

With Pride and Purpose

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Friday, 19 May, 1769—I AM FRANCIS BARE,^{1 2} the captain of the *Dembia*, a proud and sturdy brigantine. We are docked in the bustling, if not chaotic, port of Freetown, Sierra Leone, West Africa. We sail tomorrow at first light, destined for our blessed land, South Carolina, America.

From stem to stern, every available nook and cranny on and in my ship is blessed with a bountiful cargo, as a gift from our Loving God of Providence. On the maindeck, our cargo crates located aft are filled with coffee and cocoa. Included are a few bags of seeds for our coffee and cocoa plantations at Hanahan, a few miles north of Charleston. We have been delayed by one day because the crew had to rearrange the many crates onboard to provide sufficient clearance for the swing of the mainmast's boom, gooseneck side.

Below deck, our stowage of 292 slaves is shackled and calm. Thanks be to God, this is a record number for this shift! Our lumber team showed gallant fortitude in constructing shelves on the lower deck for an additional 130 slaves. Surely now, by His Grace and Favour, God will protect us for the long and treacherous sea voyage across the Atlantic.³

¹Source:

- <https://adverts250project.org/tag/david-and-john-deas/>
- <https://www.geni.com/people/John-Deas/323250126950006370>
- <https://www.geni.com/people/David-Deas/6000000019602669026>

Francis Bare was the master of the Brigantine *Dembia* merchant ship operating in the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

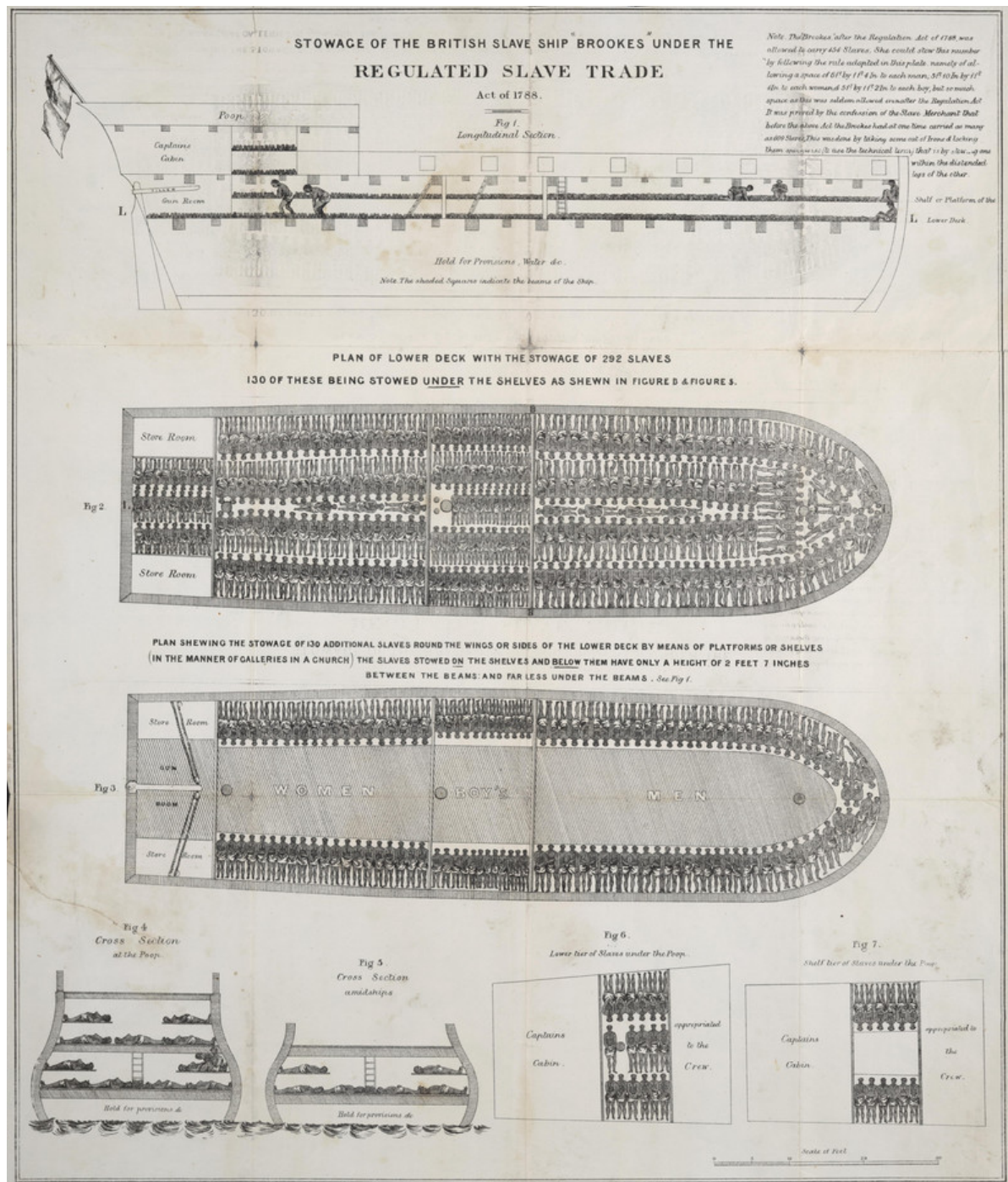
The *Dembia* brigantine ship was probably chartered or owned by the brothers David (1722–1775) and John (1735–1790) Deas. Operating from Charleston, South Carolina, they were for a time the third largest slave merchants in the mid-70s in America. John was a member of the Mason's Kilwinnig Lodge of Charleston.

²This essay was inspired by discussions in our *Rational Faith?* WhatsApp group. At the time of this writing, the members are (in alphabetical order): Anna, Daniel, Joy, Karen, Paul, Randall, Robyn, and Yvette. Thank you, *Rational Faith?*.

³Source:

- <http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3a34658/>

The schematic is actually of the stowage of the British slave ship *Brookes* under the regulated Slave Trade Act of 1788.



Wednesday, 31 May, 1769—It is with sadness that I was made to countenance an argument over dinner with the Dembia's First Naval Officer. We nearly came to blows! Verily I say, this shall be the first and last time the ship solicits the sextant skills of said Officer.

The Officer expressed outrage during dinner immediately after grace and thanksgiving for our harbouring 292 slaves on board. He claims he did not know. He discovered this yesterday while reclining in his cabin, located posteriorly on the gun deck. After he smelled foul wafts of effluent seeming to rise up from the floorboards, he chose to investigate. So he made his way to the lower deck, whereupon he came upon the stowage.

Using loud tones, he complained bitterly of the injustices being committed by this ship, and of the violation of the freedoms of the 292 people below. Of course, I reacted with concomitant and appropriate outrage. "How dare you raise your voice at me, your captain? You are not even a Christian. You are an Unbeliever," said I. "What right do you have to lecture your captain on the Ways and Purpose of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ?"

Of course, I was careful not to mention that eight slaves had already expired below deck. So he was therefore not entirely correct about the source of the foul effluent smell. The conditions below deck are a little cramped. The air is quite unsavoury. And the crew is only scheduled to unshackle the expired on 3rd June, which is three days away. So as my token of appeasement, I quickly arranged to have the Officer's sleeping quarters transferred from the gun deck to the maindeck.

Saturday, 3 June, 1769—THIS MORNING, an unexpectedly strong gust created a slight tear along the foot of the foremast's topsail. Nothing too serious. Morale onboard remains high. All hands are fully occupied.

Tomorrow shall be our second Sunday at sea. Owing to yesterday's fracas with the First Naval Officer, I spoke with the ship's Chaplain, one Rev Collins. Collins is a fine young fellow with polished manners. He said he would prepare an appropriate sermon for the morning service to be held on the maindeck, weather permitting.

Even out at sea, the crew expects Sunday to be a day of rest. Of course, apart from essential duties, I obliged, provided that Rev Collins' morning service received full attendance.

Sunday, 4 June, 1769—I ALWAYS LIKE to rise early, just before dawn. I like to survey the two rigs, the maindeck, the gun deck, and most of the berth deck, being careful to avoid the stairwell to the lower deck. Few of us need go there except to supply the daily water rations to the (292-12) slaves in stowage, to inspect the chains, and to perform the daily live head count. Four more slaves have expired since 31st May. Thankfully, so far, the expiry rate is within the expected range.

A brisk South Easter filled our two sail rigs with pride and purpose, and cast a lingering yet gentle spray across the maindeck. With pride and purpose. As I stood there, leaning against the port side rail, feeling that inevitable ebb and flow of the deck boards underfoot, with the enigmatic deep blue below, the spray, and the lightening expanse of sky above, I knew then and there that this, too, was my pride and purpose.

I also knew that this would be a good Sunday service.

The most sheltered point on deck is between the mast and foremast. Rev Collins had placed his mahogany pulpit with its polished ivory cross facing the early rising sun. I stood there, momentarily transfixed by the image of that cross. What an evocative emblem it is: a visual and compelling reminder of our Loving God's Gift of Grace, of life through death, of joy through suffering, of atonement through sacrifice. Of liberty through bondage.

Soon, our stowage of (292-13) slaves shall rejoice in their suffering as they begin to experience a promised land of genteel Christian values, far removed from the savage devil-worshipping iniquity in all of West Africa. Surely, their present discomforts will quickly fade, like a passing storm, like the hush of an audience. For they too shall likely discover God's relational love in their hearts, and that truly, we are all slaves in Christ.

Reverend Collins did not disappoint. As he read from the Holy Scriptures, he massaged its pages with facile aplomb and effect, causing them slowly to rise and fall like the wings of an albatross. He began with Genesis 9:18–27:

[...]And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren." And he said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant."

The reverend explained how Shem and Japheth's descendents became prosperous around the world. But Ham's descendents would become dark and physical in strength and posture; this in due fulfilment of their pre-destined subservience.

To dispel any possible lingering doubt in the pre-ordained purpose, mission and sanction of this ship, I am grateful for Rev Collins' recitation of and exposition on verses with which I am familiar. He recited Leviticus 25:39–41, 44–46, which clarifies the difference between slaves and hired servants, and that the keeping of slaves is right and acceptable in the eyes of our God.

Clearly, Rev Collins was prepared to countenance dissenting opinion brought about by that filthy so-called abolitionist movement which seems to be gaining some traction in the Old World, particularly in Britain. For he was quick to recite a few New Testament verses too, starting with Ephesians 6:5–9:

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in Heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Collins said that these verses clearly and convincingly legitimise the roles of slave and master in society. Then he read Titus 2:9–10:

Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive.

Paul, our great leader from Antiquity, offered good advice on the behaviour of slaves toward their masters. Reading Philemon 1:8–16, Collins elaborated how Paul, entreating Philemon to free the fugitive slave Onesimus, says nothing about any injustices being committed, to which our First Naval Office alluded recently!

He then read from 1 Corinthians 7:21–22:

Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you, although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave.

Methinks I might instruct Collins briefly to endure the conditions in the lower deck in order that he recite and explain these such verses to our slave cargo. Of course, he will need the help of Timothy Ndangomo, our ship interpreter.

Reverend Collins brought his sermon to a close by taking it back to the Old Testament, reading from Exodus 21:4–6:

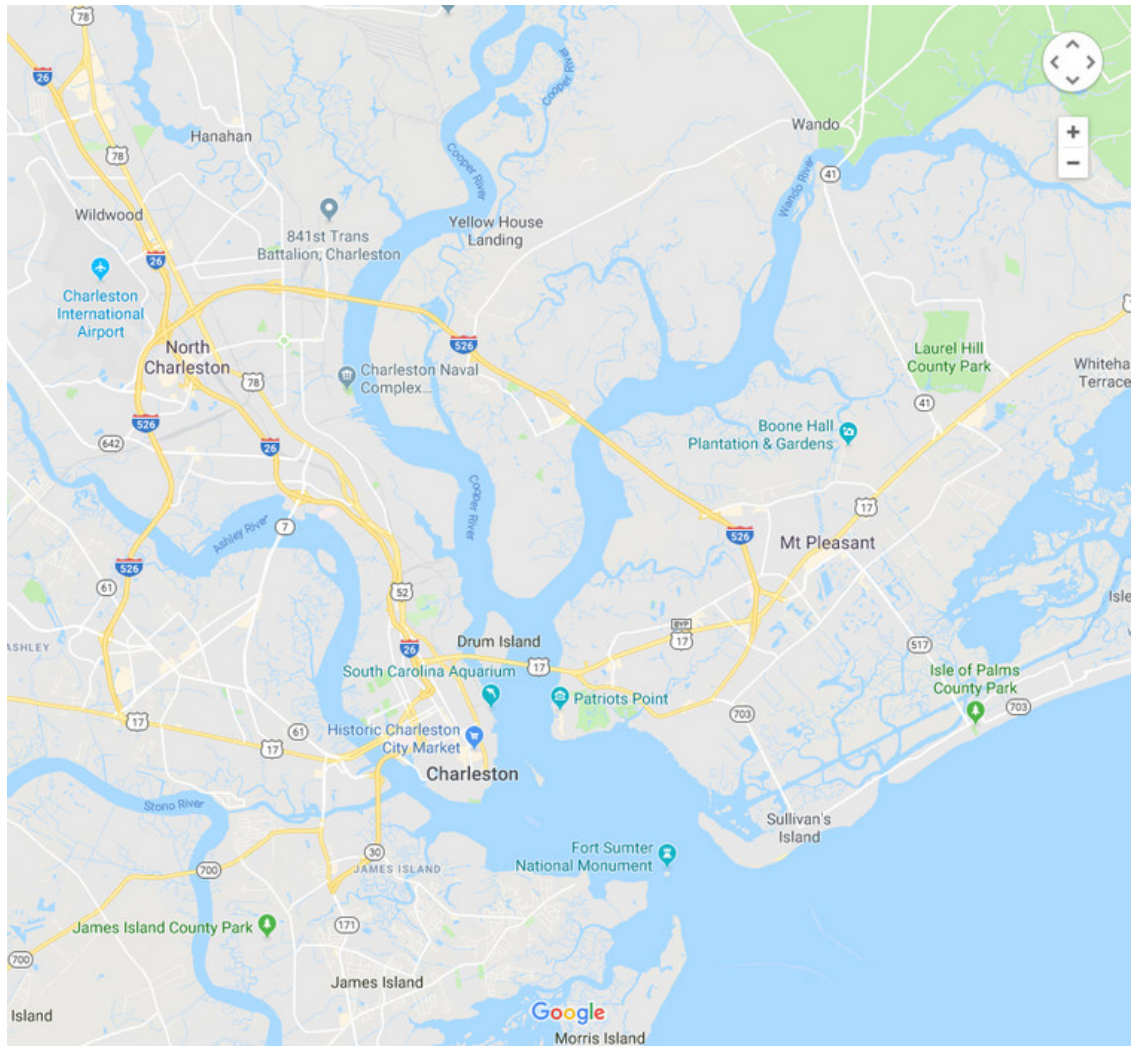
If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free. But if the servant declares, "I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free," then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.

This verse reminded me of home, South Carolina. For there, many slaves have taken the piercing sign in order to remain with their wife and children. Finally, by reciting Exodus 21:20–21, 26–27, 32, Collins reminded us that we as masters have a responsibility too. For the passage exhorts us not to beat a slave to death. We may beat our male and female slaves with a stick provided that it recovers after one or two days:

Anyone who beats their male or female slave with a rod must be punished if the slave dies as a direct result, but they are not to be punished if the slave recovers after a day or two, since the slave is their property. [...] If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave, and the bull is to be stoned to death.

As we were dispersing from the service area on the maindeck, I glanced over at the First Naval Officer. With his head bowed he seemed crestfallen. Perhaps he realised the folly and fault of his earlier outburst. Perhaps he had never been exposed to the fiat words of wisdom captured for posterity by God in His Word.

Thursday, 22 June, 1769—WE ARRIVED IN Charleston late last night. The crates of coffee and cocoa have already been unloaded without hitch. Our stowage of (292-33) slaves shall remain on board, below deck, awaiting clearance. On Monday 26th June, they shall be moved by horse-drawn carriage to our waypoint on Drum Island, where they shall receive substantial rationing. This is to prepare them for display at the Charleston City Market on Sullivan's Island, Thursday 3rd August.

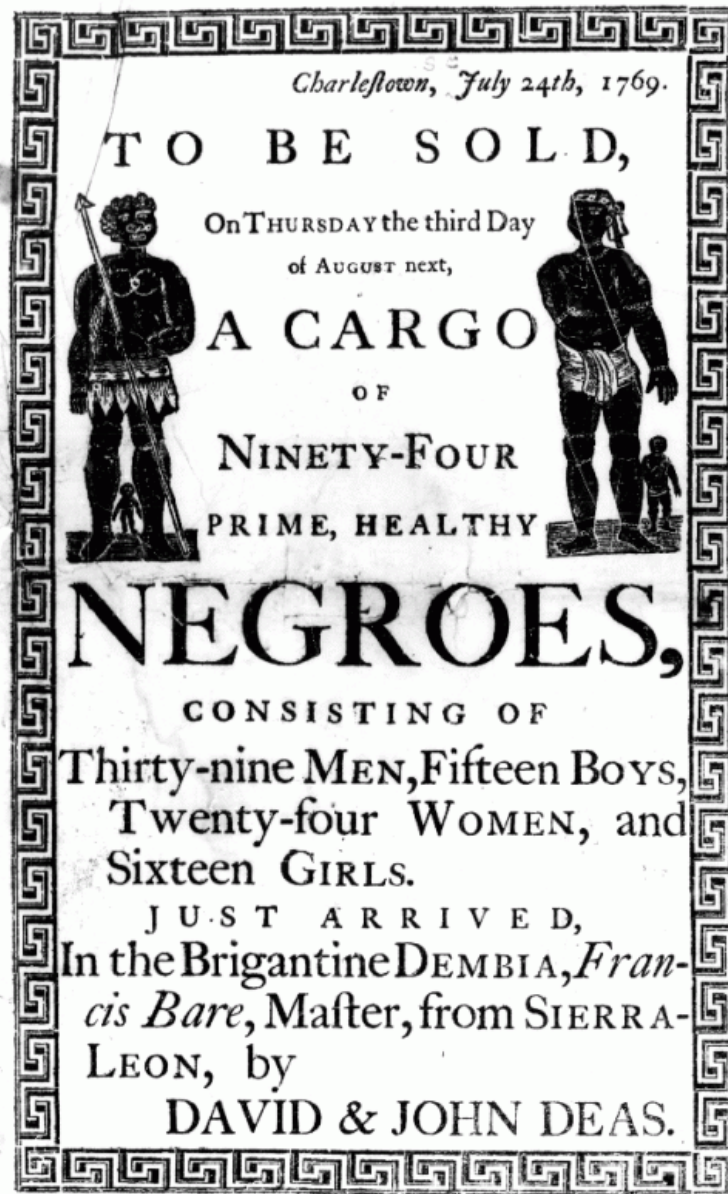


The office of John and David Deas in town has already been hard at work preparing for the big day. Here is a mock-up of the broadside to be on display a few days prior to market day.⁴

⁴Source:

— <https://advert250project.org/tag/david-and-john-deas/>

David and John Deas distributed infamous broadsides (what we would call posters today) such as this one, in Charleston, South Carolina, in the decade before the American Revolution. The broadsides depicting “PRIME, HEALTHY NEGROES” graphically reflect the treatment of Africans as mere tradeable commodities. As a modern viewer, these haunting images elicit a repulsing emotional response. But in the cultural milieu of the 1760s in the American south, this would not necessarily have been the case.



Sunday, 25 June, 1769—I DECIDED TO accept the invitation to attend a plenary church service organised by the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina. The ecclesiastical luminary, Bishop William Meade of Virginia,⁵ delivered a powerful sermon in which he clarified that our Loving God is using slavery to punish people for their sinful deeds committed, which deeds were never discovered earlier. He also said that God is actually pleased to have given us slaves here, and that our slaves must be well-behaved in this life in order to avoid Hell in the afterlife.

Bishop Meade echoed the insightful words of Bishop Stephen Elliott, that the Atlantic Slave Trade is being used by God to bring His salvation to West Africa, and to civilise the pagans there, teaching them self-control, obedience, perseverance, adaptability, and meekness.⁶

⁵Source:

- Jeffrey Robert Young (ed), *Proslavery and Sectional Thought in the Early South, 1740–1829: An Anthology*, ISBN-13: 978-1570036170, University of South Carolina Press, 2006. p. 198.
- Bird Wilson, *Memoir of the Life of the Rt. Rev. William Meade, Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of Pennsylvania...*, ISBN-13: 978-1271130788, Nabu Press, 2001. Notes: This is a reproduction of Johns and Sparrow's book published in 1867.
- John Johns (1796–1876) and William Sparrow (1801–1874), *A Memoir of the Life of the Right Rev. William Meade, D.D., Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Virginia*, Baltimore, Innes & company, 1867. Notes: Also available at <https://archive.org/details/memoiroflifeofri00john/page/n10>

⁶While the account of Francis Bare attending such a church service is fictitious, the existence of Bishop William Meade and the views reflected in his sermons and writings regarding slavery, and as articulated here, are real. So too are the views and writings of

The Right Reverend Bishop Meade was kind enough to have prepared a leaflet elaborating on his teachings today and on the writings of Bishop Elliott:⁷

The Right Reverend Bishop William Meade:

“[I]s it not possible you may have done some other bad thing which was never discovered, and that Almighty God, who saw you doing it, would not let you escape without punishment one time or another? And ought you not, in such a case, to give glory to him, and be thankful that he would rather punish you in this life for your wickedness than destroy your souls for it in the next life? But, suppose that even this was not the case (a case hardly to be imagined), and that you have by no means, known or unknown, deserved the correction you suffered; there is this great comfort in it, if you bear it patiently, and leave your cause in the hands of God, he will reward you for it in Heaven, and the punishment you suffer unjustly here shall turn to your exceeding great glory hereafter.

[...]

Almighty God hath been pleased to make you slaves here, and to give you nothing but labor and poverty in this world, which you are obliged to submit to, as it is his will that it should be so. And think within yourselves, what a terrible thing it would be, after all your labors and sufferings in this life, to be turned into Hell in the next life, and, after wearing out your bodies in service here, to go into a far worse slavery when this is over, and your poor souls be delivered over into the possession of the devil, to become his slaves forever in Hell, without any hope of ever getting free from it! If, therefore, you would be God’s freemen in Heaven, you must strive to be good, and serve him on earth. Your bodies, you know, are not your own; they are at the disposal of those you belong to; but your precious souls are still your own, which nothing can take from you, if it be not your own fault.”

The Right Reverend Bishop Stephen Elliott:

“We can find that interest only in the institution of slavery which was the immediate cause of this revolution. We can find the sin only in that presumptuous interference with the will and ways of God, which coalesced rapidly with infidelity, and ended in a bold defiance of the Word of God.

[...]

If we examine the religious condition of the world we will perceive that Christian influences are steadily at work every where else except in Africa. Europe is Christian in its entire length and breadth. America has been re-peopled altogether from Christian nations, and the cross is adored over all her wide area, save where the rapidly expiring Indian tribes yet break its continuity. England, France, and Russia are fast casting over Asia the spell of their vast political power, and the old worship of Brahma and the moral teachings of Confucius and the imposture of Mohammed are tottering to their fall. Australia is peopling under the auspices of Great Britain, and wherever she goes, her Church goes with her. Africa alone is uninfluenced by Christianity, and whence is that influence to proceed?

[...]

How, then, is that dark spot upon the world’s surface to be enlightened? Who is to pierce those pestilential regions and preach the everlasting Gospel? [...] The indomitable missionaries of the Moravian Church have tried it until Sierra Leone has been a very Golgotha to them.

[...]

We are driven to look for some agency which shall be able, through national affinities, through

Bishop Stephen Elliott as articulated here real. Indeed, the views and writings of both clergymen came at a much later time when slave trading had already been outlawed, and when Christian moral support for slavery was declining.

⁷Source:

- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *A Key to “Uncle Tom’s Cabin;” presenting the original facts and documents upon which the story is founded*, ISBN: 1-557094934, John P. Jewett & Co. of Boston and Jewett, Proctor & Worthington of Cleveland, Ohio, and Low & Company of London. 1853. p. 249. Notes: This source contains some of the writings of Bishop William Meade (1789–1862).
- Stephen Elliott, Bishop of the Diocese of Georgia, “Our Cause in Harmony with the Purposes of God in Christ Jesus. A Sermon Preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on Thursday, 18th September, 1862”, Academic Affairs Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000. Retrieved on 16 April 2019 from <https://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/elliott5/elliott5.html>

In September 1862, as the presiding Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America, Stephen Elliott (1806–1866) delivered a sermon, extracts of which are included in the main body of this essay. The American Civil War (1861–1865) had already begun.

a like physiological structure, through a oneness of blood and of race, to bear the burden of this work, and ultimately, in God's own time, to plant the gospel in their Father-land, after they themselves shall have been prepared, through a proper discipline, for the performance of this duty. And I find this agency in the African slaves now dwelling upon this Continent and educating among ourselves.[...] [A]nd it is this conviction, and not any merit in ourselves, which makes me confident that we shall be safely preserved through this conflict.

[...]

He has caused the African race to be planted here under our political protection and under our Christian nurture, for His own ultimate designs, and He will keep it here under that culture until the fullness of His own times, and any people which strives against this divine arrangement will find that it is running against the thick bosses of Jehovah's buckler. Those who have looked at slavery superficially, have permitted themselves to be moved away from scriptural decrees by such trivial things as are the necessary accompaniments of all bondage, and have rashly yielded to their sensibilities the conclusions which ought to be drawn exclusively from the Word of God."



I felt proud to be a part of God's Plan for ensuring His justice prevails while bringing the Good News and a new sense of civility to the pagans in Africa. I heard that quiet inner voice recite for me Acts 1:8:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Through his Holy Spirit, God works in mysterious ways!



The transatlantic slave trade began in the late 15th century, and came to an end with the defeat of the Confederacy in the American Civil War in 1865, thus spanning a period of about 400 years. During this time, the size of the trade increased exponentially, until its decline after being outlawed by the British Parliament in 1807 and the US Congress in 1808. Complicity was deep. African leaders stationed in Africa, commercial shippers in Europe and in the US, governments, private landowners, and Protestant Christianity were all complicit in the illicit trade. William Wilberforce (1759–1833) and Thomas Clarkson (1760–1846) were two influential British abolitionists.