

1713-1744. Miscellaneous Documents about Slavery from British America

Source: E. Donnan (1932/1969). *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*. NY: Octagon, v. III, 445-450.

Sugar cane production in the Caribbean using the labor of enslaved Africans was so profitable that West Indian planters preferred to assign maximum acreage to the crop while importing food. New York merchants were an important part of a trade network that brought unfree workers from Africa and exchanged mainland products for rum and molasses. By 1720, half the ships leaving the port of New York were engaged in the Caribbean trade. Another one-fourth to one-third of the ships were involved in the coastal trade transporting goods that would eventually end up in the West Indies.

Other industries grew as a result of the Caribbean trade. It stimulated farm production in the New York colony and with it the local demand for African slaves. Large farms such as Morrisana in Westchester County (now the Bronx) were modeled on southern and Caribbean plantations. Nicholas Bayard, the Livingstons, Roosevelts, Van Cortlandts and the Rhinelanders all operated sugar refineries and more than a dozen distilleries were turning molasses into rum. The port also became a major center for shipbuilding. Source: Burrows, E. and Wallace, M. (1999). *Gotham, A History of New York City to 1898*. NY: Oxford, 120, 122-123.

1713. The Solicitor General To The Board Of Trade, December 22, 1713.

As to the Act for laying a duty on negroes, wine, rum and other, spirits, cyder and vessels, Tho' this Act will expire March 10th, 1713; yet I submit to yr. Lordship's consideration how far it may be proper for them at Pennsylvania to lay a duty on negroes, wine, rum all shipping, etc. and how far it may affect His majesty's subjects here of which your Lordship are most proper judges

1723. News Item Relating To Slave Trade, 1723. Philadelphia, August 29 [1723].

By Capt. Stockin who arrived here last Week from Barbadoes, we have advice that a Sloop, belonging to New York, was arrived there from Guinea, and that the Captain died on that Coast. And that the Sloop was hired to go down to Jamaica with Slaves.

1726. Governor Burnet To The Board Of Trade. New York, 20 December, 1726.

My Lords, . . . I send your Lordships herewith an account of Negroes imported to New York since 1700, which is all that could be found. There are bonds here in the Custom House for those that came directly from Africa, but no Agent of that Company has been of late appointed to demand their dues, which possibly it may be a favour in your Lordships to let the Directors of that Company know, that they may employ some body to demand their ten pr. Cent. If I get the account from East New Jersey before this vessel sails, I will likewise enclose it. There are few Negroes, if any, imported in West New Jersey, but it is not possible for me to get an account from thence to be sent by this opportunity; but I shall obtain it as soon as can be I have just received an account of Negroes from the Collector of Amboy, Which I likewise enclose to Your Lordships. . . .

1731. President Van Dam to the Board of Trade. NEW YORK, 2d November 1731.

An Act to explain part of an Act, entitled, an Act to repeal some parts and to continue and enforce other parts of the Act therein mentioned and for granting several duties to His Majesty for supporting his Govern't in the Colony of New York from the 1st day of September 1728. until the 1st day of Sept'r which will be in the year 1733.

The reason I had My Lords for the passing of this Act, I humbly beg leave to explain, and were these: a Ship belonging to this Colony with a considerable number of Negroes on Board her, in her voyage from Africa, touched at Antegua to purchase some provisions and Refreshments but landed none of her Slaves there, and then came to the Province of New Jersey, where there is no duty paid for any Slaves imported, but the owner of the vessel being desirous to import the greatest part of them into this province, if he might be allowed to pay only the duty of five ounces of plate for every head, which seemed to be a doubt in the Act for the settling the Revenue above mentioned being, it was said the ship did not come directly

from Africa altho' the intention of the Legislature in that former Act was only to encourage the African Trade and so laid a double duty on slaves imported here from the West Indies, which are generally Refuse and very badd and could hardly be applicable to such slaves coming from Africa and had been nowhere landed although the ship had stop't at some other Port for refreshment before she arrived here; I therefore considered that if I did not pass that Law, none of the Slaves would have been brought hither which would have been a considerable loss to the Revenue and might have encouraged the bringing them in clandestinely, whereby the duty would have been defrauded; so that nothing but these considerations made me consent to that Law. . .

1735. The Board of Trade to The Privy Council.

To the Rt. Hon'ble the Lords of the Committee of His Majesty's most Hon'ble Privy Council

We have considered the humble petition of the Merchants and Traders of the City of Bristol, whose names are thereunto subscribed, refer'd to us by Your Lordships on the 1st day of November 1734 complaining of an Act pass'd in His Majesty's Province of New York intituled, "An Act to repeal the Act and to cancel the Bills of Credit therein mentioned, and grant unto His Majesty several duties for supporting His Majesty's Government in the Colony of New York until the first day of September which will be in the year 1737."

We have been attended upon this occasion by the Agent for the Petitioners and have heard what he had to offer in support of their petition and having considered the said Act and taken the advice of Mr. Fane one of His Majesty's Council at Law thereupon we take leave upon the whole to observe to your Lordships that by the following Clauses of this Act it is provided that there shall be paid to his Majesty for every slave (male or female) "of four years of age and upwards, imported directly from Africa, the quantity of five ounces of Sevil Pillar or Mexico Plate, or forty shill: in Bills of Credit made current in this Colony.

For every Negro, Mulatto or Indian Slave (male or female) of four years of age and upwards imported from all other places by land or water, the sum of four pounds in like money. . . . As these clauses are greatly prejudicial to the Trade and Navigation of this Kingdom, and are likewise expressly contrary to His Majesty's Instructions to the Govr of New York, by which he is directed not to pass any Act for imposing Duties upon Negroes payable by the Importer, or whereby the Trade or Navigation of this Kingdom might be any ways affected, unless a clause be inserted in such Act for suspending the execution thereof 'till his Majesty's pleasure should be known concerning the same, we should for these reasons propose to Your Lordships that the Act in question might be laid before His Majesty for his Disallowance.

But considering the Inconveniences and Confusion that might arise in the province of New York if this Act which settles fund for the support of His Majesty's Government there should be repealed before other provisions are made for the same purposes, we therefore humbly propose that this Act may be suffered to ly by for the present, and that orders may be immediately sent to His Majesty's Govr of New York to move the Council and Assembly of that Province forthwith to pass a New Law for repealing the three foregoing clauses and for providing and settling other Funds for the like purposes not liable to the same objections.

We take leave to transmit to Your Lordships the Draught of such an Instruction as we have prepared upon these heads for the Govr of New York, which, if Your Lordships should approve it, may be immediately sent to him. But if the Council and Assembly of New York shall refuse to comply with this Instruction, we should then propose that the Act in question may be laid before His Majesty for his Disallowance. WHITEHALL August the 6th 1735

1735. Additional Instructions to Governor Cosby, 1735. (WHITEHALL, August 6, 1735)

Whereas several Merchants and Traders of Our City of Bristol have most humbly petitioned us complaining of an Act pass'd in our Province of New York entitled "An Act to repeal the Act and to cancel the Bills of Credit therein mentioned and to grant unto his majesty several Duties for supporting His Majesty's Government in the Colony of New York until the 1st day of Sep'r which will be in the year

1737," laying a Duty of five ounces of Plate or 40s current money of New York upon every slave (male and female) of four years of age or upwards imported directly from Africa and four pound like money upon every slave of the same age from any other place for all European or East India Goods Imported with proper certificates from the British Islands in the West Indies, the sum of five pounds in like money for every lb100 value prime Cost which Act having been examined by our Commissrs for Trade and Plantations is found to be directly contrary to the 18th Article of Your Instructions, whereby you are expressly forbid to pass any law by which the trade or Navigation of this Kingdom may be any way affected declaring it to be our Royal Intention that no Duties shall be laid in the province under your Government upon British shipping or upon the Produce of Manufactures of Great Britain upon any pretence whatsoever. It is therefore Our Express will and pleasure that you move our Council and Assembly of our said Province forthwith to pass a New Law for repealing the three foregoing Clauses and for providing and settling other Funds for the like purposes not liable to the same objections, or at least that an Exception be made in favour of all Goods whatsoever of the Product or Manufacture of Great Britain; and that not Duty be laid on any Slave Imported payable by the Importer, and you are also to signify our Royal Intention to our Council and the Assembly of our said Province that if they do not immediately comply with this our Instruction we shall repeal the Act now complained of.

1744. The Council of New Jersey to Governor Lewis M 1744. 8th December 1744

Sir, . . . The next Bill rejected by the Council, was, A Bill for laying a Duty on Indian, Negroe, and Mulatto slaves, imported into this Colony.

This Bill the Council considered abstractedly from any Instructions your Excellency has in relation to the African Company, which many of the Gentlemen of the Assembly we suppose are not unacquainted with, and only weighed the Advantages and Disadvantages that would arise to the People of this Colony upon that Bill's passing into a Law. By that Bill was plainly intended an intire Prohibition of all Slaves being imported from foreign Parts, no less than a Duty of Ten Pounds being imposed on all grown Slaves imported from the West Indies, and Five Pounds on all those directly imported from Africa. Upon the most mature Consideration the Council were of Opinion, that if that Bill, or any other Bill, discouraging the Importation of Slaves, should at this time pass into a Law, the People of this Province in general (a few Labourers only excepted) and the Farmers in particular, would be great Sufferers by it, and that for the following Reasons.

It is well Known, that a great Number of Labourers went out of this Province on the late Expedition to the West Indies, and that very few of them have returned; That many, for some Time past, have been going, and still are going, on the Privateering Account; by which Means Labourers Wages are become very high, and the Farmers, Trading-Men and Tradesmen, are greatly straitened for want of Labourers to carry on their Business.

It is also well Known, that since the Manufacture of Linens has arrived to any tolerable Perfection in Ireland, we have had very few Servants or Labourers from that Island, and have no Reason to expect many for the Time to come.

The present War throughout the German Dominions, and between almost all the Powers on the Continent of Europe, give us Reason to expect no assistance from the Quarter. And as our Sovereign is deeply engaged in a war with many powerful Princes we have as little Reason to expect any Number of Servants from the Island of Great Britain. Wherefore we conceive, that it would be more for the Interest of the People of this Colony to encourage at this Time the Importation of Slaves, than by a Law to prohibit them altogether, and therefore we rejected that Bill.