse is, of course, of central importance but, as noted above, it tends to operate within cultural parameters which are not always obvious.

But it was not only values in Africa and Europe that shaped migration. Community attitudes in the South Asian areas that supplied contract labour also had a major shaping influence over movement to the Americas. From the arrival in Trinidad of the first batch of workers from China in 1809 to the ending of the traffic in the 1870s, the flow was monitored by the Chinese government, and, as in Africa, the sex and age ratio of the migrants reflected Asian conceptions of gender as well as European conceptions. Departures from India to the French, Dutch and British Americas were similarly influenced by attitudes in India, and not just by those of the British Imperial administration. The ending of the contract labour system in 1917 was a response to attacks from the burgeoning Indian nationalist movement. In addition, the willingness of some Indian women to sign up for contracts, in Surinam for example, was in part an attempt to improve their own prospects, itself a reflection of social constructions of gender in the source communities.[16]

Apart from the obvious trauma that arises at the individual level, from being a coerced as opposed to a non-coerced migrant, does it matter if migration is predominantly of one type rather than another? In strictly economic terms, coerced migration, like slavery itself, has the potential to be highly efficient. The labour a slave trade supplies is likely to be highly elastic, and because merchants could completely ignore the preferences of the migrants themselves, they were able to crowd people into a vessel so that the cost of passage was less than it would have been for any migrant who was given choice over the decision to travel. Steerage passengers from Europe in the nineteenth century never had to face conditions quite like those prevailing on a slave ship. What follows from these features is that economic growth in the host country, conventionally measured, will be much more rapid if the migrants are enslaved. Yet for transatlantic migration, perhaps the most important conclusion is that migration interacts with conceptions of the identity of the migrants themselves, as well as in donor and recipient societies. The major historical lesson is that coerced migration will tend to reinforce senses of separateness when the slave–free divide is as rigid as it was in the Americas. In the long-run, however, the opposite is likely to happen in that migration fosters more broadly conceived conceptions of self and the immediate group in which one lives. One does not have to believe in progress to find it difficult to conceive

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that coerced migration as it operated between the Old World and the New for over three centuries, could ever reappear on the global scene.

## Notes and references

1. Some might argue that all migration has been the result of the application of force at some level. Social conditions at the point of origin might be such that individuals have no choice but to leave. There is nevertheless a qualitative difference between setting out on a long-distance journey against one's will, and setting out because one has chosen to go, even though the social and cultural circumstances are such that embarking on such a journey is the least unpleasant of a range of unpleasant options. Indentured servants from Europe and contract labourers from India and China were not usually forced on board ship, chained and kept behind temporary barricades so that they could not see their homeland before setting sail. Slaves from Africa and convicts from Europe could expect all or most of these things. The distinction between free and coerced migration used in this essay hinges on who makes the decision to leave, the migrant or some other individual.
2. David Eltis, "Free and Coerced Migrations from the Old World to the New," in David Eltis (ed), *Coerced and Free Migration: Global Perspectives* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 33–74.
3. Community in the sense used here, means that everyone living in it had values which, if they were not shared around the Atlantic, were certainly reshaped in some way by others living in different parts of the Atlantic basins, and, as this suggests, where events in one small geographic area were likely to stimulate a reaction – and not necessarily just economic – thousands of miles away. The end result was, if not a single Atlantic society, a set of societies fundamentally different from what they would have been without participation in the new transatlantic network.
4. R. Steinfeld (1991) *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in the Britain and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) and R. Steinfeld (1999) Changing legal conceptions of free labor. In S. L. Engerman (ed.), *The Terms of Labor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), pp. 137–167.
5. D. Eltis (1999) *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 137–192.
6. Ida Altman points to heavy representation of hidalgos, artisans and professionals from two cities in south-western Spain. See I. Altman (1991) A New World in the Old: local society and Spanish emigration to the Indies. In I. Altman and J. Horn (eds), *'To Make America': European Emigration in the Early Modern Period* (Berkeley: California University Press), pp. 39–40, 43–47. For the volume and geography see M. Morner (1992) Immigration into Latin America, especially Argentina and Chile. In P. C. Emmer and M. Morner (eds), *European Expansion and Migration: Essays on the Intercontinental Migration from Africa, Asia, and Europe* (New York: Berg), pp. 211–43; P. Boyd-Bowman

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(1973) *Patterns of Spanish Emigration to the New World (1493–1580)* (Buffalo, NY: State University of New York); S. L. Engerman and J. C. Das Neves (1997) The bricks of an empire: 585 years of Portuguese emigration. *Journal of European Economic History*, **26**, 471–510

7. N. Sanchez-Albornoz (1974) *The Populations of Spanish America*, trans. W. A. R. Richardson (Berkeley: California University Press), pp. 86–112. The Brazilian population has yet to reverse this decline. See J. Hemmings (1978) *Red Gold: The Conquest of Brazilian Indians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), pp. 487–501.
8. S. Schwartz (1985) *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); D. Eltis (2000) *Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), ch 8.
9. Douglass North's explanation for falling transatlantic freights prior to the mid-nineteenth century – the fall in the incidence of piracy and the attendant drop in crew-per ton ratios – has been set aside. But perhaps there is a case to be made for applying it to early modern transatlantic commerce. Piracy was certainly a key cost-raising factor before 1750, but at some point in the mid seventeenth century it became feasible to set off for the Americas (and Africa) in a single vessel (albeit heavily armed) as opposed to a flotilla. Convoys became a strategy reserved for wars before 1700, whereas before 1630 they were the normal way of organizing transatlantic shipping.
10. M. S. Locke (1901) *Anti-Slavery in America* (Boston: Ginn, reprinted 1968), pp. 9–12. In the sixteenth century, the Spanish and later the Portuguese restricted the enslavement of Indians, but this was not the same as a prohibition against all slavery.
11. For the African situation see P. Hair (1965) The Enslavement of Köelle's Informants. *Journal of African History*, 5, 196–200. For the English case see P. Linebaugh (1991) *London Hanged* (London: Allen Lane).
12. The best discussion of the origins of the system is D. Galenson (1981) *White Servitude in Colonial America: An Economic Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 3–15.
13. R. R. Menard (1977) From servants to slaves: the transformation of the Chesapeake labor system. *Southern Studies*, **16**(Winter), 355–390; D. Galenson (1981) *White Servitude*, pp. 3–15.
14. C. Erickson (1984) Why did contract labour not work in the nineteenth century United States? In S. Marks and P. Richardson (eds.), *International Labour Migrations: Historical Perspectives* (Hounslow: M. Temple Smith); F. Grubb (1994) The end of European immigrant servitude in the United States: an economic analysis of market collapse, 1775–1835, *Journal of Economic History*, **54**, 794–825; 5. R. Steinfeld (1991) *The Invention of Free Labor*.
15. See C. R. Boxer (1975) *Women in Iberian Expansion Overseas, 1415–1815* (New York: Oxford University Press); D. Eltis (2000) *Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, pp. 85–113.

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## About the Author

**David Eltis** is Woodruff Professor of History at Emory University, Atlanta and Research Professor at the University of Hull, UK. He is the author, most recently, of *The Rise of Slavery in the Americas* (New York, 2000), co-editor *Slavery in the Development of the Americas* (New York, 2004).

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