

1852-1854. The Cuba Sugar Trade and Slavery

NYT. 12/7/52, 4 Report from Havana. New York Times has a regular Havana correspondent and publishes regular reports on news and commerce. Occator.

Captain Grey and the crew of the American ship *Lady Suffolk* imprisoned in Cuba on charges of “selling the ship for the slave trade, and equipping her accordingly.” The arrest based on information supplied by the British consul and appears to have marked deterioration in relationships between US and Spain. The same articles reports “The markets were without material change: Sugars were firm, but the stock was small.”

On page 8, Judge Sharkey, the American consul demanded an explanation. The claim is that the ship was sold to Spanish subjects.

7/20/53, 4 Update on the *Lady Suffolk* case. Report on regulating shipping with Cuba in Special section on page 1.

November 10, 1854, 3.

Trial of the Master of an African Slaver – His Conviction

Captain Smith tied “piracy”.

Key issue. Smith to be guilty must be a citizen of the United States and the vessel must be owned and operated for the benefit of a citizen of the United States. By disclaiming citizenship or transferring ownership could not be tried in American courts. Trial for ship *Julia Moulton*. 500 Negroes on board. The editorial November 10, 1854, 4 explains the entire process of the illegal slave trade and NYC involvement. The law charging the slave trade with piracy only pertains to American citizens.

Editorial p 4. The Slave-Trade-An Important Trial.

In the United States Circuit Court sitting in this City, one Captain James Smith has been convicted of having been engaged in the *Slave-Trade* between the Coast of Africa and the Island of Cuba. The sentence of the law, which is *death*, was suspended in order that his counsel might take the necessary steps to move for a new trial. The facts which were proved in this case were substantially these: In January last Capt. Smith went to Boston, where he purchased the brig *Julia Moulton*, cleared her in ballast for Newport, and on the 2nd of February brought her to this port. Here he engaged one James Wills as mate, telling him that he was going on a Slave-trading voyage, agreeing to pay him \$40 a month on the outward voyage, and from \$1,200 to \$2,000 for the passage back. A crew was shipped of about fifteen persons, mostly young men, and a large quantity of provisions, water, &c., with lumber, was taken on board. On the 11th of February the brig cleared from this port. And on leaving the dock, Capt. Smith pointed out to the mate a Portuguese named Lemos as the real owner of the vessel, and told him that the Secretary of the Portuguese Consul at this port had accompanied him to Boston and aided him in the purchase of the vessel. The ship was cleared by Capt. Smith and had regular papers for the cape of Good Hope. After she had been out about forty days, the timber on board was used to make a temporary deck or floor in the hold of the vessel, and all the other preparations necessary to receive a cargo of slaves were made. At the end of sixty days, they made land on the coast of Africa at a place called Cobra, where they were boarded by a boat which brought instructions, in accordance with which they cruised at sea for ten days longer, and then put in a port further South called *Ambrozzetta*, well known as a *dépôt* for the Slave-trade. Here in the course of two or three hours, *six hundred and sixty-four negroes, including forty women, were brought on board and stowed away as cargo in the hold of the brig*. They were placed on their sides, one lying in the lap of another – were taken out occasionally to be fed and aired, and after a voyage of sixty-five days were land on the South coast of Cuba. They were sent on shore in lighters, under the orders of a person who said he was a consignee, and the *American Consul* at that port. The furniture of the ship was then taken on shore and the ship herself was burned. Wills the mate came to this city in the brig *Mercellus*, where he again met Captain Smith, who refused to pay Wills the balance due him on the contract, amounting to about \$440, whereupon Wills imparted the nature of the voyage to a

Mr. Donahue, by whom it was laid before the authorities. The result was the arrest, trial and conviction of Captain Smith.

We believe this is the *first* time in which a conviction of being engaged in the African Slave Trade has ever been had in this City – and this is due entirely to a disagreement between the captain and his mate about the payment of a trifling sum of money. Yet, as we have repeated stated in the Times, *scarcely a month passes in which there are not one or more vessels cleared at this port, which embark at once in the Slave-trade and land their cargoes on the coast of Cuba*. The facts given in evidence on this trial show how easily this is done, and with what impunity, so long as all the parties engaged in it are satisfactorily paid for keeping silent. In order to a conviction, the vessel concerned must be, at the time, owned either in whole or in part by an American citizen, or else the party accused must himself be a citizen. The first provision is usually evaded by a *sham sale*: - the last by procuring a foreigner, usually a Portuguese, as a commander. The only defence attempted in this case turned upon this point. It was claimed that Mr. Smith was an unnaturalized German, and it was also asserted and partly proved that the ship was *paid for by the Secretary of the Portuguese Consul at this port*.

Editorial 11/24/54 p. 4. “We have not the slightest doubt that *there are hundreds of Portuguese – merchants and others in this City, who are constantly and largely engaged in this traffic*; - who carry it on as their regular business, - who grow rich by it, and live in splendid style and claim and hold high rank in the rich circles of our metropolis by virtue of the wealth thus acquired. We believe this fact is very generally known, – and that not a month passes in which vessels are not cleared at the Customs House, of whose destination and employment in the Slave-trade, the houses who ship crew for them, and even the officials who prepare and sign their papers are morally certain. This City and Baltimore are now, and have been for years, the great head-quarters of the African Slave-trade. In the face of all our laws, - in defiance of our treaty stipulations and in contempt of armed cruisers and men-of-war, that piratical traffic is largely carried on by ships fitted out in American ports, and under the protection of the American flag.

If the authorities plead that they cannot stop this, they simply confess their own imbecility. If they will not do it, the moral guilt they incur is scarcely less than that of the Slave-traders themselves.

From Havana. Business is quite active for this season of the year, and the sugar market firm, on the basis of No. 12, 8 1/4 @ 8 1/2 reals arrobe. Shipments of the week near 30,000 boxes. Sales large and some on speculation. Money somewhat easy to aid transactions. The stock of sugar is 270,000 boxes against 260,000 boxes last year at same date. The New York Times, July 30, 1860, p. 1.

1852. “Cuban Affairs”, *The New York Times*, 11/15/52 , 1.

“The policy of the Government has been extremely liberal to the producers of sugar, with the purpose of building up and fostering that interest as the most productive of revenue to the crown. Great privileges have been secured to the sugar planter, such as exemption from all direct taxes except tithes, and immunity from the sale of their estates by any process to satisfy the claims of creditors. Very many of the planters are large borrowers of money, and I have been informed by capitalists that, owing to the last provision, the current rate of interest on their loans is not less than fifteen per cent, at the same time that the notes of merchants and retailers are readily discounted at six per cent. There is no limit to the rate of interest established by law. A very large capital is required to “make a sugar estate.” But when the requisite money is at hand, the prices of land are so low that to begin from the foundation is the preferable way for a planter to establish himself. This accounts for the exorbitant usury they are willing to pay. But the more usual way of getting possession of estates is to purchase them in full operation by paying five or ten per cent down, and paying a certain sum, frequently as low as two and a half per cent per annum till the whole be paid. An estate, such as is sold in this way, consists of land, negroes, horses, mules cattle,

hogs, machinery and everything appertaining to a complete establishment. I have heard of sales where the first crop would reimburse the first payment, and each successive crop provide for the current payment, and leave the purchaser from two to four times as much more for regular income. Thus an estate was sold for \$450,000-\$50,000 being paid down, and in ninety days the maturing crop produced \$50,000, and the remaining \$400,000 of the purchase money was payable in annual installments of \$10,000, without interest, and the annual product continues not less than \$50,000. Cane is seldom planted oftener than once in five years, and on a majority of estates not oftener than once in ten years. When estates are sold, they are sold entire, as above described. The negroes and other stock are not valued separately unless they are separately sold. The rule as to treatment of negroes is said to be "plenty of feed and plenty of work." "The slaves are driven to the field at dawn, after breakfasting before it is light enough to work; have rest and dinner at noon, work till dark, and then supper and locked up to sleep. Marriage is unknown among them – most of the planters pay no regard to breeding slaves, it is cheaper to buy "green" ones from Africa than to raise them, and intercourse between the sexes, when permitted at all, is promiscuous. The African trade is now flourishing, after a nearly total interruption under Concha, who refused the usual bribes, and exerted himself to prevent the importation of slaves with so much success that their value increased about fifty per cent."