

Beyond the Triangle Trade: Rhode Island and the West Indies

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Popular and scholarly examinations that have focused on the connection between slavery and Rhode Island have emphasized the participation of colonists in the "triangle trade," whereby Rhode Island slave traders bought slaves in West Africa, sold them in the West Indies, purchased molasses, and brought it to Rhode Island to make rum, which was then sold back in West Africa for more slaves.¹ Rhode Islanders' dependence on slavery or on the Atlantic slave economy, however, went beyond the trade itself. While the majority of the colony's ship clearances and tonnage were to North American ports, nearly two-thirds of the value of this coastal trade derived from reexporting West Indian goods or their derivatives produced by enslaved Africans laboring on the plantations.

Accurately establishing the prominence of trade for Rhode Island's colonial economy requires investigating the quantities, values, and destinations of exports. As John McCusker has observed, "overseas commerce did not just merely make colonial life comfortable, it made it possible," and exports were the leading factor behind economic development.² Methodologically, this approach requires following the example set by James Shepherd, whose own work offers an examination of "the magnitudes, patterns and composition" of colonial trade through the use of the Inspector General's Customs Reports.³ Shepherd refines his data with Gary Walton in the classic study *Shipping, Maritime Trade, and the Economic Development of Colonial America*, which has become

¹ Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981) remains the definitive account.

² John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British North America, 1607–1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), pp. 71 and 55–88, which discusses why exports rather than population growth are the key to understanding the economic growth of the colonies. The author's interpretation follows that of McCusker and Menard in this regard.

³ James F. Shepherd, *Commodity Exports from the British North American Colonies to Overseas Areas, 1768–1772: Magnitudes and Patterns of Trade*, Paper No. 258—October 1969, Institute for Research in the Behavioral, Economic, and Management Sciences (Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University, 1969). Shepherd uses the Customs Ledger of Imports and Exports, British North America, 1768–1772, CUST 16/1, PRO, TNA, London, UK, as the basis for his work.

the standard reference for historians.⁴ The data provided by Shepherd and Walton to estimate the total value of all exports, however, utilize only thirteen selective commodities out of a possible one hundred eighty. This leads to lowering substantially the actual value of trade. Moreover, they use regional pricing. For example, to estimate horse prices they rely upon a single invoice for a horse sold in Boston and then apply that to all of New England, which distorts pricing differences among each of the New England colonies.⁵ Additionally, their regional perspective distorts the particularities of each colony's trading patterns—including Rhode Island.⁶ Finally, they omit the coastal trade, the largest export area in terms of value, worth over 45 percent of the total (*Table 5*).

To compensate for these problems this author has employed several corrective measures. Since the individual port records for Rhode Island have not survived, the broadest number of commodities listed in the Customs Ledger of Imports and Exports, which covers the five years between 1768 through 1772, has been used in combination with a new price series based on Rhode Island sources (*Appendix 1*).⁷ This fuller accounting provides a more accurate assessment of the export value of various markets: southern Europe, Great Britain, the coastal trade, and even the more widely known African trade.⁸ What becomes clear after such an examination is that the West Indian trade was the foundation for Rhode Island's exports—either directly or indirectly through the reexporting of West Indian commodities in the coastal trade.

⁴ Gary Walton and James F. Shepherd, *Shipping, Maritime Trade, and the Economic Development of Colonial America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Lynne Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island: Newport and Providence in the Eighteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), chaps. 2–3, pp. 13–50, and Appendix B: Trade, pp. 117–22, Tables B-3, B-4, and B-5; these draw exclusively from Walton and Shepherd. Other examples include David Richardson, "Slavery, Trade, and Economic Growth in Eighteenth-Century New England," in *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System*, ed. Barbara L. Solow (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 249–50, and McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British North America*, which primarily uses Shepherd and Walton despite also strongly critiquing them. See n. 5 below.

⁵ This author's critique differs from that offered by John McCusker, "Colonial Statistics," in *Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Edition*, 5 vols., ed. Susan B. Carter, et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5:734, which echoes earlier comments he and Menard make in *Economy of British North America*, faulting Shepherd and Walton for not discussing smuggling, shipping costs, and shipping earnings. See their discussion on pp. 72–80 and especially p. 72 n. 2.

⁶ Shepherd's earlier work, noted in n. 3, provides a separate listing for Rhode Island but excludes the coastal trade and is limited by only using thirteen commodities to estimate the "overseas" trade.

⁷ Customs Ledger of Imports and Exports, British North America, 1768–1772, CUST 16/1, PRO, TNA, London, UK. There are no full sets of data for the years prior to 1768. For details on the creation of the Customs Records see McCusker, "Colonial Statistics," 5:643.

⁸ This author has constructed a price data series for Rhode Island using commodity listings in the *Providence Gazette* in combination with prices provided by Rhode Island merchants in their letter books and account books.

This approach provides an alternative to existing studies that examine Rhode Islanders' trading activities and generally fall under three main categories. The first is the slave trade. As early as 1787 Samuel Hopkins argues that "this trade in human species has been the first wheel of commerce in Newport, on which every other movement in business has chiefly depended."⁹ Over a century later W. E. B. Du Bois approvingly cites Hopkins's statement as evidence in his classic *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade* and expands the impact to all of New England.¹⁰ Later historians like Lorenzo Greene, Edgar McManus, and Elaine Forman Crane, follow Du Bois's example and continue this line of interpretation.¹¹ All of these authors frame the colonial economy around the slave trade, overlooking the impact and importance of the coastal trade. A second group of scholars has examined either individual merchants, merchant families, or mercantile networks, tracing their economic activities and providing important details regarding their individual involvement with the West Indian trade.¹² The goals of these valuable studies, however, preclude them from providing the larger details regarding colony-wide trading patterns and their comparative value. A third group of studies, including Jay Coughtry's *Notorious Triangle*, mention in passing that the Caribbean was the most important export trading region for Rhode Islanders, but most offer few details.¹³ Still, Coughtry's trenchant

⁹ Samuel Hopkins, "Essay on the African Slave Trade," originally published under the pseudonym "Crito," in the *Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, 6 and 13 October 1787. It was reprinted and given a new title, "The Slave Trade and Slavery," by the editor of *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, 3 vols. (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1854), 2:613–24.

¹⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1896; reissued 1965), pp. 34–35. Du Bois refers to the trade in the shape of a "perfect circle" rather than the more famous "triangle" used by subsequent scholars.

¹¹ Lorenzo J. Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942; reissued by Atheneum, 1968), pp. 69, 319, and Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), pp. 9–10; Elaine Forman Crane, *A Dependent People* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985), pp. 16–33, argues this point only for Rhode Island and not New England overall.

¹² Bruce Macmillan Bigelow, "The Commerce of Rhode Island with the West Indies before the American Revolution" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1930; James Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations: The Colonial Years* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1968); Richard Rudolph, "The Merchants of Newport, Rhode Island, 1763–1786" (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1975); Stanley F. Chyet, *Lopez of Newport* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979); Charles Rappleye, *Sons of Providence, The Brown Brothers, the Slave Trade, and the American Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006) combines both the slave trade and the family network story.

¹³ Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle*, pp. 5–21, and the *Brown University Report on Slavery and Justice* (2007), http://www.brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/. The high-profile report broadly notes on p. 11 that "as important as the triangle trade was it was dwarfed by the bilateral trade between Rhode Island and the Caribbean," yet it provides no details beyond citing a single voyage. The report ends up refocusing on the slave trade and slave ownership in Rhode Island, both important topics, but the full scope of the West Indian connection is largely overlooked.

point helps to anchor this paper and it previews one of its conclusions: "the African trade, like the coasting trade in rum [here he limits a trading pattern that was much larger than just rum, as we will see] was an extension of Rhode Island's commerce with the West Indies."¹⁴ To demonstrate this fact requires that we examine where Rhode Island ships went, their tonnage, cargoes, and how much these cargoes were worth.

But first the prior economic development of the colony needs reviewing. Though Rhode Island was founded as a religious refuge by Roger Williams, commercial interests quickly became part of the colonial agenda.¹⁵ By 1698 Governor Cranston still referred to the colony as a "frontier," and as late as 1708 the population remained quite small, totaling only 7,181 people.¹⁶ By 1730, though, the population had risen to 17,935.¹⁷ According to a report made by Governor Ward to the Board of Trade in 1740, despite "several commodious harbors within this colony...little or no navigation was carried on till about the beginning of the eighteenth century."¹⁸ Until 1700, Ward further writes, "husbandry and mechanical arts were the only employ of the inhabitants of this colony." Although some small trading voyages began after 1700, any expansion was tempered by the outbreak of Queen Anne's War in 1702, which depressed trade until 1715.¹⁹

With the war's end economic circumstances improved, and by 1738 one contemporary estimate found "above one hundred sail of vessels belonging to this town [Newport], besides what belong to the rest of the colony."²⁰ Local Episcopal clergyman James McSparran surveyed the economic output of Rhode Island and found by 1753 "the produce of this colony is principally butter and cheese, fat cattle, wool, and fine horses, that are exported to all parts of the English America."²¹ The horses of the colony particularly caught his attention, as they did West Indian planters. McSparran notes that "they are remarkable to fleetness and swift pacing, and I have seen some of them pace a mile in little more than two min-

¹⁴ Coughtry, *Notorious Triangle*, p. 21.

¹⁵ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Fat Mutton and Liberty of Conscience: Society in Rhode Island, 1636–1690* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1974) makes this point very clearly.

¹⁶ Governor Cranston to the Board of Trade, 8 May 1698, in the *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England*, ed. John Russell Bartlett, 10 vols. (Providence, 1856–1865), 3:337 (hereafter cited as *RCRI*).

¹⁷ Evarts B. Greene and Virginia D. Harrington, *American Population before the Federal Census of 1790* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), pp. 62–63.

¹⁸ Report of Governor Ward to the Board of Trade, Newport, 9 January 1740, in *RCRI*, 5:8–9. All the quotations in this paragraph are from Ward's report.

¹⁹ Another factor limiting economic growth, currency problems, is the focus of Margaret Newell, *From Dependency to Independence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

²⁰ John Callender, *Historical Discourse* (Boston, 1739), p. 41.

²¹ James McSparran, *America Dissected, Being a Full and True Account of the American Colonies* (Dublin, 1753), p. 132.

utes, a good deal less than three."²² He also notes the large number of ships found in the colony: "there are above three hundred vessels, such as sloops, schooners, snows, brigantines and ships, from 60 tons and upwards belonging to this colony."²³ Colonists vigorously embraced the growing West Indian markets and the larger Atlantic slave economy. As Rhode Island's economy continued to expand in the middle of the eighteenth century so did the sugar and slavery complex in the West Indies. By the start of the 1760s plantation demand set the stage for what historians have called Rhode Island's Golden Age.²⁴

Between 1768 and 1772 nearly 3,000 voyages were launched from Rhode Island of which 1,848 were to North American ports, accounting for over 62 percent of all clearances (*Table 1*). Nine hundred sixty-seven voyages were made to the West Indies, representing almost one-third of all sailings made from Newport, Providence, and other smaller ports in the colony.²⁵ Few ships took transatlantic voyages to European ports. Fifty-six voyages were made to England between 1768 and 1772, accounting for barely 2 percent of all voyages.²⁶ Ports in southern Europe and the Wine Islands were more frequented, 18 voyages in all, but traffic to those ports constituted barely more than half of one percent.

By contrast, slaving voyages to Africa were the most important transatlantic trips made from Rhode Island. One hundred one voyages were made during this time.²⁷ While as a percentage these African voyages accounted for just over 4 percent of the vessels clearing outward from Rhode Island, they were a significant circuit directly linked into the West Indian system.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 132–33.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

²⁴ In "The Commerce of Rhode Island," pt. 1, chap. 5, p. 36, Bigelow argues that "the commerce with the French and Dutch islands made possible the Golden Age of Newport... a period not reached until just before the American Revolution, but the stage was set between 1733 and 1756." He devotes an entire chapter to this "boom," which he dubs "the Golden Age of West Indian commerce." See chap. 7, "The Golden Age," where he expands on this in some detail. Withey has restated this idea in *Urban Growth*, p. 33. For more recent details of the Caribbean expansion see Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery* (New York: Verso, 1997), pp. 401–56; McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, pp. 144–68, and Richard Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623–1775* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

²⁵ Unless otherwise stated, all the data presented regarding vessels, tonnage, and cargoes clearing outward or entering inward are this author's calculations based on Customs Ledger of Imports and Exports, British North America, 1768–1772, CUST 16/1, PRO, TNA, London, UK.

²⁶ Even fewer went to Ireland; one in 1771 and one in 1772.

²⁷ This is the total provided by Coughtry. Regular customs records covering the entire British North America only record 83 voyages, but through other sources Coughtry solidly demonstrates that far more voyages went to Africa than were recorded. See Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle*, p. 77.

In some sense the African slave trade was an outgrowth of the West Indian trade as Jay Coughtry has observed.²⁸ During the colonial era Rhode Island traders sold almost two-thirds of their slaves to the West Indies, and between 1768 and 1775 this figure rose to 88 percent. Most of the enslaved Africans ended up in Barbados, followed by Jamaica.²⁹ The remaining people were sold in mainland North American ports, with customers in Rhode Island particularly willing to invest in human flesh. Buyers from Newport to Providence actually purchased nearly one out of every five slaves sold between 1700 and 1775.³⁰

Despite the importance of the slave trade, many more Rhode Island ships spent their time much closer to home. Of the 1,848 coastal voyages the largest regional destinations, accounting for one out of every four voyages clearing Rhode Island, were to other New England ports (*Table 1*). Rhode Island ships made 732 trips to ports within New England, and 478 were to those in Massachusetts, which accounted for over 65 percent of all New England trips and 16 percent of all clearances. Nearby ports in Connecticut saw approximately half as much traffic—237 voyages or just over 32 percent of all New England voyages and 8 percent of all voyages. Only seventeen Rhode Island ships traveled further north to the port of Piscataqua in New Hampshire.

Five hundred seventy-three voyages were taken to the Middle Colonies, and 313 voyages were made to New York, accounting for over 54 percent of all trips to this region and 10.5 percent of voyages overall. Rhode Island vessels made 142 voyages to East and West Jersey and 118 to Philadelphia.

Two hundred ten vessels plied their cargoes in North Carolina ports, accounting for over 45 percent of all southern destinations. This port was vital for merchants, shipwrights, and anyone else involved in maritime enterprises since North Carolinians served as the largest suppliers of naval stores, the essentials for the building and maintenance of ships. Enslaved Africans provided the primary labor force responsible for producing these naval supplies, including pitch, tar, and turpentine.³¹ Seventy-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 165, 170–72.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

³¹ As Justin Williams notes, "the naval stores industry was the foundation of the economy of North Carolina," and as Marvin L. Michael Kay and Lorin Lee Cary make clear, that industry was almost exclusively worked by enslaved Africans. See Justin Williams, "English Mercantilism and Carolina Naval Stores, 1705–1776," *William and Mary Quarterly* (May 1935):169–85; and Marvin L. Michael Kay and Lorin Lee Cary, *Slavery in North Carolina, 1748–1775* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). The most recent and best exploration of this topic can be found in Robert B. Outland, *Tapping the Pines: The Naval Stores Industry in the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), pp. 8–34.

two clearances were to Virginia, 71 to South Carolina, 67 to Maryland, 25 to Georgia, 11 to West Florida, and 3 to East Florida.³²

Canada was not a popular destination for Rhode Island vessels. Only 80 voyages were made to Canadian destinations, which accounted for less than 3 percent of all voyages. Newfoundland was the most frequented with 39 trips, followed by Nova Scotia with 27 and Quebec with 18.

Having reviewed the destinations of vessels clearing outward from Rhode Island, we can now examine the tonnage figures between 1768 and 1772 (*Table 2*). Out of the 92,958 registered tons 51,105 were bound for ports along British North America, which represented 55 percent of all registered tons. More than one-third of all tonnage leaving Rhode Island ports went to the Caribbean, 33,545. Less than 5 percent headed for ports in Great Britain, less than 4 percent to Africa, and less than 1 percent to southern Europe.

Other New England ports accounted for 20 percent of all tonnage exported from Rhode Island. Of the 19,340 tons leaving Rhode Island more than 75 percent headed to Boston, Salem, Nantucket, and other Bay Colony destinations.³³ Individually, 16 percent of all tonnage leaving Rhode Island went to Massachusetts. Only 3,741 tons went to Connecticut and 730 tons to Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Over 17 percent of all tonnage from Rhode Island went to the Middle Colonies, slightly less than that moving in the intra-New England trade. Tonnage figures to New York alone accounted for 9 percent overall, as some 8,992 tons left for this port. This was approximately double the amount sent to Philadelphia—4,413 tons or over 4 percent and nearly three times as much as sent to the Jerseys—3,055 tons or just over 3 percent.

Tonnage to the southern colonies accounted for over 13 percent, or approximately 12,663 tons, with North Carolina leading all others with 5,833 tons, the fourth largest following the West Indies, Massachusetts, and New York. Tonnage to North Carolina accounted for almost half (46 percent) of all tonnage to the southern colonies.³⁴ Tonnage to the other southern areas was much smaller: 2,093 tons to Virginia, 1,893 tons to South Carolina, 1,697 tons to Maryland, 770 tons to Georgia, 302 tons to West Florida, and 75 tons to East Florida.

³² Only one ship ever traveled to the Bahamas, a small 30-ton ship in 1768.

³³ Although Nantucket was not officially listed in the customs records as a designated clearance area, the list of imported goods recorded in the coastal trade, particularly whale head matter, the main source for making spermaceti candles, indicates a substantial traffic between Rhode Island and Nantucket. In addition, the letters of merchants like Aaron Lopez and John Brown indicate a constant trade between the two areas.

³⁴ This likely originated from the increasing needs of Rhode Islanders for naval stores.

A considerably smaller amount of tonnage went to transatlantic destinations. The tonnage to Great Britain, 4,041 tons, and to Africa, 4,054 tons, each accounting for over 4 percent. Tonnage to Southern Europe, by contrast, was quite small, only 675 tons, which accounted for .7 percent.

Having considered both the number of ships and their tonnage clearing outward from Rhode Island to various Atlantic ports, we will examine the cargoes on those ships and the respective values of the goods constituting those cargoes. Because the coastal trade represents the largest portion of ship voyages and tonnage, discovering both the cargoes and their values becomes critical in establishing the comparative value of various export markets.

We begin with the largest export area: the coastal trade. Until now there has not been a single estimate provided for the value of Rhode Island's exports there.³⁵ Utilizing the full listing of commodities, in combination with new price data derived from Rhode Island sources, this study has established the value of the coastal trade and provides some comparisons to the other branches of the export trade (*Tables 4 and 5*).³⁶ Overall, West Indian slave-produced products constituted the most valuable items. Over 50 percent of the total value of all the exports between 1768 and 1772 came from molasses and rum.³⁷ New England-made rum was the single most valuable item; 1,183,733 gallons were exported, totaling £71,049 and accounting for 19 percent of the total value of the coastal export trade.³⁸ While the distilleries in Rhode Island were not primarily staffed by enslaved Africans, the primary ingredient for the making of rum, molasses, was produced by West Indian slaves in prodigious amounts—a point we will return to shortly. For the moment, let us examine the distillery industry in Rhode Island.

As early as 1684 Rhode Islanders had constructed at least one distillery and by 1772, nearly a century later, the colony contained twenty, the second largest number in the entire British mainland of North

³⁵ In fact the only estimate investigating New England's coastal trade was a regional analysis that ignored the particularities of each colony. See James F. Shepherd and Samuel H. Williamson, "The Coastal Trade of the British North American Colonies: 1768–1772," *Journal of Economic History* (December 1972): 783–810.

³⁶ These tables summarize this author's data. This is still not the complete record though it represents the vast majority of exports and their value.

³⁷ All the figures expressed in this discussion of the coastal trade represent the net value. All the data totals are this author's and are derived from a combination of the Customs Ledger of Imports and Exports, British North America, 1768–1772, CUST 16/1, PRO, TNA, London, UK, and price data utilized by this author from a variety of sources.

³⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all the figures represent net exports in terms of both quantity and value. Very little New England-made rum was imported coastwise: 15,163 gallons worth £910.

America.³⁹ These distilleries were owned by many of the most influential and prosperous members of the colony: merchants and landowners who were the political, economic, social, and cultural bedrock of Rhode Island.⁴⁰ Their fortune and standing owed much to having free laborers turn slave-produced molasses into New England rum, though quite often they eliminated this step and instead bought slave-produced West Indian rum.

One of the key components in the West Indian sugar plantation was the distillery, worked by slaves who tended the other main plantation operations as well. Nearly every planter had a still house to make rum from a mix of sugar, molasses, and skimmings,⁴¹ and rum soon became as important a product as the sugar and molasses from which it was derived. The British West Indies alone produced nearly 11 million gallons of rum in 1770.⁴² Rhode Islanders imported only a scant 2,123 gallons of West Indian rum from other British mainland colonies in the coastwise trade. Instead, they reexported West Indian rum from their own direct imports. Overall, this reexported commodity was the second most valuable item in the coastal trade: 611,016 gallons valued at £61,407, or 17 percent of the total value and sold across North American colonies out of Rhode Island-based ships.⁴³ Combining both West Indian and New England rum exports reveals that they comprised 36 percent of the total value of all coastal exports from Rhode Island.

Molasses was the third most valuable commodity exported from Rhode Island in the coastwise trade: 1,116,625 gallons valued at £56,110 or 15 percent of the total value. This was also a reexported item from the West Indies. In all, 2,345,062 gallons of molasses were imported from the plantation complex and over 47 percent of this total, 1,116,625 gallons in all, was then reloaded onto ships plying the coastal trade. Thus, slave-produced West Indian molasses provided the main source of wealth for the third most valuable coastal commodity exported. Together these

³⁹ McCusker, *The Rum Trade*, p. 439. This is his estimate. Massachusetts had the largest number. By 1760 some sixteen distilleries operated in Newport alone. Reporting to the Board of Trade, the Rhode Island General Assembly recorded "upwards of thirty distill houses... constantly employed in making rum from molasses." Report in *RICR* 6: 381. McCusker also quotes from this report. Apparently, following the Seven Years' War (1754–1763), the business suffered a decline, if these numbers are correct, though the precise reason for the contraction remains unclear. McCusker, who provided twenty as his estimate by 1770, offers no explanation as to the post-war decline. McCusker, *The Rum Trade*, pp. 440–41.

⁴⁰ McCusker, *The Rum Trade*, p. 441, provides a long list of those involved.

⁴¹ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, pp. 196–97.

⁴² David Eltis, "The Slave Economies of the Caribbean: Structure, Performance, Evolution and Significance," in *General History of the Caribbean*, 6 vols., ed. Franklin Knight (London: Macmillan: UNESCO Publishing, 1997), 3:113, Table 3.1.

⁴³ All commodity figures are this author's and are based on the Customs Ledger of Imports and Exports, British North America, 1768–1772, CUST 16/1, PRO, TNA, London, UK.

two sugar-related products, molasses and rum, generated over 54 percent of the total value of all coastwise commodities exported.

There were two significant non-West Indian exports in the coastal trade: lime and spermaceti candles. Forty-five thousand one hundred thirty-three bushels of lime were exported, worth £31,751 and accounting for 15 percent of the total value of the coastal trade exports. Candles were worth about half as much and comprised about 8 percent of the total value of the coastal trade, valued at £29,213. That Rhode Island candle makers were able to produce so much for the American market is not surprising given that they supplied two-thirds of all the exports to the West Indies (*Table 3*).⁴⁴

The total value of the exported items from the coastal trade was £380,033 (*Table 5*).⁴⁵ Most of the value of this trade originated in West Indian, slave-produced goods either directly, in the case of sugar, molasses, and West Indian rum, or through Rhode Islanders' processing molasses to produce New England rum. Viewed in this way, at the very least, more than half of the coastal trade can be understood as an extension of the West Indian trade.

The centrality of the West Indies, both as an export market and as the producer of commodities that were processed and then reexported, becomes clear when all the export regions Rhode Islanders frequented are compared (*Table 5*). Initially, the coastal trade appears as the largest export area. Such a conclusion might seem logical, given that the majority of ships and tonnage leaving Rhode Island traveled to ports up and down the mainland colonies of British North America. This trade, however, was primarily based on the reexport of West Indian products and their derivatives.

Combining the coastal trade in West Indian commodities with the direct exports from Rhode Island to the West Indies reveals just how central the role of slave labor was in creating the monetary value expressed in the cold hard calculus of the customs ledgers. Here, in British Pound Sterling, the significance of slave labor for Rhode Island emerges very clearly. Seventy percent of the value of all Rhode Island exports was dependent upon goods whose production was based on slave labor. When we add the African trade, the figure rises to nearly 77 percent. Thus over three-quarters of the value of Rhode Islanders' ex-

⁴⁴ Whether they were also the largest coastal trade exporter is currently unknown. Only exports from Massachusetts were possibly larger.

⁴⁵ However, this is the "gross," and not "net," figure. In addition, none of these figures includes the "invisibles," the value of "commercial services to overseas residents," which has been estimated to be quite high. See James F. Shepherd and Gary Walton, "Estimates of 'Invisible' Earnings in the Balance of Payments of the British North American Colonies, 1768–1772," *Journal of Economic History* (June 1969): 230–63; Shepherd and Walton, *Shipping*, pp. 114–36, and McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British North America*, pp. 71–76, 109–11. These figures also exclude any value acquired from the sale of ships.

port trade, the leading economic force in expanding the colony, was dependent upon enslaved Africans toiling on the plantation complex in the West Indies.

Table 1. Clearances from Rhode Island: 1768–1772. Source: Customs Ledger of Imports and Exports, British North America, 1768–1772, CUST 16/1, PRO, TNA, London, United Kingdom.

Destination	Clearances
Great Britain	56
Ireland	2
Europe	18
Africa	101
West Indies	967
Newfoundland	39
Quebec	18
Nova Scotia	27
New Hampshire	17
Massachusetts	478
Connecticut	237
New York	313
Jerseys	142
Pennsylvania	118
Maryland	67
Virginia	72
North Carolina	210
South Carolina	71
Georgia	25
East Florida	3
West Florida	11
Bahamas	1
Total	2,993

Table 2. Tonnage Clearing Rhode Island: 1768–1772. Source: Customs Ledger of Imports and Exports, British North America, 1768–1772, CUST 16/1, PRO, TNA, London, United Kingdom.

Destination	Tonnage
Great Britain	4041
Ireland	230
Europe	675
Africa	4054
West Indies	33545
Newfoundland	1294
Quebec	705
Nova Scotia	643
New Hampshire	730
Massachusetts	14869
Connecticut	3741
New York	8992
Jerseys	3055
Pennsylvania	4413
Maryland	1697
Virginia	2093
North Carolina	5833
South Carolina	1893
Georgia	770
East Florida	75
West Florida	302
Bahamas	30
Total	93,680

Table 3. Spermaceti Candle Exports: All Colonies to the West Indies, 1768–1772. Source: Customs Ledger of Imports and Exports, British North America, 1768–1772, CUST 16/1, PRO, TNA, London, United Kingdom.

Colony	Spermaceti Candles—Pounds	% of Total
Newfoundland	698	>1
Nova Scotia	750	>1
New Hampshire	59,925	4.00%
Massachusetts	316,220	21.00%
Rhode Island	949,677	64.00%
Connecticut	30,019	2.00%
New York	58,170	4.00%
New Jersey	1,010	>1
Pennsylvania	55,300	3.70%
Delaware	355	>1
Maryland	250	>1
Virginia	775	>1
North Carolina	1,775	>1
South Carolina	7,360	>1

Georgia	2,150	>1
Florida	200	>1
Bahamas	1,050	>1
Bermuda	325	>1
Total	1,486,009	100

Table 4. Value of Reexported West Indian Commodities, 1768–1772. Source: Commodity totals are from the Customs Ledger of Imports and Exports, British North America, 1768–1772, CUST 16/1, PRO, TNA, London, United Kingdom. Prices and values are based on the author's research. All values are in British Pound Sterling.

Commodity	Value £
Chocolate	4,244.53
Cocoa	1,228.24
Coffee	7.70
Cotton	786.50
Indigo	252.67
Mahogany	425.47
Molasses	63,816.76
Pimento	173.49
Rum—New England	80,752.69
Rum—West Indian	71,294.66
Salt	2,433.88
Sugar—Brown	13,166.84
Sugar—Loaves	4,445.18
Total—West Indian	243,028.61
Total—All Coastal	378,563.50

Table 5. Value of Rhode Island Exports to All Regions, 1768–1772. Note: All values are in British Pound Sterling. Coastal and West Indian trade figures are based on the author's research while those for Great Britain, Southern Europe and the Wine Islands, and Africa are from James F. Shepherd, *Commodity Exports*. Figures do not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Export Trade Area	£	% of Total
Coastal	378,563	45.80%
Great Britain	50,967	6.20%
Southern Europe and the Wine Islands	5,079	>1%
West Indies	334,104	41.00%
Africa	56,653	6.90%
Total	825,366	99.00%

Export Trade Area	£	% of Total
Coastal—Without West Indian Products	135,535	16.30%
Coastal—West Indian Products	243,028	29.40%
Great Britain	50,967	6.10%
Southern Europe and the Wine Islands	5,079	>1%
West Indies	334,104	40.40%
Africa	56,653	6.90%
Total	825,366	99.00%

Appendix 1: Providence Gazette Price Series. The listing, taken from the 26 May 1770 issue of the *Providence Gazette*, is a sample from the full-price series assembled by the author using the weekly prices printed in the paper from their entire run, beginning on 18 February 1769 and ending with the 26 September 1772 issue. These prices serve as one of the important sources for the new trade data values assembled by the author for the coastal and West Indian trades.

By the Bushel

Wheat	5s
Rye	3s 9d
Indian Corn	3s
Flaxseed	3s
Salt	2s 8d
Potatoes	1s 3d
Oats	1s 6d

By the Hundredweight

Flour	16s 6d
Ship Bread	16s 6d
Muscavado Sugar	36–50s

Per Gallon

West India Rum—by the Hogshead	3s
New England Rum—by the Hogshead	1s 9.5d
Molasses	1s 6d
Linseed Oil by the Barrel	4s

By the Cord

Walnut Wood	12s
Oak Wood	10s 6d

By the Barrel

Beef	38s
Pork	66s
Cyder	7s 6d
Tar	12s
Pitch	16s
Turpentine	14s
Soft Soap	15s

By the Pound

Bohea Tea	4s 6d
Coffee	1s 4d
Chocolate	1s 6d
Butter	7.5–9d

By the Pound

Hogs Lard	6d
Bayberry Wax	9d
Tallow	5.5d

By the Box

Spermaceti Candles (price per pound)	1s 9d
Bayberry Candles	NL
Tallow Candles	7.25d
Soap	5.5d

By the Thousand

Staves—Red Oak Hogshead	42s
Staves—W. Oak Hogshead	70s
Staves—W. Oak Barrel	48s
Hogshead Hoops	54s

By the Hundred Foot

1-inch Oak Boards	3s 6d
1 1/4-inch W. Oak Square Edged Boards	4s 6d–5s
1-inch Yellow Pine Square Edged Boards	5s 3d
White Oak 2-Inch Plank	10s 6d