Inikori's Odyssey: Measuring the British Slave Trade, 1655-1807
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Résumé

Abstract
In a recent article in this journal, Joseph Inikori sought to revise upwards estimates of the volume of the British slave trade in 1698-1807 published in 1989 by David Richardson. This paper questions the methodology underlying Inikori's new estimates of the trade and offers further evidence in support of Richardson's claim that his 1989 estimate represented probably an upper-bound figure for British slave shipments from the west coast of Africa in 1698-1807. The paper also seeks to move forward the debate on slave shipments by indicating the direction in which most recent estimates of the trade are going.
In recent article in this journal, Joseph Inikori (1992) presented new estimates of the volume of the British slave trade from Africa from 1655 to 1807. His estimates included the first assessment so far published of slaving voyages from the British Caribbean to Africa and also the first published assessment of British slave shipments in the late seventeenth century since Davies’s work (1957) on the Royal African Company appeared almost forty years ago. In computing the volume of the British-based slave trade after the ending of the Royal African Company’s monopoly in 1698, Inikori challenged estimates of the eighteenth-century British slave trade that Richardson published in 1989 (1989a, 1989b) and argued that, contrary to his estimate of about 3.1 million slaves, the British shipped at least 3.36 million slaves from Africa to America in 1698-1807.

We do not propose to comment on Inikori’s estimates of the slave trade from British Caribbean ports, which seems to have been fairly small. Nor do we intend to examine his estimates of the British slave trade from 1655 to 1698. A forthcoming article by David Eltis (infra) will, in any case, shed additional light on the volume of the British slave trade in this period and the reliability of Inikori’s estimate of the trade before 1698. The principal purpose of the present article is to re-examine Inikori’s new estimates of the volume of the British trade.

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* [The publication of this reply and that of David Eltis (infra, pp. 617-627) closes the debate opened in CEA, n° 128, 1992.—The Editor]

** We are grateful to David Eltis and Eric Evans for comments on an earlier version of this paper. The usual disclaimer applies.

1. Happy he who like Ulysses has made a great voyage, or like that man who won the Fleece, and then came home, full of experience and good sense, to live the rest of his time among his family!
2. BEHRENDT (1993: 67-72) estimates that the slave trade from British Caribbean ports comprised 5 per cent of the total British trade from 1785 to 1807.

after 1698. The gap between his estimate of the trade in 1698-1807 and Richardson’s is fairly small, but his critique of the latter’s estimates of the trade relies on questionable procedures in the use of British trade and shipping records, and his claim that his estimate of British slave shipments in 1698-1807 is conservative is misleading. We shall first review briefly the recent history of estimates of the eighteenth-century British slave trade in order to place Inikori’s latest contribution to the debate in its proper context. We shall then examine the main sources of disagreement between his 1992 figures and Richardson’s 1989 figures, and the misconceptions regarding British trade and shipping records underlying his figures.

Earlier Estimates of British Slaving

The publication in 1969 of Philip Curtin’s Census of the Atlantic slave trade represented a landmark in the historiography of Africa, since it set the agenda for recent research on the history of the trans-Atlantic traffic in slaves. Relying solely on published evidence, Curtin estimated that some 9.4 million slaves were imported into America from Africa between 1500 and the mid-1860s (Curtin 1969: 268). A lower figure than that commonly believed by earlier historians, Curtin’s estimate triggered a wave of archival research and publications by other historians on the numbers of slaves shipped from Africa by various European and American carriers. Much of this research has focused on the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when the trans-Atlantic slave trade was at its height. Within this period, considerable attention has been given to the British trade in slaves since it is commonly agreed the British were the largest traffickers in the century or so before abolition of their trade in 1807 (Richardson 1989b: 10).

Using different methods of computation, Curtin constructed three estimates of the numbers of slaves shipped from Africa by the British in 1701-1810, his preferred series for this period, based on a combination of crop production and slave shipping data, totalling some 2.48 million slaves (Curtin 1969: 142). Within a decade of Curtin’s findings, new estimates of British slave exports from Africa for part or all of the eighteenth century were published by Anstey, Drescher and Inikori. Relying on shipping data, Anstey (1975a: 12; 1975b: 39) calculated that British ships carried some 1.53 million slaves from Africa between 1761 and 1810. This was some 10.3 per cent more than Curtin estimated for the same period but, given the margin of error involved in such calculations, was seen by Anstey as essentially confirming Curtin’s findings.

Following Anstey, more substantial upward revisions of Curtin’s figures were produced by Drescher and Inikori largely on the basis of shipping data found in the Customs 17 series in the Public Record Office (London), a source unknown to Anstey and subsequently accepted by him as ‘superior’ to his own sources (Drescher 1977: 28; Inikori 1976a; Anstey 1976: 606). Drescher’s estimates were confined to the years 1777-1807, but his figure of 1.1 million slaves shipped for this period was almost 20 per cent higher than Curtin’s (1969). Adopting higher loadings of slaves per ship than both Anstey and Drescher, and applying

3. For surveys of this literature, see Lovejoy 1982, 1989.
these to the annual clearances of ships given in Customs 17. Inikori produced an even more dramatic upward revision in the level of the trade, claiming that in 1751-1807 British traders shipped no less than 2.48 million slaves from Africa. This was 53 per cent more than Curtin estimated for the same period. Some slight modification to this figure was subsequently accepted by Inikori in the light of criticism by Anstey (1976: 606; Inikori 1976b: 608-609). In the same publication Inikori also went on to suggest that the British shipped almost 3.7 million slaves from Africa in 1701-1807. This was about 1.2 million (or 49 per cent) more than Curtin's 1969 preferred series for the same period. Like Anstey and Drescher, Inikori used shipping data to produce his estimate of exports in 1751-1807, but for his calculation of exports for the whole eighteenth century he relied on projections based on various one-year contemporary surveys of the trade, a procedure first mooted by Curtin (ibid.: 148).

Inikori's assumptions about loading rates of ships in 1780-1807 were contested by Anstey (1976) and Drescher (1977: 210-213), and his estimates of the trade had a mixed reception among other historians. Thus, Darity (1985) adopted his figures to estimate the flow of profits to Britain from slave trading in 1761-1807, whereas Rawley (1981: 166), Lovejoy (1982) and Eltis (1987: 248) chose to use other figures in their studies of the Atlantic slave trade. The reluctance of the last three historians to embrace Inikori's estimates seems to have been vindicated with the publication in 1989 of Richardson's estimate (1989a) that the British shipped probably no more than 3.1 million slaves from Africa between 1698 and 1807. The first for the whole eighteenth century to be based on shipping data, this estimate was raised slightly following the discovery that some London-based ships involved in slaving had cleared to Madeira rather than Africa in 1710-1729 (Richardson 1989b: 3). It should be noted that as Richardson's calculations derived from data on British clearances of ships, some of which were certainly seized or lost before embarking slaves at the African coast, his figures were assumed to represent 'probably the maximum levels of the trade between 1698 and 1807' (Richardson 1989a: 158). Even so, at 3.12 million, this estimate was still nearly 600,000 lower than Inikori's for the period 1701-1807. It was subsequently adopted with only minor modifications by Lovejoy (1989) in a revision of the volume of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Richardson's paper is the principal target of Inikori's latest contribution to the volume of the British slave trade. Concerned 'to clarify those issues on the eighteenth-century trade which remain controversial', Inikori reviews 'the nature of the sources [of evidence] for the British trade (Inikori 1992: 644), and concludes that on the basis of the shipping data available to him the British shipped some 3.36 million slaves from Africa between 1699 and 1807. Although only about 240,000 more than Richardson's estimate, Inikori insists that his figure represents a minimum total, as he was 'deliberately conservative in stating the number of vessels cleared from England to Africa' (ibid.: 656). In particular he notes that he 'had used only recorded clearances' and had made no allowance for 'the relatively well-known covert participation of a large number of British ships in the slave trade of continental Europe' or for clearances of

4. It is interesting to note that after using Inikori's estimates in 1985, Darity (1989) used Anstey's estimates in a subsequent paper.
ships to Madeira and the Canaries despite the fact that such places 'were used as camouflage by slave traders wanting to evade various state laws'.

Before commenting in detail on Inikori's methods, some general observations on his assessment of British slaving are in order. Three points may be noted.

First, Inikori's new estimate of the British slave trade in 1698-1807 is only the second, after Richardson's, to be based solely on shipping data. In this respect, it differs from his own earlier estimate (1976b) of the trade in 1701-1807 which rested on various contemporary one-year assessments of the British trade. As most historians are agreed that shipping data are probably the most reliable source for estimating the export slave trade, we presume that Inikori accepts that his latest estimate supersedes all his earlier estimates of the British slave trade in 1701-1807.

Second, while Inikori refers in some detail to the origins of British shipping records, none of the principal sources used by him are new. Inikori himself used Customs 17 clearance data, Stephen Fuller's annual listings of slave imports into Jamaica, and Board of Trade Papers when making earlier estimates of the volume of the trade in 1751-1807. Richardson referred to some of these but also used Port Books, Treasury Papers, Parliamentary Papers, Colonial Office Papers, and Cuban slave import figures in 1790-1807 when compiling his estimates of the trade. Inikori's latest contribution thus relies on records used by other historians: the remaining differences in estimates of the trade depend on interpretations of the reliability of these records.

Third, Inikori's latest estimate of the British slave trade is, like his earlier estimate, a conservative figure in his view. It is, however, still some 240,000 more than the maximum figure that Richardson estimated. It should also be noted that his new estimate is some 338,000 (or 9 per cent) lower than he proposed in 1976, a point that he chooses to ignore. Disaggregation of his figures shows, moreover, that the distribution of this reduction in estimated slave shipments was not evenly spread over the century. Thus, his latest figure for 1750-1807 is, at 2.28 million, only about 85,000 (or 4 per cent) less than his earlier estimate, whereas his new estimate for 1698-1749 is some 254,000 (or 19 per cent) lower than he previously estimated. Thus, while still maintaining that slave exports in 1750-1807 were still much higher than Richardson and others have estimated, Inikori has tacitly abandoned his earlier, apparently inflated, estimate of the volume of the British trade in 1698-1749 in favour of a total much closer to that which Richardson proposed a few years ago. His new figure for 1698-1749 is, incidentally, some 217,000 (or 25 per cent) higher than Curtin's original preferred estimate (1969: 142).

A review of data published since 1969 suggests that the latest estimate of the volume of the eighteenth-century British slave trade made by Inikori represents a significant retreat from his earlier estimates of the trade. As he himself accepts, there seems now to be some broad measure of agreement between his figures and Richardson's over the level of the trade in 1698-1776. However, his latest estimate of the trade in 1777-1807 still remains substantially higher than that generally accepted by other historians. Moreover, whereas Richardson claimed that his estimates of the trade are to be seen as upper bound figures, Inikori claims that his are conservative. But a close inspection of Inikori's use of shipping data raises major doubts about the reliability of his claims. To appre-
Associate this, we shall look more closely at the genesis of his latest estimates of the trade in 1777-1807 and at his interpretation of eighteenth-century shipping data.

Inikori's Estimates Re-evaluated

Inikori's original estimate of the volume of the slave trade in 1777-1807 relied on clearance data of ships to Africa and their tonnages derived from Customs 17. To allow for the inclusion of non-slavers, he deducted 5 per cent from the customs figures, this allowance being based on Liverpool clearance data for 1750-1776 (Inikori 1976a: 210). To estimate slave shipments he then assumed a loading rate in 1777-1788 of 430 slaves per ship and a rate of 1.6 slaves per ton thereafter. The former was based on 36 ships taking in slaves at the Gold Coast in 1777-1788 while the latter was the maximum loading rate permitted under the Dolben Act of 1788. This procedure suggested to Inikori a total of just under 1.42 million slaves shipped in 1777-1807.

Inikori's assumptions about loading rates in this period were criticised by Anstey (1976a, 1976b) and Drescher (1977). Anstey challenged the reliability of the figure adopted in 1777-1788, while both he and Drescher criticised the application of a loading rate of 1.6 slaves per ton throughout 1789-1807, largely on the grounds that a further restriction on the loading capacity of ships was introduced in 1799. Inikori (1976b: 609) accepted 377 slaves per ship as a compromise for 1777-1788, but refused to adjust his post-1788 loading rate to allow for the act of 1799, arguing that the latter 'did not state any specific slaves-per-ton ratio' and that a substantial proportion of British ships discharged their slaves in non-British territories and that British legislation did not affect these. Exchanges with Anstey and Drescher resulted, therefore, in only a very modest revision by Inikori of his initial estimate of the British slave trade in 1777-1807.

Richardson's assessment of the trade (1989a: 192-195) suggested that the British shipped some 1.08 million slaves from Africa in 1777-1807. This was 340,000 (or 24 per cent) less than Inikori had estimated. Two factors accounted for this. First, Richardson assumed lower slave loading rates than those adopted by Inikori, particularly in the 1780s and in 1800-1807. Using evidence on slave deliveries per ship gleaned from Naval Office Lists, Parliamentary Papers and Cuban and South Carolina Import Series, and adjusting these data to allow for mortality in the middle passage, Richardson assumed that loading rates per ship were 348 slaves in the 1780s and 267 slaves in 1800-1807 compared to Inikori's assumptions of 377 and 311, respectively.

Second, Richardson questioned the reliability of Customs 17 as a source of evidence of British slave ships clearing for Africa after 1788, pointing to a growing discrepancy between the figures given in Customs 17 and in Parliamentary Papers. This was attributed mainly to the inclusion in customs records of foreign ships and a larger number of 'produce' ships among British ships clearing for Africa after 1788 than earlier historians, including Inikori, had assumed. For data on ship clearances, therefore, Richardson relied on listings of ships given in Parliamentary Papers rather than the summary figures given in Customs 17, though he enhanced the numbers given in Parliamentary Papers by 4 per cent to allow for possible under-recording of clearances after 1788 by this
source. As a result, whereas Inikori estimated that just over 4,000 British ships were involved in slaving voyages in 1777-1807, Richardson estimated that just over 3,500 cleared Britain in the same period.

Responding to the rejection of his estimated loading rates of ships, Inikori has now abandoned his earlier procedures, and for 1777-1789 and 1801-1807 has chosen instead to use evidence found in colonial naval office lists and Cuban records.\(^5\) The slave import figures contained in these sources were adjusted by Richardson’s data on slave mortality in the Atlantic crossing to derive estimates of average numbers of slaves loaded per ship at the African coast. However, Inikori excludes from his calculations ships arriving in Cuba with less than 200 slaves on board and also suggests, though without providing evidence to corroborate his suggestion, that Richardson’s mortality estimates are probably ‘on the low side’ (Inikori 1992: 655 fn). For 1790-1800, he relied on data from a well-known House of Lords account of the British slave trade as well as additional Cuban import data. These are all sources that Richardson and, more recently, Behrendt have used in our assessments of the volume of British slaving after 1777.

Inikori’s revisions in methods of calculating slave loading rates are to be welcomed. So, too, is his confirmation of the fact that the 1799 Act unmistakably reduced mean loading rates of British slave ships below those introduced in 1788. However, his revised loading rates throughout 1777-1807 are still higher than Richardson’s or indeed even more recent figures for much of the same period produced by Behrendt (1993: 77). One reason for this discrepancy is that Inikori uses only naval office lists for Jamaica, Barbados, St Kitts and Dominica, whereas both Richardson and Behrendt used all the available naval office lists, including those for colonies seized by Britain after 1793. Because Jamaica attracted a disproportionate number of large slave ships, Inikori overstates therefore the average number of slaves delivered per ship in the Americas in the thirty years before British abolition.\(^6\) As a result, the estimates of load-

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5. Inikori is sceptical about the accuracy of the slave import totals recorded in the naval office shipping lists. He claims that these totals, derived from customs accounts, are inaccurate because: 1) customs officials conspired to under-record the total numbers of slaves disembarked per vessel; and 2) slave import totals often included only partial cargoes. Regarding the first claim, a recent examination of several shipping sources in 1785-1807 has demonstrated the accuracy of British customs slave imports (Behrendt 1993: 43-52). Regarding Inikori’s second claim, few British slave vessels disembarked partial cargoes. From 1785 to 1807, for example, 2,397 of 2,479 British slave voyages landed their entire slave cargo in one colony (Behrendt, data-set). Inikori in fact inaccurately states that in 1802 the slave ship Mary Ellen (472 tons) only landed 249 slaves in America, including 13 in Jamaica and 236 in Trinidad (Inikori 1992: 654). He notes that ‘there is no indication whatsoever that the ship had any more slaves on board’, but a close inspection of the sources shows that the ship also landed 147 slaves at Surinam on the same voyage (Parliamentary Papers 1806, XIII No 265, pp. 3-4). Thus with a slave ‘allowance’ of 400, the Mary Ellen disembarked a total of 396 slaves in the West Indies in 1802.

6. Behrendt’s data indicate that from a sample of 651,327 slaves disembarked in British slave vessels that sailed in 1785-1807, 334,040 slaves were landed in Jamaica, Barbados, St Kitts and Dominica from 1,204 vessels, giving an average of 277 slaves per vessel. At twenty-two other American locations where British
ing rates produced by Richardson and recently refined by Behrendt are prefer-
able to those computed by Inikori.

Although he makes some concessions in calculating loading rates of ships, Inikori insists that, with a 5 per cent allowance for non-slavers, clearance figures given in Customs 17 are a more reliable indicator of British ships involved in slaving than Parliamentary Papers. His rejection of Richardson's criticisms of Customs 17 is based on three arguments. We shall deal with each one in turn.

To begin with, Inikori claims that Parliamentary Papers substantially understate clearances to Africa. Interestingly, his claim is based not on a comparison of Parliamentary Papers with Customs 17 but rather on a comparison of evidence on clearances in 1710-1724 from Port Books, the 'primary' source of customs records, with figures on clearances to Africa reported in Parliamentary Papers (Inikori 1992: 663-664). According to Inikori, the numbers of ships reported in Port Books as clearing from Bristol and Liverpool in 1710-1724 for Africa is much higher than the numbers reported in Parliamentary Papers. Indeed, he reminds us that in the case of Liverpool 'the Parliamentary Papers show a total of 4 vessels cleared to Africa between 1710 and 1723, while the Port Books show 101 vessels for the same period' (ibid.). In view of this, Inikori argues, Richardson's reliance on Parliamentary Papers for clearance data after 1777 is 'highly questionable' since it 'flies directly in the face of his own evidence showing considerable under-recording by that source' earlier in the century.

Were it true, this might be an important criticism of Parliamentary Papers. But unfortunately Inikori's argument is flawed since it is based on a simple misinterpretation of the evidence on clearances that Richardson gathered from Port Books. A close reading of the latter's work shows that the figures relating to clearances to Africa taken from Bristol and Liverpool Port Books in 1710-1724 included not only ships clearing for African destinations but also some that were cleared out for Cape Verde or Madeira and were subsequently found to be involved in slaving voyages. Thus in 1989 in referring to Bristol and Liverpool clearances in 1710-1719, Richardson (1989a: 186) noted that 'I have included a number of ships which were recorded as bound outwards for Madeira or Cape Verde but which were evidently slave ships'. Furthermore, he gave specific details of the initial destinations of the Bristol ships in a volume that Inikori cites on the port's slave trade before 1730 and made further reference to the inclusion of Madeira-bound ships in a second paper in 1989 (Richardson 1986; 1989b: 3). By the mid-1720s, the practice of some British slave traders of entering out their ships for the Portuguese Atlantic islands appears to have died out, and there is no evidence of British slave ships regularly clearing out first for Madeira or Cape Verde after 1730 (Richardson 1994). But the fact is that where ships were reported in the Port Books as clearing for Africa they were included in Parliamentary Papers in 1710-1724. And those that cleared out for Madeira and

slave ships traded. 317,287 slaves were landed from 1,251 vessels, giving an average of 254 slaves per vessel. Havana received the largest British slave vessels, 122 vessels landing 41,227 slaves, or 338 per vessel. This was followed by Jamaica, which received 255,928 slaves in 855 vessels, an average of 299 slaves per vessel. Klein and Engerman (1976: 115) first noted that slave ships trading to Jamaica were larger than average.
Cape Verde but were later involved in slaving were included in Parliamentary Papers as bound for the Atlantic islands, not Africa. Parliamentary Papers thus provide an accurate summary of clearance data provided by the Port Books in 1710-1724. Inikori has simply misinterpreted Richardson’s findings, and the conclusions he draws from comparisons of Port Books and Parliamentary Papers are fallacious. Furthermore, since he himself in estimating the volume of the slave trade largely adopts Richardson’s figures relating to ships involved in slaving in 1710-1724, his subsequent claims to have relied on ‘only recorded clearances’ to Africa and to have made ‘no allowance whatsoever’ for ships entering the slave trade via Madeira or the Canaries are totally misleading (Inikori 1992: 656). His figures do in fact include large numbers of such ships.

A second argument advanced by Inikori is that when commenting on clearances in Customs 17 in 1789-1807 Richardson overstated the proportion of ships involved in the bilateral or produce trade to Africa. Richardson’s analysis (1989a: 162-163) was based on a breakdown of clearances for Africa in 1790-1800 given in Customs 17 by David MacPherson and a listing of ships clearing to Africa in 1789-1795 found in Treasury Papers. These sources indicated that the 5 per cent allowance for non-slavers among ships clearing to Africa assumed by historians was too low for the period after the Dolben Act, and that an allowance closer to double that assumed was more appropriate.7

Inikori has accepted that the 5 per cent allowance for non-slavers that he used ‘is not adequately backed by evidence’, and attempted to resolve the issue ‘in a more incontrovertible way’ by comparing the annual value of African goods imported into England with annual exports from England to the coast. He argues that ‘since […] the goods exported from England to Africa […] paid for both slaves and African products, the proportion should indicate the share of shipping space devoted to the African products’ (Inikori 1992: 664). Using export and import data from Customs 3 and 17, and allowing for mark-ups on the value of exported goods exchanged at the coast, he calculates that while the value of African goods imported may have been as high as 14 per cent of exports before 1750, it was only 5 per cent by 1791-1800 and less than 7 per cent on average in the three decades before 1807. This, he claimed, offers the ‘most compelling’ argument (ibid.: 685) in support of his belief that ships not involved in the slave trade constituted only 5 per cent of clearances to Africa from Britain in 1777-1807.

It should be noted that a very detailed analysis by Behrendt (1993: 76) of the voyage histories of British ships trading to Africa in 1785-1807 has shown that Richardson understated the number of ships involved in the produce trade to Africa in 1786-1787. From Behrendt’s researches, it appears that Richardson may also have understated the number of bilateral traders after 1788. Richardson’s allowance for non-slavers, therefore, was possibly conservative rather than generous in this period. Be this at it may, Inikori’s use of export and import data to try to resolve the issue merits some comment. His use of these data assumes that the price of slaves at the coast did not vary in time relative to the price of other African exports. This is a very questionable assumption, partic-

7. Non-slavers clearing customs for Africa include produce ships, Sierra Leone Company vessels, sloops and schooners supplying Gold Coast forts, and privateers.
ularly in the period 1793-1807 when slave prices appear to have increased sharply in real terms (Richardson 1991a: 55). There are also doubts about both the mark-ups of exports and the general reliability of the import and export series that he uses. Inikori assumes a mark-up of 82.5 per cent in order to convert export prices, f.o.b (free on board), in Britain to African coastal prices of trade goods. However, some other historians have preferred to adopt a 50 per cent mark-up (Hogendorn & Gemery 1990: 39), while still others, recognising the extreme variability of mark-ups, remain sceptical about adopting any single figure (Eltis 1989: 198-200). As for trade figures, the late Marion Johnson re-tabulated British trade with Africa by using data for individual commodities rather than relying, as Inikori does, on annual totals (Johnson 1990). Moreover, Johnson generated figures for imports of African goods reaching Britain via America, presumably in slave ships. Apparently, Inikori was unable to find evidence of such imports in ‘the sample years of the late eighteenth century’ records that he examined (Inikori 1992: 661). As Johnson’s figures are clearly superior to those used by Inikori, her data for British trade with Africa in 1751-1807 are presented in columns 1 and 3 of the following table. Inikori’s figures are presented in columns 2 and 4 of the same table.

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<th>Décade</th>
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<td>Decade  1</td>
<td>Decade 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1751-1760</td>
<td>2,339</td>
<td>2,200</td>
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<td>1761-1770</td>
<td>5,014</td>
<td>4,840</td>
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<td>1771-1780</td>
<td>5,137</td>
<td>5,093</td>
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<td>7,342</td>
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<td>872</td>
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<tr>
<td>1801-1807</td>
<td>7,492</td>
<td>7,121</td>
<td>935</td>
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* Columns 1 and 3 Johnson data (1990: 64-66); columns 2 and 4 Inikori data (1992: 665); column 5 assumes 82.5 per cent mark-up on exports, using Johnson data; column 6 assumes 82.5 per cent mark-up on exports, using Inikori data; column 7 assumes 50 per cent mark-up on exports, using Johnson data; column 8 assumes 50 per cent mark-up on exports, using Inikori data.

A comparison of columns 3 and 4 of the table shows that, on Johnson’s figures, imports of African goods in 1751-1807 were 4-12 per cent greater than Inikori assumed. This is not surprising given that Johnson included imports via America whereas Inikori did not. Rather more surprising perhaps are the differences in values of exports. For the most part Johnson’s figures are higher than Inikori’s, but in the 1780s and 1790s they were lower, in the latter case by
some 15 per cent. These discrepancies seem to have been due 'to contemporary clerical carelessness in moving from specific items to annual totals' (Johnson 1990: 39). However, as imports of African products in the 1780s and 1790s were also higher than Inikori assumed, it follows that the share of exports consumed by produce purchases was greater in these years than Inikori estimates, even if one assumes his 82.5 per cent mark-up on exports between Britain and Africa. This is shown in columns 5 and 6 of the table. Furthermore, any lowering of the mark-up adopted naturally increases the share of exports absorbed by the produce trade. For instance, a mark-up of 50 per cent, as shown in the table, would raise the proportion of exports expended on African produce, on Johnson's data, to about 8-9 per cent in 1781-1807. This is noticeably higher than Inikori's figure for these years. Of course too much weight cannot be placed on these new estimates, since it is evident that their calculation is highly sensitive to the percentage mark-up assumed. Given the uncertainty surrounding rates of mark-up, however, it is surely premature to rely, as Inikori does, on a single mark-up rate based on just two observations in 1662 and 1774 and to claim that 'Our 5 per cent allowance [for non-slavers] can [...] be shown on the basis of the evidence to be more than adequate' (Inikori 1992: 667). In the final analysis, the method that Richardson adopted in 1989 and that Behrendt has recently refined to determine the proportion of non-slavers among clearances to Africa still seems more reliable than the method preferred by Inikori.

The third criticism of Inikori relating to Richardson's estimate of the trade concerns the treatment of foreign ships clearing Britain to Africa. In reviewing Customs 17, Richardson noted that at least 107 foreign ships were listed in these records as clearing Britain to Africa in 1777-1807 and suggested that, in estimating the British slave trade, these should be excluded. In this respect, as Inikori points out, Richardson followed a line of argument first proposed by Drescher (1977: 208).

Inikori questions whether these foreign ships were foreign-owned or foreign-built, but goes on in any case to insist that they be included in estimates of the trade since, he claims, what matters is 'the place of origin of international business' not the ownership of the resources used. Furthermore, he demands that consistency requires that, if foreign ships leaving Britain are excluded, then Drescher and Richardson ought to include British participation in the slave trade of continental European countries in their estimates (Inikori 1992: 659).

Three points may be made about Inikori's remarks. First, the growth of clearances of foreign ships from Britain to Africa occurred mainly in 1782-1783 and again in 1796-1807, and in the latter case was not confined solely to the African trade. It was in fact a more general phenomenon (MacPherson, 1805, IV: 215-535), and in 1796-1807 may have reflected a growth of American ships in British trade at this time. In any case, it appears that these ships were foreign in the terms of the British Navigation Acts, that is foreign-owned, rather than being simply foreign-built, a point that Inikori himself seems to accept (Inikori 1992: 685).

Second, it is ironic that Inikori chooses to emphasise the importance of the place of origin of international business, since he himself ignored the distinction between ownership of capital and place of business in his earlier work on the British trade. Thus, overlooking the inclusion of foreign ships in Customs 17
records, he claimed in 1976 that these records provide ‘a complete time series of British shipping to the African coast’ (Inikori 1976a: 210, emphasis added), yet at the same time insisted that British-owned ships ‘were heavily involved in the slave trade of other European nations in various ways’ (ibid.: 208) and should be included in any assessment of the British slave trade. His confusion on this issue persists in his latest contribution, with his determination to both include all clearances, British and foreign, found in Customs 17 in his estimate of the trade in 1777-1807 and also draw attention to the existence of a continental-based British slave trade. If, as he claims, foreign ships listed in Customs 17 are to be included in his assessment of the British slave trade, his references to British participation in the continental trade are, by his own logic, irrelevant.

Third, it may be conceded that, if foreign ships are excluded from clearances to Africa from Britain, consistency demands that British ships leaving continental ports be included in estimates of the British slave trade. This assumes, of course, that such ships had not first cleared Britain for Africa before visiting the continent to re-flag. The problem here is to assess how many British-owned slave ships sailed directly from continental ports to Africa, since the practice was, as Inikori admits (1992: 659), ‘covert’. Inikori himself has, as yet, failed to provide any concrete evidence of such sailings. But a detailed study of voyage records by Behrendt has shed some light on the situation.8 With reference to Inikori’s remarks on the slave trade to Spanish America, Behrendt shows that all but three of the British ships participating in this trade were flagged in Britain. They are included therefore in clearances from Britain to Africa. However, analysis of individual ship histories and other records has also allowed him to identify some nineteen slaving voyages by British ships from French ports in 1786-1792. In addition, he has detected a further twenty-one Bristol and Liverpool voyages involving ships that possibly re-flagged at continental ports, and by searching for gaps in the voyage histories of individual ships he has also identified another fifty-two ‘potential’ slaving voyages that might have been made by ships re-flagging at continental ports. Of these seventy-three possible or potential voyages, twenty-nine took place before war broke out in 1793 and a further twenty-six during the Peace of Amiens in 1803.

Firm evidence exists, therefore, for only nineteen slaving voyages in British ships from continental ports in 1785-1807, though it is conceivable that just over ninety such voyages (or about four a year) may have been undertaken in this period. For the same period, Richardson estimated that British merchants fitted out some 2,970 slaving voyages in Britain. Compared to the home-based trade, British participation in the continental slave trade was therefore fairly small-scale, despite the attractions offered by French bounties in the 1780s and, after 1788, the possibility of avoiding Parliamentary restrictions on carrying capacities of British ships. Moreover, research done by Behrendt (1993: 40) on previously unused shipping records for this period suggests that Richardson probably exaggerated, perhaps by as many as sixty, the number of British slaving voyages cleared from British ports in 1785-1807. Even if one includes voyages from continental ports, it appears in the end that, on the evidence now available.

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8. Behrendt 1993: chap. 1. For a review of the records used by him, see Behrendt 1991: 80-84; 1993: appendix A.
Richardson’s estimate of the total number of British slaving voyages in the thirty years before abolition was not very far wide of the mark.

To summarise this section, it is clear that while Inikori has adopted new methods of estimating slave loading rates in 1777-1807, his rates are still based on more limited data than those that Richardson assumed or that Behrendt has recently calculated. At the same time, his attempt to justify the use of Customs 17 as a source of evidence of clearances of British ships to Africa remains unconvincing. On the evidence offered by Inikori, there is no reason to alter the overall number or average loading rates of British ships involved in slaving that Richardson used in 1989. Indeed, on both accounts, the latter’s figures seem largely to have been endorsed by more recent research by Behrendt.

Richardson’s Estimates Re-affirmed

It should by now be clear that Inikori’s belief that his estimate of the British slave trade in 1698-1807 is conservative is misleading. Contrary to his claim that he relies only on recorded clearances of ships to Africa, his figures do in fact include ships that cleared initially for other destinations such as Madeira and Cape Verde. Moreover, by relying on Customs 17 clearance data, he overstates by nearly 20 per cent the number of British ships involved in slaving in 1777-1807.

While Inikori’s claim about the conservative nature of his own estimates of the trade cannot be accepted, Richardson’s claim that his estimate of the trade probably represents the maximum level of British slaving in 1698-1807 perhaps requires further support. This claim rested on two considerations. First, it was noted that, despite attempts to eliminate bilateral traders from ships clearing to Africa, some ships involved in the produce trade may have escaped detection. As a result, it was suggested that the clearance data used may have marginally overstated the number of British slaving voyages. Second, it was emphasised by Richardson that his estimates of the trade were based not on completed slaving voyages but on ships clearing for Africa and that some ships were lost or seized by enemy vessels before loading slaves (Richardson 1989a: 157-158).

In challenging Richardson’s argument about the bias in his estimates, Inikori questions the number of British ships that were assumed to be involved in the produce trade in 1788-1807. However, research by Behrendt has, as we have seen, indicated that Richardson probably underestimated rather than over-estimated the number of British ships involved in bilateral voyages to Africa after 1785 (Behrendt 1993). Furthermore, research by Eltis (forthc) on the British African trade before 1714 has shown that in 1699-1709 Richardson included as slavers 85 London ships that returned to the capital with African produce and without, apparently, having made a trans-Atlantic slaving voyage. The discovery of such a large number of London ‘produce’ ships casts doubt on Richardson’s suggestion that the inclusion of some produce traders should inflate his estimates of British slaving levels ‘only marginally’ (Richardson 1989a: 158). If Eltis’s findings are verified, this is certainly questionable, at least as far as the period before 1714 is concerned. The main point here, however, is that recent research has endorsed Richardson’s belief that the clearance data underpinning
his estimates of British slaving may include some ships involved in bilateral voyages to Africa.

In his estimates of the trade, Inikori ignores the question of losses of ships after clearing, even though Richardson offered specific evidence that in wartime large proportions of slave ships may have been seized by the enemy. It was acknowledged that in many instances the point in their voyage when ships were lost or captured is unknown but Richardson went on to suggest, nevertheless, that probably ‘a few were lost even before they were able to purchase slaves on the African coast’ (ibid.).

Later research indicates that in making this suggestion Richardson was over-cautious. His own work, for example, reveals that of the 136 ships fitted out in Bristol for slaving voyages in the war years 1756-1762, no less than forty (or 29.4 per cent) failed to return home, most being seized by French privateers (Richardson 1991b). Moreover, of these forty ships, at least twelve were lost or taken before commencing trade in Africa. Research done by other historians shows that heavy losses of ships also occurred in other periods of war. Thus Eltis has revealed that 14 per cent of British slave ships in 1703-1712 failed to deliver slaves to America ‘on account of the elements, enemy action and piracy’ (Eltis fthcg), while Behrendt (1993: 35) has calculated that 17 per cent of British slave ships sailing in 1785-1807 did not return home, mainly because they were lost at sea or, after 1793, were taken by the enemy. Unfortunately, Eltis does not specify at what stage in their voyages ships were lost, but Behrendt shows that among those lost in 1785-1807 about a half to two thirds were lost before they began slaving. It appears, therefore, that, largely due to capture by the enemy, at least 8 per cent of slave ships clearing Bristol in the Seven Years War and a similar proportion of all British slave ships in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars failed to load any slaves in Africa. Whether this ‘failure rate’ was the same in other wars remains to be seen. But if it was, then at least 300 slave ships leaving Britain in wartime between 1698 and 1807 may have been lost to the elements or enemy action prior to trading at the coast of Africa.9 Assuming these ships would have achieved average loadings of slaves, some 84,000 slaves should be deducted from Richardson’s estimate of the British slave trade in 1698-1807.10 This is still, however, a conservative figure since no account is taken of losses of ships in peacetime or the inclusion of undetected bilateral traders among annual clearance data. When allowance is made for these factors, it is likely that Richardson’s figure of 3.1 million shipped in 1698-1807 over-estimates the British slave trade by some 100,000 slaves.

Closer investigation of produce trading and losses of ships after clearing Britain re-affirms Richardson’s suggestion that his figure of 3.1 million represents an upper-bound estimate of the number of slaves shipped by British slave trad-

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9. Based on annual clearances given in Richardson 1989a: 185-195. For purposes of calculation, we assumed the following years were war years: 1703-1712, 1743-1747, 1756-1762, 1776-1782, and 1793-1807. According to Richardson’s figures, 3,906 British ships cleared for Africa in these years. This yields, at 8 per cent, a figure of 312 ships lost prior to trading in Africa.

10. We assumed an average loading rate of 279 slaves per ship; this is based on a total of 3.052 million slaves loaded in 10,943 ships in 1698-1807 (Richardson 1989a).
ers in 1698-1807. Determining the precise number shipped will never be possible, though detailed reconstruction of voyage histories of the sort currently being undertaken by historians will certainly allow further improvement of Richardson's estimates of the trade. However, on the evidence reviewed here, it is clear that further revisions of the volume of the British trade will tend to lower rather than raise it, particularly in wartime.

Responding to Curtin's census, Joseph Inikori estimated in 1976 that the British were responsible for shipping almost 3.7 million slaves from Africa in the eighteenth century, or approximately 1.2 million (or 49 per cent) more than Curtin had estimated seven years earlier. Sixteen years later, and in response to criticism by Richardson of his estimates, he has attempted to defend his earlier assessment of the trade, arguing that, on a conservative calculation, ships from Britain carried some 3.36 million slaves from Africa in 1698-1807. In addition, he calculates that a further 126,000 at least were shipped during the same period by ships from the British Caribbean (Inikori 1992: 676), giving a total British Empire trade, again on a conservative estimate, of almost 3.5 million slaves in 1698-1807. Over the longer period from 1655 to 1807, he estimates the total British trade conservatively at about 3.89 million slaves.

At the heart of Inikori's 1992 paper is a defence of his earlier estimates of the British slave trade in 1777-1807, based on Customs 17 clearance data, and a criticism of the global estimates of eighteenth-century British slaving that Richardson made in 1989. Inikori has chosen to dismiss the warnings that Richardson voiced about the reliability of Customs 17 and continues to suggest, as in earlier papers, the possibility of substantial British involvement in the slave trade from continental Europe. Furthermore, he still adopts higher rates of loading of slave ships than other writers. However, on close inspection, all his arguments are unconvincing, and Richardson's claim that the maximum level of the British slave trade in 1698-1807 was about 3.1 million slaves remains unscathed.

While continuing to criticise those who propose lower estimates of the British slave trade than himself, Inikori has tacitly abandoned in 1992 the estimate of the eighteenth-century slave trade that he made nearly two decades ago in favour of a total closer to that which Richardson proposed. Indeed, 1777-1807 apart, his new estimates for most of the eighteenth century are remarkably similar to those of Richardson. On reflection, this is hardly surprising, for he has also abandoned the methods he used in 1976 to estimate the British slave trade before 1750 and has turned instead to the sources of evidence that Richardson employed.

Like Odysseus (or Ulysses), who spent years attempting to find his way home to Ithaca, Inikori has clearly travelled far since he first ventured in 1976 to estimate the volume of the British slave trade. Throughout most of the last two decades, he has maintained an independent course, adrift from the main body of students seeking to estimate the volume of the British slave trade. In 1992, however, he clearly abandoned his earlier course and began to move back
strongly toward the main fleet of scholars. And should he now take our advice and free himself from Customs 17, he will actually find himself sailing more or less in the same water as that occupied by most of his fellow-travellers.

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ABSTRACT

In a recent article in this journal, Joseph Inikori sought to revise upwards estimates of the volume of the British slave trade in 1698-1807 published in 1989 by David Richardson. This paper questions the methodology underlying Inikori's new estimates of the trade and offers further evidence in support of Richardson's claim that his 1989 estimate represented probably an upper-bound figure for British slave shipments from the west coast of Africa in 1698-1807. The paper also seeks to move forward the debate on slave shipments by indicating the direction in which most recent estimates of the trade are going.

RÉSUMÉ


Key Words/Mots-clés: British Empire/Empire britannique, British West Indies/Antilles britanniques, Atlantic slave trade/trait atlantique, statistics/statistiques.