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The U.S. slave ship *Ascension* in the Río de la Plata: slave routes and circuits of silver in the late eighteenth-century Atlantic and beyond

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From 1777 to 1812, slave ships carried nearly 70,000 captives to the Río de la Plata; however, the main slave routes leading to Buenos Aires and Montevideo did not depart from Africa. The traffic direct from Africa accounted for 28,000 slaves whereas 42,000 captives were embarked in Brazil to sail south to these two ports (Borucki 2015, 25–56). In that same period, 162 transatlantic slave voyages arrived in the Río de la Plata, out of which shippers from the United States conducted at least 54 Atlantic crossings.[1] Although it only lasted from 1798 to 1809, the direct-from-Africa U.S. slave trade to the Río de la Plata was very active. This traffic was one of the main branches of commerce for U.S. merchants in this region, as Fabrício Prado reveals that out of a total 167 U.S. vessels arriving in the Río de la Plata between 1798 and 1807, at least 56 (or 33 percent) were bringing African captives (Prado forthcoming, Table 1).

This article follows the voyage of the slave ship *Ascension*, the first of these U.S. vessels bringing slaves to Buenos Aires and Montevideo, in order to explain the formation of networks between U.S. and Rioplatense merchants and the centrality of silver as means of legal and illegal exchanges. Thus, it examines the presence of U.S. shippers as new players in late-colonial Latin America, especially in the Rio de la Plata and to a lesser extent in Brazil, the demographic and commercial force of the South Atlantic slave trade beyond Brazil (extending to Mozambique and the Indian Ocean) and thus focusing on slave arrivals in Spanish colonies, and finally, the global implications of Andean silver and internal Spanish American markets for East Asian trade at the expense of enslaved Africans. The case of these U.S. slave ships in the Río de la Plata reveals unaccounted exports of silver as a result of slave sales and the significance of slave trading in comparison with the overall commerce of this region. By following Spanish American silver, this article also charts the implications of this slave route beyond the Río de la Plata, in world trade connecting New England, Mozambique, and East Asia.[2] Captives from Mozambique were not new to Atlantic slaving, but these U.S. slave traders were stepping into a new world of Indian Ocean commerce through their presence in Mozambique and the Mascarene Islands, which they considered as a gateway to Asia.

In 1795, the ship *Ascension*, which carried 208 tons and was owned by Caleb Gardner, Peleg Clarke, William Vernon (all from Newport, Rhode Island) and Samuel Brown

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(from Boston), departed from Newport in order to conduct slave voyages in the Southern Hemisphere.[3] Captained by Samuel Chace, the *Ascension* was one of the first specialized slave vessels bringing captives from Mozambique to the Río de la Plata in 1798.[4] This voyage opened a decade in which Mozambique became the most important area of direct African slave embarkation for Buenos Aires and Montevideo, and in which U.S. shippers became significant for the direct traffic between Africa and these ports. U.S. traders brought more captives direct from Africa to the Río de la Plata (rather than indirectly via Brazil) than any other nation did between 1777 and 1812, when the 250-year old slave traffic to the Río de la Plata peaked.[5]

The commercial strategies of Tomás Antonio Romero, the most important slave trader and one of the main merchants of the Río de la Plata, illustrate the significance of the voyage of the *Ascension*. Romero introduced more than 3,000 slaves to Buenos Aires and Montevideo between 1792 and 1799, of whom 2,000 came from Brazilian ports. He also introduced 3,000 captives in the decade following 1800, but by contrast, most of them were brought directly from Africa by U.S. ships rather than via Brazil.[6] After Romero bought the captives of the *Ascension* in 1798, his slave trading activities largely involved U.S. transatlantic shippers embarking captives in Mozambique rather than trade with Brazil. Some advantages offered by U.S. merchants to Romero in relation to the exchange of silver and the use of this neutral shipping during wartime made him change his commercial strategies and brought U.S. slavers to this region as never before.

Letters between the main owner of the ship, William Vernon, and Captain Samuel Chace, Spanish records from the Río de la Plata, and port registers from Rio de Janeiro and Mozambique profusely document the itinerary of the *Ascension* and make this case unique for illustrating the various degrees of legal and illegal commerce. They disclose the strategies of merchants of the Río de la Plata and Rhode Island to increase profits by avoiding regulations of both the Spanish colonial treasury and the U.S. Federal law. According to Spanish records, after the crew disembarked the enslaved Africans, the *Ascension* sailed out of Montevideo with jerked beef intended for sale in Havana. The salted meats allegedly had been the means of payment for the slaves. However, Romero and Chace owned the jerked beef, which was actually on consignment. Letters between Chace and Vernon reveal that the captives had been sold for Spanish pesos (the basis of U.S. dollars and the main currency of transoceanic commerce).[7] The silver was embarked in the *Ascension* outside of Spanish registers and without paying taxes. Illegality was also on the U.S. side because the slave trade was illegal in Rhode Island. Chace left the slaves unmentioned in the ship's logbook because of the 1794 Slave Trade Act prohibiting U.S. shippers to outfit slave vessels to other countries. While the entrance of silver was free of taxes in the United States, the origin of this silver was illegal and thus was covered under non-slave commerce, which U.S. traders carried on profusely with the Caribbean as well as with other regions. Private merchant correspondence reveals important strategies left outside of official registers, such as the smuggling of silver from Chile to Buenos Aires to board it on U.S. slave ships, as shown in the second section.

Merchants from the Río de la Plata exported cattle hides and jerked beef on consignment in U.S. ships, under the pretense that this was the result of slave sales and thus they obtained tax exceptions that the Spanish Crown granted to slave traders.[8] U.S. shippers profited from selling freight services to Rioplatense merchants by carrying hides and

jerked beef on consignment, and benefitted from bringing to the United States silver payments from slave sales, seemingly invisible for Spanish authorities and illegal according to U.S. federal law. Ultimately, these U.S. merchants used Spanish American silver pesos in the Indian Ocean, and particularly East Asia, as silver was almost the only means of payment for Chinese exports, as shown in the third section of this essay.

This story also exemplifies a switch of U.S. slave routes, mainly disembarking captives in the British Caribbean before the U.S. Revolutionary War, to both transatlantic and intra-American commerce bringing captives to the Spanish colonies after the war. While 300 U.S.-based slave ships brought enslaved Africans to the British Caribbean before 1776, only a dozen did it after independence, when U.S. merchants were denied rights to trade in British colonial ports, which led them, often, to bring captives to Cuba (Eltis 2008).[9] The Vernons of Newport, who were among the U.S. merchants with the longest engagement in the slave trade in the eighteenth century and the owners of the *Ascension*, followed this pattern. They traded in both commodities and captives with the British Caribbean (alongside some contraband and privateering), with the mainland British colonies, and to a lesser extent with Britain (sugar), Lisbon (rice), and Amsterdam (coffee) before the Revolutionary War.[10] After this conflict, they conducted slave voyages to Cuba and to other non-British islands as their commerce with the British Caribbean dwindled. In the 1780s, they named one ship *Don Galvez* in honor of Bernardo de Gálvez, the leader of the Spanish forces who fought the British in the Gulf Coast and later became Viceroy of New Spain, perhaps hoping this name would spell a warm welcome in Havana. While the Vernons still traded directly with Britain, they increased operations in Bordeaux for their European neutral trade connecting French ports in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean.[11] They continued commerce with the Netherlands (as the voyage of the *Ascension* attests) and Lisbon, and they began trading in Bilbao.[12]

At the end of the eighteenth century the United States emerged as a very active maritime commercial entity, when trade served particularly the U.S. financial sector in the two decades before 1812, as examined in the third section. Silver was essential for trade with Asia, of course, but also as a source of liquidity for increasingly complex financial instruments. In world trade, the main avenue to obtain silver meant commerce with Spain and her colonies. U.S. neutrality in the Napoleonic Wars was key, as seen next, for the timing of the entrance of U.S. shippers in Spanish America. During wartime, U.S. merchants provided shipping services and connected Spanish colonies with each other and with Spain, and beyond. Note that the last leg of the itinerary of the *Ascencion* intended to bring Rioplatense jerked beef to Cuba. Shippers from the United States inserted themselves in already existing commercial circuits in the Spanish colonies and Brazil, and thus they gained the trust of local merchants by tapping internal markets and connecting coastal trade with long-distance commerce.[13] Cuba was key for U.S. shippers in logistical and financial terms across the hemisphere, given that they exchanged bills of sale of different Spanish colonies in Havana on their way back to the United States, as shown in the second section. And of course, the Cuban slave trade was another source of silver for U.S. merchants before the 1810s, as seen in the conclusion.

The voyage of the *Ascension* took place in an era when the slave trade and neutral commerce exponentially increased the entrance of shippers from the United States in the Spanish colonies. After the Spanish Crown liberalized and opened the slave trade

in the colonies to Spaniards and foreigners in 1789, then expanding this measure in 1791, the Vernons of Newport were among the first U.S. merchants organizing slave voyages to Cuba, given that they sent the *Ascension* twice, as well as other ships, in the early 1790s.[14] In 1796, war between Britain and the Franco-Spanish alliance endangered Spanish Atlantic commerce in Spanish bottoms. To bypass the British Navy and privateers, the Spanish Crown authorized colonial trade with neutral powers in 1797. With some interruptions, and depending on each colony, this neutral commerce lasted intermittently from 1797 to 1808—when Spain allied with Britain against France (Stein and Stein 2009). In these years Havana became a hub of neutral commerce directed to Veracruz—the gateway to the largest consumer market in the Americas, Mexico.[15]

While the merchants and mariners of the *Ascension* developed a new slave route in which U.S. ships brought captives from Mozambique to the Río de la Plata and funneled silver outside of the Spanish Americas, these commercial strategies were not new, but the continuation of trade internal to the Americas that grew in the era of U.S. neutrality. Trade with foreigners (non-Spanish) siphoned silver from Havana and Veracruz (among other places) before the Seven Years' War, when merchants from what later became the United States and British Caribbean traders (both under the British flag then) engaged in multilateral slave voyages connecting the British, Spanish, and French Caribbean ports (O'Malley 2014, 291–336). This followed a pattern of the non-slave commerce, as Adrian Pearce illustrates, given that in the second half of the eighteenth century the value of the British overall trade to the Spanish colonies was three or four times bigger than previously thought, at least six percent of all British exports (Pearce 2014, 230–50, in particular 248). This was not direct commerce in the Spanish colonies but via Jamaica and Dominica after 1766, when Spanish American merchants travelled to these islands to trade. While Spanish American merchants carried most of this intra-Caribbean trade, U.S. shippers became major intermediates during wartime.[16] Beginning in the 1790s, a Spanish policy of ports more open for foreigners and a U.S. policy of neutral carrying led to merchants' capitalization of growing opportunities across borders that accounted for an increase of commerce and a reconfiguration of trading routes. For the era of neutral trade, Javier Cuenca-Esteban complements Pearce's work by calculating an even larger British trade with the Spanish colonies via U.S. shipping.[17] The larger U.S. trade and shipping services in Spanish America, which included the U.S. slave voyages to the Río de la Plata, was the main conduit through which merchants from the United States siphoned silver from the Spanish colonies. This illustrates their 'pressing need to maximize commercial returns in silver to finance their worldwide multilateral trade' (Cuenca-Esteban 2014, 67).

Merchants from the United States not only were active middlemen between Spanish America and Europe, but also they brought Spanish American silver to Asia. U.S. merchants, collectively, benefitted *twice* from this global connection, as they had the upper hand in the traffic of captives vis-à-vis the Spanish American (and Spanish) merchants who lacked regular contacts with Africa in the late eighteenth century *and* in relation to merchants of the Indian Ocean and China who lacked direct exchanges with the sources of silver other than the commerce with the Philippines.[18] Indeed, U.S. merchants became the main suppliers of silver to China from the late 1790s to the 1820s (Irigoin 2009, 209–11). The sale of captive Africans in the Spanish colonies was one of the ways in which U.S. merchants extracted silver pesos without metropolitan Spanish

intermediation and employed these coins outside the Atlantic in their exchanges in the Indian Ocean and East Asia.

The itinerary of the Ascension

The Vernons envisioned profits from the slave trade to Latin America given that they sent many vessels to Cuba, the ship *Don Galvez* to Cartagena in 1792, and the *Ascension* in 1795 initially intended for Brazil.[19] While the voyage of the *Ascension* was planned, Chace departed from these guidelines and improvised the final itinerary that disembarked captives in Montevideo. Indeed, this voyage exemplifies the haphazard way Yankee slave traders got involved in the commerce of the Río de la Plata. In 1795, William Vernon instructed Captain Chace to sail to Mozambique in the *Ascension* to embark slaves to be sold in Brazil. Vernon suggested conducting a mock sale of the ship to a Portuguese merchant to allow trade in Rio, if necessary, given that Portuguese authorities prohibited entrance of foreign ships.[20] Then, Chace was instructed to sail again to Mozambique. Vernon recommended Chace to pass the Cape of Good Hope in November on his way back to Mozambique to embark another group of captives, this time with the intention of selling these Africans in Georgia. He suggested that Chace sail back to North America before May, the beginning of winter in the Southern hemisphere, probably to avoid high mortality associated with conducting a lengthy slave voyage in winter. Given that this was the Vernons' first attempt to sell captive Africans in the South Atlantic, they gave leeway to Chace to accommodate unexpected circumstances.[21]

The final itinerary of the *Ascension* differed prominently from these plans, as Chace traded coffee between the Mascarene Islands and Europe, and as he later disembarked slaves in Spanish Montevideo. After departure from Newport in November 1795, the ship sailed to Ile de France (Mauritius) in the Indian Ocean, where Chace sold New England products (rum, beef, pork and salmon) and left 8,000 Spanish silver dollars (pesos from previous trade in Cuba) in exchange for coffee.[22] After departing Ile de France, the *Ascension* sold the cargo in the main European coffee distribution center, Rotterdam. Coffee prices peaked in the 1790s, when slave rebellions and abolition engulfed the main coffee-producer for North Atlantic markets, Saint-Domingue. In Rotterdam, the ship underwent repairs and embarked Dutch gin and European foodstuff in October 1796.[23] The vessel crossed the Atlantic to reach Rio de Janeiro in April 1797, to resume slave-trading plans. The *Ascension* docked in Rio despite Portuguese bans against foreign vessels. Local authorities reported that the ship had entered port because of problems with a mast and lack of provisions, which of course was a complete ruse.[24] Chace reported to Vernon bad market conditions in Rio.[25] The best contact that Chace made in Rio was a Portuguese merchant based in Mozambique named 'Mr. Montave,' who offered to buy the *Ascension* if Chace could deliver the ship there, an offer that evinces the need for ships for the Mozambique-based slave trade to Rio de Janeiro.[26] The ten-day stopover in Rio testifies to Chace's inability to make trustworthy local connections, proof that the slave trade to Rio de Janeiro was a Luso-African-Brazilian *only* commercial circuit. He sold a small part of the cargo in order to buy wooden planks, possibly intended to mount lower decks to intern slaves, and then sailed to Mozambique.

After a stop in Ile de France, where Chace sold most of the European foodstuffs and Dutch gin, the *Ascension* reached Mozambique in July 1797. There he bought 283 enslaved Africans

in 23 days, a very expeditious pace for gathering a sizeable group.[27] These Yao and Makua captives (the predominant groups sent from Mozambique to the markets in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans) were overwhelmingly male: 130 men, 107 boys (younger than 13 years or shorter than four feet four inches), 31 women, and 15 girls. This age and gender distribution corresponds with the patterns of nineteenth-century slave arrivals in the Americas, when men and boys were overrepresented in relation to the typical ratio of two men per one woman in the history of this traffic.[28] Chace paid 13,821.5 Spanish pesos (including duties) for the captives.[29] This amount is similar to the sum paid by Chace ($14,790) for coffee in Ile de France the previous year, proof of the range of capital he was able to commit whether in goods or captives.

The *Ascension* departed from Mozambique on 10 August and that same day Chace discovered an outbreak of smallpox, which led him to vaccinate both crew and slaves.[30] He sailed northwards to the Seychelles and landed in the uninhabited island of La Digue, where everybody began to quarantine on 28 August. By 27 September, smallpox had disappeared without mortality, which prompted Chace to order the crew and slaves to get ready for embarkation.[31] The *Ascension* returned to Mozambique for provisions in mid-October 1797, where Chace sold thirty-three Africans to an English captain heading for Cape Town. This captain told Chace that captives commanded high prices in the Cape, which had been recently occupied by the British. As communications warning about the *Ascension* carrying smallpox reached Ile de France, a slave market close to Mozambique, Chace decided instead to sail to Cape Town to sell the captives there.

On 7 November 1797, three days after the *Ascension*'s second departure from Mozambique, the slaves rebelled. Chace only let Vernon know, laconically, that the crew had quelled the revolt by shooting six Africans and that no crewmen had been injured. Most rebellions in slave ships in the history of this traffic took place while captives still could see the African littoral. Thus, the captives of the *Ascension* were in the extraordinary position of knowing *both* the ship and the crew during the previous three months *and* coming back to the same place of embarkation from where they would have recognized how to get back to their homelands. But their rebellion was unsuccessful, as the *Ascension* arrived in early December in Cape Town.[32]

Chace was unable to sell the captives in the Cape because the British forbade foreigners from doing so and thus he changed plans again, this time definitively.[33] In Cape Town, Chace met the Spanish captain Nemesio Palacios, who convinced him to sail to the Río de la Plata. Palacios had departed from Buenos Aires on 7 September 1796, commanding the ship *Nuestra Señora de la Guía*, to embark slaves in Mozambique, which he did. On his way back, a British Navy vessel captured his ship and took it to the Cape, where both ship and captives were condemned as enemy's property, given that Britain was at war with Spain.[34] Palacios was on the payroll of the ship-owner Tomás A. Romero, who later became the key merchant for U.S. slave traders in the Río de la Plata. Palacios assured Chace that he would be able to disembark slaves in Montevideo. He told Chace that he had Spanish passports for disembarkation, papers attesting that foreigners could sell slaves in Spanish colonial ports, and that Chace could embark freight in Montevideo for Havana, a hub of U.S. neutral trade. Ultimately the *Ascension* arrived in Montevideo on 29 January 1798, almost three months after the second

departure from Mozambique. Of the 250 captive Africans, thirty-three died onboard (some surely because of the rebellion) and four others after disembarkation.[35]

With the *Ascension* docked in Montevideo, Chace crossed to neighboring Buenos Aires, the capital of the viceroyalty, to organize the delivery of the Africans to Romero, clear the papers of the *Ascension*, and arrange freight for Cuba.[36] To avoid contraband charges on ivory brought by Chace, he conducted a sham sale of the ship to Romero.[37] According to documents submitted to Spanish colonial authorities, Romero was selling jerked beef in exchange for slaves, for which he received discounted export duties for products sold in slave sales. This royal policy was intended to promote slave trading by benefiting local merchants like Romero who were engaging in this traffic. Actually, Romero bought the captives with silver and bills of exchange of Havana, which left $42,810 to Chace. This was the main gain of the entire voyage for the owners of the *Ascension* (well beyond the sales of coffee and Dutch gin), and produced 30,000 pesos and, seemingly, a net benefit of some 15,000 dollars.[38]

Buenos Aires and Montevideo formed a system of ports serving the interior of the Río de la Plata and beyond, the markets from Chile to Peru, which meant that the ordeal of almost all of the Yao and Makua survivors of the *Ascension* continued after disembarkation. Only ten captives stayed in Montevideo, while four others remained in Buenos Aires. Almost all of these men, women, and children were divided into two groups. Romero put 130 Africans on consignment to José Requena in February 1798 to be sold in Lima, the capital of the viceroyalty of Peru and the main slave market in Spanish South America. The second group of about seventy-one captives was consigned to José Larramendi to be sold in territories from Salta (today's northern Argentina) to Potosí and southern Peru.[39] Price differences, the connection of markets, and the liquidity of silver facilitated this trade, as the captives of the *Ascension* commanded 240 pesos in Montevideo, 250 in Buenos Aires, an average of 370 in the interior of Upper Peru, while in Lima prices ranged from 400 to 500 pesos.[40]

Back in Montevideo, Chace discharged most of the crew since he now intended to conduct trade in Havana, without shipping slaves, on his way back to Newport.[41] However, the Spanish authorities brought charges against the arrival of captives in a U.S. vessel (this was the first U.S. slave ship in the region), the purchase of this vessel, and the introduction of ivory, all which delayed the departure of the *Ascension* for six months. After the viceroy dismissed the charges, the *Ascension* departed from Montevideo on 14 June 1798. Three-quarters of the hold was filled with jerked beef and tallow on behalf of Romero and one quarter with the same products on Chace's account.[42] Cattle hides were the main agricultural export of the Río de la Plata but trade in jerked beef and tallow was on the rise. Enslaved and free men and women worked in the cattle ranches of the countryside of Buenos Aires and Montevideo where they also processed salted meats (Garavaglia 2013). While jerked beef filled the hold of the *Ascension*, the main onboard valuables were in the form of silver pesos, which was the foremost export of the Spanish colonies to the metropolis, overwhelmingly, in terms of worth. Captive Africans performed various tasks in mining towns in the Andes, but they rarely extracted silver, which was mined by free and coerced indigenous workers (*mitayos*). Yet enslaved Africans were the main workers in the Potosí royal mint issuing the silver pesos embarked by the *Ascension*.[43]

While this slave voyage ended with the capture and confiscation of the *Ascension* by the British Navy in the Caribbean, most of the silver pesos made it safely to Newport. On 16 July 1798, on his way to Havana, at about the 12th parallel north of the equator Chace encountered the Nantucket whaler *Rebecca*, which was sailing to its home port. To avoid possible capture of a large sum, Chace transshipped to the whaler 18,000 pesos to be delivered to the Vernons. Four days later, the British man-of-war *Amphitrite* stopped the *Ascension* near Martinique. The British sent the *Ascension* to Dominica under the charge of being a Spanish vessel. Surprisingly, the British found the papers of the fake sale, which led the admiralty court to condemn both ship and cargo. Apart from Romero's and Chace's salted meats, the ship was carrying $6,000 in gold and silver, a promissory note from merchants of Ile de France for $4,100, and $5,000 in bills of Havana—all on Vernon's account. Part of the silver was condemned, but Chace hid the documents and the gold. The Vernons lost the ship (worth some $2,700) and nearly $4,000.[44]

Although the Vernons steered away from slave trading and the Río de la Plata, the network between U.S. and Rioplatense merchants initiated by this voyage continued, given that Chace returned at least twice to Montevideo and introduced other U.S. traders to this region.[45] In total, Chace sailed three times from Newport to Montevideo between 1795 and 1801, through multilateral itineraries connecting Brazil, Europe, and the Indian Ocean. In 1799, he sailed from Newport to Montevideo via Rio de Janeiro in the vessel *Agenoria* owned by John Brown (the underwriter of the *Ascension*) and other merchants. There is more about this ship that the historical record shows, such as contraband of merchandise in connection with slave trading.[46] In May 1800, Chace sailed again from Newport to Rio de Janeiro, where he wintered the ship *Almanack*, in order to arrive in Mozambique in September, where he embarked enslaved Africans to be delivered to Romero in Montevideo in January 1801. As Chace sailed to the Río de la Plata, he seemingly connected Romero to the Brown & Ives Company of Providence in business considered contraband by the Spanish authorities.[47]

Contrasting the exchange of captives and silver in Spanish and U.S. records

While this history of the slave trade to the Río de la Plata was almost *always* about getting Andean silver for human captives, the timing and patterns of the network between Rioplatense merchants and U.S. slavers make this story more complicated.[48] The strategy of selling captives for silver and taking jerked beef and cattle hides on consignment appears in other U.S. slave voyages to the Río de la Plata documented by Spanish colonial and U.S. sources in the decade following the voyage of the *Ascension*. In the instructions that the merchant of Newport Jacob Smith sent to Captain William Earl for the voyage of the ship *Charles and Harriot* in 1805, when the U.S. slave trade to the Río de la Plata was thriving, Smith told Earl to embark slaves in Mozambique and proceed to Montevideo: 'on your arrival there should you not find any instructions from me you will dispose of your Cargo for specie. Take in a full cargo of jerked beef and tallow and proceed for Newport.'[49] Thus he recommended the sale of slaves for silver and the shipping of cattle-derived products on consignment. Smith also warned Earl against allowing 'your officers and people [to] take any articles from Mozambique that will in any way lay the ship liable to seizure in Montevideo […] be also extremely

careful that nothing is smuggled from Montevideo'—clear advice in order avoid contraband charges. Finally, Smith alerted Earl that the vessel lacked insurance against slave rebellions, for which the captain had to remain watchful. As the U.S. slave traffic to foreign colonies was against federal and Rhode Island law, the underwriters' documents failed to identify this vessel as a slaver and thus the ship sailed without insurance related to slave trading.

Spanish colonial authorities seemed particularly concerned about the contraband in textiles, perhaps because clothing was more in the public eye, than about silver and hides. At some point, only slavers were permitted among U.S. ships in the Río de la Plata because of these suspicions about contraband. Scott Jenckes, a Brown & Ives captain writing from Rio de Janeiro in 1805, reported to his uncle, Nicolas Brown Jr., that 'we cannot go there [the Río de la Plata] without carrying slaves, and those who trade there dare not take dry goods with them. An American captain arrived here [Rio de Janeiro] a few days since direct from the River [Plate] and say [the Spanish] are stricter than ever.'[50] Jenckes was captaining the ship *Farmer* to deliver clothing and hardware in Buenos Aires, without captive Africans. Thus, this news of increasing vigilance over contraband made him change course and sell the merchandise in Dutch Guyana.

One of the U.S. slavers arriving in Montevideo in the last years of this route also engaged in this combination of silver payments and cattle-derived exports, with the innovation that what was initially a ship of the East Asian trade, became a slaver. The Providence-based vessel *Resource* commanded by William McGee and co-owned by Amos Jenckes carried coffee and sugar from Batavia (Jakarta) to New England in various voyages, usually stopping in the Mascarene Islands, from 1800 to 1804. The *Resource* departed from Providence with the intention of trade with China in 1805. On his way from Lisbon to Cape Town, Jenckes and McGee stopped in Gorée, where they embarked eighty-seven captive Africans. They continued to Montevideo, where they sold the Africans and also large volumes of rum, gin, port wine, and sundry goods embarked in Lisbon. They were able to sell this merchandise because of the impending British invasion of Montevideo in 1807. This emergency led Spanish authorities to prepare for a combined sea and land siege and thus they allowed disembarkation of merchandise.[51] As other Rhode Island slavers did, Jenckes and McGee received silver for captives and embarked jerked beef and cattle hides on consignment.[52] Rather than Atlantic slavers venturing into the Indian Ocean, as we have seen before, these were U.S. merchants of the Indian Ocean venturing into Atlantic slaving, which shows the flexibility of the multilateral routes engaged by merchants and mariners of the United States.

The other side of this network, the Rioplatense merchants, systematically concealed exports of silver and showed, in official records, the payment for captive Africans with cattle-based products, which surely was intended to obtain tax exceptions. Silver failed to be declared to avoid the taxation of silver exports as well.[53] Spanish records of ships sailing from Buenos Aires to southeast Africa, examined by Jean-Pierre Tardieu, only list hides, jerked beef, and foodstuff rather than silver—the main payment for slaves in Mozambique (Tardieu 2010, 64), as will be seen in the next section. Maximiliano Camarda, who analyzes the merchandise sent from Montevideo by the Catalan slave trader José Milá de la Roca, also underlines the importance of hides.[54] In the ships of Milá de la Roca, most probably foodstuff and cattle-hides were intended for the Mascarene Islands, where provisions were always scarce and where Rioplatense slavers obtained

credit to buy slaves in Mozambique. Of course hides and jerked beef were part of the payments for slave shipments, but not the only, and most probably not the main means of payment, given the demand for silver from both U.S. shippers and the sellers of captives in Mozambique. Cattle hides and jerked beef were also a very bulky cargo of relatively low value, as a single hide ranged in price from $1 to $2. Thus, this type of cargo could fill an entire hold without reaching the equivalent value in pesos of a slave shipment for which these products were supposed to be the payment.[55] As U.S. traders and other merchants sought silver payments and hides on consignment, the pattern set by the *Ascension* of hidden silver payments and consigned merchandise (declared as payment for slaves) could also apply to other slave vessels sailing out of the Río de la Plata.

Chilean merchants were middlemen in the slave trade from Buenos Aires to Lima and also sent silver to Atlantic slavers, without paying duties, in exchange for captives. Letters of the Catalan-born merchant of Santiago de Chile Olaguer Reynals reveal his contraband of silver to Buenos Aires and into U.S. slave ships in the years immediately following the *Ascension*. Olaguer told his counterpart in Buenos Aires, the merchant Jaime Alcina, of his intention of buying captives in January 1799, which he did that year.[56] In early 1800, Olaguer sent the Mendoza-based Antonio Mont to deliver six *piñas de plata* (pinecones of silver, or un-taxed and high-grade silver ingots in the shape of a pinecone) to Alcina in Buenos Aires for sale or to balance his account.[57] In December 1800, Olaguer asked Alcina about the fate of the *piñas* and asked him whether or not Romero and U.S. shippers had bought this silver. In case neither Romero nor the Americans wanted the piñas, Alcina could trade them in Barcelona.[58] They ultimately accepted the silver. Surely Rioplatense merchants got a better deal in the exchange of silver for merchandise and slaves with foreign traders than in the trade with Spain, as Barcelona was Olaguer's last option. Olaguer also alerted Alcina that he was sending ten packages of hemp (he traded hemp and copper in Buenos Aires), and that these packages had eight additional silver piñas hidden inside. Alcina could extract the piñas without unpacking the hemp by using a concealed rope attached to each pinecone, as instructed by Olaguer. He told Alcina that 'not even by paying duties' would he be allowed to extract this sum of silver from Chile. The eight piñas were sold to Romero and the Americans for 2,504 pesos and six reales in exchange for slaves who were to be sent to Lima via Valparaíso.[59] This route perhaps absorbed half of all slaves arriving in viceregal Río de la Plata, as seen in the early 1780s.[60] Merchants of these internal routes made profits even when transatlantic slave merchants suffered financial losses, as shown by the case of the slave arrivals of the Philippines Company in 1787–1789.[61]

This combined issue of unrecorded silver exports and recorded slave arrivals could help reassess the economic significance of the slave trade in relation to the overall traffic in late-colonial Río de la Plata. Zacarías Moutoukias and Antonio Ibarra employ the *avería* tax to measure the patterns of all commerce in this region (Moutoukias 1995; Ibarra 2013). However, Rioplatense slave merchants tried to evade this tax. Most surviving records on slave arrivals were produced by port officials (*Capitanía de Puerto*) and by slave traders when they sought tax exemptions for exports. Slave traders avoided paying avería tax particularly by operating in Montevideo, which made the slave trade to appear much smaller in comparison to all commerce as measured by official avería records.[62] The merchant guild of Buenos Aires (*Consulado de Comercio*)

began collecting the tax, the *avería de guardacostas* or *nueva avería* (hereafter referred to as avería), to cover war expenses in December 1800.[63] From 1801 to 1808, avería records show 9,996 captives arriving in Buenos Aires. However, port authorities and other documents show nearly 14,000 slaves arriving in the same period, which implies that merchants avoided avería tax on 4,000 slaves. [64] The total value of merchandise entering by sea to Buenos Aires amounted to $16,304,333 in 1801–1808; an additional $2,013,010 pesos (12.3 percent) corresponded to the entry of slaves. If we include the captives missing from the avería records, this addition increases to 16 percent. But this was just for Buenos Aires, whereas most slave arrivals in this region took place in neighboring Montevideo.

The commerce of the Río de la Plata functioned through a system where Buenos Aires was the center but Montevideo had the better port; thus, quantifying the avería of Montevideo (together with the records of Buenos Aires) for the total is essential because this was the main slave trade port in the region. For 1801–1806, port records show 17,651 captive Africans arriving in Montevideo, which would produce an estimated value of $3,664,567 and should have paid $146,583 of avería tax to the consulado of Buenos Aires.[65] However, records of Montevideo's avería, which list together merchandise and slaves without separating categories, jointly amount to only $25,307 in 1801–1806. It seems that only merchandise paid avería and slave traders avoided this tax there.[66] If we put the actual figure of slave arrivals in relation to the values and taxes determined by all avería entry data of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, as commerce actually worked in the Río de la Plata, the value of the combined slave imports would add 35 percent to the value of imported goods in this region from 1801 to 1806, though surely this percentage was smaller if measured for the entire period 1777–1812. Thus, for a brief period from 1801 to 1806, the value of slave arrivals, measured in pesos, accounts for an estimated one-quarter of all imports in the Río de la Plata.[67]

The volume of silver leaving this region as a result of slave sales was larger than recorded by avería and by the declarations of slave traders on exports based on slave sales. Tomás Antonio Romero never paid avería (his name is missing in the avería records of Buenos Aires), for which the Crown was pursuing him in 1809 for back-taxes, at the time that the slave trade and the colonial regime in this region were nearly ending (Tjarks 1962, 255, 395–96, 400). The avería records shed light on the complicated definition of what was considered contraband, and the close relation between smuggling, tax evasion, and legal trade. Slave traders did not conceal slave arrivals when they sought permission to export cattle hides based on slave sales. One of the most comprehensive sources of the slave trade in this region is the papers in the National Archives of Argentina that list slave arrivals according to merchants who presented the data in order to obtain tax exceptions to export cattle products. According to this source, Romero exported hides through Montevideo for $783,726 and minor products such as jerked beef for $188,555 between 1799 and 1806, all as a result of slave sales—but no silver.[68] If Romero operated with other U.S. slave traders in the same way he did with the *Ascension*, he likely exported nearly one million silver pesos and bills of exchange undercover during these years. If so, the cattle hides in Romero's records were in fact on consignment to foreign shippers rather than exports resulting from slave sales. We may wonder if this strategy was more available to Romero (who had the political connections and *gran giro*, i.e. availability of resources and cash) than to smaller merchants.

Apart from silver and cattle-derived products, U.S. and Rioplatense merchants also employed Havana's bills of exchange (*letras de cambio*), given that Havana was the perfect location for exchanging, endorsing, and cashing bills of sale from different Spanish colonies. For U.S. slavers, Cuba was on the way back from the Río de la Plata to the United States, and, also, Rioplatense jerked beef could be sold as a significant source of protein for slaves in Cuba. Rather than mainly sugar and tobacco, which the Río de la Plata could obtain cheaply from Brazil but mostly illegally (note the Spanish Crown's royal monopoly over tobacco), Cuba exported a wide array of textiles and manufactured products to the Río de la Plata. This merchandise had arrived in Havana as a result of U.S. neutral trade and contraband, and from Havana it was sent to other Spanish colonies (Souto Mantecon 2010, 334). In addition, only recently the Spanish Crown had allowed bills of exchange issued by private merchants in the colonies to be traded and cashed in other colonies rather than in the metropolis, as a result of more liberal commercial policies promoting colonial trade.[69]. Thus, U.S. multilateral trade benefitted from the use of bills of sale issued in the Spanish colonies for commerce connecting these regions with each other and with neutral powers.

This is not a story of benefits solely for U.S. merchants; traders from the Río de la Plata and Chile profited from this commerce, as well as Portuguese authorities and traders in Mozambique and Vãniyã merchants of the Indian Ocean. The main slave traders on the direct route from Mozambique to the Río de la Plata were in fact Luso-Brazilians based in Mozambique, who embarked 7,000 captives, while U.S. shippers embarked 4,000, and Rioplatense shipped 3,500 from 1797 to 1812. While U.S. slavers ended activities in the Río de la Plata by 1809, Luso-Brazilians continued bringing slaves from Mozambique until 1811, when revolution and war ended this traffic in the Río de la Plata.[70] From 1797 to 1812, the Río de la Plata became as important as Rio de Janeiro for the slave traffickers in Mozambique, as an estimated 18,000 slaves were sent from southeast Africa to Rio de Janeiro as well as an additional 16,000 captives to the Río de la Plata. Price difference attracted merchants from Mozambique to sell slaves directly in Montevideo, given that recently disembarked Africans could be sold in the Río de la Plata for twice the price paid in Brazil (Harries 2016, 413). In the slave trade between Brazil and the Río de la Plata, examined elsewhere, silver played the leading role as a means of payment followed by hides and jerked beef. This silver circulated within Luso-Brazilian routes and ended in Mozambique, among other places, because of the commerce between Mozambique and Rio de Janeiro (Machado 2014, 239–46; Capela 2002; Borucki 2015, 25–56). Multiple players profited from these slave routes, at the obvious and direct expense of the enslaved people themselves.

Implications in Rhode Island, Mozambique, and China

The U.S. slave route to the Río de la Plata was part of the exchanges within the Atlantic, but also it belonged to the flow of silver and captives within the wider world commerce. Atlantic wars, neutral trade, and the demand for slave labor defined the growth of U.S. multilateral trading routes and volumes of imported silver in the 1790s and the following decade. Merchants of the United States tried to sell where prices were high and buy where prices were low, with rapid changes defined by war shaping these routes. Through the chaos of war and multilateral trade, the extraction of silver through trade led U.S.

merchants to earn a certain type of credit for transoceanic long-distance exchanges, particularly as silver was almost the only means of commerce for foreigners in China. In an era in which trade became the main relationship between the United States and Spanish America, commerce with the Spanish colonies, including the slave traffic, increased the ability of U.S. merchants to diversify and multiply their exchanges in the Indian Ocean and China (Fitz 2016, 17–46).

The voyage of the *Ascension* belonged to the larger U.S. trade with Spanish America in which U.S. merchants obtained goods on consignment and increasing volumes of silver that they used, essentially, to trade with China. James Fichter emphasizes that commerce with Asia and neutral trade positioned U.S. merchants to become investors enabled to participate in the complex world of finances after 1815 (Fichter 2010, 278–79). Silver was central to the exchanges of the *Ascension* in the Indian Ocean and the Río de la Plata. By 1798, the Vernons sent the sloop *Juliet* to Manila,[71] using Spanish pesos in Indian Ocean commerce with India and China, just as they had left silver pesos in Ile de France (Mauritius) during the first part of the voyage of the *Ascension*. For them, the only large source of silver to conduct trade in Asia at this time was the coinage brought by their traffic in the Spanish colonies. Later in 1803 William Vernon founded the Newport Bank.[72] Silver coins flowing outside of Spanish America, the lifeblood of these activities, facilitated world commerce and credit.[73] While few U.S. individual merchants engaged *both* the Spanish Americas (not just the Río de la Plata) and East Asia at the same time and moved this silver themselves, U.S. shipping considered as a whole was essential for this transference of silver from the Spanish Americas to China during the decades of neutral trade.[74]

This transference of silver pesos was rooted in the first integration of world markets in 1540–1640, when the different ratio between gold and silver in Europe (1:12) and China (1:6) fueled world trade (Flynn and Giráldez 2002, 393, 402–4). Massive amounts of Mexican and Peruvian silver pesos reached China through Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Ocean routes. After stabilization of the gold-silver ratio across the globe in the late seventeenth century, a second 'silver cycle' developed in the first half of the eighteenth century, with different ratios of 1:15 in Europe and 1:10 in China. While this gap was smaller than the one provoking the first cycle, the amount of silver shipped to China in the first half of the eighteenth century was larger than in the previous phase.[75] Silver imports continued in the second half of the eighteenth century, when the ratio of silver-gold aligned and thus this difference disappeared. Yet, in the years of U.S. neutral trade in Spanish America, U.S. merchants became the main suppliers of silver for China (Irigoin 2009, 209–11). It seems that U.S. merchants sent more silver to China than the silver entering the United States (Cuenca-Esteban 2014, 80–81), when commerce in the Spanish Americas, including the slave sales by U.S. merchants, was the leading source of silver pesos entering the United States and later sent to China.

Spanish American coins became one of the most reliable currencies in China in the late eighteenth century, as Chinese merchants and officials trusted the availability and circulation of the Spanish peso; this, in turn, afforded pesos a premium compared to other foreign silver coins as well as to the silver ingots circulating in China.[76] After the 1770s, it was no longer arbitrage but the needs of the Chinese markets that drove this demand for silver. The surge in imported silver that took place in China after

1780, particularly in the 1790s, pushed down the price of silver in China, as a trend, compared to other measures of value. By 1800 China had absorbed the equivalent of 18 percent of the silver produced in the New World, though not all this silver came from the Americas but also from Japan (Deng 2008, 325–29; Von Glahn 2016, 320–30). By 1800 the silver peso was itself a commodity in East Asia, one that could be added to objects in patterns of artistic repetition as these coins, though mass-produced, were also part of individual art items (Hamman 2016).

As the failures and sudden changes of itinerary of the *Ascension* illustrate, this was not a swift U.S. integration into the global networks of commerce. In fact, the merchants behind this venture considered this voyage a commercial fiasco, as quarrels suggest little financial gains for Vernon, Gardner, or Brown. While they initiated disputes against Chace and the underwriters up to 1803, the 1794 anti-slave-trade law complicated the resolution of these conflicts for them.[77] Letters between Brown and Vernon show their disgruntlement with Chace, but also their unwillingness to go to court. While the Vernons could pressure Chace and put him temporarily in jail, they avoided suing him given that conducting slave trading abroad was illegal. Merchants bypassed anti-slave-trade laws overseas, but these measures eliminated formal ways to resolve disputes, among them in U.S. courts. The cloaked U.S. slave trade abroad also complicated the resolution of insurance conflicts, as the *Ascension* was not identified as a slaver by the insurance. The underwriters of the *Ascension* John Brown and Thomas Arnold belonged to interconnected families in Providence. While John Brown was the most engaged of his brothers in the slave trade, Thomas Arnold was a Quaker who then became a leading abolitionist.[78] The owners of the *Ascension* settled the dispute and were compensated by the underwriters without trial, in 1803.[79]

Silver and neutral trade were also important in Mozambique, from where the *Ascension* and other U.S. ships embarked captives heading to the Río de la Plata. The main exchanges in this Indian Ocean system connected Western India and Portuguese southeast Africa through the commerce of Indian textiles.[80] The *piastres* (the French word for Spanish pesos) and *patacas espanholas* (the Portuguese term for this coinage) had circulated in the Indian Ocean since the early eighteenth century, if not before, but the presence of silver dramatically increased in the 1770s after the rise of slave trading in Mozambique (Machado 2014, 240). This increase in the slave trade in Mozambique was due to the demand created in French plantations in Ile de France and Reunion where the first modern coffee plantations run by Europeans with African, Indian, and Malagasy slave laborers had developed. The French used silver acquired from Atlantic trade to buy captives and this silver, in turn, became one of the main forms of payment in Mozambique for textiles produced in and exported from India.[81] The entry of U.S., Rioplatense, and Brazilian merchants into the slave trade in Mozambique in the 1790s caused silver eventually to become equal to ivory as a means of payment for these textiles.[82] Portuguese authorities reported that 100,000 silver coins entered Mozambique as a result of slave sales in 1788, and that later, from 1793 to 1801, this traffic brought in more than 1,500,000 patacas (Capela 2002, 184–85). The Portuguese Captain General of Mozambique stated in 1790: 'The commerce of Mozambique flourishes because of the miracle of the importation of patacas and exports of slaves' (Capela 2002, 174). The trade in Indian textiles in Mozambique led Indian merchants to carry this silver to India, where it was transformed into jewelry and silver rupees,

and commonly backed the credit system based on *Hundis*, a financial instrument similar to an IOU.[83]

The combination of a market providing captives in Mozambique, coffee in the Mascarene Islands, neutral trade, as well as a gateway to Asia, attracted U.S. shippers to southeast Africa. In 1792, Samuel Brown (one of the owners of the *Ascension*) wrote to William Vernon about the prospect of slave trading in Mozambique being far better than in Anomabu (a large slave port on the Gold Coast, today's Ghana) and presented the Mascarene Island as a gateway to the Indian Ocean and the China trade.[84] In 1793, Brown gave leeway to a captain to trade either (or both) coffee or slaves between Mozambique and the Mascarene Islands.[85] The next year Brown informed Vernon that increasing French slave trading in Mozambique had pushed slave prices up. A captain working with Brown left 1,900 Spanish silver pesos in Mozambique to be used when the French ships had left and slave prices had fallen. These vignettes illustrate the increasing involvement of U.S. merchants with Portuguese traders and authorities in Mozambique and with French merchants in the Mascarene Islands.[86] Captains conducting slave voyages between Mozambique and the Mascarene Islands, and also to the Atlantic, sometimes shipped coffee to Europe, as Chace did in the *Ascension*. Local conditions in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans shaped captains' decisions on whether it was more feasible or profitable to sell coffee in Europe or captives in the New World.

As in the Río de la Plata, U.S. merchants enjoyed certain neutrality in relation to Anglo-French conflicts when they inserted themselves into the Indian Ocean exchanges. The French slave trade in Mozambique peaked in 1785–1794, just before the beginning of the Anglo-French wars in 1793 that led to the British occupation of Cape Town in 1795, during which the British Navy and privateer vessels chased and captured French and Spanish ships in the southern hemisphere (Capela 2014, 174; Harries 2016, 411). By following French routes, U.S. merchants arrived in the Mascarene Islands in 1786, but their commercial involvement in Mozambique increased substantially after 1796 due to their comparative benefits as neutral shippers.[87]

Merchants from the Río de la Plata, Ile de France, and Mozambique also sought benefits from connecting southeast Africa with the Río de la Plata, but they could become prey to warships and privateers more frequently than U.S. shippers. As a result of the late 1790s French-Spanish alliance, colonial authorities in Buenos Aires envisioned selling salted meats and provisions to Ile de France, which they also saw as a gateway to both Africa and Asia. Some merchants from Ile de France moved to Buenos Aires in this decade, carrying with them small groups of enslaved Africans. One of the most important Montevideo-based slave traders, José Milá de la Roca, organized five slave voyages to Mozambique that also involved Ile de France (one of his ships was captured by the British). British Navy and corsairs similarly endangered French trade between the Indian Ocean and the Río de la Plata, for which French merchants sent, at least once, goods and slaves from Ile de France to Montevideo in a French warship seeking provisions (Cooney 1986, 40–41; Borucki 2015, 49). While Portuguese ships avoided capture by British vessels because they were allies with Britain, French privateers in the Mozambique Channel and the Río de la Plata sometimes attacked Portuguese shipping.

The U.S. slave trade route to the Río de la Plata was part of interdependent commerce driven by neutrality and trans-regional arbitrage of silver, goods, and captives as well as a

segment belonging to multiple circuits of silver and commercial credits.[88] The increasing and combined U.S. trade and freight services with Spanish America, Europe, the Indian Ocean, and East Asia were the lion's share of these commercial networks. Neutral trade and slave traffic in times of Atlantic war put U.S. shippers in an advantaged position in world commerce compared to other merchants that still benefited from these networks. The story of the *Ascension* shows the scale and mechanics of the hitherto unknown South Atlantic-Indian Ocean-Asian portion of this global system and situates the Atlantic slave trade squarely within world commerce (Coclanis 2006, 728).[89] The slave trade was a part of an increasingly vast and complex network of transactions in world history beyond the oft-mentioned triangular trade.

Concluding remarks: silver and the slave trade to Spanish Americas

At the turn of the eighteenth century, the revolutionary era when individual rights and freedoms were so loudly proclaimed, this global chain of silver and bodies illustrates the expansion of Atlantic slaving, in the shipping of captives from Mozambique through the Río de la Plata to Lima, as well as in the funneling of silver from Buenos Aires through New England to China. It is worth reiterating that the Age of Revolutions developed simultaneously with the largest quantifiable growth of Atlantic slaving in the almost four centuries of the history of this traffic.[90]

Even before the nineteenth-century abolition of the transatlantic slave trade by the British, U.S., Luso-Brazilian, Spanish American, and Spanish authorities pushed slave traders to conceal their activities; they already operated under a cloak when crossing imperial boundaries, as this commonly involved some type of contraband according to custom offices of one or both sides. The concept of a 'Hidden Atlantic,' a term coined by Michael Zeuske to conceptualize the nineteenth-century illegal slave trade, applies to the U.S. traffic and contraband of captives and silver in the Spanish colonies (Zeuske 2018). While merchants from the Río de la Plata concealed the payments in silver from Spanish tax officers, U.S. shippers masked their slave trading in the Spanish Americas and thus the trade of captives and silver was disconnected in both Spanish and U.S. records. This intended invisibility complicates research on the role of the Spanish colonies in the slave trade and clouds the relationship between the traffic of captives to the Spanish Americas and the overall commerce of the Spanish colonies with foreign merchants in the fast-changing years between 1780 and 1810.

This article shows the formation of a new slave-trading route in the Río de la Plata, the increasing significance of the slave trade related to all commerce in this region measured by silver pesos, and some of the implications of this route outside this region. These repercussions should be considered also with an eye on the role of silver in the overall slave trade to the Spanish Americas in this period. By way of conclusion, this article poses the question as to what degree the availability of silver pesos should be considered as a variable to explain the fluctuations in the slave trade in Spanish America in these decades. The answer is beyond the scope of this work, but this question should at least be framed in the most comprehensive Spanish American context.

In the 1780s, the Liverpool-based slave-trade firm Baker and Dawson shipped enslaved Africans to Venezuela, Cuba, and the Río de la Plata under separate contracts arranged from Madrid rather than connected with Spanish American merchants, with

the expectation of obtaining silver returns. The ship *Garland* was the first of Baker and Dawson's vessels to arrive in La Guaira, the port serving Caracas, in 1786. The British captain sought silver in exchange for slaves and the local planters requested credit. As silver was always scarce in Venezuela, the Intendant Francisco de Saavedra interceded by providing credit to the planters and by paying with a *libranza* (an official order of payment) to the captain to be cashed in the Royal Treasury of Havana, where the ship was heading.[91] During the 1780s, the treasury in Caracas supplied credit to planters (land-rich but silver-poor) to buy slaves brought by Baker and Dawson. This acceptance of bills drawn on other colonial treasuries (*cajas reales*) made it possible for the British slave traders to embark this silver in Havana.[92] Without silver, these slave arrivals in Venezuela would have been smaller than the planters demanded, or they would have been redirected to other markets providing silver, such as Cuba. The effects of lack of silver as well as credit are shown in the case of the Vernons' ship, *Don Gálvez*, which arrived in Cartagena in 1792. Very few captives were sold there and instead, the ship later sailed to Havana to deliver these Africans. Lack of silver pesos as means of payment in Cartagena led the captain to sell captives in Havana.[93] The annual transfers (*situados*) from the Royal Treasury in Mexico City funded colonial rule in Havana and this also created relative liquidity in Cuba compared to other Spanish Caribbean and circum-Caribbean colonies (Marichal and von Grafenstein 2012).

In the late 1780s, other British slave shipments to the Río de la Plata show the importance of silver in the form of loans from colonial treasuries to fund a test on how to supply local slave markets by the Spanish Royal Philippines Company (Real Compañía de Filipinas). Established in 1785, this private royal partnership was entrusted to increase commerce between the metropolis and the Philippines in the context of growing transoceanic trade. While most of its activity involved the commerce of textiles, the Philippines Company arranged for British slavers to conduct slave voyages to the Río de la Plata in 1787 as a test encouraged by the Crown. This was in the context of the Spanish Crown envisioning new commercial schemes to expand slave arrivals in the Americas, cut foreign middlemen, and increase silver heading to Asia. Under this arrangement, Spanish agents sailed from Great Britain to the Bight of Biafra in British vessels, which disembarked captives in Montevideo (Díaz 1965, 224–25). The initiative of the Philippines Company received subsidies from colonial treasuries in that the company took a loan of 200,000 pesos from the royal coffers in Lima in 1787 and an additional one million pesos from Buenos Aires in the following two years, as 'advance[s] for trade' in slaves, which the viceroy in Buenos Aires wanted repaid.[94] The company used these funds to buy goods in the trade with China. Thus, the Crown subsidized a slave-trading venture with loans from the Americas for this private royal company's commerce in Asia. This was the only time that the company engaged in slave trading, as this was considered a financial disaster by colonial and metropolitan authorities.

Silver was also prominent in the rise of slave arrivals in Cuba during the two decades following the liberalization of the slave trade in 1789. While the surge of U.S. slavers in the Río de la Plata was important for this region, it was smaller than the flow of enslaved Africans to Cuba onboard U.S.-owned ships in these years. Between 1790 and 1808, nearly 51,000 enslaved Africans arrived in the Río de la Plata, whereas around 133,000 disembarked in Cuba (Borucki 2015, 25–56; Felipe-González 2020; Marques 2016, 12–

85). Jorge Felipe-González's examination of the slave trade to Cuba between 1790 and 1808 points out that 45 percent of the slaves arriving in Cuba came from the Americas rather than direct from Africa, and that U.S. vessels were the most important carriers of captives to Cuba, as they disembarked 43,200 captives (33 percent) of the total (both transatlantic and intra-American) between 1790 and 1808. Shippers from the United States also played a significant role in the intra-Caribbean Danish slave trade to Cuba, which carried an additional 15,000 captives (11 percent). From 1801 to 1803, the merchant guild of Havana (*consulado*) debated whether or not to prohibit using silver as means of payment for slaves because of its scarcity. According to the consulado, which accounts for a fraction of the figures of slave arrivals and silver exports, 276,476 silver pesos left Havana as a result of slave sales in 1799, and this figure increased to $822,532 in 1800.[95] In the smaller port of Santiago de Cuba, José Belmonte shows increments of silver exports connected to slave sales from $23,800 in 1789 to $65,483 in 1794 (Belmonte 2011, 168–74). We may wonder about the relation of the slave trade to all trade in Havana in connection with this shortage of silver, and thus an all-time high of U.S. neutral trade rather than the slave traffic may have provoked this scarcity at a time when U.S. trade with Spanish America soared.[96] However, the consulado *only* highlighted slave arrivals as the main cause for this scarcity of silver.

New research on the slave routes to the Spanish Americas during neutral trade may consider the role of silver and the relation of the slave traffic to all commerce as two significant variables shaping the fluctuations of slave arrivals. For instance, the Intra-American Slave Trade Database, which shows slave voyages within the Americas rather than from Africa, also reveals the significance of the period 1780–1810 for the Spanish colonies. This database shows some 297,000 slaves arriving in all of the Spanish Americas from non-Spanish colonies, out of which 119,000 disembarked from 1780 to 1810.[97] These figures will increase after the addition of ongoing research on the many branches of this traffic in the Spanish colonies. This will bridge the gap between these numbers and the estimate of all intra-American slave trade to the Spanish Americas of 566,000 captives, out of whom 208,000 arrived between 1761 and 1820 (Borucki, Eltis, and Wheat 2015, 441).[98] Research linking the slave trade with all commerce to the Spanish Americas will also bridge the scholarship on this traffic with the general history of commerce in the Spanish colonies.[99]

While the merchants of Río de la Plata and those of New England saw themselves engaged in a 'win-win' situation when their initiatives went as hoped, for African captives and their homelands, this trade was individually, collectively, and in the long term destructive. As Stephanie Smallwood conceptualizes the cruel and calculated alchemy of gold and slaves through the commodification of humans in the Gold Coast, much remains to be studied about the role of silver in the commodification of Africans (Smallwood 2007, 9–10). The experience of the captives of the *Ascension* reveals tortuous itineraries shaped by external and internal markets of forced labor as well as by the strategies of survival of these Africans. Their arrival in the Río de la Plata marked the beginning of another forced passage, this time to Lima. Most of the captives departing Buenos Aires were conducted across what is today Argentina towards the Andes, then to ascend these mountains on the backs of mules and to descend into the port of Valparaíso. Others continued their odyssey from Montevideo down the Atlantic across the Magellan Straits, from where they then sailed the Pacific up to Valparaíso. Those who crossed overland

went through grasslands and semi-arid pampas before the dreadful passage through the Andes, while those reaching Valparaíso by the sea had to sail near the Antarctic Ocean, all of which severely affected their health. The inland and maritime routes met in Valparaíso, from where captives sailed to Lima (Grandin 2014, 112–17).[100] Montevideo was halfway for Africans between their three-month forced sailing from Mozambique and the additional three-month journey from the Río de la Plata to Lima. In this long ordeal, places like Montevideo, where Atlantic crossings met internal routes, became the gateway of New World slavery for the recently arrived Africans and hubs where they first put together information of the strange world in which they found themselves.

Notes

1. Fifty-four U.S. voyages from Africa to the Río de la Plata and two from Rio de Janeiro to this region: see the Slave Voyages Website, TSTD, https://slavevoyages.org/voyage/database#searchId=94uLHSb1, and The Intra-American Slave Trade Database, https://slavevoyages.org/american/database#searchId=94uLHSb1.
2. For the importance of this silver within the Luso-Brazilian slave trade, which also connects with Asian textiles, see Bohorquez 2020.
3. Slave Voyages Website, TSTD, id# 36620, www.slavevoyages.org.
4. The *South Sea Company* conducted the first slave voyages from southeast Africa (Madagascar) to the Río de la Plata in 1717. Three non-specialized slave vessels connected Ile de France (Mauritius) with this region in 1797 (id# 96010, 96011, and 96076, Slave Voyages Website, TSTD). The *Ascension* was one of the first two specialized slave ships embarking captives from Mozambique to the Río de la Plata in 1798 (the other was the *Faustina de Buenos Aires*, id# 96009, which departed from the United States with Spanish flag and under the ownership of José Milá de la Roca).
5. The maritime slave trade to the Río de la Plata lasted from the 1580s to the 1830s; see Studer 1958; Borucki 2015, 25–56; Borucki 2020; Cooney 1986; Tardieu 2010; on the early traffic, see Schultz 2016.
6. Romero organized few voyages direct from Africa in his own ships before the arrival of the *Ascension*. He sent Nemecio Palacios to Mozambique in 1796, as seen in the next section. Papers of Tomás A. Romero, Archivo General de la Nación, Argentina (hereafter AGN-A), IX, 18-8-11. On Romero, see Galmarini 1980.
7. On the relation between Spanish pesos and U.S. Dollars, see Seijas and Frederick 2017.
8. On tax benefits to slave traders, see Borucki 2015, 35.
9. On U.S. slave merchants in Brazil and Cuba, and the historiography, see Marques 2016.
10. The Vernons sent at least forty-five ships to sell captives primarily in the British Caribbean and the U.S. South from 1737 to 1807 (Kelley 2016, chapters 1 and 2; on pre-revolutionary commerce, see 24–26).
11. Newport was not among the main U.S. ports sending ships to Bordeaux, but New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and to a lesser extent Baltimore, Charleston, and Salem (Marzagalli 2005).
12. They communicated with Diego de Gardoqui, the main Spanish politician in the United States and member of the House of José de Gardoqui e Hijos in Bilbao (Newport Historical Society, Vernon Papers [hereafter NHS-VP], Box 63, Folder 7, Ship papers, ship *Active* to Bilbao, and Box 49, Letters from José Gardoqui and Sons, 1783). The Vernons continued trade with the other states of Union after the war, but now Newport played a secondary role to Providence in Rhode Island's shipping.
13. For Brazil, see the ongoing research of Fabrício Prado and Reeder 2019.
14. Id#36570 and #36590, Slave Voyages Website, TSTD.

15. Among many publications on neutral trade, see García-Baquero 1984; Barbier and Kuethe 1984; Cuenca-Esteban 1984; Marichal 2000; Souto Mantecón 2001; Salvucci 2005; Adelman 2007.
16. The 1760s saw the beginning of this process with the end of Cádiz's monopoly on trade with the colonies in 1765, when Barcelona, Santander, Gijón, La Coruña, Málaga, Cartagena, Alicante were allowed to trade with Cuba, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, Margarita and Trinidad. Additional ports were added in 1774 and 1776–1778. The British Free Port Act of 1766 established Jamaica and Dominica for trade with other colonies, particularly to the Spanish Caribbean (Pearce 2014, 41–79; Cromwell 2018, 34, 118).
17. He examines the difference between figures of English exports to the United States and U.S. imports from Britain, which builds robust estimates of British re-exports in U.S. ships, and adds 29 percent to Pearce's estimate in the mid-1790s and 31 percent in 1807 (that is 2,585,000 pounds sterling in 1795, 3,878,000 in 1800, and 4,473,000 in 1807); see Cuenca-Esteban 2014, 84, 91.
18. On the overall slave trade organized by Spanish and Spanish American merchants, see Borucki, Eltis, and Wheat 2015.
19. On the Rhode Island traffic, see Coughtry 1981; on the *Ascension*, see #36570 and #36590 at Slave Voyages Website, TSTD.
20. The first vessel from the mainland British colonies to reach Brazil was the whaler *Leviathan* in 1772, sent by the Jewish-Portuguese merchant Aaron Lopez of Newport (Alden 1964). I thank Fabrício Prado for pointing this out to me.
21. Vernon to Chace, Newport, 30 October 1795. NHS-VP, Box 215, Folder 5.
22. Chace had conducted a slave voyage on behalf of the Vernons with the *Ascension* to Cuba in 1793.
23. 'Log of the ship *Ascension*, 1795–1797' and 'Ship *Ascension*, Financial account,' NHS-VP.
24. 'Ascension,' 26 June 1797, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, Codice 492, Autos de Embarcaçoes, no. 224. I thank Fabrício Prado for this reference.
25. Samuel Chace to William Vernon, 9 April 1797, New York Historical Society, Slavery Collection, Subseries 1, Samuel and William Vernon (hereafter NYHS-SC-SSWM). Very few U.S. vessels disembarked captives in Brazil before 1840.
26. This 'Mr. Montave' may have been a misspelled reference to the Mozambique-based merchant Joaquim do Rosário Monteiro, given that 'Mr. Montave' had conducted captives from Mozambique to Rio as Monteiro did too. On Monteiro, see Harries 2016 and Capela 2014.
27. This may reflect his previous trade and knowledge of the slave market in Mozambique. The logbook dates the arrival in Mozambique on 12 July, but Chace later wrote to Vernon that he arrived on 16 July. Chace to Vernon, Cape Good Hope, 11 December 1797 (NHS-VP, Box 43, f. 26).
28. See the dossier of *Slavery and Abolition* on children and slavery of August 2006.
29. The proceedings of the sale of foodstuff and Dutch gin in Ile de France may have funded slave purchases ('Ship *Ascension*, Financial account,' NHS-VP).
30. The process of vaccination against smallpox began in England in 1796; Chace had access to this new vaccine while the *Ascension* was docked in Rotterdam.
31. To survive one month in this island, they consumed most of the provisions and they caught turtles ('Logbook of the *Ascension*,' NHS-VP; see entries for 19 and 27 September 1797).
32. Chace to Vernon, Cape Good Hope, 11 December 1797. NHS-VP, Box 43, f. 26.
33. The British occupation of the Cape, in 1795–1803, officially prohibited slave traffic. However, this traffic occurred illegally in limited ways. The Cape was a safer market for Mozambique's slave traders than South America because of the shorter journey. Also, they could obtain Spanish pesos there as well (Machado 2014, 234; Harries 2016, 423).
34. Palacios and his crew were imprisoned, but the British then released Palacios and the pilot Domingo Calvo ('Visita de arribo de la fragata Inglesa-Americana Ascensión,' AGN-A, IX, 36-4-5, 1798, and 'Salida de Ntra Sa de la Guia,' AGN-A, IX, 45-1-6, 1796).
35. Diseases such as dysentery caused death for weeks after arrival.

36. By 1810, the population of Buenos Aires ranged from 45,000 to 60,000, whereas nearly 20,000 inhabitants lived in Montevideo. In both cities, the black population was nearly a third of the total (Borucki 2015, 7–8).
37. Chace sold Palacios 500 pounds of ivory. It was illegal for foreign ships to disembark ivory in the Spanish colonies—it was legal only in the metropolis, or in Spanish ships in the colonies ('Visita de arribo de la fragata Inglesa-Americana Ascensión,' 1798, AGN-A, IX, 36-4-5).
38. Pesos and dollars are interchangeable in the accounts of Chace (Vernon, Gardner, and co-owners of the ship *Ascension* in account current with Samuel Chase, 11 November 1797, NYHS-SC-SSWM).
39. Papers of Tomás A. Romero, 29 December 1798, Buenos Aires, AGN-A, IX, 18-8-11.
40. The maritime and overland slave routes from Río de la Plata to Peru passed through Valparaíso. In 1802 the U.S. ship *Tyre* stopped in Valparaíso on the way from Providence to China. The supercargo Stephen Dexter kept a log, where he asserted that 3,000 slaves passed by Valparaíso each year on their way from Buenos Aires to Lima. This reference is from May 1802, during the peak of this traffic (Journal of the Ship *Tyre*, 1801-1803, f. 6r/v. Arnold Family Business Records, John Carter Brown Library [hereafter JCBL]); I thank Kimberly Nusco for this reference.
41. Slave ships enrolled larger crews than regular merchant vessels in order to control captives ('Logbook of the *Ascension*,' NHS-VP).
42. Apart from his salary, Chace was allowed to embark fifteen captives for his profit and to fill from one-fourth to one-third of the ship's hold on the way home with cargo on his account. Thus, Chace was allowed to act as a merchant of goods and captives (Vernon to Chace, Newport, 30 October 1795. NHS-VP, Box 215, Folder 5; and Chace to Vernon, Dominica, 5 August 1798, NHS-VP, Box 81, Folder 8). On captains becoming slave merchants, see Rediker 2007, 187–220.
43. On Potosí and the mint see Lane 2019; on the fluctuations of silver production, see Tepaske 2010, 30.
44. Some of these bills were still used in 1801, when the Vernons needed cash (W. H. Vernon to William Vernon, 4 March 1801, Personal Archive of Marion Morrison, Little Compton, Rhode Island).
45. While Chace never worked again for these merchants, the Vernons turned away from slave trading when the son of William Vernon took over the family business, after the death of his father in 1806.
46. 'Visita de llegada de la fragata angloamericana La Agenoria,' 1799, Archivo General de la Nación, Uruguay (hereafter AGN-U), Escribanía de Gobierno y Hacienda, Caja 41, Exp. 122; see also Chandler 1946, 603; Borucki 2015, 30–31.
47. Romero later sent Antonio Sanzetenea to New England to arrange the commerce of captives and goods. Sanzetenea contracted with Brown & Ives (headed by Nicholas Brown Jr., nephew of John Brown the insurer of the *Ascension*) to deliver European textiles to Romero in a contraband scheme that ended with Brown's ship *Mary Ann* detained in Buenos Aires between 1800 and 1803. On the *Mary Ann*, see the catalog of the JCBL, Brown Family Business Papers (hereafter JCBL-BFBP), and Jacobs 1957; on contraband in the Río de la Plata, see Prado 2015.
48. On the early seventeenth-century traffic, see Schultz 2016; on the overall eighteenth-century trade, see Borucki 2020; on the 1830s slave trade unrelated to silver, see Borucki 2015, 50–56.
49. Jacob Smith to William Earl, 29 May 1805, NHS-VP, Box 43A, folder 26. Smith's contact in the Río de la Plata was the U.S. merchant Thomas Halsey, who lived in Buenos Aires.
50. Scott Jenckes to Brown & Ives, Rio de Janeiro, 4 September 1805, JCBL-BFBP, Box 535, folder 8.
51. The British invaded the Río de la Plata in 1806 (occupation of Buenos Aires) and in 1807 (occupation of Montevideo). Local militias defeated them twice.
52. Voyage Id# 36839, Slave Voyages Website, TSTD; Brown & Ives to Amos Jenckes, 1 March 1807; Amos Jenckes to Nicholas Brown, 3 March 1807, Montevideo, JCBL-BFBP, Box 636,

Folder 3; *Papers of the American Slave Trade*, Series A: Selections from the Rhode Island Historical Society, Reel 19 and 20.

53. Before the 1791 royal edict liberalizing the slave trade to Montevideo, local merchants needed special licenses to export silver as a result of slave sales. After this measure, they only had to pay a six percent export fee, which still they tried to avoid (Cooney 1986, 39).
54. On Milá de la Roca, see Camarda 2014; on Diego de Agüero, see Schlez 2016.
55. Note also that U.S. ships were smaller than Spanish and Portuguese ships, so that filling a hold with hides limited the ability of payment of slave shipments with cattle-based products. On the volume and prices of hides, and their relation to ships' holds, see Moutoukias 1995, 786–87, 805.
56. Olaguer Reynals to Jaime Alcina y Verges, 2 January 1799, Archivo Nacional, Santiago de Chile, Fondo Olaguer Reynals, Caja 12.
57. 'Piña' or pinecone became the general term for un-taxed, high-grade silver ingots. They had a hole in the middle through which a cord was passed, attaching them to the inside of the packages of hemp. 'Piñas' produced in Potosí usually were fist-sized and weighed 20–25 lbs, or an average of 10 kilos (Reynals to Antonio Mont, 9 April and 19 July 1800; and to Alcina, 18 October 1800, Archivo Nacional, Santiago de Chile, Fondo Olaguer Reynals, Caja 12). I thank Kris Lane for this explanation.
58. 'Si fuese caso que Romero no le tomase mis seis piñas de Plata que le había vendido para el Americano, no se aflija VM, que como la plata es de tan superior calidad, no faltará otros que la compren, y de lo contrario, a su tiempo caminará para Barcelona' (Reynals to Alcina, 11 December 1800, Archivo Nacional, Santiago de Chile, Fondo Olaguer Reynals, Caja 12).
59. Reynals to Alcina, 10 January and 9 February 1801, Archivo Nacional, Santiago de Chile, Fondo Olaguer Reynals, Caja 27.
60. In the peak years of slave arrivals in Buenos Aires and Montevideo in 1782–1783, half of the captives were sent westward to the slave routes between Mendoza and Lima (Jumar 2019).
61. The 1787–1789 slave trade sally of the Royal Philippines Company in the Río de la Plata was considered a financial disaster by metropolitan and colonial authorities as well as by the investors due to the high price of captives in the Bight of Biafra and the high mortality rate. However, local merchants who managed the Buenos Aires-Lima route actually profited from this, as most captives were sent to Lima (Ibarra 2021).
62. This tax was not consistently levied across Spanish colonies. In 1794, the Spanish Governor of Trinidad excempted slave traders from paying avería (José Chacón to Real Hacienda of Caracas, Archivo General de Indias [hereafter AGI], Caracas 23, Puerto de España, 6 February 1794).
63. This imposed four percent of the value of the maritime imports, which included slaves, and two percent of the value of exports (AGN-A, IX, 4-8-4, Averías, 1800–1808). I thank Antonio Ibarrra and Luis Aguirre for their generosity in providing these data.
64. I am using the same database employed in Borucki 2015, 25–56.
65. This is an estimate. Here we have applied to the slave arrivals in Montevideo the same ratio (207.61) between the number of slaves arriving in Buenos Aires (9,966) according to the avería records and the overall sum paid by slave traders on avería tax ($2,013,010) in Buenos Aires for these very same captives. Using this ratio, 17,651 Africans arriving in Montevideo were sold for an overall estimate value of 3,664,567 pesos, which should have produced (if paid) a contribution of avería of $146,583. We have eliminated the fractions (reales) in the pesos for simplification.
66. On slave traders resisting avería tax, see Tjarks 1962, 225.
67. The combined value of merchandise entering Buenos Aires and Montevideo in 1801–1806 (we lack data of avería entry in Montevideo for 1807) is $14,164,860; the additional value of entering slaves is an estimate based on the recorded number of arriving slaves and average avería value of $5,024,967, or an additional 35 percent to the value of commodities. The avería taxed four percent on the value of maritime imports.

68. 'Valor de los frutos extrahidos de la cuenta de Tomás Antonio Romero,' 24 December 1807, AGN-A, IX, 18-8-11. This source lists individual ships and can be cross-checked with the port records.
69. I thank Josep Delgado Ribas for this observation. On the more liberal Spanish policy following 1787, see Tavárez 2018.
70. The United States prohibited the transatlantic slave trade in 1808, and later the revolutionary government of Buenos Aires declared this traffic illegal in 1812 (Borucki 2015, 25–56).
71. 'Vernon Wm and Samuel, Ship Accounts,' NHS-VP, Box 229.
72. On the *Juliet*, see NHS-VP, Box 229, Folder Vernon Wm and Samuel, Ship accounts; on the bank see Chernos 2002, 30.
73. On the impact of this silver on U.S. public bonds and banking, see Nelson 2012, 35–36.
74. Additional freight services to Spanish America by U.S. shippers and a larger volume of silver entering the U.S. further supports Douglass North's view that the carrying trade became the main force behind U.S. economic growth during the era of neutral commerce (North, Anderson, and Hill 1983, 65–71). For critiques to this view, see Shepherd and Walton 1976; Goldin and Lewis 1980.
75. The Dutch and the English East India companies transferred over ten percent of the New World silver production directly to the Indian Ocean from about 1660 to 1760, and part of this silver came from slave sales in the Spanish colonies (Richards 1983, 24).
76. The silver peso was valuable as 'certified and reliable means of payment,' rather than for the amount of silver (Irigoin 2009, 239; Irigoin 2013).
77. Samuel Brown thought that Chace was overpricing the coffee, that his debit due to the shipowners was larger, and overall that Chace pursued 'a regular system of fraud' (Samuel Brown to William Vernon, 23 February 1799, NHS-VP, Box 45, Folder 1; Samuel Brown to William Vernon, 8 April 1799, Personal Archive of Marion Morrison, Little Compton, Rhode Island).
78. The story of insurance also illustrates the various degrees of complicity of U.S. merchant families with the slave trade at the turn of the century. It is surprising to see Thomas Arnold as underwriter of a slave voyage, perhaps unknowingly given that nowhere in the papers of the *Ascension*'s insurance are mentions of slave trading. The voyage of the *Ascension* began in 1795, two years before Arnold led the campaign against John Brown.
79. 'Statement of money Received by Caleb Gardner, September 1803,' NHS-VP, Box 81, Folder 8.
80. U.S. merchants followed previous French trade routes between the Mascarene Islands and Mozambique that included the Western coast of India. The exports of Indian cotton cloth to southeast Africa and the imports of African ivory tusks to India, as shown by Pedro Machado, were the predominant exchanges of these routes. Vãniyã merchants of Western India sold cotton textiles to Portuguese and African merchants in southeast Africa to obtain ivory. This cloth circulated in Mozambique as well as in the Portuguese Indian and Atlantic trade. French merchants later participated, and U.S. traders became late eighteenth-century newcomers. Madagascar also participated in these exchanges, particularly, by selling provisions to feed consumers in the Indian Ocean (Hooper 2017, 147–54).
81. The case of the ship *Ruby* shows the significance of silver and gunpowder in the trade of the Mascarene Islands, Madagascar, and Mozambique. French merchants intended to buy slaves in Mozambique with piastres, gunpowder, iron bars, firearms, and textiles in 1764. While the piastres were the most valuable item, the firearms were a close second. In fact, war-related items surpassed the silver (Jauze 2012, 154).
82. Thus, from the 1790s on, a transition from ivory to slave trade took place, though the latter did not completely displace the former (Machado 2014, 201).
83. Vãniyã merchants also provided credit, cloth, and shipping for Mozambique-based slave traders in the 1790s such as Joaquim do Rosario Monteiro, who received cotton cloth on credit and introduced Indian merchants to investing in the slave trade to Brazil (Machado 2014, 210, 230–31).

84. Paper money and bills of exchange were under twenty percent compared to cash (Samuel Brown to William Vernon, 7 March 1792, NYHS-SC-SSWM). Already in 1744, Portuguese colonial administrators in Brazil communicated to the Crown that slaves sold in Mozambique were cheaper than in Costa da Mina (Gold Coast and Bight of Benin), and thus the price of captives compared to other regions was a factor attracting Atlantic slavers to Mozambique (Capela 2014, 182).
85. A captain working with Brown brought captives from Mozambique to Ile de France (Samuel Brown to William Vernon, 28 January 1793, NYHS-SC-SSWM).
86. French traders in Ile de France began accepting U.S. bills of exchange for 9,000 'hard dollars' the following year (Samuel Brown to William Vernon, 1 and 14 March 1794, NYHS-SC-SSWM).
87. Out of 55 U.S. slave voyages embarking captives in southeast Africa, 31 took place between 1797 and 1808. Only three took place in the first half of the decade of the 1790s (Slave Voyages Website, TSTD). The *Ascension* was the first Rhode Island bottom arriving in Ile de France in 1796, but the main U.S. ports organizing voyages to this island were Salem, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, which were less connected with the slave trade and more involved with Europe and Asia. The U.S. commerce in Ile de France finished with the ending of neutral trade and British occupation of this island, now Mauritius, in 1810, which curtailed slave trading as well (Toussaint 1954, 7, 73).
88. This world of profit-seeking entrepreneurs and capitalist relations of production emerged in various places beyond the North Atlantic (Tutino 2011).
89. While excellent studies examine French slave voyages in the Indian Ocean by showing ships conducting quadrangular trade connecting the Indian Ocean, Saint-Domingue and France, the case of the *Ascension* shows the full extent of trans-imperial and transoceanic exchange (and contraband) of captives and silver connecting the Indian Ocean, Europe and both North and South America in times of neutral trade. Apart from Jauze 2012, on a rebellion of slaves embarked in Madagascar, see Bialuschewki 2011; on Saint-Domingue and quadrangular trade, see Vernent 2011.
90. During the entire history of the slave trade, 1520 to 1867, about half of the 12.5 million captives embarking in Africa into Atlantic slaving sailed during the period 1750–1825 (Slave Voyages Website, TSTD).
91. Francisco de Saavedra to Consejo de Indias, AGI, Caracas 23, 20 December 1787. I thank José Belmonte for this reference.
92. On transferences among colonial treasuries and how this connected with degrees of negotiations between the colonies and the metropolis, see Irigoin and Grafe 2008; Marichal and von Grafenstein 2012; on smuggling and the flow of silver in late-colonial Venezuela, see Piñero 1994 and Cromwell 2018.
93. I thank José Belmonte for this reference, id#70018 in Slave Voyages Website, TSTD. On Venezuela, Cuba, and Cartagena's slave trade in these year, see Belmonte 2019.
94. 'Memoria de las primeras operaciones de la Real Compañía de Filipinas y su estado actual,' 1787, AGI, Filipinas 986, 13. See also, 'Buenos Aires, 11-3-1789. N° 122,' AGI, Filipinas 987.
95. 'Expediente instruido por la Junta de Fomento con objeto de acordar si conviene o no suspender por tiempo limitado la extracción de caudales en retorno de Negros Bozales, 1801–1803,' Archivo Nacional de Cuba. Real Consulado y Junta de Fomento. Leg. 72, Exp. 2791. I thank Jorge Felipe-González for this reference.
96. Cuenca-Esteban identifies the years between 1795 and 1808 as the peak of British trade with the Spanish colonies, particularly through U.S. neutral shipping (2014, 86).
97. For Intra-American slave arrivals, see https://slavevoyages.org/voyages/0I33wjjp; for transatlantic slave arrivals, see https://slavevoyages.org/voyages/bIy4SJvU.
98. For the breakdown in periods, see 'Notes on the Estimates of the Intra-American Slave trade to the Spanish Americas' and 'IntraAmertoSpa_Amer2015,' available at https://slavevoyages.org/voyage/downloads.
99. To illustrate this gap in the historiography of the trade of non-human merchandise and the scholarship on the slave trade, Pearce leaves the slave trade out of his examination of British commerce to Spanish America; for an explanation of his reasoning, see Pearce 2014, x.
100. On the slave market in Santiago, see Cussen, Llorca-Jaña, and Droller 2016.

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