

Cottons Consumption in the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World

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The importance of West African, North American, and Caribbean demand for the emergence of the modern cotton textile industry has long been recognized.¹ Yet in striking contrast to the careful study devoted to the contours of cottons consumption within Europe,² remarkably little is known about the reception and appropriation of cottons in the non-European Atlantic. Who bought which cottons? When, where, and how? For what reasons? What trends characterized cottons consumption across time and place? With what other fabrics did they compete? Employing probate inventories, merchant accounts, and other contemporary documents, this essay examines these issues in British and French trading posts in West Africa and North American and Caribbean colonies and their commercial hinterlands from the late seventeenth century through the third quarter of the

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¹ E.g., Alfred P. Wadsworth and Julia de Lacy Mann, *The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire 1600-1780* (Manchester, 1931), esp. pp. 145-69; Paul Butel, 'France, the Antilles, and Europe in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Renewals of Foreign Trade', in James Tracy, ed., *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350-1750* (New York, 1990), esp. p. 169.

² E.g., Beverly Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite: The Cotton Trade and the Consumer in Britain, 1660-1800* (Oxford, 1991); Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing. Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge, 1994), esp. pp. 118-50.

eighteenth. During this period the dynamic Atlantic system linked formerly separate markets and created new ones, challenging existing producers and products while encouraging new entrants and new goods.

West Africa

Cottons had been woven in many parts of West Africa since at least the eleventh century, and some of these fabrics, together with North African imports brought across the Sahara, had entered both coastal and inland commercial networks.³ So substantial was West African demand that from the earliest years of contact European traders acquired substantial amounts of locally produced cottons to exchange for gold, ivory, and slaves. Though quantitative data are sparse, the continuing importance of local production is indicated by the 12,000 Benin and 10,000 Ardra cloths that Dutch merchants alone traded in 1653-57, or the cottons from another half-dozen regions that can be identified in contemporary merchant accounts.⁴ Existing supply seems, indeed, to have been insufficient to meet West African demand. In the first half of the sixteenth century Portuguese traders, apparently building on existing but non-commercialized production, developed thriving cotton and indigo plantations and associated weaving and dyeing manufactures on several islands in the

³ Jean Boulégue, 'La SÉNÉGAMBIE du milieu du XVe siècle au début du XVIIIe siècle' (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Paris, 1968), pp. 87-8, 98; George E. Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers. Ecology, Society, and Trade in Western Africa, 1000-1630* (Boulder, Col., 1993), pp. 55-56, 68, 129, 219-20, 300.

⁴ A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans 1485-1897* (New York, 1969), pp. 37, 93-94; Ray Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore, 1982), pp. 208-9.

Cape Verde archipelago using enslaved Africans brought from cotton regions on the mainland.⁵

By the early sixteenth century, Portuguese merchants trading at São Jorge da Mina on the Gold Coast had introduced Indian printed chintz, muslins, and calicos, scarlet cottons made in Portugal, Holland, and India, and fustians from Muslim producers,⁶ but from all evidence imported cottons were of minor importance well into the next century. A ‘formula’ sent by the governor-general of the now-Dutch fort at Elmina in 1645, listing goods suitable for trade along the entire Gold Coast and the neighboring Bight of Benin, proposed cargoes containing just 12 percent cottons by value, as against 55 percent linens and 32 percent woolens. Again, a Dutch ship that arrived at Elmina soon after had just two types of cottons in its cargo, and they had cost only 4 percent of all textiles, far behind linens (75 percent) and woolens (22 percent).⁷

⁵ Aluise da Cada Mosto, ‘The Second Voyage of Aluise da Cada Mosto to the Coast of Africa, in 1456’, in Thomas Astley, *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London: 1745-47), vol. i, 594; T. Bentley Duncan, *Atlantic Islands. Madeira, the Azores and the Cape Verde in Seventeenth-Century Commerce and Navigation* (Chicago, 1972), pp. 21, 160, 212-30.

⁶ J. W. Blake, *Europeans In West Africa 1450-1560* (London, 1941), pp. 97-98, 108; John Vogt, ‘Notes on the Portuguese Cloth Trade in West Africa, 1480-1540’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 8 - 4 (1975), esp. pp. 644 and 648.

⁷ K. Ratelband, ed., *Vijf dagregisters van het kasteel São Jorge da Mina (Elmina) aan de Goudkust (1645-1647)* (The Hague, 1953), pp. 388, 390-1.

African cottons continued to dominate inland markets, at least, throughout the period.⁸ But by the end of the seventeenth century, imported cottons were becoming a larger presence along the Gold Coast. Between 1685 and 1694, cottons comprised 16 percent by value of textiles in Royal African Company cargoes dispatched to Cape Coast Castle, a few miles from Elmina (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, they still lagged well behind linens (35 percent) and woolens (48 percent); in addition, turnover (70 percent of existing or newly arrived cottons were disposed of between 1687 and 1691) was noticeably lower than for either linens (97 percent) or woolens (90 percent).⁹ Detailed examination reveals selective acceptance of imported cottons. For example, wide baftas were popular but narrow were not; again, white pautkas were best sellers, while blue pautkas languished on the shelves. Rather than a demand-side problem of trying to open new markets with unfamiliar goods, that is, European merchants faced a supply-side problem of furnishing knowledgeable, developed markets with goods that consumers wanted.

Over time, they learned, and cottons steadily gained market share. By 1760-74, imported cottons composed 62 percent of Cape Coast Castle cargoes (Fig. 4), their gains coming at the expense of linens (16 percent) and particularly woolens (14 percent). Merchants offered a broader selection—29 as against just 12 in the late seventeenth century—while also meeting changing West African preferences. Earlier, tapseils (23 percent of cottons), guinea stuffs (11

⁸ David Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers. Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 149, 169-71.

⁹ The National Archives, Kew [henceforth TNA], T70/1230.

percent), and pautkas and allejaes (10 percent each) had led; now the favorites were chintz (26 percent), cotton romals (16 percent), chelloes (10 percent), and neganepauts (9 percent).

Angola lacked indigenous cottons production and overland trade fell short of meeting demand.¹⁰ These factors may explain why imported cottons always loomed large. In Royal African Company cargoes between 1676 and 1693, 18 varieties of cottons comprised 84 percent of textiles by value (Fig. 1). Nor did this heavy preference for cottons diminish, though Royal African Company shipments did; cottons were 95 percent of fabrics in cargoes sent by French merchants from Nantes in 1767-70 (Fig. 4).¹¹ As on the Gold Coast, more types of cottons were imported into Angola over time, and preferences shifted, though niccanees and tapseils remained among the four most popular types from the later seventeenth to the later eighteenth century.

The Gold Coast and Angola retained distinct cottons profiles, however; in 1760-74 as in the later seventeenth century only one type of cotton was popular in both regions (tapseils earlier, chelloes later). The two regions did concur in receiving growing amounts of European-made cottons in their cargoes, although Indian goods always predominated. Virtually unknown in the later seventeenth century, by 1760-74 a significant proportion was identified as Dutch, English, French, occasionally German. French cotton manufacturers

¹⁰ Joseph Miller, *Way of Death. Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade 1730-1830* (Madison, Wisc., 1988), pp. 79-81.

¹¹ In 11 cargoes dispatched by the Dutch Middelburgsche Commerciale Compagnie (MCC) between 1761 and 1772, cottons formed 96 percent of textiles; Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg, MCC 20/399, 519, 524, 528, 533, 802, 824, 930, 1009, 1014, 1019.

seem to have been the most successful in meeting African demand. Whereas a third or more of the leading cotton varieties sent to Angola in French ships were domestically made, the English cottons shipped to Cape Coast Castle were not among the most sought after types. For example, niccanees formed 19 percent of the cottons in French cargoes for Angola; of them, 44 percent were French, as were 36 percent of tapseils (15 percent of all cottons), and 46 percent of calicoes (12 percent). On ships bound for Cape Coast Castle, 30 percent of the carridarries and 24 percent of the tapseils were English, but these each counted for only about 4 percent of all cottons.¹²

Sketchy price data and travelers' reports indicate that cottons woven in West Africa found customers in most social classes, at least within producing regions or areas with which they traded. Different strata probably wore diverse qualities and quantities of cottons, the most colorful varieties being made into elaborate garments worn by elites, while the poor made do with plain breechclouts or skirts.¹³ Consumption of imported cottons is a more contentious matter. Some contemporaries and recent scholars consider imported textiles to have been

¹² Cfr. Wadsworth and Mann, *Cotton Trade*, pp. 148-60, and David Richardson, 'West African Consumption Patterns and Their Influence on the Eighteenth-Century English Slave Trade', in Henry Gemery and Jan Hogendorn, eds., *The Uncommon Market. Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1979), pp. 303-30.

¹³ Cfr. 'Diary kept by Ph. Eytzen on board the ship "Utregt" and in the Lodge at Fida [Whydah], April-May 1718', in A. Van Dantzig, *Dutch Documents Relating to the Gold Coast and the Slave Coast (Coast of Guinea) 1680-1740. Translations of Letters and Papers Collected in the Algemeen Rijks Archief (ARA), State Archives of the Netherlands at the Hague* (Legon, 1971), p. 139; Astley, *New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*, vol. ii: 270-71, 563, 632; vol. iii: 17 and 95; Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Politics*, pp. 209, 210, 215, 315, 319.

‘nonessential luxuries’ or ‘prestige goods’ destined for elites, while commoners self-provisioned or wore only local fabrics.¹⁴ But imported cottons, like domestic, included both more and less expensive types, so at least in a region with little pre-existing textile production, like Angola, by the eighteenth century imported inexpensive thin cottons clothed ordinary people both in the ports and in the interior; more colorful varieties were bought by ‘dignitaries’.¹⁵ Whatever its origin, its price, or its specific type—and despite sizable imports of European linens and woollens—some sort of a cotton, it seems safe to conclude, was the fabric of choice for garments throughout most of West Africa.

The New World

North American and Caribbean cottons consumption developed in environments that differed in several significant respects from West Africa. Not only was there no indigenous cloth production of any sort but long-established—if evolving—textile cultures accompanied both African and European settlers. Climatic conditions and patterns of economic development also diverged notably across the area. How did these factors contribute to cottons’ reception?

¹⁴ Cfr. L’abbé Proyart, *Histoire de Loango, Kakongo, et autres royaumes d’Afrique* (Paris and Lyon, 1776), pp. 109-10; Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers*, pp. 56-57 (quotations).

¹⁵ Miller, *Way of Death*, pp. 80-81; Joseph Miller, ‘Capitalism and Slaving: The Financial and Commercial Organization of the Angolan Slave Trade, According to the Accounts of Antonio Coelho Guerreiro (1684-1692)’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 17 -1 (1984), pp. 32, 28-39.

New France

In the last quarter of the seventeenth century, cottons formed just 4 percent by value of Montreal-area merchant stocks, far behind woolens (67 percent) and linens (19 percent) and even behind silks (6 percent) (Fig. 1). This profile is not unexpected in light of New France's harsh climate, the dominance of woolens and linens in domestic French consumption, and the importance of trade with Amerindians, who favored lengths of woolens and linen shirts. But even among settlers cottons were little used, forming just 7 percent of garments (Fig. 2). Whereas other fabrics were worn in both town and country, moreover, cotton textiles were mainly found in accessories in the wardrobes of urban male officials, merchants, and professionals, who occasionally donned dimity drawers and muslin and *toile de coton* cravats, but usually favored linen items and had a few cotton curtains, table linens, and bedspreads in their homes. Very rarely did men and women from other social and occupational groups own any type of cotton goods.

By the later eighteenth century, cloth habits had been transformed (Fig. 4): cottons comprised 30 percent of merchant textile stocks by value, just behind woolens (34 percent) but ahead of linens (26 percent) not to mention silks (8 percent). Increased supply was partly responsible: both city and village shops carried many more varieties of cottons than their predecessors. But that the new pattern mainly reflected changing settler preferences is indicated by the fact that the proportion of cottons in garment listings rose even more than in merchant stocks. Cottons were the leading textiles used for garments (33 percent), ahead of linens (26 percent), woolens (23 percent), and silks (8 percent) (Fig. 5). Equally important,

cottons had been transformed from novelties into widely and regularly employed everyday products throughout the population. Besides the *caleçons* and cravats of their forebears, settlers in the 1760s and 1770s wore cotton skirts, vests, jackets, and breeches; even cotton cloaks, capes, and overcoats made their appearance. The greater popularity of cottons rested on a degree of continuity in that dimity and muslin remained popular. But calico was more in demand, enabling Montrealers to wear petticoats, cloaks, capes, and (for men) waistcoats in a much greater range of colors and patterns than before.

Improvements in settlers' domestic environment likewise drew upon and fed into rising consumption of cottons. Though linens were also employed for this purpose, probate inventories reveal mounting accumulations of cotton napkins, tablecloths, curtains, towels, sheets and pillow covers, even blankets among rural and urban residents alike. Cotton fabrics also increased their social range. Only for the well-to-do in the later seventeenth century, by 1760-74 cottons were owned by colonists of middling or even less wealth.

Yet if the expansion of cottons consumption touched many strata, it did so unevenly: as they became more widely available, cottons formulated distinctive gender and spatial textile cultures. On the one hand, cottons turned into women's cloth, reversing their previous gender affiliation. By the 1760s a Montreal woman of any class would own three or four times as many cotton garments as a man. On the other, urban women and men turned to

cottons sooner and at a higher rate than their fellows in the countryside.¹⁶ Among settlers, in short, differential appropriation of cottons contributed to the advent of a specifically urban apparel regime, in which urban women and men dressed in lighter and more colorful clothing, more often made of cotton fabrics, than their rural counterparts, whose garments remained more rooted in linens and woolens, some of them now woven in Canada.

Pennsylvania

Documents from late seventeenth century Philadelphia reveal a cottons culture that resembled contemporary Montreal's in many respects. Cottons were a minor—if slightly larger—presence in merchant stocks (8 percent) (Fig. 1), muslin was especially popular in each colony, and the premium that consumers paid for cottons compared to linens and woolens was also in the same range. Following British practice, inventories contain little usable information about garments. But sales records extracted from the earliest surviving shopkeeper's account books (1704-20) likewise show cottons to have formed a minimal part of consumer textile expenditures (6 percent).¹⁷

In Philadelphia as in Montreal the supply of cottons grew appreciably across the eighteenth century, though not as strikingly in the former as in the latter. In 1760-74, cottons accounted for 20 percent by value of inventoried merchant textile stocks and orders (as against about a

¹⁶ Cfr. Archives Nationales du Québec, Montréal [henceforth ANQM], Fonds Château de Ramezay P 345; Baby Collection, Université de Montréal, G2/34, Registre 3, Etienne Augé et Pierre Guy, Grand livre de comptes 1740-56; Archives Canada, Mf. 852, Etienne Augé, Journal E.

¹⁷ Historical Society of Pennsylvania [henceforth HSP], Am. 7079, Thomas Coates Ledger.

third in Montreal) (Fig. 4).¹⁸ Some of the lesser increase bears witness to the expansion of Philadelphia's Indian trade, which focused on woolens and linens. But mainly it was due to British colonists' continuing commitment to woolens, linens, and silk.¹⁹

In Philadelphia, too, many more types of cottons became available, both in general stores and in specialized establishments like Francis Jeyes's 'London ware-house for printed calicoes, cottons, and linen'—though Jeyes's decision just a few months later to add woolens and silks to his offerings hints at a reluctance to embrace cottons.²⁰ Again, though peddlers and country stores began to stock a larger variety of cottons, rural Pennsylvania like rural New France proved tardier than the cities to adopt cottons; revealingly, the booming town of Lancaster, a transport and farm supplies hub 100 km west of Philadelphia, had a cottons consumption profile midway between more heavily farming areas and Philadelphia.²¹ Finally, while in Philadelphia as in Montreal cottons diffused throughout society in the course of the eighteenth century,²² there is also much evidence—again as in New France—that they

¹⁸ For orders, HSP, Jones Papers, D-39, Jones and Wistar Invoice Book 1759-62; HSP, Waln Family Papers, Richard Waln, Junior, Invoice Book 1763-72.

¹⁹ HSP, Morris Papers, Deborah Morris Account Book; Ralph Davis, 'English Foreign Trade, 1700-1774', *Economic History Review*, 15 (1962-63), pp. 285-303.

²⁰ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 17 December 1761, 4 March 1762. Advertisements in the *Gazette*, which began publication in 1728, chart the growing variety of fabrics on sale across the eighteenth century.

²¹ Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Del., MS, acc. 1338, Potts family accounts, vol. 4; Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pa., [Peter Buffington] Store Account Books 10, 14; Hagley Museum and Library, Acc. 890, vol. 3, Unknown Lancaster merchant Daybook 1765-66.

²² In advertisements for runaway servants and slaves in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 4 percent of garments were specified as cottons in 1731-33, 13 percent in 1774.

became predominantly women's fabrics, whether in the form of expensive chintz for gowns or cheap check for aprons.²³

South Carolina

South Carolina and Louisiana experienced milder winters and longer, hotter summers than either Pennsylvania or New France, and their economies relied upon slave labor to a much greater extent, though both also traded furs and deerskins with Amerindians. Nevertheless, their cottons consumption patterns bore some striking resemblances to those obtaining further north. Thus in South Carolina, merchants initially stocked limited amounts of cottons, a situation that changed only slowly. The two merchant inventories surviving from the mid-1690s, soon after the colony's foundation, contained 7 percent cottons by value, far behind linens (29 percent), woolens (52 percent), even silks (10 percent) (Fig. 1). Even in 1730s merchant inventories, cottons account for just 9 percent of total textile stocks (Fig. 3).²⁴ And though the proportion rose thereafter, at 20 percent of textile stocks in 1760-74 it was no greater than Philadelphia's (Fig. 4). Linens (43 percent) had become the leading fabric, well ahead of woolens (25 percent).

²³ HSP, Ms. Am 909, James Bonsall Account Book 1722-28; HSP, Morris Papers, Deborah Morris Account Book.

²⁴ Tellingly, a list of 'Goods proper for So Carolina' drawn up by the Charleston merchant Robert Pringle in September 1738 specified more than a dozen types of linens, some eleven woolens, but only checks and printed ('painted') calicoes for cottons; Walter B. Edgar, ed., *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle*, 2 vols. (Columbia, S. C., 1972), vol. i: 31-2.

As in the north, too, urban consumers proved friendlier to cottons than their country cousins. Thus cottons comprised 16 percent by value of the textile stocks of merchants operating in or near Charleston during the 1730s, 24 percent in 1760-74. Rural traders, in contrast, had just 3.5 percent and 7 percent respectively. Doubtless price was an important consideration (cheap cotton check, for instance, stayed about twice as expensive as osnabrig linen), but the popularity of rough and heavy linens and woolens in the countryside suggests that durability mattered as well to Euro-American settlers when they bought for their own use, when they clothed their slaves, and when they traded with Indians.²⁵ In South Carolina, too, broader North American patterns of differential cottons appropriation by gender and social geography were likewise apparent: women no matter where they lived seem to have preferred cottons more than men, and Charleston women had the edge over their rural sisters.²⁶

Louisiana

²⁵ South Carolina Historical Society [henceforth SCHS], Charleston, 34/613, Ely Kershaw Account Book 1769-74 (Kershaw, a storekeeper in Cheraw, 200 km. north of Charleston, sold mainly to Euro-American settlers for themselves and their slaves); South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, Microfilm of original at Clemson University Library, Clemson, S. C., Macartan & Campbell, Augusta Account Book 1762-66 (Macartan and Campbell's customers were largely Indian traders). Runaway slave advertisements in the *South Carolina Gazette* tell the same story: despite the very occasional calico petticoat, cotton gown, or fustian breeches, the overwhelming majority of slave garments were made of osnabrig linen and plains ("Negro cloth") woolens.

²⁶ For urban patterns, SCHS, Lindley Papers, 34-355, 1718-20 expenditures for the orphaned Lindley children, and Charleston Museum, James Poyas Account Book, 1760-65; for rural, SCHS, 34/613, Kershaw Account Book.

Compared to the other continental colonies, cottons consumption developed precociously in Louisiana. Already in the first usable inventories of merchant stocks, which date from the 1730s, cottons accounted for 23 percent by value, some three times the proportion in Charleston (Fig. 3). Similarly, cottons composed 29 percent of the garments from that decade (Fig. 2). In other respects, however, Louisiana participated in general North American trends. Whereas between a third and a half of a few distinctively male garments (notably culottes and vests) were tailored from cottons, half to three-quarters of nearly every type of women's garments save blouses were, so overall about one-quarter of male clothing was made from cottons, nearly two-fifths of female. Though evidence is sparse, cottons apparently also shared the familiar association with urban residents. In contrast, rural settlers were more likely to have woolen and linen clothing, destined not only for their own bodies but also for those of their slaves, who were largely excluded from early cottons consumption.

By the 1760s, the proportion of cottons in merchant stocks had risen to 33 percent—not a dramatic increase but nevertheless to a level well above the British colonies if about on a par with Montreal (Fig. 4)²⁷—and the proportion of cotton garments edged up slightly, to 31 percent (Fig. 5). But this stability concealed a deeper shift, as cottons' gender identity became significantly more pronounced. On average, women in 1760s Louisiana owned about twice as many cottons as men, who owned half again as many linens and at least five times as many woolens, whereas woolens had all but disappeared from women's wardrobes. In

²⁷ Linens had fallen from 53 percent to 44 percent, woolens remained about the same (11 percent vs. 12 percent in the 1730s).

contrast, cottons' marker as a distinctively urban fabric weakened, suggesting the emergence of a more unified lower Mississippi settler material culture, thanks perhaps to the influence of planters and their families who lived both in New Orleans and on their plantations. Finally, very incomplete data from the Illinois country (Upper Louisiana) suggest that both the popularity of cottons and its association with women traveled inland in the packs of voyageurs and peddlers.²⁸

Native North America

Over time, Amerindians came to participate in Atlantic textile culture, as commercial and gift exchange introduced new cloth garments to their wardrobes and allowed substitution of imported fabrics for skins and furs in traditional clothing. Presents may have expressed official norms more than Native wishes, but traders likely responded to Amerindian preferences more closely, since competitors were usually close to hand. It is therefore probably significant that in the course of the eighteenth century many traders' assortments came to include increasing quantities of cottons even though heavy and durable woolens and linens always remained clearly dominant and cottons seem not to have won as great favor among Amerindians as among colonists.

Initially, Amerindian access to cottons remained as limited as settler; well into the eighteenth century, moreover, it lagged behind. Late seventeenth century cargoes from Montreal to the

²⁸ Kaskaskia Manuscripts, Randolph County Courthouse, Chester, Ill., docs. 21:9:13:1, 63:6:19:1, 63:6:20:1, 67:10:20:1, 70:6:25:2.

Great Lakes region typically included no cotton cloth or garments, those sent in 1715-39 just 2 percent by value, those in 1740-48 barely 3 percent.²⁹ But despite their small contribution to total cargo values, from the late 1730s on cottons did begin to carve out a niche as higher priced blouses and shirts for adults at a number of the posts. Whereas virtually all shirts and blouses had previously been made of linen, in the 1740s nearly 14 percent of those sent to Green Bay were fashioned of cottons, 24 percent of those sent to Michilimackinac, and 30 percent at Rainy Lake. By that point, many Native Americans around the Great Lakes had evidently come to expect cottons in trade goods assortments, for during the 1750s, when war disrupted supplies from France, *voyageurs* reportedly stopped at the British Oswego post to obtain printed cottons among other ‘prohibited goods’.³⁰ The British conquest may have accelerated diffusion among Amerindians of the region, for cotton fabrics and garments composed as much as a quarter of total ellage in early 1770s traders’ stocks.³¹ But if the availability—or the regular availability—of cottons may have increased after the Treaty of Paris, it seems likely that Amerindian taste for them had already developed under the French. Thus when a Philadelphia merchant went to the Illinois country to exploit the Indian trade

²⁹ For 1685 cargoes, see Université de Montréal, Collection Baby, docs. G1/5, G1/6, G1/8; for 1688, George Irving Quimby, *Indian Culture and European Trade Goods* (Madison, Wis., 1966), p. 65. For eighteenth century cargoes, I am grateful to Dean Anderson for Great Lakes data, drawn from the “Montreal Merchants Records Project. Research Files, 1971-1975. Microfilm edition. Minnesota Historical Society” (St. Paul: 1985); cf. Dean Anderson, ‘Documentary and Archaeological Perspectives on European Trade Goods in the Western Great Lakes Region’ (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis., Michigan State University, 1992).

³⁰ Joseph Peyser, ed., *On the Eve of the Conquest. The Chevalier de Raymond’s Critique of New France in 1754* (East Lansing, Mich., 1997), p. 70.

³¹ ANQM, not. Panet 2737, not. Mezières 2413 #1962. No document gives prices or values.

soon after the French withdrew his orders included chintz and muslins as well as the standard trade woolens and linens.³²

Flows of cottons to British-allied Native Americans from Philadelphia started at a similarly low level as those in Canada. In 1722-28, for example, cottons comprised just 2 percent of the lengths of fabric that the leading wholesaler James Bonsall sold to Indian traders.³³ As among the settler population, however, so among Amerindians—or among their Pennsylvania suppliers, at least—the taste for cottons may have grown more slowly than further north. In the mid-1750s, the value of cloth and clothing held by western Pennsylvania Indian traders included 73 percent woolens, 25 percent linens, just 1 percent cottons.³⁴ Gifts of fabrics and garments presented by ‘The Friendly Association for Regaining & Preserving Peace with the Indians by Pacific Means’ in 1761 comprised (by value) just 1 percent cottons as against 84 percent woolens and 15 percent linens.³⁵ Again, across the 1760s, cottons accounted for only a few percent of both the private trade of and the Crown gifts distributed by the trader George Croghan, based at Fort Pitt, at the western edge of the colony.³⁶ Nevertheless, Amerindian consumption of cottons does seem to have grown during the 1760s in some parts of the Pennsylvania trade area. Cottons and calicoes

³² HSP, Ms. 10615, George Morgan Letter Book 1768-69.

³³ HSP, Ms. Am 909, Bonsall Account Book 1722-28.

³⁴ HSP, Etting Collection, vol. 40, dossiers 7, 17, 29, 30.

³⁵ HSP, Cox-Parrish-Wharton Family Papers, box 18, folder 13. Cf. the ‘List of a Large Assortment of Indian Goods suitable at this time at Pittsburg Nov 24th 1761’, HSP, Etting Collection, vol. 40, dossier 36.

³⁶ HSP, George Croghan Account Book.

comprised 8 percent of the sales recorded in the 1760 account book of the Philadelphia Indian trader outfitter David Franks, and in 1763 goods stocked at a Susquehanna Valley frontier post included 12 percent cottons and calicoes by value.³⁷

Calico petticoats and pieces of ‘course flowered Calicoe’ were mentioned when South Carolina’s Commissioners of the Indian Trade established prices of trade goods in 1716, and both were also offered as gifts.³⁸ But in the list ‘of Severall things proper...to make Presents to the head men of the Indians in Carolina’ for Governor-to-be Nicholson in September 1720 ‘painted flannel or callamanco’ could replace ‘course callico’ (the only cottons mentioned), and the detailed ‘Invoyce of a charge of Indian trading goods of abt one thousand pounds ster value’ that accompanied Nicholson’s list entirely omitted cottons.³⁹

Cottons are more noticeable when records next become available, costing 6 percent of the ‘Invoice for goods given to South Carolina and Georgia Indians, 1748-9’.⁴⁰ Their presence increased further in the 1760s, when the Directors for the Cherokee Trade regularly bought striped cottons and cotton hollands, and the 1767 ‘Estimate of Presents & Provisions Annually Necessary for the Southern Department of Indian Affairs exclusive of General

³⁷ HSP, Ms. Am. 0684; HSP, Gratz Collection, box 10, case 14, ‘Invoice...from the Trading House at Fort Augusta’, 22 August 1763.

³⁸ W. L. McDowell, ed., *Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade, September 20, 1710-August 29, 1718* (Columbia, S. C., 1955), pp. 89, 104, 269.

³⁹ TNA, CO 5/358, fols. 30, 31. John Barnwell, one of the colony’s Indian agents, drew up the list.

⁴⁰ TNA, CO 5/389, fols. 9-14, 19, 25, 30, 32, 72-73v, 75v-76, 77, 78, 87. In 1758, Indian allies were regularly given lengths of striped cottons; W. L. McDowell, ed., *Documents Relating to Indian Affairs, 1754-1765* (Columbia, S. C., 1970), pp. 457-58.

Meetings & Congresses' comprised (by cost) 9.5 percent calico.⁴¹ Perhaps more important, the Indian traders supplied by George Galphin's Silver Bluff trading post on the Savannah River in the late 1760s and early 1770s regularly bought lengths of calico and cotton romals, as well as cotton check shirts, that amounted to 10-15 percent of their total outlays.⁴²

French officials in Louisiana either disdained or could not obtain cottons, but private traders sold them. Thus while cottons were rarely found in gift distributions,⁴³ five frontier traders' invoices from 1737 and 1739 comprised 6 percent cottons by value.⁴⁴ That cottons had become part of the expected bundle of consumer goods among Amerindians in the Louisiana territory is suggested by the first presents that the newly dominant British dispensed in 1763, in which Indian calico, romals, and cotton handkerchiefs accounted for 6 percent by cost, and by the prices negotiated with the Creeks and the Choctaws in June 1765, in which these cotton goods were included.⁴⁵

⁴¹ McDowell, ed., *Documents Relating to Indian Affairs, 1754-1765*, pp. 520, 535, 579; TNA, CO 5/68.

⁴² Georgia Historical Society, Savannah. File 269, Mf. GHS010, George Galphin Account Books from the Silver Bluff Trading Post 1767-72.

⁴³ None are mentioned in Dunbar Rowland, Albert G. Sanders, and Patricia Galloway, eds., *Mississippi Provincial Archives, French Dominion*, 5 vols. (Jackson, Miss., 1927-84), passim; a few dozen ells were distributed to the Choctaws in 1760 but none in 1763; Archives Nationales, France, Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, C13a, vol. 43, fols. 406-407v..

⁴⁴ Louisiana Historical Center, New Orleans [henceforth LHC], French Superior Council Records [henceforth FSC], docs. 1737081405, 1737081501, 1739031002, 1739070701.

⁴⁵ Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Mississippi Provincial Archives 1763-1766. English Dominion* (Nashville, 1911), vol. i: 69-70, 215, 253-4.

It is difficult to ascertain the social distribution of cottons among Amerindians. At least in South Carolina, administrators—probably reflecting settler usage—considered cottons female fabrics. When Indian Peggy delivered a captive Frenchman to colonial officials in November 1716, she was voted a reward of ‘a Suit of Calicoe Cloaths, for herself’ (together with a suit of woolen stuff for her son), and while Governor-select Nicholson was informed that ‘course calico gowns and petticoats’ were appropriate gifts for women, only woolens and linens were specified for men.⁴⁶ Similarly, when the Savanna Indians received allotments on 6 September 1749, Itchcoe’s daughter got (together with woolens) 2 yards of calico for herself and her two children, whereas her brother acquired woolens and a check linen shirt.⁴⁷ Whether Indians themselves shared this view is less clear: the Montreal cargo manifests for Great Lakes posts listed cotton shirts for both men and women.

The Caribbean

In climate, colonization history, and economic and demographic evolution, Jamaica and Saint-Domingue strongly resembled one another. Neighboring tropical island colonies, both had been marginal at best under the Spanish but after conquest became respectively Britain

⁴⁶ McDowell, ed., *Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade...1710-...1718*, pp. 127-28; TNA, CO 5/358, fol. 3 [1720].

⁴⁷ ‘An Account of the distribution of His Majesty’s Presents’, TNA, CO 5/389, fols. 177-90. For other gender-specific gifts following the same linens-for-males, cottons-for-females rule, see W. L. McDowell, ed., *Documents relating to Indian Affairs May 21, 1750-August 7, 1754* (Columbia, SC, 1958), p. 376; McDowell, ed., *Documents relating to Indian Affairs 1754-1765*, pp. 282, 475. French officials, who distributed virtually no cottons, gave out linens and woolens to both genders.

and France's richest colonies and leading sugar producers, marked by dramatic growth in plantation agriculture and in numbers and proportions of their enslaved populations. For all that, they developed distinctive patterns of cottons consumption.

As elsewhere in the late seventeenth century New World, imported cottons were a minor part of Jamaica's textile culture, forming some 8 percent of merchant stocks (Fig. 1). Virtually all were found in free settlers' wardrobes, along with woolens, silks, and finer linens, while rough linens clothed slaves.⁴⁸ By 1760-74, cottons accounted for a slightly larger proportion of merchant stocks (12 percent) (Fig. 4), but had made only slight inroads into slave clothing, instead serving to replace some woolens and linens on free bodies.⁴⁹ As elsewhere in the British Atlantic, the price-durability calculus consistently worked against planters' selecting cottons for slave garments: osnabrig linens cost 30-80 percent of the price of cheap cottons, a proportion little changed from a century earlier.⁵⁰

Though no Saint-Domingue inventories have survived from the unsettled late seventeenth century, those from the 1730s already show a strong presence of cottons (31 percent of merchant stocks), well above that reached in Jamaica even several decades later (Fig. 3).

⁴⁸ For Jamaican sartorial habits, see Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands...* (London, 1707, 1725), vol. i: xlvii, lv.

⁴⁹ For a similar proportion (13 percent) in shipments from London to Jamaica in 1772, see TNA, C108/42, no. 11, Invoice Book of John Parkinson.

⁵⁰ TNA, C104/8, Chancery Hall Plantation, Accounts 1768-72. For contemporary descriptions, see Charles Leslie, *A New and Exact Account of Jamaica* (Edinburgh, 1739), pp. 35-36; Thomas Thistlewood's 1750s diary, quoted in J. R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery, 1750-1834*, (Oxford, 1988), pp. 213-4; and Edward Long, *History of Jamaica* (London, 1774), vol. i: 522-23.

Cottons were well rooted among the free minority (39 percent of garments) and were yet more widely held by planters, comprising two-thirds of plantation cloth holdings (Fig. 2). A substantial portion consisted of inexpensive varieties while others were dearer sorts, indicating that both slaves and planters wore cottons.

By 1760-74, these patterns had only been strengthened: merchant textile stocks consisted of 39 percent cottons by value (Fig. 4).⁵¹ While fragmentary evidence does not permit quantification, it does make clear that planters continued to buy substantial amounts of both cheap and dear cottons, in part, one imagines, because the price ratio of cheap cottons to cheap linens had dropped from about 2:1 to 1.2:1. Demand was also greatly increased by slaves' own purchases with earnings from market gardens and other by-employments. Numerous commentators noted female slaves' fashion—probably based on African prototypes—for elaborate and frequently changed headdresses of up to a dozen kerchiefs, many of Indian cotton, not to mention others worn around the neck; muslin and calico skirts also found much favor.⁵²

But if cottons were found in larger quantities and in the garments of a wider variety of people in Saint-Domingue than elsewhere in the French and British New World, they

⁵¹ Cfr. HSP, Ms. Am 936, Account Book of John and Peter Chevalier (cloth shipped from Philadelphia in 1761); Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Marseille-Provence [CCIM-P], Fonds Roux, L 09/0701 (1760s correspondence between Jean André Guieu, Port-au-Prince, and Jean Baptiste Honoré Roux & Co., Marseille).

⁵² Cfr. Médéric Louis Elie Moreau de St. Méry, *Description topographique, physique civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle de Saint-Domingue* (Philadelphia, 1797-98), vol. i: 59-60.

retained the same gender identity as elsewhere. Beyond descriptions like Moreau de St. Méry's, analysis of free colonists' garments in 1760-74 shows that about a quarter (27 percent) of men's wardrobes were cottons, as against a half (51 percent) of women's, whereas linens and especially woolens were heavily male. Race was also inscribed in cottons consumption. Whites of all classes favored woolens and silks to a much greater extent than free people of color of any class, who wore considerably more clothing made of cottons and linens. These contrasting racial material identities among the free population intersected with a dichotomy based on gender, profession, and legal status: nearly all woolen and silk garments belonged to male planters, irrespective of race, whereas they clothed their slaves in linens and cottons.

Conclusions

The trends reviewed in Fig. 6 were part of broad Atlantic phenomena. Both initially minimal cottons consumption and its pronounced expansion in eighteenth-century West Africa and the New World strongly resembled developments in Europe.⁵³ Also similar was the increasing diffusion of the taste for cottons among classes, strata, and occupations throughout society. At least on the Continent, finally, cottons were also predominantly

⁵³ Roche, *Culture of Clothing*, pp. 118-50; Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite*; Lidia Torra Fernández, 'Pautas de Consumo Textil en la Cataluña del Siglo XVIII', and Máximo García Fernández, 'Los Bienes Dotales en la Ciudad de Valladolid, 1700-1850', in J. Torras and B. Yun, ed., *Consumo, Condiciones de Vida y Comercialización. Cataluña y Castilla, Siglos XVII-XIX* (Valladolid, 1999), pp. 89-105, 133-58; Johan A. Kamermans, *Materiële cultuur in de Krimpenerwaard in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw* (Wageningen, 1999), esp. pp. 135, 228-32.

identified with women, though that gendered identity does not seem to have obtained in England.⁵⁴

Changes in supply were critical for these developments. The introduction of production and market efficiencies that reduced prices (and typically enhanced quality to boot) made cottons accessible to a more extensive clientele.⁵⁵ That cottons consumption was price-sensitive is suggested by the uniformly greater increase in French colonies, where relative cottons prices declined the most, than in British.⁵⁶ But falling prices and enhanced quality were not the whole explanation, because cottons' share of consumer purchases grew in the British Atlantic even though cottons prices declined there much less than the prices of popular woolens (e.g., flannel) or best-selling linens like osnabrig.⁵⁷ Improvements in marketing, which made available many more types of cottons, attracted a broader array of customers, even if like the 225 varieties of cotton textiles that Lemire cites for mid-1770s England were

⁵⁴ Roche, *Culture of Clothing*, p. 144 n. 61, p. 146 nn. 63, 65; Kamermans, *Materiële cultuur in de Krimpenerwaard*, p. 228; Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite*, p. 113.

⁵⁵ For an excellent introduction to this topic, too vast to elaborate here, see Carole Shammas, 'The Decline of Textile Prices in England and British America Prior to Industrialization', *Economic History Review* 47 – 3 (1994), pp. 483-507. For the importance of quality improvements, see John Munro, 'Industrial Energy from Water-Mills in the European Economy', in S. Cavaciocchi, ed., *Economia e energia secc. XIII-XVIII* (Florence, 2003), pp. 266-68.

⁵⁶ Cfr. Richardson, 'West African Consumption Patterns', p. 324: 'French manufacturers based at Nantes and Rouen were able to produce imitations more satisfactorily and cheaply than their Lancashire rivals'. The textiles were not necessarily from France; cf. the letter of Jean André Guieu, Port-au-Prince, to Jean Baptiste Honoré Roux & Co., Marseille, 7 April 1764, CCIM-P, L 09/0701, naming Swiss towns that produced such good calicoes that they were preferred to those from India.

⁵⁷ Shammas, 'Decline of Textile Prices', p. 503, Table 7.

to be found anywhere in the colonies or on the African coast.⁵⁸ Commercial innovations and increasing variety were not, however, restricted to cottons, and it is hard to see that cottons benefited differentially from them.

Demand-side factors clearly mattered as well, if in complex ways. For example, climatic and economic diversity doubtless influenced some of the disparities in cottons appropriation, not only between colonies but also between town and country. But Montreal data, not to mention the contrast between Jamaica and Saint-Domingue, demonstrate that neither climate nor economic structure alone determined what fabrics would be purchased or worn. Again, prior acquaintanceship with indigenous cotton textiles may have eased acceptance of imported cottons—and made for more demanding consumers—in West Africa and Saint-Domingue, at least. Once landed in the New World, however, slaves wielded only marginal choice over their garments; planters' decisions were paramount.

With good reason, the role of fashion, particularly the turn to colorful thin materials in the eighteenth century, has drawn much attention recently. Allied with new discourses about reason, respectability, and reform, and transmitted by newspapers, specialized periodicals and books, fashion dolls, word of mouth, and example, fashion's power was increasingly felt among all segments of society.⁵⁹ Armed with such knowledge, not only could a South Carolina merchant upbraid his London supplier for sending him calicos with 'very Old and Unfashionable patterns which Render them unsaleable here', but when the New Orleans

⁵⁸ Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite*, pp. 95 (varieties), 135-49, 166-69; Roche, *Culture of Clothing*, pp. 259-395.

⁵⁹ Cfr. Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite*, pp. 3-17, 164-66; Roche, *Culture of Clothing*, pp. 399-519.

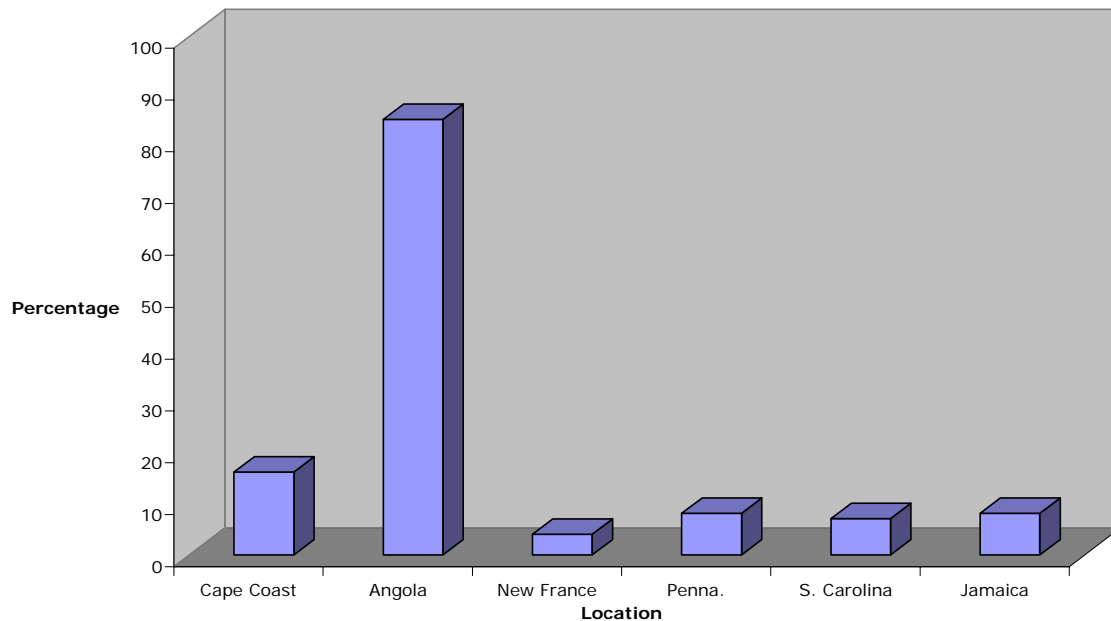
slave girl Babete took some money from her employer, she spent it on vogueish fabrics.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, an orientation to fashion did not necessarily translate into consumption of cottons: Babete bought linen and silk as well as cotton and calico, and producers of calimancos, striped linens, and other bright, lightweight fabrics profited as well from settlers' custom.⁶¹

Cottons' rise was, in short, a story of multiple determinants engaging both supply-side and demand-side innovations. The evidence we have examined from across the Atlantic basin demonstrates that cottons' appeal across social groups, in unison with their more pronounced popularity in specific social locations—among women and townspeople—was critical. Cottons served both to denote a common orientation to a cosmopolitan Atlantic style and to express particular identities within that hegemonic trend. Where especially favorable price ratios and/or existing textile cultures obtained—as in West Africa and in French New World colonies—cottons consumption boomed. But their higher level of adoption in those places was a difference of degree rather than kind. Throughout the Atlantic world, and before the Industrial Revolution, the eighteenth century saw cottons become a regular, substantial, and expected part of the everyday world of goods.

⁶⁰ Edgar, ed., *Letterbook of Robert Pringle*, I:56 (1738); LHC, FSC, docs. 1765101001, 1765101102 (1765).

⁶¹ Wadsworth and Mann, *Cotton Trade*, p. 119. Advertisements in colonial newspapers like the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and the *South Carolina Gazette* attributed fashionability to all sorts of cloth.

Figure 1. Cottons as Percentage of All Textiles in Cargoes and Merchant Stocks, Late Seventeenth Century



Sources and Dates:

Cape Coast Castle, 1685-94 (22 cargoes): Public Record Office, Kew, T70/1222

Angola, 1676-93 (37 cargoes): Public Record Office, Kew, T70/1222

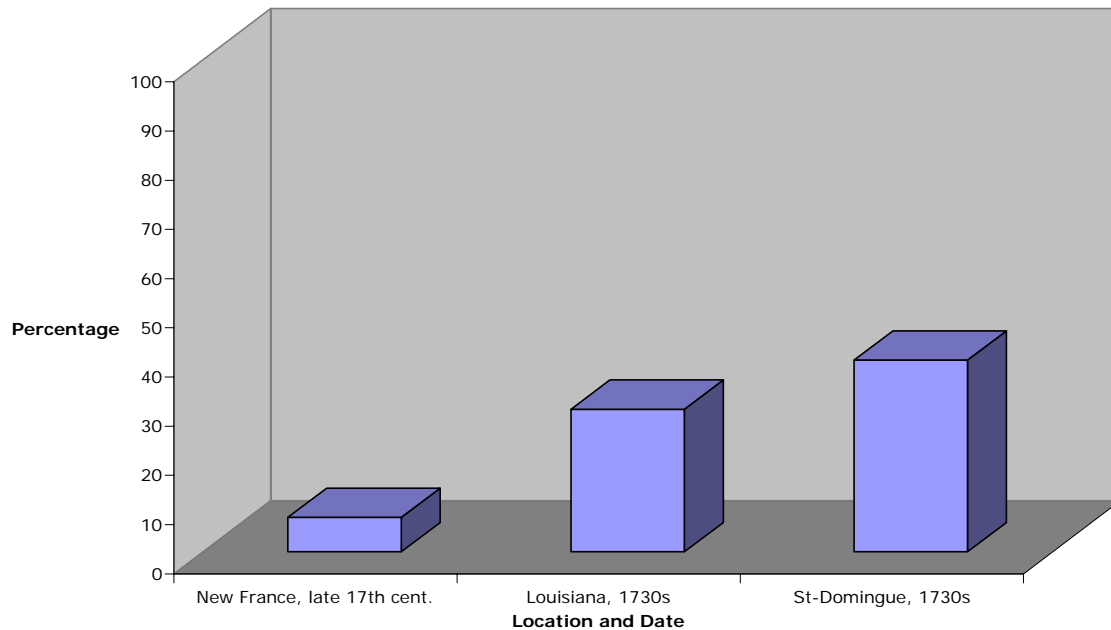
New France, 1677-97 (11 merchants): Archives Nationales du Québec, Montréal, Not. A. Adhémar, Basset, Bourguine, Mauge, Moreau, Pottier

Pennsylvania, 1686-1703 (15 merchants): Philadelphia Registrar of Wills

South Carolina, 1692, 1694 (2 merchants): Charleston County, South Carolina, Wills and Miscellaneous Records, WPA Transcriptions, vol. 53

Jamaica, 1674-99 (74 merchants): Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Inventory Book 1-3, 5

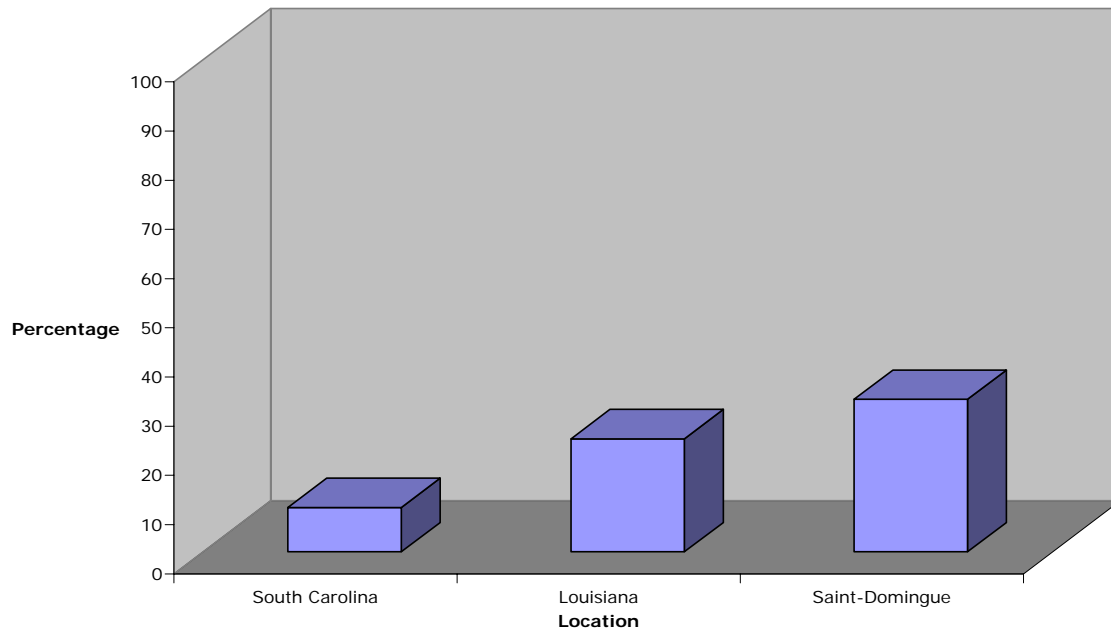
Figure 2. Cotton Garments as Percentage of All Garments in Three French Colonies, Late Seventeenth Century and 1730s



Sources :

New France, 1651-1700 (1400 garments): Archives Nationales du Québec, Montréal, Not. A. Adhémar, Basset, Bourguine, Closse, De Saint Pierre, Gastineau-DuPlessis, Mauge, Moreau, Pottier
Louisiana (1958 garments): Louisiana Historical Center, New Orleans, French Superior Council Records, Inventories, 1730-39; New Orleans Notarial Archives Research Center, New Orleans, Inventories
Saint-Domingue (1183 garments): Archives Nationales, France, Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, Not. Carier, Casamajor, Delinois, Delorme de Roissy, Laville, Martin, Saunier, Vieilhomme

Figure 3. Cottons as Percentage of All Textiles in Merchant Stocks, 1730-39



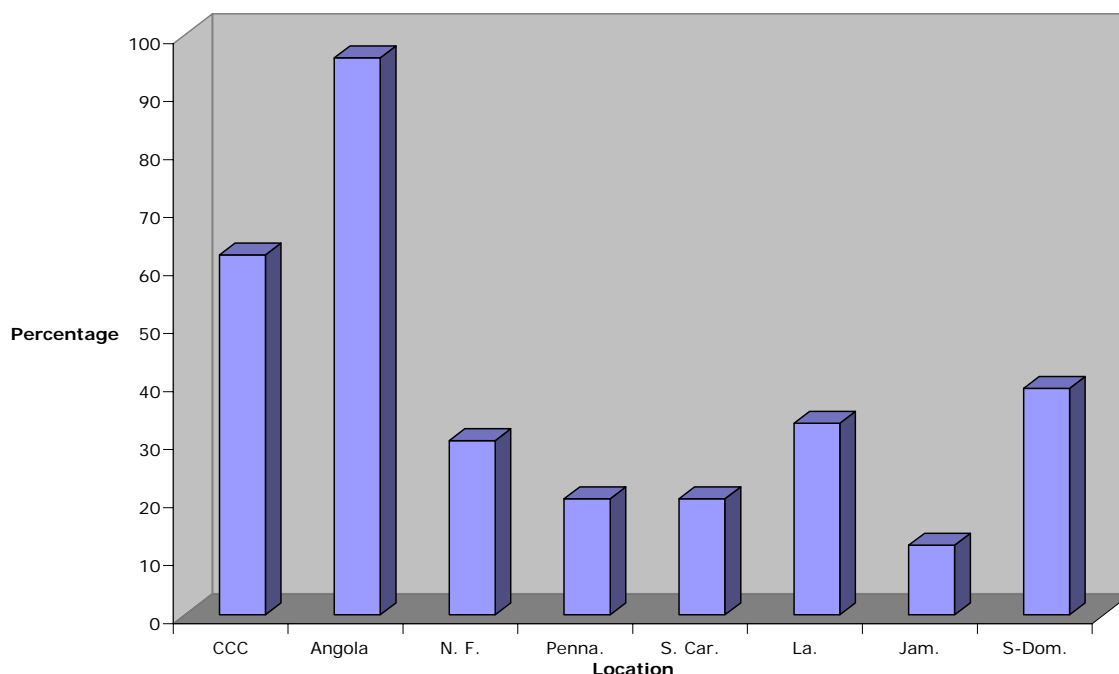
Sources

South Carolina (19 merchants): Charleston County South Carolina, Wills and Miscellaneous Records, WPA Transcriptions, vols. 62, 64-68, 71

Louisiana (6 merchants): Louisiana Historical Center, New Orleans, French Superior Council Records, Inventories, 1730-39; New Orleans Notarial Archives Research Center, New Orleans, Inventories

Saint-Domingue (4 merchants): Archives Nationales, France, Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, Not. Delinois, Martin, Saunier

Figure 4. Cottons as Percentage of All Textiles in Cargoes and Merchant Stocks, 1760-74



Sources

Cape Coast Castle (32 cargoes): Public Record Office, Kew, T70/927-929

Angola, 1767-70 (6 voyages): Archives Départementales de la Loire Atlantique, Nantes, 8J/10

New France (17 merchants): Archives Nationales du Québec, Montréal, Not. Chatellier, Duvernay, Foucher, Hodiesne, Mezières, Panet, Racicot, Simonet, Vautier

Philadelphia (87 merchants): Records of Wills, Surrogate's Courts, Burlington County, Cumberland County, and Hunterdon County, all in New Jersey State Library and Archives, Trenton; Register of Wills, Cecil County, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis; Registrar of Wills, Philadelphia, Pa.; Wills and Inventories, Chester County Archives and Records Services, West Chester, Pa.; Wills and Inventories, Lancaster County Historical Society, Lancaster, Pa.; Register of Wills, York County Archives, York, Pa.

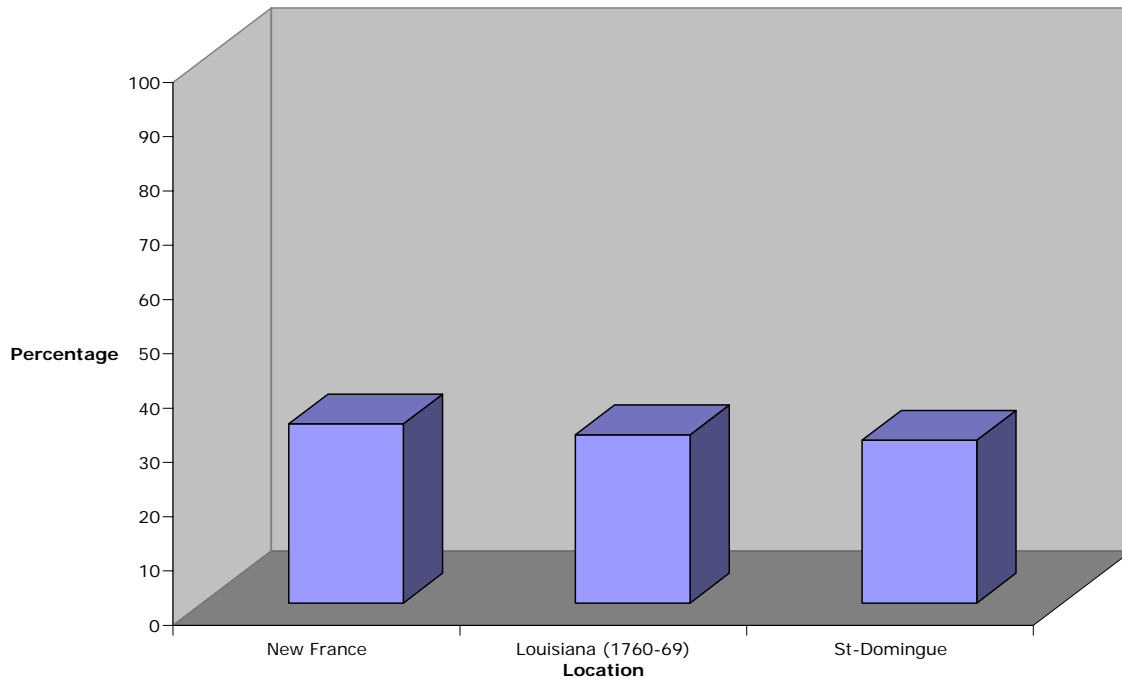
South Carolina (26 merchants): Charleston County, S. C., Wills and Miscellaneous Records, WPA Transcriptions, vols. 90-94, 98

Louisiana, 1760-69 (7 merchants): Louisiana Historical Center, New Orleans, French Superior Council Records, Inventories, 1760-69; New Orleans Notarial Archives Research Center, New Orleans, Inventories; Natchitoches Parish Court House, Louisiana, Conveyance Record Book 1

Jamaica (64 merchants): Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Inventory Books 1B/11/3/41, 43-55

Saint-Domingue (25 merchants): Archives Nationales, France, Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, Not. Beaulieu, Belin de Ressort, Bugaret, Daudin de Bellair, Dupuis de Lavaux, Laroque, Le Jeune Duparnay, Legendre (Cayes), Legendre (St Louis), Martigniat

Figure 5. Cotton Garments as Percentage of All Garments in Three French Colonies, 1760-74



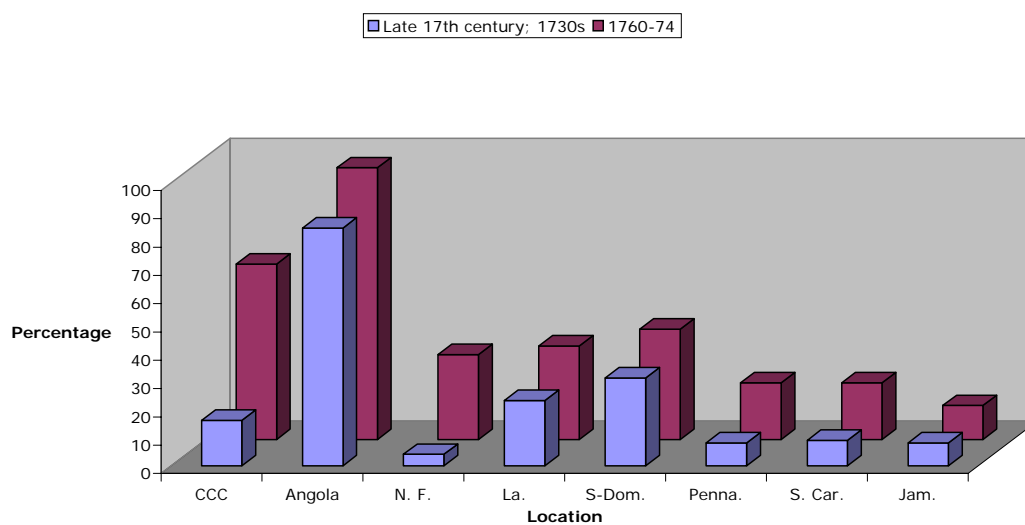
Sources

New France (5798 garments): Archives Nationales du Québec, Montréal, Not. Blanzly, Bouvet, Chatellier, Cherrier, Coron, Courville, Deguire, Duvernay, Foucher, Grise, Hantray, Hodiesne, Jehanne, J. Lalanne, P. Lalanne, Legacy, Loiseau, Mezières, Panet, Racicot, Sanguinet, Simonet, Soupras, Souste, Vautier

Louisiana, 1760-69 (3218 garments): Louisiana Historical Center, New Orleans, French Superior Council Records, Inventories, 1760-69; New Orleans Notarial Archives Research Center, New Orleans, Inventories; Natchitoches Parish Court House, Louisiana, Conveyance Record Book 1

Saint-Domingue (7575 garments): Archives Nationales, France, Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, Not. Beaulieu, Belin de Ressort, Berton, Bugaret, Daudin de Bellair, Dubernes de la Greffière, Dupuis de Lavaux, Duval, Flanet, Guilleau, Ladoué, Laroque, Le Jeune Duparnay, Legendre (Cayes), Legendre (St Louis), Mallet, Martigniat, Michel, Rivet, Sennebier, Sibire de Morville

Figure 6. Cottons as Percentage of All Textiles in Cargoes and Merchant Stocks



Sources and Dates

See Figures 1, 3, 4

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