AHR Exchange

From "Black Rice" to "Brown": Rethinking the History of Risiculture in the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Atlantic

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In the December 2007 issue of this journal and in the first major piece of scholarship to make use of the recently launched second version of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD2), David Eltis, Philip Morgan, and David Richardson challenge what has come to be known as the "black rice thesis."[1] Developed over several decades by Peter H. Wood, Daniel C. Littlefield, and Judith A. Carney, the thesis posits that skilled rice farmers from Upper Guinea introduced technology important for the establishment and expansion of lowland South Carolina and Georgia's eighteenth-century rice-based plantation system.[2] Carney extends the argument by applying it elsewhere, including Maranhão, Brazil.[3] Underlying Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson's challenge are two assertions. First, they state that most of the Africans shipped to South Carolina, Georgia, and Amazonia (by which they mean the eighteenth-century captaincies of Maranhão and Pará) during "crucial" periods in the development of plantation rice agriculture were not Upper Guineans but were Af-

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[1] David Eltis, Philip Morgan, and David Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History: Reassessing the African Contribution to Rice Cultivation in the Americas," *American Historical Review* 12, no. 5 (December 2007): 1329–1358. For another critique, see S. Max Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006), 53–91. The TSTD2 is at http://www.slavevoyages.com. The term "black rice" is often applied to *O. glabberima*, a dark-grain rice indigenous to West Africa. Carney uses the term to refer metaphorically to rice of any strain (especially white-grain *O. sativa* varieties) that was produced by Africans using technologies developed in Africa. Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001). I discuss the "black rice debate" in an interview conducted by Peter Limb and Peter Alegi for the Africa Past & Present Podcast, Episode 12, August 30, 2008, http://afripod.aodl.org/?m=200808.

[2] Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974); Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Baton Rouge, La., 1981); Carney, *Black Rice*. More recently, see Edda L. Fields-Black, *Deep Roots: Rice Farmers in West Africa and the African Diaspora* (Bloomington, Ind., 2008). The definition of "Upper Guinea" has changed over time. Here I use Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson's delineation—Senegal to Liberia, including the Senegambia, Windward Coast, and Sierra Leone slave-trading regions.

[3] Judith A. Carney, " 'With Grains in Her Hair': Rice in Colonial Brazil," *Slavery and Abolition* 25, no. 1 (2004): 1–27; Carney, "Rice and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Atlantic Passages to Suriname," *Slavery and Abolition* 26, no. 3 (December 2005): 325–347.

FIGURE 1: Inundated rice fields in Maranhão, Brazil. Photo by Walter Hawthorne, 2005.

ricans with no previous knowledge of rice cultivation.[4] Second, they write that, more than the "basic farming knowledge" that African slaves possessed, planter power and a broad Atlantic economy and culture shaped how rice-based plantation systems emerged. A "subaltern role" in the making of New World agricultural systems "should be highlighted," they instruct, "where it is attested," but Africans were not, they conclude, "the primary players in creating and maintaining rice regimes."[5]

Though Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson demonstrate that some of Carney's ancillary arguments should be rethought, I am not convinced that we should throw the black rice out with its husks—discard, that is, the "black rice thesis" altogether. Embracing the trio's approach, I fear, risks writing Africans and their descendants in the Americas once again out of history. If planters "called the shots," they did not necessarily know more than their slaves about particular crops. If planters "experimented keenly," their experiments were not necessarily better than the ones that African farmers had been conducting for hundreds of years. If we do no more than "highlight" the agricultural initiatives of African slaves where white people "attested" to them, black people will necessarily occupy positions in the backgrounds of our studies. Following Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson's thoughtful essay, we should recognize that over the course of the eighteenth century, on all of the Atlantic's coasts but at a different pace in different places, rice became metaphorically "brown," as light- and dark-skinned people responded to market forces, devised new methods for planting and processing the grain, and created new dishes that featured

[4] Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1334.
[5] Ibid., 1335, 1357.

it.[6] But before the eighteenth century, rice, to the extent that it was known in the Atlantic world, was "black." In this period, Upper Guineans—and not Europeans—were the Atlantic's master rice producers. Evidence that Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson call on to refute the claim that Upper Guineans introduced rice technologies to parts of the Americas is not always as revealing as they claim, and at times it is contradicted by alternative sources from Maranhão.

Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson's critique of Carney's work is founded on their different understandings of what constitutes sound evidence for historical reconstruction. Following an Africanist tradition of seeking non-archival approaches to construct knowledge about people who did not leave written records, Carney adopts what she calls a "geographical perspective focused on culture, technology, and environment." Her assumption is that the Columbian exchange involved more than the transfer of seeds. "People and plants together migrated," and it was people who brought with them knowledge of how to plant seeds, cultivate crops, and process, store, and cook what they harvested. Since "the only people in South Carolina" possessing knowledge of how to grow rice in wetlands were West Africans, one must look to them, she argues, "for adapting the crop to challenging New World conditions."[7] Although she can cite no contemporary observer who attested that West African technologies were responsible for the establishment and expansion of rice agriculture in South Carolina, Georgia, or Maranhão, she reads the landscapes of rice-producing regions on both sides of the Atlantic, finding parallels in techniques of production, processing, and cooking that she argues are evidence in support of her thesis.

Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson are not impressed with Carney's geographical perspective. Taking an archival approach to historical evidence, they see script penned on paper as the stuff of source material. For them, it is all the better if that paper holds data that can be quantified. And quantifiable data is what they have—records of the voyages of more than 35,000 slave ships contained in the TSTD2.

As its predecessor was, the TSTD2 promises to be an invaluable tool for the crafting of innovative studies about the early modern Atlantic. But databases have limitations, and the limitations of the TSTD2 make it a dubious source for a critique of the "black rice thesis." First, its data are most thorough for periods when bureaucracies capable of tracking shipments from particular African ports and to particular American ports were well established. But bureaucracies were not well established in early colonial North America. It is odd, indeed, that the first publication to focus attention on the TSTD2 dwells on a period (pre-1700) in South Carolina

[6] Ibid., 1358. Here the trio makes this point clearly: "Atlantic history was the result of the creolization of peoples from four continents." I agree, but I argue for more attention to time and place. Rice slowly became an Atlantic crop in the eighteenth century, with people from many places reshaping how it was grown, processed, and cooked, but it was not so much an Atlantic crop in the seventeenth century.

[7] On Africanist approaches to evidence, see Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison, Wis., 1994), 40–59; Steven Feierman, "African Histories and the Dissolution of World History," in Robert H. Bates, V. Y. Mudimbe, and Jean O'Barr, eds., *Africa and the Disciplines: The Contributions of Research in Africa to the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Chicago, 1993), 182; Joseph C. Miller, "History and Africa/Africa and History," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 1 (February 1999): 1–32. Quotations from Carney, *Black Rice*, 6–8, 81–82.

and Georgia's history for which the dataset records no slave arrivals.[8] A second limitation of the TSTD2 is that it contains a range of information about slave shipments from Africa and only from Africa. Yet most of the slaves who arrived in the Lowcountry and Chesapeake when experiments with rice agriculture were first being conducted were transfers from other American colonies. Many were "saltwater" slaves—Africans—who touched briefly at Barbados.[9] These transfers are not recorded in the dataset. At best, then, the TSTD2 provides only a fuzzy snapshot of the makeup of North America's African population during the "crucial formative period" in the history of North American rice farming.

Finally, the TSTD2 does not reveal where slaves forced onto ships at African ports hailed from. That is, while it allows users to determine the number (among other things) of slaves embarked at particular African ports and disembarked at particular American ports, it does not enable them to determine the birthplaces of the Africans aboard any given ship. Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson rightly note that Upper Guinea "was never uniformly committed to rice production," and that the nature of rice cultivation there and across the ocean was not fixed but was in great flux in the eighteenth century.[10] But without data on Upper Guinea slave origins, they rely on speculation as the basis for one of their central arguments—their claim that "the number and percentage of Africans with rice-growing experience must have been far below the total number of slaves leaving Upper Guinea."[11]

WERE THERE NECESSARILY "FEW" RICE PRODUCERS on "many of the vessels from Upper Guinea"?[12] Although research into the British and French trades is needed to fully answer this question, written sources indicate that Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson's speculation is wildly off the mark for the eighteenth-century Portuguese trade. The first source is a registry from the slave ship *S. José*, which departed Cacheu in 1756.[13] The total number of captives was ninety-seven, of which fifty-two had been seized in a swampy "lowland" coastal strip not far from the ports of Bissau and Cacheu. This strip was occupied by small communities composed of people from a range of ethnic groups. Those listed on the registry were Balanta, Bijago, Floup, Brame, and Papel. The remaining forty-five captives hailed from farther inland or north, and most were identified as Mandinka.[14] Lands that Mandinka occupied were higher in

[8] From a search of TSTD2 (accessed September 22, 2009). The database lists thirty ships arriving in Virginia. Of the twenty-two identified by region of embarkation, eight were from Senegambia (Upper Guinea) and eight from Bight of Biafra. Two were from West Central Africa, two from the Gold Coast, one from Southeast Africa, and one from Benin.

[9] John Coombs, "Building the 'Machine': An Episode in the Development of Plantation Slavery in Colonial Virginia, 1630–1730" (Ph.D. diss., William and Mary, 2006), 103–104. Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson assume that since many slaves arriving in South Carolina were transfers from Barbados, the slave population in the two places must have looked the same. Yet for many of the ships the TSTD2 lists as disembarking at Barbados in the period before 1700, the African port of embarkation is unknown.

[10] Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1345–1346.

[11] Ibid., 1348.

[12] Ibid., 1349.

[13] Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa [hereafter BNL], Collecção Pombalina, codice 628. Of the hundreds of ship registries from Upper Guinea departures that I have examined for the eighteenth century, this is the only one that lists the ethnic origins of the captives held on board.

[14] For a history of the region, see Walter Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Trans-*

elevation than those of the coastal strip, and thus are often called "uplands." A second source is a database (the Maranhão Inventories Slave Database, or MISD) derived from inventories of slave populations in Maranhão that were recorded between 1767 and 1832.[15] It dovetails with the ship's records. Isolating the period 1767 to 1800, it shows that Upper Guineans made up the largest single group of slaves in Maranhão (followed by *crioulos* or Brazilian-born slaves), and that almost two-thirds of Upper Guinean slaves had been born in the lowland coastal strip. They were from the same ethnic groups as the slaves listed on the registry from the *S. José*, and there were also some Biafada. The other third of Maranhão's Upper Guinea–born slaves were overwhelmingly Mandinka.[16]

From the late seventeenth century, all of the people from the Upper Guinean coastal strip who were represented on the registry from the *S. José* and in the MISD had some commitment to rice agriculture on uplands or lowlands. Some of the most proficient producers of rice in lowland mangrove swamp areas were Floup and Brame, whose agricultural sectors approached paddy rice monocultures. Moreover, from about the mid-eighteenth century, the commitment of Papel and Balanta to mangrove swamp cultivation increased considerably, as most coastal dwellers turned to the crop because it could be grown in places that slave raiders could not easily reach, and it could be marketed in growing urban centers and to ship captains.[17] Although, as Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson note, not all Mandinka were rice producers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many did produce rice, particularly those who lived only sixty to one hundred miles east and north of Cacheu and Bissau around the towns of Farim and Geba, and tens of miles to the north along the Casamance River. Contemporary observations indicate that it was these Mandinka who accounted for the bulk of Mandinka forced onto ships such as the *S. José* that left Cacheu and Bissau from the mid-eighteenth century.[18] To be sure, as Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson write, rice producers were not "easy prey" for slavers.[19] In Upper Guinea's coastal strip, few communities were eradicated as a result of slaving. Overall, rice-producing communities defended themselves well. However, individuals from coastal communities were taken captive and sold abroad. They became slaves as a result of tensions within communities that resulted in witch-

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formations along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400–1900 (Portsmouth, N.H., 2003); and Hawthorne, "Nourishing a Stateless Society during the Slave Trade: The Rise of Balanta Paddy-Rice Production in Guinea-Bissau," *Journal of African History* 42, no. 1 (2001): 1–24.

[15] I assembled the MISD at the Arquivo Judiciário of the Tribunal de Justiça do Estado do Maranhão (TJEM). It contains information about the names, gender, region of origin, age, marital status, and health of most of the approximately 8,500 slaves listed in it. Inventories at the TJEM have not been catalogued. There are 342 slaves listed in the database for the period 1767 to 1800.

[16] The percentages of people from coastal and interior (mainly Mandinka) groups remained almost identical from 1801 to 1832.

[17] Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves*, 35–39, 155–157.

[18] On rice around Farim and Geba and near the Casamance, see Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino [hereafter AHU], Guiné, cx. 11, docs. 57 and 63; cx. 12, doc. 3-A; Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo [hereafter ANTT], Junta do Comércio, mç. 63, cx. 203; Olga F. Linares, "From Tidal Swamp to Inland Valley: On the Social Organization of Wet Rice Cultivation among the Diola of Senegal," *Africa* 51, no. 2 (1981): 577–578. On the capture of Mandinka near Cacheu and Bissau, see AHU, Guiné, cx. 9, doc. 55; cx. 11, docs. 20 and 63; cx. 12, doc. 13. On violence in the region, see Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1998), 92.

[19] Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1346.

craft accusations and kidnappings and tensions among communities that gave rise to small-scale raids.[20]

There were, then, many rice producers on Portuguese vessels bound for Maranhão and Pará. Since the Portuguese and British concentrated their efforts at different Upper Guinea ports, data for the Portuguese trade does not necessarily reflect the British trade bound for South Carolina.[21] Nonetheless, data from the Portuguese trade raises an important question: Is Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson's archival evidence more accurate than the evidence that Carney derives from a "geographical perspective"?

Unlike tobacco, sugar, and cotton, rice was a crop that African farmers had cultivated long before European seafarers reached the Upper Guinea coast in the fifteenth century. It was also a crop that African farmers adapted to a variety of ecological conditions by drawing on indigenous knowledge. On upland (dry-land or rainfed) areas, farmers could produce rice with relatively little labor and by using crude tools. When planted on lowlands (wetlands), however, and particularly on tidal floodplains, rice demanded an incredible amount of technological sophistication and tremendous inputs of labor. In tidal zones in West Africa, rice farmers had to clear mangroves, build and maintain dikes with specialized tools, leach salt from soils, carve paddies out of the land, and manage freshwater levels. Planting, harvesting, processing, and storing rice required considerable effort, too, much more, perhaps, than any other staple of eighteenth-century Atlantic Rim diets.[22]

Recognizing the differences between the demands of upland and lowland rice agriculture, Carney develops in *Black Rice* an argument that is more nuanced than Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson acknowledge. She shows (and the trio does not dispute) that the sophistication of rice production in South Carolina and Georgia increased as the number and ratio of Upper Guinean slaves in the region increased.[23] From close readings of descriptions of agricultural landscapes, she argues that upland rice was "emphasized" from the late 1600s through the early 1700s, when Upper Guineans were present but Angolans constituted a majority of slaves. It was "from the 1750s," she writes, that "the even more productive but labor-demanding tidal floodplain system . . . would dominate Carolina and Georgia rice plantations until the Civil War."[24] And, indeed, the calculations that Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson

[20] Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves*, 91–110; Robert Martin Baum, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegambia* (New York, 1999), 108–129. I explore this data in greater depth in my forthcoming book.

[21] In Upper Guinea in the eighteenth century, the Portuguese were based at Bissau and Cacheu, though they obtained some slaves from farther south, transshipping them on small vessels. The British and French dominated other ports, obtaining a considerable but unknown number of slaves from Bissau, Cacheu, and the neighboring Bijagos Islands by breaking Portuguese monopolies at will. Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves*, 67–82; Jean Mettas, "La traite portugaise en Haute Guinée: Problèmes et méthodes," *Journal of African History* 16, no. 3 (1975): 343–363; Walter Rodney, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545–1800* (New York, 1970), 122–151.

[22] Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves*, 159–166; Baum, *Shrines of the Slave Trade*, 28–31; Linares, "From Tidal Swamp to Inland Valley," 557–591.

[23] Nowhere do Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson acknowledge the technical sophistication required in paddy rice production. They focus only on the possibility that "some" Africans "introduced Old World customs of sowing, threshing, and winnowing" to the New. They ignore similarities in diking and water and saline management practices on both sides of the Atlantic. "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1335.

[24] Carney, *Black Rice*, 82–85.

make with the TSTD2 confirm Carney's contention that for a period after 1750, Upper Guineans arrived in South Carolina and Georgia in greater numbers than slaves from other regions of Africa.[25]

With respect to the Lowcountry, the "black rice thesis" should not, then, be discarded. A paucity of archival evidence about early colonial South Carolina and Georgia should not be enough to trump knowledge gained through a "geographical perspective." It appears possible that in the formative years of the upland rice complex, and likely in the formative years of the lowland complex, Upper Guineans were, as Carney points out, the only people in South Carolina who knew how to produce rice on a large scale. Nowhere has that point been disproved.[26]

Is the same true of Maranhão? Did Africans introduce the technology required for the establishment and expansion of agriculture there? In their examination of this region, Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson make two flawed arguments in an attempt to downplay the significance of rice in the eighteenth century. First, they state, "Rice was not . . . the major crop of Amazonia." It "always lagged behind cotton and cacao."[27] On this point they are correct, but in fact, what Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson have dubbed "Amazonia" comprised two captaincies— Maranhão and Pará. If we disaggregate exports from Maranhão (where rice was a significant crop) from exports from Pará (where it was not), we must draw a very different conclusion. Rice was the largest single export from Maranhão for most years between 1774 and 1811. Cacao exports from Maranhão lagged far behind those from Pará. Cotton was an important export from Maranhão, but it did not surpass rice in pounds exported. Some years the valuation of rice exports was higher than the valuation of cotton exports. Moreover, rice was consumed in Maranhão, meaning that export figures do not give a full picture of the crop's centrality to slaves' working lives.[28] Contemporary

[25] Ibid., 89; Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1336.

[26] Edelson argues that planters brought knowledge of channeling water from England to South Carolina. However, he does not show that the same farmers who mastered water-control technologies in England moved to South Carolina. Moreover, I am not convinced that the technologies applied in England were all that similar to those necessary for paddy rice agriculture anywhere—particularly on tidal flats. This is not to say that planters did not learn rice technologies over time. Clearly, Edelson shows, planters wrote about the crop. They were innovators. Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina*, 53–91; Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1353–1354.

[27] Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1342.

[28] Maranhão exported more than twice as much rice as Pará from 1776 to 1780, just under half as much from 1781 to 1785, and about two-thirds more from 1786 to 1790. When the period 1796–1811 is looked at as a whole, the value of cotton exports from Maranhão was higher than the value of rice exports. However, cotton was not more valuable every year. For example, foodstuffs (most of which was probably rice) accounted for 65.1 percent of the value of all exports in 1802, and in 1811 they were 65 percent. The trio errs when reading Portuguese sources for rice export data. Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson say that rice could not have accounted for more than 10 percent of the value of Maranhense exports from 1796 to 1811. From the sources they cite, the figure should be 20 percent. "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1342. They cite José Jobson de A. Arruda, *O Brasil no comércio colonial* (São Paulo, 1980), Table 28, which is of *imports into* and not *exports from* Maranhão. My calculations are from Arruda, *O Brasil*, 245–247; Raymundo Jozé de Souza Gayozo, *Compendio historico-politico dos principios da lavoura do Maranhão* (Paris, 1818), 182; Manuel Barata, *A antiga producção e exportação do Pará: Estudo historico-economico* (Belem, 1915), 3; M. Nunes Dias, *Fomento e mercantilismo: A Companhia Geral do Grão Pará e Maranhão (1775–1778)* (Belém, 1970), 430; C. M. dos Santos, "Cultura, indústria e comércio de arroz no Brasil colonial," *Lavoura Arrozeira* 32, no. 315 (1979): 6–20; Dauril Alden, "Late Colonial Brazil, 1750–1808," in Leslie Bethell, ed., *Colonial Latin America* (Cambridge,

observations leave little doubt that slaves in Maranhão spent considerable time growing rice in the second half of the eighteenth century.[29]

Second, Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson attempt to downplay the importance of rice in Maranhão by demonstrating that exports from South Carolina were far greater after 1785 (the period when Maranhense exports reached a high point and then plateaued and South Carolina exports recovered from a decline during the Revolutionary War).[30] This claim is correct, but it should be put into historical perspective. Before the mid-eighteenth century, Maranhão was an underdeveloped outpost of the Portuguese empire. Its exports were few, and the colonial population was small.[31] After mid-century, policymakers fostered economic expansion in Amazonia by encouraging white immigration and African slave imports (principally from Upper Guinea). Rice was first exported from Maranhão in 1767, and its production grew steadily over the next fifteen years, leveling off at about 9.1 million pounds per year after 1785.[32] By that time, South Carolina had been exporting rice for ninety years. Too, South Carolina had a considerably larger population than Maranhão by 1785. In 1787, the governor of Maranhão figured the region's colonial population at 61,699, of which an estimated 18,894 were white and 35,963 were black.[33] The population of South Carolina in 1790 was more than four times larger, standing at 249,073, of which 140,178 were white and 108,895 black.[34] Given this, it is not all that impressive that South Carolina's rice exports were four times higher than Maranhão's from 1785 to 1789, the period for which Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson provide data. Lower export totals from Maranhão are not evidence that rice was an insignificant crop in the captaincy.

With respect to Maranhão, Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson do not, then, provide

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Mass., 1984), 601–660; and César Augusto Marques, *Dicionário histórico-geográfico da Província do Maranhão* (Rio de Janeiro, 1970), 207; supplemented with data from AHU and BNL. On rice consumption, see AHU, Maranhão, cx. 45, docs. 4458 and 1772; Marques, *Dicionário histórico-geográfico da Província do Maranhão*, 93.

[29] Among many others, see AHU, Maranhão, cx. 43, doc. 4264; AHU, Maranhão, cx. 51, doc. 4938. Also Marques, *Dicionário histórico-geográfico da Província do Maranhão*, 93.

[30] Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson do not provide export figures for South Carolina during the American Revolution. They argue that Lowcountry exports between 1770 and 1774 were seven times those of Amazonia after 1785. "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1340–1341.

[31] In 1720, white Maranhense numbered 1,378, and there were few Africans among them. Jerônimo de Viveiros, *História do comércio do Maranhão, 1612–1895* (São Luís, 1954), 63.

[32] Calculated from Gayozo, *Compendio historico-politico dos principios da lavoura do Maranhão*, 182; Barata, *A antiga producção e exportação do Pará*, 3; Dias, *Fomento e mercantilismo*, 430; Santos, "Cultura, indústria e comércio de arroz no Brasil colonial," 6–20; Alden, "Late Colonial Brazil," 601–660; and confirmed by sources from AHU. Portuguese consumers did not like the dark-grain indigenous rice that was native to Maranhão, so until a new strain introduced from South Carolina was substituted for it in farmers' fields in the mid-1770s, Maranhão's rice export sector did not thrive. AHU, Maranhão, cx. 46, doc. 4528. This does not necessarily mean, as Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson state, that the introduction of a new rice strain and "not the arrival of slaves from Upper Guinea" was responsible for an export-based risiculture. Following Carney's logic, someone had to have knowledge of rice production. "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1342.

[33] There were Indians counted in the census, too. Figures presented here do not count Piauí, a small captaincy that Maranhão controlled. Maranhão and Piauí had a combined population of 98,743. ANTT, Ministério do Reino, mç. 601, cx. 704. In 1777, when Maranhão's economic expansion was beginning, its total population stood at 47,410, which was far below South Carolina's. Dauril Alden, "The Population of Brazil in the Late Eighteenth Century: A Preliminary Survey," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 43, no. 2 (1963): 191.

[34] Walter B. Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, S.C., 1998), 327.

FIGURE 2: Man in Maranhão, Brazil, gathering unmilled rice that has dried in the sun. Photo by Walter Hawthorne, 2005.

adequate evidence to undermine the foundation of the "black rice thesis." However, they do show that parts of the thesis are problematic. First, they make convincing arguments against Carney's claims that rice-producing slaves in the Americas used skills developed in Africa as a bargaining chip in negotiations with planters over

work. Simply put, there is no evidence that Upper Guineans agreed to apply specialized knowledge to rice production in exchange for better labor conditions.[35] Second, with data from sales and an impressive array of contemporary observations, Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson show that Carney, like many before her, is incorrect in stating that South Carolina planters were willing to pay a premium for Upper Guinean women because they possessed particular knowledge of rice.[36] Data from the MISD supports the same conclusion for Maranhão, where the values of slave women between the ages of 18 and 37 were, on average, less than those of men of the same age.[37]

Finally, Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson present compelling evidence that planter preference does not account for the proportionately large presence of Upper Guineans among slave imports into South Carolina and Georgia in the period after 1750.[38] And evidence supports the same conclusion for Maranhão.[39] At times Amazonian landowners expressed a desire for slaves from specific places, but their reasons for doing so had nothing to do with perceptions of skill levels and everything to do with the health, size, and age of slaves arriving from particular ports at particular times. The journey to Amazonia was shorter from Upper Guinea than from Mina, Angola, and Mozambique, meaning that Upper Guineans generally arrived in better condition than others, and thus often fetched higher prices. But such was not always the case. In 1774, Maranhão's governor claimed that "the best slave is a Mina, which is the nation of the most value selling here for 100,000 reis, and those of Angola and other nations very much cheaper."[40] The governor was writing in the midst of Maranhão's rice boom, and Mina slaves arrived with no knowledge of rice agriculture. That same year, planters complained that slaves arriving on several ships from Cacheu, who were likely skilled rice producers, were "very old and worthless."[41] In 1787, a different governor expressed a different opinion. "The common price for slaves in Maranhão," he said, was "150,000 reis for those of top quality from Cacheu and Bissau and for those of first quality from Angola 120,000 reis."[42] Yet evidence from the MISD shows that differentials in the average values of slaves from various places in Africa disappeared once the slaves became acclimated to life in Maranhão. From

[35] Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1356; Carney, *Black Rice*, 99–101.

[36] Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1334, 1350–1353; Carney, *Black Rice*, 107; Wood, *Black Majority*, 106–107; Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves*, 56–57. The argument was first made in Elizabeth Donnan, "The Slave Trade into South Carolina before the Revolution," *American Historical Review* 33, no. 4 (July 1928): 804–828.

[37] Calculated from the MISD for the years 1767–1832.

[38] Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1338–1339; Carney, *Black Rice*, 88–97.

[39] Upper Guineans arrived in Amazonia in large numbers for the reasons that Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson explore—favorable winds and currents. A metropolitan desire to reestablish influence at Bissau and Cacheu and develop the economy of northeastern Brazil is also an explanatory factor. Carney erroneously cites Gayozo's work as a source attesting that Upper Guinean slaves commanded a higher price, with planters "selecting" them for their skills. However, Gayozo's discussion was centered on the price that African sellers wanted for their captives in Africa, not the price that captives were sold for in Maranhão. Where Gayozo derived his information is unclear, and I suspect he was wrong. Carney, "'With Grains in Her Hair,'" 14; Gayozo, *Compendio historico-politico dos principios da lavoura do Maranhão*, 244.

[40] AHU, Maranhão, cx. 48, doc. 4665.

[41] Ibid., cx. 47, doc. 4618.

[42] ANTT, Ministério do Reino, mç. 601, cx. 704.

FIGURE 3: Woman pounding rice in Maranhão, Brazil. Photo by Judith A. Carney, 2002.

1767 to 1800, the average inventory valuation of slaves in Maranhão who had been born in the Upper Guinea coastal zone was not different from that of slaves from the Angola-Congo region.[43]

That Upper Guineans were not, over time, more valuable to rice planters in Maranhão is not surprising given the relatively low level of technological sophistication applied to rice farming there, which is a topic that Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson do not explore. Accounts from Maranhão indicate that most rice was of the upland variety. Slaves cleared forests by burning them, and they used tools and

[43] Calculated from the MISD. Calculations made for groups delineated by age and gender and adjusted for inflation over time in the price of slaves.

techniques similar to those applied to rice agriculture in Upper Guinea for planting. But little that slaves did in fields required a skill set that approached the skills required for paddy rice production in mangrove swamp areas.[44] Angolans and Minas, who brought no rice knowledge from their homelands, labored beside those who did, performing the same tasks under a hot equatorial sun. This is not to imply that Upper Guinean knowledge was valueless. Before mechanical mills were established throughout Maranhão, slaves, the majority of whom were from Upper Guinea, processed rice the same way they had in their homelands—with mortars and pestles.[45] Moreover, Upper Guinea women slaves introduced rice-cooking techniques and rice-based dishes to Amazonia, many of which are popular today.[46]

Why a rice-producing region with high concentrations of coastal Upper Guineans did not make the leap from upland rice to higher-yielding paddy rice is a question that should be addressed in future studies. In addition, there is much left to understand with regard to why rice agriculture of any type emerged in some parts of the Americas that had concentrations of Upper Guineans but not in others.[47] Further, advocates of the "black rice thesis" should address questions about why Upper Guineans introduced technologies to a slave system that brutalized them.[48] And, finally, if planter preference does not explain why Upper Guineans were found in concentrations in two rice-producing regions of the Americas, scholars need to focus more attention on the role of unanticipated contingencies—forces "seen and unseen"—in the making of the Atlantic world.[49]

Although there are questions yet to be answered, the "black rice thesis" itself should not be discarded. To be sure, the nature of rice production—and of the cultural systems in which rice was central—transformed in the eighteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic, as light- and dark-skinned people met and mixed. On the Upper Guinea coast, the introduction of large quantities of iron, the spread of violence associated with slaving, and the development of urban and Atlantic markets for rice sparked massive changes in rice systems as people sought ways to produce sustenance and to garner a share of the goods brought on oceangoing vessels.[50] In

[44] For descriptions of Maranhense rice production, see Dias, *Fomento e mercantilismo*, 443; Antonio Bernardino Pereira do Lago, *Estatistica historica-geografica da provincia do Maranhão* (Lisbon, 1822), 54–56; F. A. Brandão Júnior, *A escravatura no Brasil: Precedida d'um artigo sobre agricultura e colonisação no Maranhão* (Brussels, 1865), 31–38; printed in Robert Edgar Conrad, *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (University Park, Pa., 1984), 96–99; Carney, " 'With Grains in Her Hair,' " 15–16.

[45] By 1772, there were only five small and unreliable mechanical mills in all of Maranhão, so most milling was done by hand. AHU, Maranhão, cx. 46, doc. 4514; cx. 45, docs. 4458 and 4460.

[46] Personal observations; Matthias Rohrig Assuncão, "Maranhão, terra Mandinga," *Boletim da Comissão Maranhense de Folclore* 20, no. 4–5 (August 2001): 4–5.

[47] Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson point to Chesapeake as an example of a place with a concentration of Upper Guineans but without a history of rice agriculture. However, many factors—ecological, economic, cultural, political, demographic, and technological—determined what commodities were produced in particular places at particular times. That rice did not emerge as an important crop in Virginia does not necessarily undermine the foundation of Carney's argument. "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1337.

[48] Ibid., 1356. Upper Guineans may have grown rice in the Americas in part because they could not contemplate a meal without it. Further, that Africans applied technologies from their homelands to crop production is not surprising. When given a task, Upper Guinean slaves did it the only way they knew how.

[49] Ibid., 1358.

[50] Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves*, 119–143, 151–171.

parts of the Americas, Upper Guineans applied technologies developed in their homelands while toiling in slave systems, growing rice for white masters who sought new technologies and labor organization schemes to make those systems more efficient. Over time, rice-producing cultures in the Americas became "creolized"; they transformed as the result of many forces "relating to both inheritance and experience."[51] By 1800, America's "black rice" was "brown." But acceptance of this point does not require rejection of the argument that the roots of American rice cultures can be traced to Africa. Rice, particularly paddy rice produced in tidal areas, required too much technological sophistication to be developed and sustained by people who knew nothing about the crop. Through a "geographical perspective," Carney finds an innovative way to construct knowledge about people who left no written records. Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson point historians of the Atlantic in a new and promising direction and correct some of Carney's few mistakes, but they do not undermine the foundation upon which the works of Carney, Littlefield, and Wood are built.

[51] Quote from Eltis, Morgan, and Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History," 1358.

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