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Women of the British Atlantic Slave Trade

Abstract:

English men, especially those involved in the Atlantic slave trade, define much of what we know about British slavery. We can read books about the leading men of the Royal African Company, which held a monopoly on the early British slave trade. Scholars have devoted countless pages to the lives of slave ship captains, officers, and seamen. More recently, they have documented the triumphs and travails of English traders who resided on the West African coast and bartered British goods for captives there. Historians have made the English men who bought those African men, women, and children after they disembarked from slave ships in the British colonies familiar to us, too. Yet, what is not readily apparent from this scholarship, and what this paper shows, is that the business of Atlantic slave trading was dependent upon British women, too.

Drawing on personal and business correspondence, travel narratives, passenger lists, account books, newspapers, and business directories, "Women of the British Atlantic Slave Trade" shows that women participated in almost every documented aspect of Britain's slave trade commerce. If it is true what Eric Williams said—that British slavery was fundamental to the rise of British capitalism—then women's myriad investments in the slave trade also proved to be investments in a global economic system the likes of which the world had never seen. It is time for us to know these women.

Bio:

Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers is an Associate Professor and Chancellor's Professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley where she specializes in African-American history, the history of slavery and women's and gender history. She is the author of *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (2019), which won the Lapidus Center for the Historical Analysis of Transatlantic Slavery (at the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture) 2020 Harriet Tubman Prize for the best nonfiction book published in the United States on the slave trade, slavery, and anti-slavery in the Atlantic World, the Southern Association for Women's Historians 2020 Julia Cherry Spruill Prize awarded for the best book in southern women's history, the Southern Historical Association's 2020 Charles S. Sydnor Award which is awarded for the best book in southern history published in an odd-numbered year, the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic's 2020 Best Book Prize, and the Organization of American Historians' 2020 Merle Curti Prize for the best book in American social history. Jones-Rogers was also the first African-American and the third woman to win the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in History since the award's inception in 1980. In 2023, she received the Dan David Prize, the largest history prize in the world.