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.

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*
- Episode 8: Atlantic — Part 1: Outward Bound – *18 minutes*
- Episode 8: Atlantic — Part 2: On the Coast – *18 minutes*
- Episode 8: Atlantic — Part 3: The Crossing – *20 minutes*

Total Series Length: *183 minutes*

Study Activities:

- Quiz (16 short answer questions): 50–70 minutes
- Single Essay Question: 2–4 hours (including research and writing)
- Reviewing Timeline, Maps, and Glossary: 20–30 minutes
- Complete study guide activities: 8–10 hours

What is Essential vs. Supplementary

Essential for Basic Understanding:

- Listen to all eight 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. The series is dense by design and rewards repeated listening.

This study guide exists partly to help unpack what a single listen might not catch. Listeners are advised to:

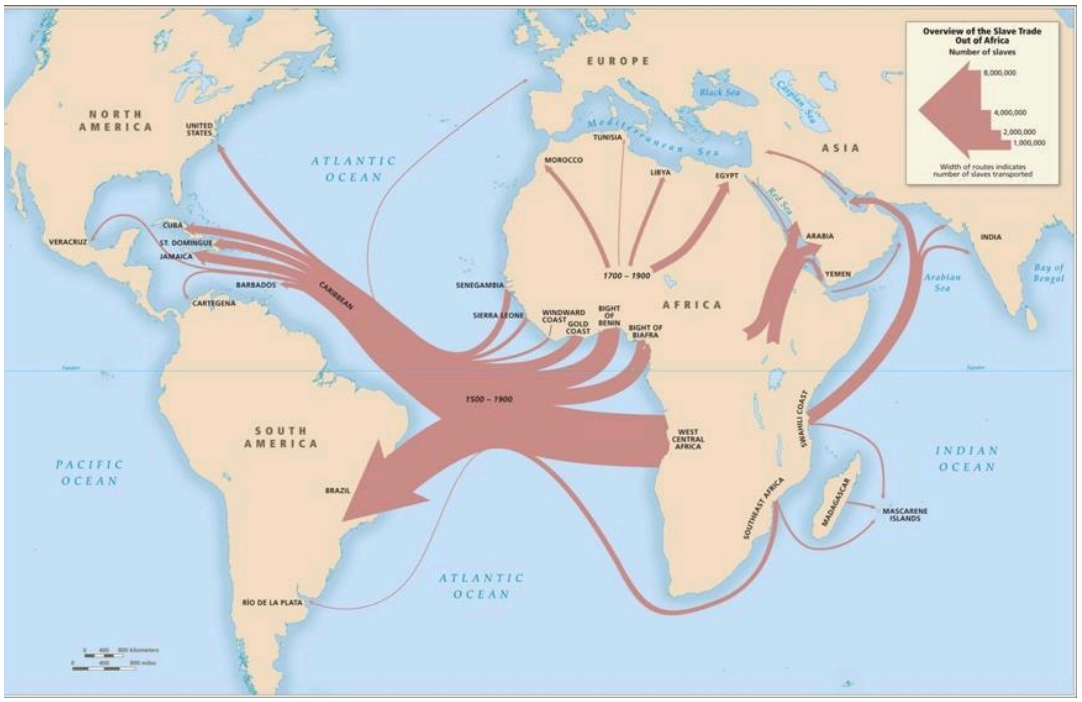
- Take breaks as needed
- Discuss challenging material with others
- Seek additional historical context when questions arise
- Remember that this history, while painful, is essential to understanding the present

Questions or Feedback?

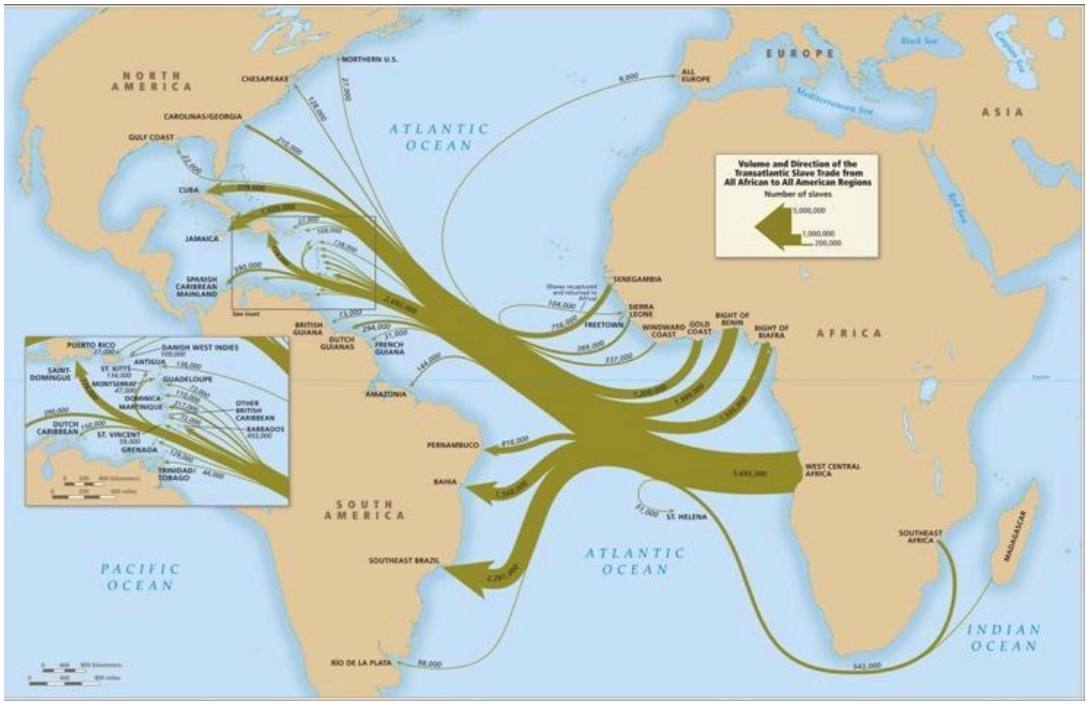
For questions about the series or this study guide, contact: calvinwalk@gmail.com

TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE MAPS

Introductory maps to the Transatlantic Slave Trade courtesy of David Eltis and David Richardson from *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New Haven, 2010) ©Yale University Press. Visit SlaveVoyages.org.



©Yale University Press - David Eltis and David Richardson.
Overview of the slave trade out of Africa, 1500-1900



©Yale University Press - David Eltis and David Richardson.
Volume and direction of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from all African to all American regions

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 becomes 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 challenging 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.

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.

1. BARRACOONS — Holding & Assessment (circa 1684>)
● Fortified enclosures ● Categorised by age, gender, strength, health ● Weeks and months of waiting
2. DOCUMENTATION — The Paper Trail (1684–1800s)
● Royal African Company records from 1684 ● Ledgers: names, ages, origins, valuations ● Mortality tracked as business losses
3. FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS — Risk & Capital (1694–1800s)
● Insurance policies on human cargo ● Bank of England (est. 1694) financing ● Bank governors and directors: slavers and plantation owners
4. MODERN SYSTEMS — Enduring Legacy
● Accounting practices refined for tracking human property ● Insurance underwriting principles ● Risk management systems

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

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.

Episode 8: Atlantic — In 3 Parts (*56 minutes total*)

Drawing on Professor Bruce L. Mouser's transcription of **Captain Samuel Gamble's logbook**, this episode follows the **Sandown's** slave trading voyage from the **Thames** to **Jamaica** across 1793 and 1794. Gamble's **meticulous record** of provisions, weather, deaths, and cargo counts reveals the trade not as an abstraction but as a daily practice of bureaucratic precision, carried out against a backdrop of war, disease, and relentless attrition. The episode traces the full circuit: preparation in **London**, months of stagnation on the **West African coast**, the **Middle Passage**, and the sale of human beings in **Kingston**.

Unlike previous episodes, which draw on multiple sources to build a thematic picture, Episode 8 stays with a single voyage and a single voice. The listener experiences the trade as Gamble recorded it: day by day, death by death, transaction by transaction.

View a simplified route map and timeline of the Sandown's journey.

Part 1: Outward Bound (*18 minutes*)

The Sandown prepares on the Thames, navigates wartime embargoes and impressment, and makes its way south to the Isles de Los on the West African coast. The war with France shadows every decision.

Part 2: On the Coast (*18 minutes*)

Months of waiting on the Rio Núñez as disease devastates the crew, captives trickle in, and the French privateer Renaud threatens from offshore. The mechanics of coastal trading laid bare.

Part 3: The Crossing (*20 minutes*)

The loading of captives, an insurrection, the Middle Passage, desertion at Barbados, and the sale of human beings in a glutted Kingston market. Gamble's mission reaches its conclusion.

Total Series Duration: *183 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?

13. What was the "**bar**" as used by slave traders on the West African coast, and what does its evolution from object to abstraction reveal about the trade?

14. Captain Gamble's crew suffered devastating losses from disease during the months on the **Rio Núñez**. How did **crew mortality** affect the practical operations of the slave trade, and what does it reveal about who bore the costs of the system?

15. Describe the role of **Dr James Walker** as a resident trader on the Rio Núñez. How did his position as an intermediary illustrate the structure of coastal trading?

16. Gamble titled his logbook "A Journal of an Intended Voyage **by God's Permission**." What does this phrase reveal about how slave traders reconciled their activities with their moral framework?

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. *(EP01)*

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. *(EP01, EP03)*

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**." *(EP01, EP03)*

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. *(EP04)*

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. *(EP05)*

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. *(EP02, EP03)*

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. *(EP03, EP07)*

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. *(EP05)*

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. *(EP05)*

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. *(EP06)*

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. *(EP07)*

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. *(EP07)*

13. The "**bar**" originated as the price of an actual iron bar, one of the key trade goods shipped from Europe to the African coast. Over time it became an **abstract unit** of accounting: **all goods, labour, and captives were valued in bars** regardless of whether physical iron changed hands.

    This evolution from material object to accounting unit mirrors the broader abstraction at the heart of the trade, where human beings were converted into numbers in a ledger. When Gamble records paying his white carpenters 15 bars and his black carpenter 10 bars, he is using a currency that began as metal and became pure notation. *(EP08)*

14. Crew mortality was catastrophic. The young seamen, many in their teens and twenties, died of **yellow fever, malaria, and dysentery** at a rate that left the Sandown barely operable. At several points, Gamble had fewer than three fit men aboard. This meant he could not receive captives, could not prepare the ship, and could not sail.

    The trade depended on **expendable labour** at every level: the captives who were its cargo, and the crew who were its workforce. Many of these **young men** had been **lured** aboard by false promises or pressed into service by captains who understood the risks far better than they did. *(EP08)*

15. **Dr James Walker** had lived on the West African coast for over 30 years, having arrived as a ship's surgeon. He established a permanent trading post on the **Rio Núñez** that locals called "**Walkeria**." Walker functioned as the essential link between visiting ship captains like Gamble, who stayed weeks or months, and the interior trading networks controlled by the **Fula people**. He warehoused trade goods, arranged the delivery of captives, provided local knowledge, medical facilities, and security.

    Gamble could not have conducted his trade without Walker, and Walker's operation depended on a steady stream of ships like the **Sandown**. The arrangement illustrates how the coastal trade was not a series of one-off transactions but an entrenched infrastructure with permanent residents, established relationships, and long-term commercial agreements. *(EP08)*

16. The phrase "**by God's permission**" was not unusual in 18th-century maritime writing, but in the context of a slave trading voyage it reveals how traders operated within a moral framework that placed their activities under divine sanction. **Gamble does not appear troubled** by any contradiction between Christian faith and the buying and selling of human beings.

    His log records deaths, cargo counts, and prayers with equal matter-of-factness. This echoes the broader pattern explored throughout *Dark Bullion*: the use of **religious authority**, from papal bulls to Protestant theology, to **frame the trade as morally acceptable** or even divinely ordained. Gamble's phrasing is not exceptional; it is representative. *(EP04, EP08)*

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? *(EP02, EP05)*
- How does the practice of woman-to-woman marriage in Dahomey challenge modern Western understandings of marriage, family, and inheritance? *(EP05)*
- The Mino (Agojié) were both warriors and symbols of the state. What does their existence tell us about gender in precolonial Dahomey? *(EP05)*
- **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? *(EP05)*

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? *(EP01)*
- What does the Tree of Oblivion ritual reveal about the psychology of enslavement – the attempt to erase identity, memory, and homeland? *(EP01)*
- **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? *(EP01, EP06)*

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? *(EP04)*
- How did Vodou function both as a target of European persecution and as a tool of African resistance and survival? *(EP01, EP04)*
- What does the reinterpretation of the "Curse of Ham" reveal about how religious texts can be manipulated for political and economic purposes? *(EP04)*

- **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? *(EP04, EP05)*

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? *(all episodes)*
- How do you reconcile the fact that some African leaders and merchants participated in the slave trade while others resisted it? *(EP01, EP02, EP03)*
- What does it mean that a society like Dahomey could be relatively gender-equal while simultaneously being deeply involved in enslaving others? *(EP02, EP05)*
- **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? *(all episodes)*

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? *(EP01, EP03)*
- 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? *(EP06)*
- **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? *(EP03, EP06, EP07)*

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? *(EP02, EP03)*
- **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? *(EP02, EP03)*

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? *(EP03, EP08)*

- 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? *(EP03, EP06)*

- **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. *(EP03, EP06)*

On Resistance and Resilience

- What forms of resistance (military, diplomatic, spiritual, cultural) proved most effective? What were the limitations of each approach? *(EP02, EP05, EP08)*

- Vodou, Candomblé, and Santería survived and evolved in the Americas despite brutal suppression. What does this spiritual persistence tell us about cultural resilience? *(EP01, EP04)*

- **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? *(EP02, EP05)*

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? *(EP04)*

- **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? *(EP04, EP07)*

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? *(EP02, EP06)*

- 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. *(EP02)*

- **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? *(EP02, EP06)*

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? *(all episodes)*

- **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? *(all episodes)*

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? *(EP07)*

- 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? *(EP07)*

- 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? *(EP07)*

- **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? *(EP07)*

On Bureaucracy and Documentation

- Gamble's logbook is meticulous: provisions received, weather observed, deaths recorded, cargo counted. The same document that records "fine pleasant weather" also records "departed this life, aged 17." What does it mean that atrocity can be administered through routine paperwork? *(EP08)*

- The log was preserved at the Royal Museums Greenwich and later transcribed by Professor Bruce L. Mouser. Without this scholarly work, the Sandown's voyage would remain inaccessible. What role do archives and the scholars who work in them play in making hidden histories visible? *(EP06, EP08)*

- **Today's echo:** Corporate supply chain audits document labour conditions without necessarily changing them. ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) reports quantify human impact in spreadsheets. Annual reports record profits without tracing them to their human cost. How do modern documentation practices create the same illusion of accountability that Gamble's meticulous log created? When does record-keeping become a substitute for conscience? *(EP06, EP08)*

On Labour Exploitation and Coercion

- Many of the young seamen who signed onto slave ships were lured by false promises, plied with drink, or pressed aboard by captains who understood the dangers far better than they did. How does the coercion of crew members complicate the simple division between oppressor and victim? *(EP08)*

- Gamble paid his white carpenters 15 bars and his black carpenter 10 bars for the same work. The black carpenter was a free tradesman, hired to help prepare a ship for carrying enslaved people. What layers of complicity and contradiction does this single transaction contain? *(EP08)*

- **Today's echo:** Migrant workers recruited through deceptive contracts, seafarers trapped on vessels under flags of convenience, gig economy workers bearing all the risk with none of the protections. How do contemporary labour practices echo the coercion of 18th-century crew recruitment? When workers have technically "consented" to exploitative conditions, does that consent mean what it appears to mean? *(EP08)*

On War, Commerce, and Opportunity

- The outbreak of war between France and Britain in 1793 raised insurance costs, restricted trade, and made the Atlantic more dangerous. Yet Gamble sailed anyway, because fewer ships meant higher prices for those who got through. Greater risk, greater reward. *(EP08)*

- The French privateer Renaud and British traders like Gamble occupied the same waters, simultaneously at war and in competition for the same human cargo. National enmity did not interrupt commercial logic. *(EP08)*

- **Today's echo:** Conflict zones today generate both humanitarian crises and commercial opportunities. Arms manufacturers profit from the wars that create refugees. Sanctions regimes create scarcity that raises prices for those willing to circumvent them. How does the entanglement of war and commerce in Gamble's world mirror contemporary patterns? *(EP07, EP08)*

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).
Levels : ★ accessible, ★★ intermediate, ★★★ advanced

Core Essays

Essay 1: Women, Power, and Paradox ★★ (EP02, EP05)

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:

- Women as rulers and military leaders (Queen Nzinga Mbande, the Mino/Agojié, Queen Amina) *(EP05)*
- Women as spiritual authorities and visionaries (Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita, Queen Agontimé) *(EP04, EP05)*
- Women's participation in the slave trade as merchants and intermediaries *(EP03, EP05)*
- The paradox of women simultaneously holding power and being vulnerable to enslavement *(EP05)*
- How woman-to-woman marriage functioned as a strategy for securing legacy and power *(EP05)*

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 ★ (EP02, EP03, EP05, EP08)

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:

- Military resistance by kingdoms and leaders (Queen Nzinga's decades-long struggle, the Kru people's fierce resistance) *(EP05)*
- Community-level survival strategies (the Tofinu people's creation of Ganvié water village, the Mandé's longer resistance to European enslavement) *(EP02, EP03)*
- Spiritual and intellectual movements (Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita's Antonianism, the preservation and transformation of Vodou) *(EP04, EP05)*
- Individual acts of defiance (the high suicide rates among the Igbo people, escape and rebellion) *(EP02, EP03, EP08)*
- The limitations and challenges faced by those who resisted *(all episodes)*

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 ★★ (EP01, EP04, EP05)

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:

- European religious justifications (the "Curse of Ham" reinterpretation, Papal Bulls, the complicity of the Church of England) *(EP04)*
- The contradiction between biblical passages condemning enslavement (Exodus 21:16) and passages used to justify it *(EP04)*
- West African spiritual systems (Vodou/Vodún) and their integration into daily life and governance *(EP01, EP02)*
- The survival and transformation of African spirituality in the Americas (Vodou in Haiti, Candomblé in Brazil, Santería in Cuba) *(EP04, EP05)*
- Spiritual resistance movements (Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita's Antonianism proclaiming Jesus and the saints were African) *(EP05)*
- The 2019 Church of England investigation and contemporary reckonings with religious complicity *(EP04)*

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 ★★ (EP06, EP07)

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:

- The role of barracoons in the "warehousing" of human beings *(EP06)*
- Assessment and categorization practices described by Alexander Falconbridge and other sources *(EP06)*
- Financial innovations: ledgers, insurance policies, and risk management for human cargo *(EP06, EP07)*
- The role of institutions like the Bank of England and the Royal African Company *(EP06, EP07)*
- The parallel between gold extraction and human extraction *(EP06)*
- How these practices shaped modern accounting, insurance, and banking systems *(EP06, EP07)*

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 ★★ (EP07)

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:

- The Dutch Republic's financial innovations: tradeable shares, shareholder meetings, and the "separation of profit from morality" *(EP07)*
- France's intimate investment model: Nantes' merchant dynasties, state bounties on captives, and the supporting industries (boatyards, Indienne textile workshops) *(EP07)*

- Britain's comprehensive system: Liverpool's dominance, Birmingham's metalworks, Manchester's cotton mills, and Lloyd's insurance *(EP07)*
- The role of consumer demand for slave-produced goods (sugar, coffee, tobacco, cotton) in sustaining the trade *(EP03, EP07)*
- Age of Enlightenment contradictions: philosophers who denounced slavery while owning shares in slave trading companies (e.g. John Locke) *(EP07)*
- How institutional wealth generated from slavery (universities, banks, churches, grand homes like the Palais de l'Élysée) endures today *(EP04, EP07)*

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 6: A Voyage in Detail ★★★ (EP08)

Theme: Bureaucracy, Mortality, and the Ordinary Face of Atrocity

Episode 8 follows a single slave trading voyage through the captain's own logbook. Unlike the thematic structure of earlier episodes, it presents the trade as a lived experience unfolding day by day. Using specific examples from the Sandown's voyage, analyze how the episode reveals the Atlantic slave trade as a system maintained not by exceptional cruelty but by routine administration.

In your essay, consider:

- Gamble's logbook as a document: what it records, what it omits, and what its tone reveals about the normalisation of the trade *(EP08)*
- The parallel mortality of crew and captives, and how the system consumed both while valuing them differently *(EP08)*
- The role of intermediaries (Walker, the Fula traders, the coastal brokers) in sustaining the trade's infrastructure *(EP08)*
- The legal and financial mechanisms visible in the voyage: insurance, impressment, the Dolben Act, the "bar" currency, the auction of dead men's clothes *(EP06, EP07, EP08)*
- The insurrections (aboard the Sandown and the Venus) as acts of resistance within a system designed to make resistance impossible *(EP03, EP08)*
- Gamble's phrase "by God's permission" and what it reveals about moral self-justification *(EP04, EP08)*

Key concepts to discuss: logbook as primary source, coastal trading networks, Fula people’s control of interior supply, crew impressment, the bar as unit of account, the Dolben Act, Middle Passage mortality, Kingston slave market, privateer warfare

Extension question for advanced students: Gamble's logbook survived because it was preserved in a museum archive and later transcribed by a scholar. Most such documents did not survive, and most voyages left no detailed record. What does it mean to reconstruct history from the records kept by perpetrators? What voices are missing from Gamble's account, and how might the same voyage have been recorded by a captive, a pressed sailor, or a Fula trader?

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

Date/Period	***Event or Context***
15TH–16TH CENTURIES: FOUNDATIONS & EARLY CONTACT	
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	**Pope Nicholas V** issues the papal bull *Dum Diversas*, giving the King of Portugal the right to perpetually enslave non-Christians.
1454	Pope Nicholas V issues *Romanus Pontifex*, allowing Catholic nations to expand dominion over "discovered" land and validate the enslavement of non-Christian "pagans."
1493	**Pope Alexander VI** issues the papal bull *Inter Caetera*, granting Spain and Portugal rights to claim non-Christian lands.
17TH CENTURY: PEAK ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE ERA	
1621	The **Dutch West India Company** (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 **Royal African Company** (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 **chattel slavery** and the principle of *partus sequitur ventrem*.
1670s	The Dutch Republic's "Golden Age" wanes; the WIC reorganizes, focusing on Curaçao's slave depot and Asiento contracts.
1684	**Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita is born** in the Kingdom of Kongo (Angola). Royal African Company documentation begins.
October 1685	The main setting for *Dark Bullion* EP01 and EP06: episodes set in **Ouidah**, **Dahomey**, detailing trade dynamics, the **Tree of Oblivion** ritual, and the **barracoons**.

Date/Period	*Event or Context*
1694	**Bank of England** 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	**Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita** 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; **Birmingham** produces shackles, chains, and firearms for the trade. Manchester processes slave-grown cotton.
1706	Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita is arrested and **burned at the stake for heresy** at the age of 22.
1713	The *Asiento* is granted to the **South Sea Company** via the Treaty of Utrecht. **Queen Anne** 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. **Antoine Crozat**, wealthiest man in France, directs the Compagnie de Guinée. He builds a home for his daughter that later becomes the **Palais de l'Élysée**.
1755	Liverpool dominates the British slave trade; the city's population grows from 5,000 (1700) to 80,000 by century's end.
1777	**King Louis XVI** publishes the *Déclaration pour la Police des Noirs*, restricting the entry of Black people into France while creating exceptions and profiting from deposit fees.
1787–1792	The **Sierra Leone colony** is established by British abolitionists as a settlement for freed Africans. **Freetown** is founded in 1792 with settlers including Black Loyalists from Nova Scotia and the "Black Poor" of London.
1788	**The Dolben Act** (*An Act to Regulate the Carrying of Slaves*) is passed by the British Parliament, limiting the number of captives a ship may carry based on tonnage. It is among the first legislative attempts to regulate (not abolish) the trade.
1789	The **French Revolution** 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.

Date/Period	*Event or Context*
Jan 1793	**France declares war on Britain.** Captain **Samuel Gamble** takes command of the **Sandown** on the Thames, bound for the West African coast to trade for 250 captives.
Jun 1793–Mar 1794	The Sandown is on the **West African coast** (Isles de Los, Rio Núñez). Yellow fever, malaria, and dysentery devastate the crew. Gamble waits months for captives from the interior.
Mar–May 1794	The Sandown completes the **Middle Passage** to Jamaica via Barbados, arriving in Kingston with 226 surviving captives out of 250 received. Most of the crew desert at Barbados.
1807	**Great Britain bans the slave trade** (Slave Trade Act 1807). The U.S. Congress also bans the African slave trade, effective January 1, 1808.
1818–1858	Reign of **King Ghezo** 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 **dissolution of the Agojié (Mino) women's regiment**.
20TH–21ST CENTURIES: MODERN RECKONING	
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 **Tree of Oblivion** (replanted in the 20th century) is found uprooted and split in two in Ouidah.
2025	A cross-party group of 27 MPs and peers urge the incoming **Archbishop of Canterbury**, **Dame Sarah Mullally**, to scrap the Church of England's proposed £100m slavery reparations fund (known as "Project Spire"), calling it a "legally dubious vanity project."
2026 (Mar.)	A large majority of UN member states vote for a declaration, led by **Ghana**, formally recognising the historical trafficking and chattel enslavement of Africans as a crime against humanity. Britain abstains.
2026 (July)	**Dame Sarah Mullally**, installed as the 106th and first female **Archbishop of Canterbury** in March, renews her commitment to the £100m fund during a visit to Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, where enslaved Africans were held before being trafficked to the Americas. The Church describes the payouts as a "moral imperative." Backlash from within the Church and Parliament continues.

Date/Period	***Event or Context***
2026 (Sept.)	The Register of British Slave Traders is published, the product of a three-year project by historians across three UK universities. It identifies approximately 13,000 Britain-based investors, including monarchs, MPs, merchants, and over 1,000 women, who financed the transportation of 3.2 million enslaved Africans from the 1560s to abolition in 1807. The register provides biographical detail for 10,500 of them, building the most comprehensive picture to date of those who perpetrated and profited from the trade. A BBC Two documentary series, *Finding Britain's Slave Traders* with David Olusoga, accompanies the launch.

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		
King James II of England	Governor and chief stockholder of the **Royal African Company (RAC)**.	Previously, as the Duke of York, he had many enslaved people branded with the initials D-O-Y.
Captain Henry Clarke	Slave trader captain of the ship *Prosperous*.	Commanded the ship on behalf of the Royal African Company.
King Louis XIV of France	French monarch who established the *Code Noir* (Black Code).	The *Code Noir* created regulations for slavery, defining enslaved people as movable property and authorizing slave owners to mutilate human chattel.
King Louis XVI of France	French monarch who published the *Déclaration pour la Police des Noirs* (1777).	Complained about the growing numbers of Black people in French cities; restricted their entry while creating exceptions and taxing the practice.
Pope Innocent VIII	Roman Catholic Church leader.	Personally received enslaved Africans as a gift from the Spanish monarchy and distributed them among his Cardinals and Roman elites.
Pope Alexander VI	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.
Alexander Falconbridge	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. Referenced in EP08 in contrast to Gamble's omission of crew violence against female captives.
Queen Anne	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.

Character Name	*Role/Affiliation*	*Context in Sources*
René Montaudouin	Nantes merchant and slave trade magnate.	Outfitted *L'Hercule*, Nantes' first slave voyage. Over decades, the Montaudouin family outfitted 357 slave ships, becoming one of the city's wealthiest dynasties.
Antoine Crozat	Wealthiest man in France; directed the Compagnie de Guinée.	Directed one of the largest slave trading companies operating between Nantes and Saint-Domingue. Built a home for his daughter that later became the **Palais de l'Élysée**.
John Locke	Enlightenment philosopher.	Proclaimed that one person should not enslave another, yet owned stock in slave trading companies – embodying the Age of Enlightenment's contradictions.
Captain Samuel Gamble	Commander of the slave ship **Sandown** (1793–1794).	An experienced captain who kept a detailed logbook of his voyage from London to West Africa to Jamaica. His meticulous records of provisions, deaths, cargo, and weather provide a rare day-by-day account of a slave trading voyage. The logbook is preserved at the Royal Museums Greenwich.
Dr James Walker	Resident slave trader on the **Rio Núñez**, West Africa.	A former ship's surgeon who had lived on the coast for over 30 years. He established a permanent trading post ("Walkeria") and served as the essential intermediary between visiting ship captains and the interior trading networks controlled by the Fula people.
Philip Beaver	British naval officer and abolitionist colonist.	Governor of an experimental abolitionist colony on the island of Bulama. After the colony failed and its settlers abandoned him, he fled to the Rio Núñez, where Gamble received him aboard the Sandown with a seven-gun salute.
Renaud	French privateer operating along the West African coast (1793–1794).	He seized British vessels and repeatedly threatened to capture or destroy the Sandown. At one point he offered 10 slaves for a pilot willing to guide him to Gamble's position on the Rio Núñez.

Character Name	*Role/Affiliation*	*Context in Sources*
WEST AFRICAN LEADERS AND SPIRITUAL FIGURES		
Queen Nzinga Mbande	Leader (Queen/King) of **Ndongo and Matamba** (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.
Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita	Religious visionary in the **Kingdom of Kongo** (Angola).	Founded **Antonianism**, 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.
Queen Agontimé (Na Agontimé)	Queen in Dahomey, later enslaved, and Candomblé Priestess in Brazil.	Originally captured from the Mahi people, she rose to become a wife of **King Agonglo** 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.
King Agonglo	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.
King Ghezo	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.
Hevioso	Vodou god of Thunder, Lightning, and Rain.	Summoned, metaphorically, to manifest his wrath in EP01, resulting in the uprooting of the Tree of Oblivion.
Mawu-Lisa	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.

Character Name	*Role/Affiliation*	*Context in Sources*
Queen Amina	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.
MODERN SCHOLARS		
Professor Bruce L. Mouser	American historian; editor and annotator of Gamble's logbook.	His painstaking transcription, *A Slaving Voyage to Africa and Jamaica: The Log of the Sandown, 1793–1794*, made an otherwise inaccessible primary source available to researchers and, through *Dark Bullion*, to a wider audience.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Term	*Definition*
Abomey	The capital city and location of the Royal Palace in the Kingdom of **Dahomey**.
Agojié	An alternate name for the Mino, the **all-female military** regiment of Dahomey.
Agontimé	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**.
Ahosi	The Fon term for the **king's wives in Dahomey**. Some Ahosi were recruited into the all-female military regiment.
Akan	A people of the Gold Coast (**modern Ghana**), known as gold miners, traders, and warriors, whose kings wore **kente cloth**.
Antonianism	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.
Asiento de Negros	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.
Bar (unit of trade)	A **unit of account** used by European traders on the West African coast. Originally the **price of an actual iron bar** (a key trade commodity), it evolved into an abstract accounting unit. All goods, labour, and captives were valued in bars.
Barracoon	A **fortified enclosure** or barracks used to hold **enslaved people** on the coast while they awaited shipment across the Atlantic.
Barricado	A heavy **wooden barrier** erected across the deck of a slave ship, pierced with holes for blunderbusses. It **separated the captive men** from the crew quarters and served as a defensive position in case of insurrection.
Beatriz Kimpa Vita, Dona	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**.

Term	*Definition*
Candomblé	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.
Chattel Slavery	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**.
Code Noir	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.
Coromantee	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.
Curse of Ham	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.
Curaçao	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.
Dahomey	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**.
Dolben Act (1788)	**British legislation** (*An Act to Regulate the Carrying of Slaves*) that limited the number of captives a slave ship could carry based on its tonnage. One of the first attempts to **regulate, though not abolish**, the conditions of the trade.
Dutch West India Company (WIC)	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.
Factor	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.

Term	*Definition*
Factory Island	The most easterly of the **Isles de Los**, off the coast of present-day Guinea. It functioned as a major logistical base for slave trading operations: **repairs, provisioning**, and **skilled labour**.
Fon	The dominant ethnic group and **language** of the Kingdom of **Dahomey**.
Fula people (Fulani / Peul)	A large, widely **dispersed West African people**, historically pastoralists and traders. By the 18th century they controlled significant territory in the interior and **dominated the slave paths** bringing captives to the coast. Their willingness to send captives depended on price, giving them considerable leverage over **coastal brokers** and European captains.
Ganvié	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."
Gbeto	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**.
Gold Coast	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.
Guinea (coin)	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.
Harmattan	A dry, **dusty wind** that blows from the Sahara across West Africa, typically from November to March. It brings **heavy dew** at night, thick **morning fog**, **scorching** daytime heat, and **biting** cold, replacing the tornado season.
Hevioso	The Vodou **god of thunder**, lightning, and rain in the Fon tradition of Dahomey.
Igbo	A **people** from the region of **modern-day Nigeria**. European slavers stereotyped them as more submissive but prone to melancholy and suicide.
Impressment	The practice of **forcibly recruiting** men into naval or maritime service. During the Anglo-French war, the **Royal Navy** regularly boarded merchant vessels on the Thames and **took crew members**, disrupting slave trading voyages like Gamble's before they had even sailed.

Term	*Definition*
Indentured Servitude	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.
Indienne (textiles)	**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.
Isles de Los	A **group of islands** off the coast of **present-day Guinea**, serving as a major hub for slave trading operations on the West African coast. **Factory Island**, the most easterly, was the principal base.
Kente Cloth	A textile made of **brightly-colored**, handwoven strips of silk and cotton, worn by the kings and elite of the **Akan people**.
Kingdom of Kongo	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.
Legba (Papa Legba)	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.
Lloyd's	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.
Mandé	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.
Mawu-Lisa	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).
Middle Passage	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.
Mino	The Fon name, meaning "our mothers," for the **all-female military** regiment of Dahomey, also known as the Dahomey Amazons.
Nzinga Mbande, Queen	A 17th-century queen of the **Ndongo** and **Matamba** kingdoms in West Central Africa. She was a skilled diplomat and military leader

Term	*Definition*
	who led **resistance** against **Portuguese colonization** for decades.
Ouidah	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.
Palais de l'Élysée	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.
Papal Bulls	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.
Pawns	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.
Rio Núñez	A river in **present-day Guinea** where several European slave traders, including **Dr James Walker**, maintained permanent trading posts. It was the site of the **Sandown**'s extended stay while waiting for captives from the interior.
Royal African Company	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."
Saint-Domingue	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**.
Separate Traders	**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**.
South Sea Company	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.
SPG (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel)	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**.

Term	*Definition*
Suriname	A **Dutch colony** on South America's northeast coast. Over 300,000 enslaved Africans were shipped there for **plantation work** under **notoriously brutal** conditions.
Tofinu	A people, part of the **Ajitado** group, who ingeniously evaded Fon slave raids by building the **water village** of **Ganvié**.
Triangular Trade	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.
Vodou (Vodún)	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.
Walkeria	The local name for **Dr James Walker**'s trading post on the **Rio Núñez**. Walker, a former ship's surgeon turned resident trader, operated from this base for over 30 years, serving as **intermediary** between European ship captains and interior trading networks.
Yellow Fever	A viral disease transmitted by **mosquitoes**, endemic to tropical **West Africa** and devastating to European crews with no immunity. Symptoms include high fever, jaundice (yellowing of the skin), black vomit, delirium, and **death, often within 72 hours**. Contemporary treatments (bleeding, blistering, opium) generally accelerated death rather than preventing it.
Yoruba	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.

SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

A work in progress, not exhaustive, but representative of the research behind each episode.

Episode 1: A Portal to Oblivion

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Episode 2: West African Peoples

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Episode 5: Women of West Africa

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Episode 6: Inventory

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