

# Dark Bullion: Study Guide

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## Project Description

The *Dark Bullion* audio series is a historical project that explores the Atlantic slave trade, focusing on lesser-known themes and contradictions rather than the widely documented horrors. It begins in mid-17th century West Africa and utilizes AI-generated voices.

The content is drawn from historical records, traveler accounts, and European enslavers' reports, aiming for historical accuracy while acknowledging conflicting interpretations among historians. The project seeks to present the complexity and contradictions of the past with care, without simplification.

**Note on Terminology:** For accessibility, the podcast uses “Voodoo,” though “Vodou” or “Vodún” are the appropriate spellings in the context of West African religious traditions.

## How to Use This Guide

This study guide is designed to enhance your understanding of the *Dark Bullion* audio series and provide multiple ways to engage with the material, whether you're studying independently, in a classroom, or as part of a book club or discussion group.

### Recommended Approach

#### **For First-Time Listeners:**

1. Read the Project Description to understand the scope and methodology
2. Listen to each episode without interruption to experience the narrative flow
3. Explore the Maps and Timeline to contextualize the events geographically and chronologically
4. Review the Glossary and Cast-List for any unfamiliar terms or figures
5. Use the Quiz Questions to test your comprehension

#### **For In-Depth Study:**

1. Listen to an episode while following along with the transcript
2. Take notes on key themes and contradictions
3. Answer the corresponding quiz questions for that episode
4. Consult the Timeline and Cast-List for historical context
5. Tackle one of the Essay Questions that interests you most

#### **For Discussion Groups:**

1. Assign one or two episodes per meeting
2. Begin with the Quiz questions as a warm-up exercise
3. Use the "History in the Present Tense" section as a springboard for group discussion
4. Assign one Essay question per group or individual as a follow-up

## Time Commitments

### **Current Episodes Listening Time:**

- Episode 1: A Portal to Oblivion – 14 minutes
- Episode 2: West African Peoples – 10 minutes
- Episode 3: Captive Markets – 15 minutes
- Episode 4: Paper Bulls – 13 minutes
- Episode 5: Women of West Africa – 22 minutes
- Episode 6: Inventory – 23 minutes
- Episode 7: Meanwhile in Europe – 30 minutes

**Total Series Length:** 127 minutes

### **Study Activities:**

- Quiz (12 short answer questions): 40–55 minutes
- Single Essay Question: 2–4 hours (including research and writing)
- Reviewing Timeline, Maps, and Glossary: 20–30 minutes
- Complete study guide activities: 6–8 hours

## What is Essential vs. Supplementary

### **Essential for Basic Understanding:**

- Listen to all seven episodes
- Review the Glossary for unfamiliar terms
- Complete the Quiz questions to test comprehension

### **Supplementary for Deeper Learning:**

- Study the Timeline to understand historical progression
- Examine the Maps to visualize trade routes and regions
- Research characters in the Cast-List for biographical context
- Write responses to Essay Questions for analytical depth

### **Optional Extensions:**

- Explore the SlaveVoyages.org database for additional data
- Read the episode transcripts for direct quotations and citations

## A Note on the Material

The content of *Dark Bullion* deals with the Atlantic slave trade and contains discussions of violence, dehumanization, and systematic oppression. While the series focuses on lesser-known themes rather than graphic depictions of suffering, the subject matter is inherently difficult. We encourage listeners to:

- Take breaks as needed
- Discuss challenging material with others
- Seek additional historical context when questions arise
- Remember that this history, while painful, is essential to understanding the present

## Questions or Feedback?

For questions about the series or this study guide, contact: [calvinwalk@gmail.com](mailto:calvinwalk@gmail.com)



## Episode Guide

### Episode 1: A Portal to Oblivion (14 minutes)

This episode explores **Ouidah, Dahomey in 1685**, a key West African trading port deeply involved in the Atlantic slave trade. It details the dynamics between European powers like the **Royal African Company** and African rulers. Key aspects include the trade of captives for weapons, **the Tree of Oblivion ritual**, and the extensive involvement of various European empires in the trade. The episode also touches on the symbolic depiction of Black figures in European art.

### Episode 2: West African Peoples (10 minutes)

This episode examines 17th-century **European stereotypes about West African peoples**, contrasting them with the rich diversity of cultures like the **Yoruba, Fon, and Mandé**. It details their political systems, economies, traditions, and clothing. The narrative highlights the **complex reality of West African kingdoms**, their internal trade networks, linguistic diversity, and varying degrees of resistance to the Atlantic slave trade.

### Episode 3: Captive Markets (15 minutes)

This episode investigates the developing mechanics of the **Atlantic slave trade**, emphasizing the immense suffering involved. It details methods of capture, including warfare, kidnappings, and false **accusations of witchcraft**. The episode explores the market **dynamics of assessing and trading captives**, the roles of African and European traders, and the evolution of violence. It also notes efforts by communities, like the **Tofinu**, to evade enslavement.

### Episode 4: Paper Bulls (13 minutes)

This episode explores how religion shaped the Atlantic slave trade. It traces the Church's reinterpretation of the "**Curse of Ham**" as justification for slavery, contrasts it with biblical passages against enslavement, and highlights the **complicity of popes** and the **Church of England**. Alongside, it examines African **spiritual traditions such as Vodou**, their survival in the Americas, and the Church of England's recent admission of its historic ties to slavery.

### Episode 5: Women of West Africa (22 minutes)

This episode examines the **complex and multifaceted roles of women** during the Atlantic slave trade period in West Africa. It profiles the **Mino (Agojié)**, Dahomey's all-female military regiment, and explores women's positions as **traders, political advisors, and warriors**. It highlights three remarkable figures: **Queen Agontimé**, who rose from captivity to become a Candomblé priestess in Brazil; **Queen Nzinga Mbande** of Ndongo and Matamba, a diplomatic and military leader who resisted Portuguese colonization; and **Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita**, a religious visionary whose Antonianism movement challenged both church authority and the slave trade.

The episode also details the unique practice of **woman-to-woman marriage** in Dahomey, emphasizing how women navigated survival, power, and legacy in a society where they could be simultaneously victims, traders, and architects of their own destinies.

## Episode 6: Inventory (23 minutes)

This episode examines the **barracoons** and other holding facilities where captives awaited transport across the Atlantic. It details the **systematic assessment**, categorization, and commodification of enslaved people through European traders' documentation practices.

### **BARRACOONS**

#### *Holding & Assessment (1685)*

- Captives held in fortified enclosures
- Systematic categorization by age, gender, strength
- Assessment: inspecting teeth, bodies, health
- Duration: weeks to months of waiting

### **METICULOUS DOCUMENTATION**

#### *The Paper Trail (1684-1800s)*

- Royal African Company records began 1684
- Detailed ledgers: names, ages, origins, valuations
- Mortality rates tracked as "business losses"
- Humans catalogued as "units" with market values

### **FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS**

#### *Risk & Capital (1694-1800s)*

- Insurance policies for "human cargo"
- Bank of England (est. 1694) financed slave trade
- Plantations held as loan collateral
- Governors & directors were slavers and plantation owners

### **MODERN SYSTEMS**

#### *The Enduring Legacy*

- Accounting practices refined for tracking human property
- Insurance underwriting principles developed
- Risk management systems established
- Banking infrastructure built on slave trade capital

*Based on Royal African Company records, Bank of England archives,  
and testimony of Alexander Falconbridge*

The episode draws on historical accounts like **Alexander Falconbridge's testimony** to reveal the clinical brutality of the sorting process, while exploring how the financial infrastructure developed for the slave trade (**ledgers, insurance policies, and banking systems**) would shape modern commerce.

The episode also draws **parallels between gold mining and human extraction**, and contrasts European and African concepts of time.

#### Episode 7: Meanwhile in Europe (*30 minutes*)

This episode examines how the Atlantic slave trade became **democratized across 17th-century Europe**, focusing on the **Dutch Republic, France, and Britain**. It details the evolution from royal monopolies to common investment, revealing how ordinary citizens – clerks, shopkeepers, artisans, and widows – purchased shares in slave trading companies.

The episode explores **Amsterdam's financial innovations, Nantes' merchant dynasties, and Liverpool's dominance** through supporting industries in Birmingham and Manchester. It highlights the economic infrastructure, institutional wealth, and **Age of Enlightenment contradictions** that enabled mass participation in the trade across all levels of European society.

**Total Series Duration:** *127 minutes*

## 1) Quiz

### 1) Quiz: Short Answer Questions

Answer each question in 2–3 sentences using only information from the provided sources.

1. What was the **Tree of Oblivion** ritual in **Ouidah**, and what was its intended purpose for the enslaved?
2. Describe the primary reasons for the development of the **Atlantic slave trade**, particularly concerning labor in the New World.
3. How did European traders use weapons to create a self-perpetuating cycle of enslavement in **West Africa**?
4. Explain the concept of the **Curse of Ham** and how Christian institutions reinterpreted it to justify the enslavement of African people.
5. Who were the **Mino** (or **Agojié**) of **Dahomey**, and how were they recruited into service?
6. Contrast the general characteristics of local slavery within West Africa with the system of **chattel slavery** that developed in the Americas.
7. Identify the two European nations responsible for transporting the most enslaved Africans and the primary destination for the largest percentage of disembarked captives.
8. Who was **Queen Nzinga Mbande**, and what methods did she employ to resist Portuguese colonial expansion?
9. Describe the practice of **woman-to-woman marriage** in Dahomey and its main social and economic functions.
10. What were barracoons, and what role did they play in the mechanics of the Atlantic slave trade? Describe what happened inside them.
11. How did the **Dutch Republic**, **France**, and **Britain** each develop systems that allowed ordinary citizens to invest in and profit from the slave trade?
12. What role did the cities of **Liverpool**, **Birmingham**, and **Manchester** play in supporting Britain's slave trade infrastructure?

### Answer Key

1. The **Tree of Oblivion** ritual forced captive men to circle a giant tree nine times and women seven times. The enslavers' intention was to use this Vodou ritual to erase all memory of the captives' identity, family, and homeland, thereby "rebranding" them and preventing their spirits from returning to seek vengeance after death.
2. The Atlantic slave trade was driven by a high demand for labor in **the New World** to produce export crops like sugar and coffee. This labor shortage was caused by the rapid decline of the **indigenous Amerindian population**, who lacked immunity to **Old**

**World diseases**, and the refusal of sufficient numbers of Europeans to migrate to the tropics.

3. European traders exchanged goods like **cannons and muskets for captives**. This armed warring African communities to fight more efficiently, which in turn guaranteed a larger, continuous stream of future captives for the Europeans to trade for more weapons, creating a cycle of “**divide, control, conquer**.”
4. The “**Curse of Ham**” comes from a Bible story where Noah curses Ham’s son, Canaan, to be a “servant of servants.” Though the original story makes no mention of skin color or Africa, **European theologians** beginning in the Middle Ages reinterpreted it to falsely claim Ham was the ancestor of African peoples, thereby framing slavery as a divine plan.
5. The **Mino**, also known as **Agojié**, were an all-female military regiment in the Kingdom of Dahomey. They were recruited from various sources, including foreign captives, free Dahomean women who volunteered, and the king’s wives (**Ahosi**); some women were also forcibly enrolled if males complained to the king about their behavior.
6. Slavery within West Africa often resembled **indentured servitude**, was not necessarily heritable, and allowed for some social mobility, with some slaves even owning their own slaves. In contrast, **chattel slavery** in the Americas was a permanent, hereditary condition where enslaved people were legally defined as **movable property**, or chattel, with no rights.
7. **Portugal** (including Portuguese Brazil) was the **largest carrier**, responsible for 47.6% of slave voyages, followed by Great Britain at 25.5% (source: SlaveVoyages.org). The primary destination for the largest group of enslaved Africans was Brazil, which received 45% of the approximately 10 million people who were disembarked.
8. **Queen Nzinga Mbande** was a 17th-century leader of the **Ndongo and Matamba kingdoms** who resisted Portuguese colonization. A formidable diplomat and military strategist, she negotiated treaties, waged war, converted to Christianity for diplomatic purposes, allied with the Dutch against the Portuguese, and established her territory as a refuge for escaped captives.
9. **Woman-to-woman marriage** was a practice in Dahomey, **primarily among wealthy women**, where one woman would pay bride dues for another woman to be her wife. This was not necessarily a homosexual union but a social and economic strategy that allowed a “woman-husband” to secure her family name, property, and influence by having heirs, as children born by the wife (fathered by a designated male) were legally considered the offspring of the woman-husband.
10. Barracoons were **fortified enclosures** or barracks where enslaved people were held on the African coast while awaiting transport across the Atlantic. Inside, **captives were divided by gender and age**, shackled together in cramped, dark, filthy conditions with minimal food and water. They were forced to exercise daily to maintain strength for the

voyage, and many died from disease, trauma, or despair during the weeks or months of waiting.

11. In the **Dutch Republic**, the West India Company sold shares that even small investors – clerks, shopkeepers, widows – could purchase, attending shareholder meetings and voting on policy. In **France**, ship owners in Nantes divided voyage costs into portions, and the state paid bounties on each captive sold to colonies. In **Britain**, following the end of the Royal African Company’s monopoly in 1698, private “separate traders” could operate freely, and mechanisms included company shares, voyage partnerships, insurance syndicates, and direct licenses.
12. **Liverpool** became Britain’s dominant slave port, transporting more enslaved Africans than Bristol and London combined. **Birmingham** and the Black Country produced the physical tools of the trade – shackles, neck irons, chains, and firearms, including muskets prized for reliability in damp conditions. **Manchester** and Lancashire’s mill towns processed slave-grown cotton into cloth, some of which was shipped back to Africa as trade goods to exchange for more captives, completing a self-reinforcing cycle.

## 2) History in the Present Tense: The Atlantic Slave Trade Today

These questions are designed to spark conversation and reflection on key themes from *Dark Bullion*. They work well for classroom discussions, book clubs, podcast listening groups, or personal journal entries. There are no “right” answers. The goal is to engage critically with the material, explore different perspectives, and consider how echoes of this history resonate in our present day.

### On Gender and Power

- What surprised you most about women’s roles in West African societies during the slave trade period? How do these realities contrast with common assumptions?
- How does the practice of woman-to-woman marriage in Dahomey challenge modern Western understandings of marriage, family, and inheritance?
- The Mino (Agojié) were both warriors and symbols of the state. What does their existence tell us about gender in precolonial Dahomey?
- **Today’s echo:** Women continue to be disproportionately affected by modern forms of trafficking and exploitation. How do the survival strategies of women like Queen Nzinga, Agontimé, and the Mino inform our understanding of women’s agency in oppressive systems today?

### On Memory and Symbolism

- How do you think the Tree of Oblivion’s fall in 2024 relates to the podcast’s themes? Is it merely coincidence, or does it carry symbolic meaning?
- What does the Tree of Oblivion ritual reveal about the psychology of enslavement – the attempt to erase identity, memory, and homeland?
- **Today’s echo:** Many descendants of enslaved people struggle to trace their ancestry due to deliberately destroyed records. How does this ongoing erasure of family history continue the work of the Tree of Oblivion? What does it mean to reclaim identity when records have been systematically erased?

### On Religion and Justification

- Compare religious justifications for slavery across different European nations and church institutions. Were there meaningful differences between Catholic and Protestant approaches?
- How did Vodou function both as a target of European persecution and as a tool of African resistance and survival?
- What does the reinterpretation of the “Curse of Ham” reveal about how religious texts can be manipulated for political and economic purposes?
- **Today’s echo:** Religious institutions and texts continue to be invoked to justify discrimination and oppression. What parallels do you see between the church’s justification of slavery and contemporary uses of religion to legitimize inequality? How do communities resist through spiritual practice today?

### On Complexity and Contradiction

- The series emphasizes “lesser-known themes and contradictions” rather than the well-documented horrors. What contradictions or complexities stood out to you most?
- How do you reconcile the fact that some African leaders and merchants participated in the slave trade while others resisted it?
- What does it mean that a society like Dahomey could be relatively gender-equal while simultaneously being deeply involved in enslaving others?
- **Today’s echo:** We often live with contradictions, benefiting from systems of exploitation (cheap goods produced in sweatshops, tech devices made with conflict minerals) while opposing injustice. How do the moral complexities of the slave trade period help us think about our own complicity in modern exploitation?

### On Economic Systems and Exploitation

- The “divide, control, conquer” strategy – arming communities to fight each other to create more captives – was economically strategic. How did this create a self-perpetuating cycle?
- European enslavers could legally sue for “damaged goods” if an enslaved person became mentally ill from trauma. What does this reveal about chattel slavery as an economic system?
- **Today’s echo:** Modern slavery and human trafficking generate an estimated \$150 billion annually. The International Labour Organization estimates 50 million people live in modern slavery. How do contemporary forms of exploitation (debt bondage, forced labor in supply chains, prison labor, sex trafficking) echo the economic mechanisms of the Atlantic slave trade? What role do corporations play today that mirrors the role of the Royal African Company?

### On Displacement and Migration

- Entire coastal communities relocated inland to avoid capture. The Tofinu people built Ganvié on water to escape slave raids. What do these survival strategies tell us about forced displacement?
- **Today’s echo:** Climate change, conflict, and economic instability create massive migration and displacement today. Refugees flee violence; communities relocate due to rising seas or drought. How do contemporary displacement crises echo the forced movements of the slave trade era? What can we learn from historical survival strategies like Ganvié?

### On Methods of Control and Dehumanization

- Accusations of witchcraft, invented crimes, impossible trials. These were systematic methods to generate captives. How did the legal system itself become a tool of enslavement?
- The series notes that terms like “cruelty” and “brutality” fall short – “there are no words yet created to capture the magnitude of that suffering.” Why is language inadequate? What does it mean to discuss atrocities that exceed vocabulary?
- **Today’s echo:** Mass incarceration in the United States (particularly of Black Americans) has been called “the new Jim Crow.” Prison labor, criminalization of

poverty, cash bail systems – how do modern criminal justice systems echo the use of “legal” mechanisms to control and exploit populations? Consider also: immigrant detention, the school-to-prison pipeline, three-strikes laws.

### On Resistance and Resilience

- What forms of resistance (military, diplomatic, spiritual, cultural) proved most effective? What were the limitations of each approach?
- Vodou, Candomblé, and Santería survived and evolved in the Americas despite brutal suppression. What does this spiritual persistence tell us about cultural resilience?
- **Today’s echo:** How do contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter, decolonization efforts, Indigenous land back movements, and reparations campaigns echo historical resistance? What can we learn from Queen Nzinga’s diplomatic strategies, the Mino’s military organization, or Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita’s spiritual movement?

### On Historical Reckoning and Repair

- The Church of England proposed a £1 billion reparations fund in 2019, but it remains a “wish, not an allocated sum.” Historical revisionists attempt to minimize church complicity. What would genuine institutional accountability look like?
- **Today’s echo:** Debates over reparations for slavery continue in the United States, Caribbean nations seek reparations from European colonial powers, and institutions examine their historical ties to slavery (universities, corporations, museums). Is financial compensation sufficient? What other forms might repair take? How do we reckon with inherited wealth built on exploitation? Who has the responsibility to repair historical harms – governments, institutions, individuals, or all of the above?

### On Identity and Categorization

- European traders created crude stereotypes of different African peoples to assign them “market value.” The Yoruba were “compliant,” the Coromantee “rebellious,” the Igbo “prone to melancholy.” How did these dehumanizing categorizations serve the economics of slavery?
- Europeans wrongly referred to diverse peoples simply as “Africans,” erasing the distinct languages, cultures, and political systems of the Yoruba, Fon, Mandé, Akan, Hausa, and many others.
- **Today’s echo:** How do modern racial categories (themselves largely invented to justify slavery) continue to flatten complex identities? How does the term “African American” simultaneously represent a powerful shared identity and mask the enormous diversity of peoples whose histories were deliberately erased? What parallels exist in how other groups (immigrants, refugees, Indigenous peoples) are categorized in ways that erase their specific identities?

### On Witnessing Difficult Histories

- The *Dark Bullion* series focuses on “lesser-known themes and contradictions” rather than graphic depictions of suffering. Why might this approach be valuable? What are its limitations?
- **Today’s reflection:** How do we bear witness to historical atrocities without either exploiting suffering or minimizing horror? What responsibility do we have to learn difficult histories? How do we sit with the discomfort of knowing that our present comfort may be built on past (and ongoing) exploitation?

### On Mass Participation and Moral Distance

- Episode 7 reveals that ordinary Europeans – clerks, shopkeepers, widows – could purchase shares in slave trading companies. How does the democratization of investment create moral distance from the human cost of the trade?
- The Dutch Republic pioneered what the episode describes as “the separation of profit from morality.” How did financial instruments like shares and insurance policies abstract the reality of human suffering into columns of numbers?
- French Indienne textiles were manufactured specifically to appeal to African traders who would exchange them for captives. What does it mean that entire industries – from textile workshops to Birmingham’s metalworkers – were organized around serving the slave trade?
- **Today’s echo:** Modern consumers are similarly distanced from the labor conditions behind the products they purchase. How do contemporary investment structures (index funds, pension funds, supply chains) create the same moral distance that allowed a Rotterdam clerk or an Amsterdam widow to profit from slavery without confronting its reality? Is ignorance an excuse, then or now?

### 3) Essay Questions

These essay questions are designed for deeper analytical work. Choose one that interests you and develop a well-structured argument supported by specific examples from the *Dark Bullion* series. Each essay should be 1,500–2,500 words (5–8 pages).

#### Core Essays

#### **Essay 1: Women, Power, and Paradox ★★**

##### **Theme: Gender and Agency**

Analyze the complex and often contradictory roles of women in 17th and 18th-century West African societies amidst the Atlantic slave trade. How did women navigate positions of power, vulnerability, and survival in a world increasingly shaped by the demand for enslaved labor?

##### **In your essay, consider:**

1. Women as rulers and military leaders (Queen Nzinga Mbande, the Mino/Agojié, Queen Amina)
2. Women as spiritual authorities and visionaries (Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita, Queen Agontimé)
3. Women's participation in the slave trade as merchants and intermediaries
4. The paradox of women simultaneously holding power and being vulnerable to enslavement
5. How woman-to-woman marriage functioned as a strategy for securing legacy and power

**Key figures to discuss:** Queen Nzinga Mbande, Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita, Queen Agontimé, the Mino (Agojié)

**Extension question for advanced students:** How does understanding the agency and complexity of West African women during this period challenge both historical narratives that portray Africans solely as victims and narratives that oversimplify the role of “patriarchy” in global history?

#### **Essay 2: Forms and Strategies of Resistance ★**

##### **Theme: African Agency and Defiance**

Explore the various forms of African resistance to the slave trade documented in the *Dark Bullion* series. Resistance took many shapes – from military opposition and diplomatic maneuvering to community adaptation and spiritual movements. How effective were these different strategies, and what do they reveal about African agency during the slave trade period?

##### **In your essay, consider:**

1. Military resistance by kingdoms and leaders (Queen Nzinga's decades-long struggle, the Kru people's fierce resistance)

2. Community-level survival strategies (the Tofinu people's creation of Ganvié water village, the Mandé's longer resistance to European enslavement)
3. Spiritual and intellectual movements (Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita's Antonianism, the preservation and transformation of Vodou)
4. Individual acts of defiance (the high suicide rates among the Igbo people, escape and rebellion)
5. The limitations and challenges faced by those who resisted

**Key examples to discuss:** Ganvié, Queen Nzinga Mbande, Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita, Vodou's survival and transformation

**Extension question for advanced students:** Historians debate whether to emphasize African resistance or victimization when teaching about the slave trade. How does focusing on resistance risk minimizing the horror of the trade, while focusing only on victimization risks erasing African agency? How can we hold both truths simultaneously?

### ***Essay 3: Sacred Justifications, Sacred Resistance ★★***

#### **Theme: Religion and Ideology**

Discuss the critical role of religion and spiritual beliefs in both perpetuating and challenging the Atlantic slave trade. How did European Christian institutions provide justification for enslavement, and how did African spiritual systems both suffer under and resist this system?

#### **In your essay, consider:**

1. European religious justifications (the "Curse of Ham" reinterpretation, Papal Bulls, the complicity of the Church of England)
2. The contradiction between biblical passages condemning enslavement (Exodus 21:16) and passages used to justify it
3. West African spiritual systems (Vodou/Vodún) and their integration into daily life and governance
4. The survival and transformation of African spirituality in the Americas (Vodou in Haiti, Candomblé in Brazil, Santería in Cuba)
5. Spiritual resistance movements (Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita's Antonianism proclaiming Jesus and the saints were African)
6. The 2019 Church of England investigation and contemporary reckonings with religious complicity

**Key concepts to discuss:** Curse of Ham, Papal Bulls, Vodou, Mawu-Lisa, Papa Legba, syncretic religions, Antonianism

**Extension question for advanced students:** The Church of England proposed a £1 billion reparations fund (which is a "wish, not an allocated sum"), while historical revisionists attempt to minimize church involvement. What would genuine institutional accountability look like? Is financial reparation sufficient, or even possible, for such historical wrongs?

## **Essay 4: The Infrastructure of Dehumanization ★★**

### **Theme: Systems and Documentation**

Examine how the Atlantic slave trade developed systematic methods of turning human beings into commodities. How did documentation practices, financial instruments, and physical infrastructure work together to enable and normalize the trade? What legacies of these systems persist in modern commerce and governance?

#### **In your essay, consider:**

1. The role of barracoons in the “warehousing” of human beings
2. Assessment and categorization practices described by Alexander Falconbridge and other sources
3. Financial innovations: ledgers, insurance policies, and risk management for human cargo
4. The role of institutions like the Bank of England and the Royal African Company
5. The parallel between gold extraction and human extraction
6. How these practices shaped modern accounting, insurance, and banking systems

**Key concepts to discuss:** Barracoons, ledgers, mortality rates, the Guinea coin, insurance underwriting, Cape Coast Castle records

**Extension question for advanced students:** Episode 6 notes that the meticulous documentation of the slave trade – created to protect profits – now serves to condemn it. How does the archive itself become a site of both violence and resistance? What ethical responsibilities do we have toward historical records that document atrocities?

## **Essay 5: The Democratization of Slavery ★★**

### **Theme: Mass Participation and Moral Responsibility**

Episode 7 reveals that the Atlantic slave trade was not merely the project of monarchs and merchants, but became a system in which ordinary European citizens participated through investment, labor, and consumption. How did the trade become embedded in the everyday economic life of the Dutch Republic, France, and Britain, and what does this mass participation reveal about collective moral responsibility?

#### **In your essay, consider:**

1. The Dutch Republic’s financial innovations: tradeable shares, shareholder meetings, and the “separation of profit from morality”
2. France’s intimate investment model: Nantes’ merchant dynasties, state bounties on captives, and the supporting industries (boatyards, Indienne textile workshops)
3. Britain’s comprehensive system: Liverpool’s dominance, Birmingham’s metalworks, Manchester’s cotton mills, and Lloyd’s insurance
4. The role of consumer demand for slave-produced goods (sugar, coffee, tobacco, cotton) in sustaining the trade

5. Age of Enlightenment contradictions: philosophers who denounced slavery while owning shares in slave trading companies (e.g. John Locke)
6. How institutional wealth generated from slavery (universities, banks, churches, grand homes like the Palais de l'Élysée) endures today

**Key concepts to discuss:** Dutch West India Company, Asiento contracts, Curaçao, Nantes, Montaudouin family, Antoine Crozat, Liverpool's separate traders, triangular trade, the Guinea coin

**Extension question for advanced students:** The episode suggests that financial instruments created moral distance between investors and human suffering. How do modern investment structures (pension funds, index funds, multinational supply chains) create similar distance? Is there a meaningful moral difference between a 17th-century Amsterdam widow collecting dividends from the West India Company and a modern investor whose pension fund holds shares in companies with exploitative labor practices?

## Essay Writing Tips

### ***Before you begin:***

- Listen to all relevant episodes at least twice
- Take detailed notes on specific examples and quotations
- Consult the Timeline, Cast-List, and Glossary for context
- Review the episode transcripts for precise wording when quoting

### ***Structure your essay:***

- Introduction: Present your thesis and outline your argument
- Body paragraphs: Each should focus on one main point supported by specific examples from the series
- Conclusion: Synthesize your arguments and consider broader implications

### ***Citation:***

- When referencing specific information, cite the episode: (*Dark Bullion*, EP03)
- When quoting directly, use quotation marks and provide the speaker if known: "Violence begets fear. Begets violence." (*Dark Bullion*, EP03)

## Timeline of Important Events

<b>Date/Period</b>	<b>Event or Context</b>
<b>15TH–16TH CENTURIES: FOUNDATIONS &amp; EARLY CONTACT</b>	
15th Century	Portuguese mariners begin explorations down the coast of West Africa. Slavery had existed in the Iberian Peninsula throughout recorded history.
1441–1444	Portuguese traders first capture Africans on the Atlantic coast (in present-day Mauritania), establishing a fort for the slave trade at the Bay of Arguin.
1452	<b>Pope Nicholas V</b> issues the papal bull <i>*Dum Diversas*</i> , giving the King of Portugal the right to perpetually enslave non-Christians.
1454	Pope Nicholas V issues <i>*Romanus Pontifex*</i> , allowing Catholic nations to expand dominion over “discovered” land and validate the enslavement of non-Christian “pagans.”
1493	<b>Pope Alexander VI</b> issues the papal bull <i>*Inter Caetera*</i> , granting Spain and Portugal rights to claim non-Christian lands.
<b>17TH CENTURY: PEAK ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE ERA</b>	
1621	The <b>Dutch West India Company</b> (WIC) is chartered, enabling Dutch participation in the Atlantic slave trade and colonial enterprise. Small investors in the Dutch Republic – clerks, shopkeepers, widows – can purchase shares.
Mid-1600s	The <b>Royal African Company</b> (RAC) sets up along the West Coast of Africa, establishing six forts on the Gold Coast and a post in Ouidah. The RAC’s income from slave trading exceeds that from gold.
1653	Cape Coast Castle begins as a Swedish timber trading post; captured by the Danes, then seized by the British, who expand it into a major slave-holding fortress.
1662	Slavery is progressively codified in Virginia, beginning with <b>chattel slavery</b> and the principle of <i>*partus sequitur ventrem*</i> .
1670s	The Dutch Republic’s “Golden Age” wanes; the WIC reorganizes, focusing on Curaçao’s slave depot and Asiento contracts.
1684	<b>Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita is born</b> in the Kingdom of Kongo (Angola). Royal African Company documentation begins.
October 1685	The main setting for <i>*Dark Bullion*</i> EP01 and EP06: episodes set in <b>Ouidah, Dahomey</b> , detailing trade dynamics, the <b>Tree of Oblivion</b> ritual, and the <b>barracoons</b> .
1694	<b>Bank of England</b> founded; will provide commercial facilities for the Atlantic slave trade.
1698	The Royal African Company’s monopoly breaks. Private “separate traders” can now operate freely, accelerating Britain’s dominance, especially through Liverpool.

## 18TH–19TH CENTURIES: HEIGHT OF TRADE & ABOLITION

Early 1700s	<b>Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita</b> preaches in the Kingdom of Kongo (Antonianism movement). Nantes begins outfitting slave ships; the Montaudouin family launches *L'Hercule*, Nantes' first slave voyage.
1700s	Liverpool's boatyards expand; <b>Birmingham</b> produce shackles, chains, and firearms for the trade. Manchester processes slave-grown cotton.
1706	Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita is arrested and <b>burned at the stake for heresy</b> at the age of 22.
1713	The *Asiento* is granted to the <b>South Sea Company</b> via the Treaty of Utrecht. <b>Queen Anne</b> declares Britain's right to supply enslaved Africans to Spanish colonies.
1715–1850	Dahomey's King Agaja (1718–1740) and King Ghezo (1818–1858) play major roles during intense slave trading.
Mid-18th C.	Nantes becomes hub of France's colonial trade. <b>Antoine Crozat</b> , wealthiest man in France, directs the Compagnie de Guinée. He builds a home for his daughter that later becomes the <b>Palais de l'Élysée</b> .
1755	Liverpool dominates the British slave trade; the city's population grows from 5,000 (1700) to 80,000 by century's end.
1777	<b>King Louis XVI</b> publishes the *Déclaration pour la Police des Noirs*, restricting the entry of Black people into France while creating exceptions and profiting from deposit fees.
1789	The <b>French Revolution</b> begins, declaring all men born free and equal. By this point, 12% of the French workforce is employed in trades connected to slavery. Nantes seeks to prolong the trade.
1807	<b>Great Britain bans the slave trade</b> (Slave Trade Act 1807). The U.S. Congress also bans the African slave trade, effective January 1, 1808.
1818–1858	Reign of <b>King Ghezo</b> in Dahomey. He expanded the roles and numbers of the Mino (Agojié) women warriors.
1833	The Slavery Abolition Act is passed by the UK Parliament, gradually abolishing slavery in the British Empire.
1892 (Nov.)	The Dahomey kingdom falls after its two wars against the French, leading to the <b>dissolution of the Agojié (Mino) women's regiment</b> .
<b>20TH–21ST CENTURIES: MODERN RECKONING</b>	
2019	The Church of England launches an internal investigation into its financial ties to the slave trade. Lloyd's of London publishes a formal apology for its role insuring the slave trade.
2024	The <b>Tree of Oblivion</b> (replanted in the 20th century) is found uprooted and split in two in Ouidah.
2025	New archbishop <u>urged to scrap £100m fund</u> over slavery links

## Cast-List of Important Characters

Historical figures crucial to the *Dark Bullion* narrative, particularly those involved in the slave trade, African leadership, or spiritual movements.

Character Name	Role/Affiliation	Context in Sources
EUROPEAN FIGURES		
<b>King James II of England</b>	Governor and chief stockholder of the <b>**Royal African Company (RAC)**</b> .	Previously, as the Duke of York, he had many enslaved people branded with the initials D-O-Y.
<b>Captain Henry Clarke</b>	Slave trader captain of the ship <b>*Prosperous*</b> .	Commanded the ship on behalf of the Royal African Company.
<b>King Louis XIV of France</b>	French monarch who established the <b>*Code Noir*</b> (Black Code).	The <b>*Code Noir*</b> created regulations for slavery, defining enslaved people as movable property and authorizing slave owners to mutilate human chattel.
<b>King Louis XVI of France</b>	French monarch who published the <b>*Déclaration pour la Police des Noirs*</b> (1777).	Complained about the growing numbers of Black people in French cities; restricted their entry while creating exceptions and taxing the practice.
<b>Pope Innocent VIII</b>	Roman Catholic Church leader.	Personally received enslaved Africans as a gift from the Spanish monarchy and distributed them among his Cardinals and Roman elites.
<b>Pope Alexander VI</b>	Successor to Innocent VIII; described as a corrupt and immoral person.	His Papal Bulls were routinely interpreted by colonial powers to validate lifelong bondage and colonization of the New World.
<b>Alexander Falconbridge</b>	British surgeon who served on multiple slaving voyages in the late 18th century.	His detailed account of the slave trade on the Coast of Africa provides crucial testimony about assessment practices and conditions in barracoons.
<b>Queen Anne</b>	British monarch (reigned 1702–1714).	Declared Britain's right to the Asiento for supplying enslaved Africans to Spanish colonies for 30 years. Her successors George I and II held substantial shares in the trade.
<b>René Montaudouin</b>	Nantes merchant and slave trade magnate.	Outfitted <b>*L'Hercule*</b> , Nantes' first slave voyage. Over decades, the Montaudouin family outfitted 357 slave ships, becoming one of the city's wealthiest dynasties.
<b>Antoine Crozat</b>	Wealthiest man in France; directed the	Directed one of the largest slave trading companies operating between Nantes and Saint-

	Compagnie de Guinée.	Domingue. Built a home for his daughter that later became the <b>Palais de l'Élysée</b> .
<b>John Locke</b>	Enlightenment philosopher.	Proclaimed that one person should not enslave another, yet owned stock in slave trading companies – embodying the Age of Enlightenment's contradictions.
<b>WEST AFRICAN LEADERS AND SPIRITUAL FIGURES</b>		
<b>Queen Nzinga Mbande</b>	Leader (Queen/King) of <b>**Ndongo and Matamba**</b> (present-day Angola).	A formidable diplomat and military strategist who fought against Portuguese colonization for decades, reorganizing Matamba into a refuge for escaped captives. She was trained militarily and adopted the title "King" to assert authority.
<b>Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita</b>	Religious visionary in the <b>**Kingdom of Kongo**</b> (Angola).	Founded <b>Antonianism</b> , a movement blending Christian and Kongo beliefs. She called for reunification and condemned the enslavement of fellow Congolese, proclaiming Jesus and the saints were African. Burned at the stake for heresy in 1706.
<b>Queen Agontimé (Na Agontimé)</b>	Queen in Dahomey, later enslaved, and Candomblé Priestess in Brazil.	Originally captured from the Mahi people, she rose to become a wife of <b>King Agonglo</b> and mother of the future King Ghezo. Following a conspiracy, she was sold to Portuguese traders and, once in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, established herself as a respected Candomblé priestess.
<b>King Agonglo</b>	Reigning King of Dahomey, husband of Queen Agontimé.	Assassinated due to a conspiracy; his son, born of another wife, sold Queen Agontimé and other suspects into slavery.
<b>King Ghezo</b>	Controversial future King of Dahomey (reigned 1818–1858).	Son of Agontimé. His reign occurred during the abolition of slave trading. He expanded the role and number of the Mino women warriors.
<b>Hevioso</b>	Vodou god of Thunder, Lightning, and Rain.	Summoned, metaphorically, to manifest his wrath in EP01, resulting in the uprooting of the Tree of Oblivion.
<b>Mawu-Lisa</b>	The single great creator in Fon belief (Vodou/Vodún), representing gender duality (moon/female and sun/male).	Their duality inspired the progressive, gender-equal society of precolonial Dahomey. Mawu (female) is sometimes given creative primacy.
<b>Queen Amina</b>	Warrior queen of the Hausa people.	Reigned until the beginning of the 17th century and refused to marry, preferring to choose temporary husbands from vanquished foes.

## Glossary of Key Terms

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Abomey</b>	The capital city and location of the Royal Palace in the Kingdom of Dahomey.
<b>Agojié</b>	An alternate name for the Mino, the all-female military regiment of Dahomey.
<b>Agontimé</b>	A queen of Dahomey, originally captured from the Mahi people, who was later sold into slavery in Brazil. There, she rose again to become a renowned Candomblé priestess in Salvador de Bahia.
<b>Ahosi</b>	The Fon term for the king's wives in Dahomey. Some Ahosi were recruited into the all-female military regiment.
<b>Akan</b>	A people of the Gold Coast (modern Ghana), known as gold miners, traders, and warriors, whose kings wore kente cloth.
<b>Antonianism</b>	A religious movement in the Kingdom of Kongo started by Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita. It mixed Christian and Kongo beliefs, proclaimed that Jesus and the saints were African, and condemned the enslavement of fellow Congolese.
<b>Asiento de Negros</b>	A system where the Spanish Empire awarded a license, often to foreign merchants (like the Portuguese, Genoese, or British), to trade enslaved people from Africa to its American colonies. Granted to the South Sea Company in 1713, and later claimed by Queen Anne for Britain.
<b>Barracoon</b>	A fortified enclosure or barracks used to hold enslaved people on the coast while they awaited shipment across the Atlantic.
<b>Beatriz Kimpa Vita, Dona</b>	A religious visionary from a noble family in the Kingdom of Kongo who started the Antonianism movement. Her movement challenged both church authority and the slave trade, leading to her execution for heresy at the age of 22.
<b>Candomblé</b>	A religion in Brazil that blends Portuguese Roman Catholicism with traditional African religions, brought to the Americas by enslaved Africans. Queen Agontimé established a center for it.
<b>Chattel Slavery</b>	The system of slavery practiced in the Americas where an enslaved person was the legal property (chattel) of their owner and could be bought and sold. This status was permanent and hereditary.
<b>Code Noir</b>	The "Black Code" established by French King Louis XIV, which created regulations for slavery in the French Caribbean. It defined enslaved people as movable property and authorized owners to punish or mutilate them.
<b>Coromantee</b>	A term used by European slavers for people from the Gold Coast. They were perceived as strong and brave but also rebellious and prone to uprisings.
<b>Curse of Ham</b>	A biblical story from Genesis, originally about Noah cursing his grandson Canaan. It was reinterpreted by European theologians to

	falsely identify Ham as the ancestor of Africans and justify their perpetual enslavement.
<b>Curaçao</b>	A Dutch colony in the Caribbean that served as the central warehouse and depot of the Dutch slave trade, from which enslaved Africans were brokered and sold to Spanish, French, and British buyers.
<b>Dahomey</b>	A West African kingdom (in modern-day Benin) that was a major power from the 17th to 19th centuries. It was deeply involved in the slave trade, known for its highly organized military, which included the Mino female warriors, and was the birthplace of Vodou.
<b>Dutch West India Company (WIC)</b>	A chartered Dutch company established in 1621 that managed trade, colonization, and the slave trade in the Atlantic. Small investors could purchase shares, making slave trading a broadly democratic enterprise. Dutch ships carried 500,000 enslaved people; Dutch merchants brokered hundreds of thousands more.
<b>Factor</b>	A European agent or manager established on or near the African coast to manage a trading post (factory) and expedite the purchase and shipping of slaves.
<b>Fon</b>	The dominant ethnic group and language of the Kingdom of Dahomey.
<b>Ganvié</b>	A water village built on stilts since the 16th century by the Tofinu people to escape slave raids from the Fon warriors, whose religion forbade them from fighting on water. The name translates to “we survived.”
<b>Gbeto</b>	The huntress regiment of the Dahomey women warriors, skilled at hunting elephants. It is thought by some to have been the original all-women warrior unit.
<b>Gold Coast</b>	A region on the West African coast (modern Ghana) named by Europeans for its rich gold resources. It was a major site of European forts and a significant source of enslaved people.
<b>Guinea (coin)</b>	A gold coin minted from Gold Coast gold, stamped with the Royal African Company’s elephant symbol – the same company that shipped both gold and enslaved people as commodities.
<b>Hevioso</b>	The Vodou god of thunder, lightning, and rain in the Fon tradition of Dahomey.
<b>Igbo</b>	A people from the region of modern-day Nigeria. European slavers stereotyped them as more submissive but prone to melancholy and suicide.
<b>Indentured Servitude</b>	A system where a person signs a contract to work for an employer for a set number of years in exchange for passage to a colony, food, and housing.
<b>Indienne (textiles)</b>	Printed textiles originally imported from India, later produced in French workshops (particularly in Nantes) specifically for the African market. Their patterns and colors were designed to appeal to African traders who exchanged them for captives. They accounted for at least half the value of a slave ship’s cargo.

<b>Kente Cloth</b>	A textile made of brightly-colored, handwoven strips of silk and cotton, worn by the kings and elite of the Akan people.
<b>Kingdom of Kongo</b>	A kingdom in West Central Africa (modern Angola) weakened by civil wars that fed the slave trade. It was the home of Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonianism movement.
<b>Legba (Papa Legba)</b>	A key spirit in Vodou, serving as the gatekeeper between the great creator (Mawu-Lisa) and humanity. He is believed to speak all human languages and must grant permission to communicate with other spirits.
<b>Lloyd's</b>	Originally a London coffeehouse where insurance for slave voyages was arranged. It became the global center for insuring Britain's vast shipping industry, including the transportation of enslaved Africans. It has since issued a formal apology for its role.
<b>Mandé</b>	A group of peoples in West Africa, including the Mandingo, who were descendants of the Mali Empire. They were known as merchants, blacksmiths, and scholars who resisted large-scale European enslavement longer than many coastal groups.
<b>Mawu-Lisa</b>	The single great creator god in Fon belief, a unified and dual-gendered deity. Mawu is the female moon aspect (the primary creator), and Lisa is the male sun aspect (teacher of civilization).
<b>Middle Passage</b>	The brutal, weeks-long sea voyage that transported enslaved Africans from West Africa to the Americas. Mortality rates were high due to disease, brutal treatment, and unsanitary conditions.
<b>Mino</b>	The Fon name, meaning "our mothers," for the all-female military regiment of Dahomey, also known as the Dahomey Amazons.
<b>Nzinga Mbande, Queen</b>	A 17th-century queen of the Ndongo and Matamba kingdoms in West Central Africa. She was a skilled diplomat and military leader who led resistance against Portuguese colonization for decades.
<b>Ouidah</b>	A key port city in the Kingdom of Dahomey, deeply involved in the Atlantic slave trade and known as the birthplace of Vodou. It was the site of the Tree of Oblivion ritual and forts for European powers like Portugal, England, and France.
<b>Palais de l'Élysée</b>	The official residence of the President of France. Originally built by Antoine Crozat, the wealthiest man in France, using slave trade money, as a home for his daughter.
<b>Papal Bulls</b>	Official decrees issued by the Pope. In the 15th century, bulls like *Dum Diversas* and *Romanus Pontifex* endorsed the subjugation and enslavement of non-Christian peoples, providing religious justification for the slave trade.
<b>Pawns</b>	A system where African traders would leave a relative or associate on a European slave ship as collateral. The pawn would be freed if the trader delivered the promised number of captives.
<b>Royal African Company</b>	An English trading company, chartered in 1672, that held a monopoly on the slave trade. Its governor and chief stockholder was King James II. It shipped more enslaved Africans to the Americas than any other

	single company. Its monopoly was broken in 1698, opening the trade to private “separate traders.”
<b>Saint-Domingue</b>	The French colonial name for present-day Haiti, the most profitable colony in the Caribbean. Its sugar, coffee, and indigo exports fueled the prosperity of French Atlantic ports, particularly Nantes.
<b>Separate Traders</b>	Private British traders who were allowed to operate freely in the slave trade after the Royal African Company’s monopoly was broken in 1698. Their entry accelerated Liverpool’s dominance.
<b>South Sea Company</b>	A British joint-stock company that transported over 34,000 Africans. A Church of England fund, Queen Anne’s Bounty, invested heavily in this company in the 18th century.
<b>SPG (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel)</b>	The Church of England’s missionary organization. The 300 enslaved people working on its plantations in Barbados were branded with the word SOCIETY, indicating they were church property.
<b>Suriname</b>	A Dutch colony on South America’s northeast coast. Over 300,000 enslaved Africans were shipped there for plantation work under notoriously brutal conditions.
<b>Tofinu</b>	A people, part of the Ajitado group, who ingeniously evaded Fon slave raids by building the water village of Ganvié.
<b>Triangular Trade</b>	The three-legged trade system: 1) European goods (guns, textiles, alcohol) taken to Africa and exchanged for captives; 2) Enslaved Africans transported across the Atlantic to the Americas; 3) Goods produced by slave labor (sugar, cotton, tobacco) transported back to Europe. Note: slave ships were purpose-built for human cargo and often returned partially empty; sugar and cotton were typically shipped by a separate fleet.
<b>Vodou (Vodún)</b>	A complex West African religion, originating in Dahomey, deeply woven into society. It involves a single great creator and numerous spirits, and was carried to the Americas where it transformed into traditions like Haitian Vodou, Candomblé in Brazil, and Santería in Cuba.
<b>Yoruba</b>	A major cultural and linguistic group from the region of modern Nigeria, Benin, and Togo. European enslavers perceived them as religious and spiritual but generally compliant laborers.