2005

Cloth And The Emergence Of The Atlantic Economy

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Cloth and the Emergence of the Atlantic Economy

Robert S. DuPlessis

The growth of the Atlantic economy should be one of the great themes of early modern history. But the actual emergence and precise contours of that economy are difficult to discern. The data that reveal the increasing dynamism and commercial importance of the Atlantic basin were generated within empires constituted by and centered on European metropoles, and up to the present, scholarship has largely remained within and mirrored those imperial boundaries. As a result, it is difficult to discern when (if at all) and the extent to which an economy rather than an aggregate of economies formed in the Atlantic basin. Is it, in fact, correct to speak of an Atlantic economy, or should we refer to the English imperial Atlantic economy, the French Atlantic economy, the Dutch, and so forth?

One way to try to answer this question is to look at goods consumed within the Atlantic world. If an Atlantic economy was coming into existence, we would expect that the process of material standardization that Timothy Breen has proposed for eighteenth-century British North America would obtain more widely. Is that what happened? Did European expansion issue in common Atlantic consumption patterns? Or was the fact that New World colonies were established by distinct European nations reflected in diverse colonial or imperial material cultures?

The Atlantic—even just the North Atlantic—covers a large space, and even in the early modern period the commodity flows were substantial. So in order to get a handle on them, and on the larger issue, this chapter concentrates on imported cloth in four cities in continental British and French North America and their more and less distant market areas, together with brief comparisons with England and France. It employs primary data bearing on (and for the most part still housed in) Montreal, Philadelphia, Charleston, and New Orleans and their commercial hinterlands. Each of these cities was a leading center in its empire and its region, trading with Native Americans, African Americans, and European Americans alike to export staples and supply necessary imports.

This essay encompasses the period from the late seventeenth century to the 1760s/70s, a time when, scholars hold, the most rapid and major changes in consumption occurred, adding up, in some accounts, to a consumer revolution. The
analysis focuses on two periods: as early as adequate documentation first becomes available and as close as possible to the end of the original colonial regimes. For Montreal and Philadelphia, the initial data come from the 1680s and 1690s, and the later information from the early 1770s; for Charleston and New Orleans, from the early 1730s and the 1760s. Hence the inquiry brackets the 1740s and 1750s, the time when colonial habits of consumption are said to have most significantly changed.4

For several reasons the study focuses on textiles imported into the New World. For one thing, they were the largest single category of consumer items—and usually the most valuable—sent to the colonies, and their share of trade was growing.3 For another, as major items of consumption among all segments of the populace, irrespective of age, gender, ethnic group, locality, or occupation, cloth and the clothing and furnishings fashioned from it constituted the second biggest item, after food, in household budgets.6 Textiles, including cloth garments, were likewise major components of colonists’ trade with Native Americans.7 As a result, consumption of imported cloth should reveal important information about the constitution and composition of whatever Atlantic consumer economy came into being.8

This chapter is based on a variety of sources, among the most important of which are the detailed lists of merchandise included in probate (postmortem) inventories of merchants.9 These documents are particularly valuable because few merchant accounts or similar records survive from this period. Inventories, of course, record possessions at death; they do not register sales over the decedents’ mercantile careers. Still, merchants who stayed in business during their lifetimes, as those presented here did (I have avoided bankruptcy inventories), must have been reasonably well attuned to their markets and therefore possessed inventories representing actual consumption fairly well.10 Although it would be preferable to study both the quantities (yardage or ellage) and the values of the cloth, the sources only permit calculations based on value. Admittedly, this focus tends to minimize the significance of less expensive textiles, many of them linens, while overstating that of more costly fabrics such as woolens and silks. But if we thereby gain a somewhat distorted sense of the volume of the various textiles that were in circulation, focusing on values does indicate the manner in which consumers allocated their expenditures among the various types of textiles.

Patterns of Textile Consumption

What kinds of cloth, then, did North Americans acquire? How similar were their purchases within and between empires? To what extent did social characteristics (for example, ethnicity, gender) affect their textile possessions? Did their consumption patterns shift over time? Table 8 presents a first approximation of the situation obtaining during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.
Table 8: Textile values in early Montreal, Philadelphia, Charleston, and New Orleans areas* by type of cloth
(values as percentage of total merchant textile stocks)**
n=number of merchant inventories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of cloth</th>
<th>Montreal (n=12)</th>
<th>Philadelphia (n=9)</th>
<th>Charleston (n=19)</th>
<th>New Orleans (n=6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linens</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woolens</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottons</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silks</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Montreal and Philadelphia = 1680s–90s; Charleston and New Orleans = 1730s
**Textiles insufficiently described to classify constituted the remainder.

Sources: Archives nationales du Québec à Montréal (henceforth ANQM), all notaries operating in 1680s–90s; the collections of Philadelphia-area inventories, 1680–99, at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and the Chester County Archives and Record Services (henceforth CCA), West Chester, Pennsylvania; Charleston County, South Carolina, Wills and Miscellaneous Records, vols. 62–65 (1730s); Louisiana Historical Center (henceforth LHC), French Superior Council Records (henceforth FSC), Inventories, 1730–39; New Orleans Notarial Archives Research Center, New Orleans (henceforth NONA), Inventories.

Table 8 suggests that each region had a fairly distinctive textile consumption profile in its early years.11 Individual inventories and contemporary comments alike imply that climate had something to do with the differences. For example, New France's harsh weather encouraged purchases of woolens, notably among groups that were most exposed to the rigors of long, bitterly cold winters,12 whereas hot summers made thinner fabrics attractive in Pennsylvania.13 Yet this explanation seems less convincing when we look at Charleston and New Orleans. Merchant inventories from South Carolina are heavily weighted toward woolen fabrics, whereas those from Louisiana were just as heavily tilted toward linens. Equally striking is the stark opposition between the two cities with respect to cotton textiles. These contrasts existed, moreover, despite climates that had much more in common than either had with Philadelphia, much less Montreal. What, then, better explains the diversity among the selections available in merchant shops?

A closer look at the inventories from 1730s Charleston together with additional documentation from 1730s New Orleans allows us to begin to answer this question. Table 9 indicates that people living in and around Charleston had strongly different demand preferences than those buying cloth on the frontier. In fact, the overall proportions derived from the inventories of urban Charleston merchants in the 1730s (table 9, column 3) look a lot like those derived from contemporary...
inventories of Louisiana merchants (reported in table 8, column 5), all of whom lived in New Orleans. Further clarification results when we consult fresh sources for Louisiana to supplement the urban merchant inventories. Table 10 reveals considerable divergence in the textile market in and around New Orleans (column 2, reproduced from table 8, column 5) as compared to those obtaining more widely over backwoods Louisiana and on into Illinois and other inland areas, which can be discerned from columns 3 and 4. Probably the best indicator of frontier demand is column 4, and it resembles nothing so much as table 9, column 4, the South Carolina frontier traders.

Taken together, tables 9 and 10 indicate that textile demand already displayed some similarities across imperial frontiers in the early eighteenth century. On the one hand, consumption in the southern borderlands of both British and French colonial North America was strongly oriented toward woolens.14 Who were the consumers in these areas? Many, if not most, were Native Americans,15 who swapped furs for heavy and durable woolens such as stroud (French écarlate), limbour, melton (French molton), broadcloth, halfthicks, or duffel (duffil).16 On the other hand, both the Charleston and the New Orleans urban zones show a more varied textile consumption, with a marked taste for lighter linens and cottons and rather less for woolens.

These patterns appear, moreover, to have prevailed more widely over British and French North America. Although the Montreal data cannot adequately be disaggregated, the fact that nearly all the late-seventeenth-century merchants inventoried in that city participated substantially in trade with Amerindians—usually by outfitting coureurs de bois and voyageurs who traveled to the West—is likely to have contributed significantly to the pronounced bias for woolens displayed in table 8, column 2.17 Individual inventories indicate, furthermore, that colonists who lived in Montreal opted for linen garments much more often than farmers and rural artisans did.18 Again, the fact that Philadelphia’s late-seventeenth-century merchants played only a minor role in frontier commerce, focusing instead on the settler population, probably helps explain why woolens bulked less large in that area’s textile profile (table 8, column 3), which looks more like that reported for the more urban-oriented merchants in South Carolina and Louisiana (table 9, column 3, and table 10, column 2).

Unfree colonists—slaves—also significantly and similarly affected merchant stocks and inventories in both the Charleston and New Orleans regions.19 Slaves’ consumption is difficult to discern from the merchant data because no shopkeepers or traders specialized in trade with slaves, most of whose textiles were purchased by their owners. However, two-fifths of all the woolens sold by Rasteau in New Orleans in 1736–37 (table 10, column 3) consisted of étoffe à Nègre, a cheap fabric specifically designed for slave clothing; it is entirely absent from both the fur traders’ invoices and merchant inventories.20 Again, nearly a third of the linens he sold comprised cheap Halle and brin (a plain-weave strong linen, made of hemp), varieties also largely intended for slaves. No documents of this
Table 9: Cloth values in 1730s South Carolina by type of business
(values as percentage of total merchant cloth stocks)*
\(n = \) number of merchant inventories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of cloth</th>
<th>All merchants (n=19)</th>
<th>Charleston (urban) merchants (n=12)</th>
<th>Frontier traders (n=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linens</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woolens</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottons</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silks</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Textiles insufficiently described to classify constituted the remainder.

Sources: Charleston County, S.C., Wills and Miscellaneous Records, vols. 62–65, merchant inventories from 1730 to 1739.

Table 10: Three views of cloth consumption in 1730s Louisiana
(values as percentage of total cloth stocks or sales)*
\(n = \) number of merchant inventories, accounts, or invoices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of cloth</th>
<th>All merchants (n=6)</th>
<th>Store Accounts (n=1)</th>
<th>Frontier traders (n=5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linens</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woolens</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottons</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Textiles insufficiently described to classify constituted the remainder.

Sources: LHC, FSC, docs. 1730011601, 1730033002, 1737041801, 1738012101, 1739092503; NONA, September 14, 1735; accounts from Paul Rasteau’s store, October 2, 1736–October 2, 1737; LHC, FSC, doc. 1737100201 (this business sold both retail and wholesale, outfitting residents of New Orleans, planters in the vicinity, and traders to the Illinois Indians); LHC, FSC, docs. 1737081405, 1737081501, 1739031002 (two invoices), 1739070701.
type have survived for early South Carolina, but about one-fifth of the woolens in merchant inventories were “plains,” an inexpensive flannel-like woolen that many owners bought for slaves; duffel, used for slave as well as Amerindian blankets, comprised another two-fifths. Nearly 30 percent of linens enumerated were osnaburgs (or osnabrig, a cheap, coarse, unbleached linen, used especially for shirts and shifts), likewise destined largely for slave clothing. Indeed, with their heavy orientation to woolens together with a notable minority of linens, textile expenditure patterns for African American slaves in the 1730s resemble nothing so much as the Native American markets in both French and British North American colonies, although the particular types of woolens and linens consumed by each group only partially overlapped.

No later than the 1730s, then, colonial British and French textile cultures displayed a good degree of similarity across imperial boundaries. This was true even though the garments specific to each group, and some of the varieties of cloth each used, differed as a function of their dissimilar social ecologies. The free settler population enjoyed access to the greatest variety of fabrics, and Native Americans and African Americans had rather less. Already before the postulated mid-century “consumer revolution,” in other words, a process of consumption standardization by broad social groups was well under way in continental North America. The variety depicted in early merchant inventories thus mainly reflected the disparate weight of different groups in each area’s trade, which in turn expressed to some degree the distinct social composition of each colony, rather than any broad differences among empires as such.

Over time, standardization both extended its reach and fragmented. Even without distinguishing among submarkets or distinctive categories of consumers, table 11 shows an increasing resemblance, by the end of the colonial regimes, among all the areas’ cloth cultures in terms of the three major kinds of fabrics. (As before, Charleston and New Orleans and their respective commercial zones exhibit the strongest deviation from the norm, but now with respect to only one textile category.) The conspicuous popularity of cottons (including calicoes) and the waning of demand for woolens were equally striking manifestations of this consumption convergence. In merchant stocks, at least, a continental North American model that largely ignored political and social boundaries both between the British and French empires and between colonies within the same empire had become evident by the 1760s and 1770s. Following Louisiana’s precocious lead, the consumption of cotton fabrics had increased so impressively in every colony (even Charleston showed nearly a doubling in just three decades) that it does not seem fanciful to speak of a “cotton revolution” of the mid-eighteenth century. What explains this growing congruence?

Part of the reason may lie with changing Native American tastes. Already in the 1730s and 1740s cottons (including calicoes) accounted for perhaps 15 percent of the value of the cargoes that Montreal merchants sent to the Illinois Indians
Table 11: Cloth values in late Montreal, Philadelphia, Charleston, and New Orleans areas* by type of cloth
(values as percentage of total merchant cloth stocks)**

n=number of merchant inventories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of cloth</th>
<th>(1) Montreal (n=8)</th>
<th>(2) Philadelphia (n=8)</th>
<th>(3) Charleston (n=18)</th>
<th>(4) New Orleans (n=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linens</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woolens</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottons</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silks</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Montreal and Philadelphia = 1770–74; Charleston and New Orleans = 1760s

**Textiles insufficiently described to classify constituted the remainder.

Sources: ANQM, all notaries operating in 1770–74; the 1770–74 merchant inventories in the collections of Philadelphia-area inventories at the CCA and (on microfilm) the Winterthur Library, Wilmington, Delaware; the 1774 wills printed in Alice Hanson Jones, American Colonial Wealth: Documents and Methods, vol. 3 (New York, 1977); Charleston County, S.C., Wills and Miscellaneous Records, vols. 68, 71; LHC, FSC, Inventories, 1760–69; NONA, Inventories; Natchitoches Parish Court House, Louisiana, Conveyance Record Book 1 (microfilm copy).

(who lived southwest of the Great Lakes) and to the Green Bay, Rainy Lake, and Michilimackinac fur-trade posts around the northern Great Lakes; woolens were some 55 percent and linens about 30 percent. In 1758, when the last cargoes of the French era went out to the Detroit post, linens made up 47 percent of the consignments, woolens 27 percent, and cottons and calicoes just under 25 percent.

Evidence from Philadelphia’s increasingly vigorous commerce with Native Americans indicates less change, however. In the mid-1750s the value of cloth and clothing held by western Pennsylvania Indian traders included 73 percent woolens, 25 percent linens, and just 1 percent cottons. Again, 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) 84 percent woolens and 15 percent linens, while the nearly contemporaneous “List of a Large Assortment of Indian Goods suitable at this time at Pittsburg Nov 24th 1761” showed the clear dominance of woolens (forty-eight bales of stroud, halfthicks, and blankets), as against ninety-five pieces of linen, thirty pieces of the “brightest” calico, and six dozen silk handkerchiefs. Two years later Indian trade goods at the Susquehanna Valley frontier post of Fort Augusta included (by value) 78 percent woolens, 10 percent linens, and 12 percent cottons and calicoes,
the latter representing the high point of cottons’ market penetration among Amerindians in the colonial Pennsylvania borderlands. South Carolina sources suggest much the same pattern, for among the gifts presented to Indians by the South Carolina provincial government in the spring of 1758 were (by value) about 70 percent woolen fabrics, blankets, and garments; some 20 percent linens (many in the form of shirts); and about 10 percent cottons and calicoes.

While open to new varieties of fabrics, then, Amerindians continued to opt for woolens at a rate above that of the North American population as a whole. No matter what their preferences, however, by the 1760s and early 1770s Native American consumers were much less important to the textile market than earlier. Both absolutely and relatively, Amerindians formed a decreasing part of the North American population across most of the eighteenth century. Given Indians’ preference for woolens, there can be little doubt that their declining weight in the market, even more than the partial diversification of their tastes, explains some of the waning of demand for woolens registered in table 11. Little wonder that even at Camden, in the South Carolina backcountry, stroud and duffel accounted for less than 15 percent of Ely Kershaw’s woolen fabric sales in the years around 1770.

Not all of woolens’ decline can be attributed to alterations in the Amerindian market, however. Important changes occurred among settlers, and given the dramatic growth in their numbers, their tastes had the largest impact on the relative fortunes of specific types of fabric. Among free colonists, to begin with, the personal and domestic uses of linens and particularly cottons had expanded dramatically by the 1760s–70s. Little mentioned in the late seventeenth century, save for kerchiefs and cravats as well as an occasional shirt, blouse, or curtain, by the early 1770s cottons had been transformed from novelties to widely and regularly employed everyday products. Skirts, vests, jackets, breeches, gowns, shirts, and blouses were all tailored from cottons and calicoes (as well as from linens). Strikingly, in light of the continuing rigors of winter in New France, in Montreal cloaks and capes (especially those worn by women) and even the occasional greatcoat, all previously the exclusive preserve of woolens, were now more likely to be fashioned from cottons. Concomitantly, as the inventories of individuals in Montreal and New Orleans disclose, woolens lost ground among nearly all groups of settlers.

Of great consequence, too, were transformations taking place in the dwellings of European Americans, who during the eighteenth century came to enjoy a higher level of domestic comfort than their pioneer ancestors had. Because they set fancier tables, put hangings over their larger and more abundant windows, cleaned themselves and their quarters more adequately, and slept in less vermin-infested beds, they used greater amounts of linens and cottons for napkins, tablecloths, curtains, towels, sheets, and pillow covers. Conversely, woolens were rarely employed for such purposes; bed curtains and blankets formed the main
exceptions, but even for those purposes woolens could claim no monopoly. Thus woolens benefited little from the growing consumption of cloth to enhance both the body and the household environment of European Americans. 36

Clothing slaves also affected textile consumption patterns in the southern colonies, but in quite discrepant ways. In South Carolina, where the slave population increased dramatically in both absolute and relative terms, owners’ preferences slowed the shift away from woolens and linens. In 1760–65 woolens accounted for 43 percent of the textiles sold by the Charleston merchant James Poyas, who counted planters among his leading customers, and 60 percent of the woolens were plains. 38 Other woolens—mainly flannel, Russian “drab,” and occasionally stroud—were also used for slave garments, and duffel continued to be favored for slave blankets, but all evidence shows the overwhelming predominance of plains for caps, jackets, and breeches. 39 The annual summertime destruction of woolens by moths, frequently alluded to in merchant letters, 40 assured that demand would remain vigorous in and year out. The increase in Charleston merchant holdings of linens can likewise probably be traced to the rising South Carolina slave population since plantation owners maintained their partiality for osnaburg and similar varieties of cheap linen. 41

Although I have found no contemporaneous account books there, Louisiana inventories indicate that, contrary to South Carolina, slaves in the French colony wore few woolens by the 1760s. 42 Instead, Louisiana slaves dressed largely in cheap kinds of linen as well as in “couty” and “siamoise” (cotton or cotton-linen mixtures). 43 Why the two colonies clothed their slaves so differently is not clear. Price does not seem to have been crucial, for in South Carolina as in Louisiana planters chose inexpensive fabrics. Perhaps the secret lay in supply rather than demand. Were French woolens manufacturers unable not only to satisfy Native American consumers but also to develop a cheap light woolen adequate for clothing slave populations? Or, to look at the issue from another perspective, were British cotton manufacturers unable to come up with viable substitutes for the woolens that were destined to be eaten ragged each summer in the low country?

An Atlantic World of Goods
The rising North American partiality for cottons and calicoes, and the withdrawal of custom from woolens, was part of a wave breaking on both sides of the Atlantic. Studies of England by Lemire and of France by Roche have established that cottons captured comparably large shares of the market in those countries as well, as “ordinary, everyday people” (in Lemire’s words) began to use them. 44 Based on detailed analysis of Parisians’ clothing, in fact, it appears plausible to speak of an eighteenth-century “cotton revolution.” Whereas in 1700 cotton was the least important garment fabric for all social groups from servant to noble, by
1789 it had become the leading one for all save aristocrats, officiers, and professionals. In light of this consumption convergence, not only might we extend across imperial borders Breen’s thesis about the growing standardization of colonial consumer goods, but we might also speak of an Atlantic world of goods that extended from London to Louisiana, Paris to Pennsylvania.

The process of textile standardization did not occur uniformly, however. First, some regional variation continued. Besides the prominent Charleston—New Orleans contrast, table 11 indicates a positive north-south gradient with respect to linens and the absence of a similar slope among cottons. Taken together, these figures reveal the interweaving of price and bondage since linens were considerably cheaper light fabrics than cottons, which free colonists increasingly favored. Second, what looks like a notable transatlantic difference developed—although, after other parts of Europe are studied, it may turn out to be a distinction between metropolitan capitals and hinterlands on both sides of the Atlantic. For not only was the most popular garment fabric of the late eighteenth-century Parisian elite silk (it made up a third or more of their clothing), but even the armoires of wage earners and domestic servants, at the bottom of the Paris hierarchy, boasted 12–15 percent silk items.

The data presented in this essay indicate that no North American merchant stocked or sold anywhere near as many silk textiles. Individual inventories tell a similar, yet slightly nuanced story. In and around Montreal (where the documentation is most complete), the overall proportion of silk garments did not increase from the late seventeenth century to the early 1770s (it rose from 4 to 5 percent of the total, a change that is not statistically significant). But silk expanded its clientele socially. People of middling wealth began to display more silk kerchiefs, cravats, and other accessories—the kinds of silk items of which their hollogues would have had just one, if that, in the late seventeenth century—and by the 1770s most of them had also acquired a few basic silk garments such as jackets or skirts for their wardrobes. Indeed, even some of the poorer Canadian colonists, including one of every two artisans and farmers, could sport an item made from a cheaper grade of silken fabric. Thus in New France, as in France, silk garments remained disproportionately represented in the dress of the well-to-do, while losing their status as markers of social exclusivity. Yet in the colonies they were unable to lay claim to anything resembling the high proportion of total clothing expenditures found in the metropole.

In short, cloth served not only to integrate but also to separate the North Atlantic. And silk was not the only fabric that defined social and spatial divisions. Even the cotton revolution had its active and passive citizens. Thus whereas Louisiana planters clothed themselves and their families in the more expensive grades of linens, cottons, and calicoes, they dressed their slaves largely in cheap types. In South Carolina slaves do not appear to have received much of even low-cost varieties of cottons or cotton-linens, although checked cottons and
calicoes were included in the list of fabrics to which slave clothing was restricted after 1735. Nevertheless, there too slaves came to wear garments fashioned of a distinctive textile, plains or Negro cloth. In the early eighteenth century these were commonly conferred on Amerindians and bought by poorer farmers, but by the 1760s, although still listed in one frontier price list, they seem no longer to have been given as presents to Native Americans nor purchased by free colonists. By that point advertisements for runaway slaves in the *South Carolina Gazette* suggest that many slaves wore virtually a uniform consisting of plains trousers and jackets together with osnaburg shirts. And—again parallel to Louisiana—their masters fancied expensive woolens.

Specific types of textiles played a more complicated role in distinguishing Amerindians from colonists than in setting off slave from free. Admittedly, both stroud and what the French called “trade” linen and the English “garlix” were expressly intended for Indians. Yet South Carolina slaves, at least, also wore stroud and could, under the terms of the 1735 law, have had garlix garments, and settlers bought tidy amounts of garlix for themselves. Similarly, Native Americans purchased linens not specifically aimed at their custom, and they were given or otherwise acquired many if not most of the same fabrics as their European American neighbors in both the French and the British colonial backcountry. Even expensive “holland” linen, destined mainly for colonists, was regularly distributed in presents to Native American leaders. Still, it seems clear that woolens and linens remained more prominent on the bodies of Native Americans than on those of European Americans; in that important way African and African American slaves resembled Native Americans more than they did European Americans. And although not unchanging, the textile markets oriented to Amerindians and slaves did prove the most stable across the eighteenth century.

Finally, certain categories of textiles acquired something of a gender identification. Evidence from individual inventories shows that by the 1760s and 1770s women in Montreal and Louisiana owned three to four times as many cotton garments as men did; in contrast, woolen clothing was male by a ratio of two or three to one on the banks of the Mississippi and the St. Lawrence. These ratios have much to do with garments specific to each gender as well as with their distinctive occupations. But the gendered nature of cotton cloth does not seem to have been limited to French colonies nor only to European Americans. The detailed barter and gift lists that South Carolina officials drew up when dealing with Native Americans mention calico only in relation to Amerindian women. In short, while many groups had some form of access to an increasingly homogeneous Atlantic world of goods, levels of actual participation varied considerably, particularly along lines of ethnicity, status, and gender.

These distinctions are not just a matter of historical typology; they actively shaped aspiration and action, as the story of a Louisiana slave girl exemplifies. In early October 1765 the eleven-year-old Babete, who declared herself “catholic
and apostolic and roman, a creole of this town” of New Orleans, found herself working for the city’s jailer and his wife, to whom she had been leased by her owner. Yielding to temptation one day, Babete took “some piastres” from “a chest that she found open, that is, not locked,” then set off with another slave woman to make the rounds of shops and hawkers. Although she bought some candies and a cheap gold ring, most of Babete’s funds (including the paper piastre she received in change after one of her purchases) went toward two ells of expensive cotton that she turned into a skirt, four ells of indienne or printed calico (out of which she fashioned another skirt), a casaquin (a short overjacket of unspecified fabric), a silk kerchief, and a blue kerchief (probably of linen). She also tried to buy some red linen (again for a skirt), but the merchant she asked had none in stock.  

The documents that contain the interrogations of Babete and the men and women who sold goods to her in flagrant violation of the Code Noir are as rich as they are rare. They provide fascinating glimpses into the actual workings of the slave system: some of the sellers admitted to knowing about the Code Noir’s prohibition, but all, for one reason or another, felt justified in contravening it; and apparently no one doubted that even a young slave could have been given money, as she claimed, to make purchases for her mistress (in fact, most sellers did not even bother to ask Babete where she had gotten her cash). The court records also instruct about the formal and informal sites of consumption and the broad range of participants in trade: Babete’s sources included a shoemaker’s wife, a drummer in the New Orleans garrison, a soldier in M. Duplessy’s company, another woman, and just two individuals who identified themselves as merchants, one of whom was better known as a ship’s captain. What needs most to be underlined in this context, however, is that the fabrics Babete bought were commonly found in New Orleans but were more expensive than those that masters typically distributed to slaves. Her purchases thus represented a bold attempt to surmount the boundaries imposed on her by the normal cloth culture, a bid to participate more fully in a common North Atlantic world of cloth and clothing. But because Babete could hope to buy them only thanks to stolen funds, her acquisitions also demonstrate just how effectively—and how frustratingly—those boundaries ordinarily operated.

Babete’s story likewise points once again to limits on the process of Atlantic standardization. The “shared language of consumption” that Breen postulates was not the only tongue being spoken in the early modern North Atlantic world, and there seems to be some justice in Richard Bushman’s argument that eighteenth-century clothing patterns reinforced the traditional hierarchy.  

As a result of simultaneously convergent and contrary developments a normalizing Atlantic consumer economy and distinctive consumer subeconomies founded on region, status, wealth, and gender emerged hand in hand during the eighteenth century.
Appendix: The significance of textiles to English and French Atlantic trade during the eighteenth century

A. English textile exports and re-exports*
(amounts in £ sterling)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1699–1701</th>
<th>1722–1724</th>
<th>1752–1754</th>
<th>1772–1774</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cloth exports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only to Americas</td>
<td>237,000</td>
<td>378,000</td>
<td>701,000</td>
<td>2,138,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and West Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As percent of</td>
<td>7.54</td>
<td>12.17</td>
<td>15.99</td>
<td>40.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>all cloth exports</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloth re-exports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only to Americas</td>
<td>216,000</td>
<td>384,000</td>
<td>409,000</td>
<td>580,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and West Africa**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As percent of</td>
<td>32.14</td>
<td>35.89</td>
<td>36.81</td>
<td>38.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all cloth re-exports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cloth exports</td>
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<tr>
<td>and re-exports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Americas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and West Africa</td>
<td>453,000</td>
<td>762,000</td>
<td>1,110,000</td>
<td>2,718,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As percent of</td>
<td>11.87</td>
<td>18.24</td>
<td>20.20</td>
<td>39.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>all cloth exports</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>and re-exports</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


**Calicoes, silks and related textiles, linens.
B. The Place of Specific Textiles

About 1770, according to McCusker and Menard, "[a]round half of all English exports of... silk goods, printed cotton and linen goods, and flannels were shipped to colonial consumers. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of all exported English... linen and Spanish woolen goods went to British America." According to their calculations, 79.2 percent of all linen exported from England went to British America. This was the highest proportion of twenty-seven items; calicoes (enumerated as printed cotton and linen), 58.9 percent of which ended up in the same destination, ranked sixth from the top.²

Although detailed figures are lacking, cloths also loomed large in France's Atlantic exports. John Clark's study of La Rochelle's commerce found that "[t]extile products composed the single most important category of trade goods to the West Indian and mainland colonies... During the first half of the eighteenth century, textiles often exceeded one-half of total exports to Africa and the colonies." Contemporaries were fully aware of the situation. In 1761 the Chamber of Commerce of Marseilles reported that Canada "consumes a great quantity... of woolens of every type [and] of linens." Thus the anticipated loss of the colony as a result of the Seven Years' War would be a harsh blow to the French textile industry, which furnished a large (but unknown) proportion of cloth exports.⁴

2. McCusker and Menard, Economy of British America, 284 (tab. 13.2).
Notes

1. By the eighteenth century, the first era for which aggregate data exist, growth in Atlantic exports and imports far outstripped that of any other sector, at least for England and France. According to calculations based on the data in Ralph Davis, "English Foreign Trade, 1700–74," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 15 (1962–63): 300–303, imports to England from the Americas and Africa increased 331 percent between 1699–1701 and 1772–74, and exports (including reexports) 505 percent (compared with overall growth of 118 and 144 percent, respectively). Imports from these areas were 19 percent of England’s total in 1699–1701 and 39 percent in 1772–74; they took respectively 13 and 38 percent of exports and reexports (13 and 47 percent of manufactures). Calculations based on Paul Butel, *L’économie française au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Sedes, 1993), 88, show French imports from America and Africa (which started from a smaller base) rising 2741 percent between 1716 and 1772 and exports rising 1567 percent, as compared to overall increases of 680 and 624 percent, respectively. These areas’ share of total French imports rose from 12 to 42 percent over the period; their share of total exports rose from 4 to 10 percent.


5. For the view from the perspective of exports, see the sources cited in the appendix and, more generally, Robert DuPlessis, *Transitions to Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For the import perspective, see Louise Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth Century Montreal* (Montreal and Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992; trans. by Liana Vardi from *Habitants et marchands de Montréal au XVIIe siècle* [Paris: Plon, 1974]), on the basis of whose table 17 on p. 79 it can be calculated that cloth (and goods made of textiles) constituted 30 percent of merchant stocks in Montreal before 1664 and more than half between 1680 and 1720. As Dechêne summarizes (78), "[t]he principal import was finished fabrics."

6. Fabrics and garments formed "the second largest single expenditure on the people in the household" in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain, according to Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain 1660–1760* (London and
New York: Routledge, 1988), 119; see also 133 (table 6.4), where she quotes account books and contemporary estimates that place cloth and clothing expenses at 8–15 percent of annual budgets, with most figures at the upper end. Cf. Daniel Roche, The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the "Ancien Régime" (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994; trans. from La culture des apparences [Paris: Fayard, 1989]), chap. 5, although Roche discusses only garments as a proportion of total moveable wealth at death.

7. For two exemplary studies, see Kathryn E. Holland Braund, Deerskins & Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685–1815 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), esp. 121–27; and Dean L. Anderson, “The Flow of European Trade Goods into the Western Great Lakes Region, 1715–1760,” in The Fur Trade Revisited: Selected Papers of the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 93–115. Sales to Indian traders and Amerindians could loom large in the trade of individual merchants: for example, they represented three-quarters of the cloth and clothing transactions, and nearly half the total business, of the leading Montreal merchant Alexis Lemoine Monière in 1715–24, as calculated from Dechêne, Habitants and Merchants, 307 (graph 11).

8. Of course, textiles woven within the colonies, most often by professional weavers using thread spun by farm families, were also consumed, but they are only a peripheral concern of this chapter. On the one hand, they were rarely to be found in the merchant inventories on which this study is mainly based because for the most part buyers ordered them directly from weavers (the “bespoke” method). On the other hand, they formed a small part of overall consumption. In the British colonies this was partly because cloth making was hobbled by the Navigation Acts, which in good mercantilist fashion severely limited or outright forbade the manufacture of many items in the colonies in order to protect metropolitan producers. The effects of these laws should not be overestimated, however. They were flouted during periods when restive British colonists, decreeing non-importation agreements to challenge taxes and other actions taken by the imperial government, turned to their own manufactures. More important, it would seem, colonists mainly chose to specialize in exportable foodstuffs and raw materials, for which prices generally rose across the eighteenth century, and to purchase mostly imported manufactures, for which prices were generally falling. As Carole Shammas and Adrienne Hood have shown, the myth of British American colonial self-sufficiency and reliance on domestically produced goods is just that—a myth; to the contrary, colonists were customers for external suppliers of consumer goods (Shammas, “How Self-Sufficient Was Early America?” Journal of Interdisciplinary History 13 [1982]: 247–72; Hood, “The Material World of Cloth: Production and Use in Eighteenth Century Rural Pennsylvania,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., 53 [1996]: 43–66). See also Mary Schweitzer, Custom and Contract: Household, Government, and the Economy in Colonial Pennsylvania (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 71–77, esp. 72 (table 2.7). French policy was, at least on its face, less opposed to colonial cloth production; in fact, various initiatives were sponsored or at least favored by colonial authorities (see Dechêne, Habitants and Merchants, 78–79). But no Canadian textile industry of any size ever got going during the French period. The extensive domestic production often thought characteristic of rural New France actually emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; see


10. The fact that the inventories used in this study come, in every area, from all times of the year minimizes the possibly distorting effects of seasonality.

11. For what it is worth, the two surviving merchant inventories from 1690s Charleston already show a distribution quite similar to that present a third of a century later, with the exception of cottons, where the much lower proportion is consistent with that found in contemporary Montreal and Philadelphia. The precise proportions are 31 percent linens, 54 percent woolens, 2 percent cottons, 4 percent mixed, 8 percent silks. See Charleston County, South Carolina, Wills and Miscellaneous Records, vol. 53 (Works Progress Administration transcription), inventories of Wilson Dunston, April 17, 1692 (117–32), and John Vansusteren, May 23, 1694 (199–204).

12. Woolen garments predominated in the armoires of all Montreal-area colonists in the late seventeenth century, but farm families held proportionately the largest share, followed by artisans. Conversely, urban dwellers, most notably merchants, clothed themselves more in linens and other fabrics. For more details, see DuPlessis, “Was There a Consumer Revolution?”

13. A mid-eighteenth-century German pastor visiting Pennsylvania noted that due to the intense summer heat, “light coats or jackets are worn which are neatly made of fine linen or dimity [a sturdy and serviceable cotton fabric]” (Gottlieb Mittelberger, Journey to Pennsylvania in the Year 1750 and Return to Germany in the Year 1754, trans. C. Eben [Philadelphia: J. J. McVey, 1898], 118).

14. It might be argued that because some linen was tailored into shirts and blouses in Europe or in the ports before being exchanged with Native Americans, the proportion of
linen in the Amerindian trade is underestimated by the figures quoted in tables 9 and 10. For instance, Rasteau (table 10, col. 3) sold linen shirts worth about one-fifth as much as his total sales of linen cloth; moreover, 95 percent of those shirts were tailored of so-called "trade linen" (toile de traité), designed specifically for—though not actually sold exclusively in—the Native American market. Even earlier the "Statement of expenses for Mississippi for 1703" listed outlays of 1,240 livres for cloth and clothing "to give to persons dispatched to friendly [Amerindian] nations," 250 livres (20 percent) of which paid for one hundred men's linen shirts (the rest was spent on woolens: 300 livres for thirty ells of "red cloth," 240 for red cloth overcoats, and 450 for three hundred ells of red stuff for breechclouts); see Jeffrey Brain, Tunica Treasure (Cambridge: Peabody Museum of Architecture and Ethnology, Harvard University/Salem, Mass.: Peabody Museum of Salem, 1979), 294. Still, as this example demonstrates, woolen fabrics were also made up into garments before being shipped to the frontier, and these, like linen shirts, were not enumerated in the textile lists; what is more, woolen garments were on the whole more expensive both individually and collectively. Overall, it seems safe to conclude, Native American demand for cloth and clothing in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century British and French North America embraced a respectable minority of linens (perhaps 15 to 20 percent by value) but was mainly focused on woolens.

15. Peter Mancall, Joshua Rosenbloom, and Thomas Weiss, "Indians and the Economy of Eighteenth-Century Carolina" (essay in this book), in table 16 calculate that Indians numbered about 40,000 of the 100,000 people in the Lower South (the Carolinas and Georgia) in 1730. It should be noted that the Amerindian population not only formed the largest single group (whites were some 34 percent, blacks 26 percent) but also would have been a much larger proportion of the population living on or near the frontier. Similar figures are not available for Louisiana; but the estimates of 150,000 Native Americans in 1699 and around 70,000 in 1763 by Thomas N. Ingersoll, Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718–1819 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 18, suggest a 1730s Native American population that was both absolutely and proportionally much larger than the settler population, both free and unfree, which numbered about 5,740 in 1731.


17. Cf. Richard White, The Middle Ground (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 136–38, who shows that the eillage of woolen cloth and the number of blankets taken west by Canadian fur traders at least doubled and may have tripled between the 1670s and 1690s, as Indians began to adopt woolen clothing in place of that made of skins.

18. See n. 13, above.
19. According to Mancall, Rosenbloom, and Weiss, “Indians and the Economy of Eighteenth-Century Carolina,” table 16, the 26,000 slaves in the Lower South in 1730 formed 26 percent of the area’s total population or 43 percent of the area’s settler population; by 1740 their numbers had risen to 41,000 (respectively, 30 percent and 42 percent). In Louisiana the 4,112 slaves counted in 1731 formed 72 percent of the settler population; my calculations are from Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon*, 18.

20. Cheap woolens for slaves are cited in the list of “Ammunitions and merchandise for the Colony of Louisiana for 1734,” put up for bid at La Rochelle, which includes “1,000 ells of *tir[argent]aine* from Amiens for the negroes [sic]”; see Brain, *Tunica Treasure*, 300. No linens are mentioned in this document. “*Tir[argent]aine*” was a cheap, coarsely woven woolen or linsey-woolsey. I have not encountered it in any Louisiana inventories or invoices.

21. For the identification of these fabrics as particularly destined for slaves, see “Expense of purchasing [and operating] a plantation in South Carolina, within 40 miles of Charles Town,” a 1755 document that lists five yards of white plains per slave per year, a blanket every third year, and unspecified amounts of “ozinbrig” [osnaburg] linen annually; see “C.W.” [Charles Woodmason], “The Economics of a Plantation Venture, 1755,” in *The Colonial South Carolina Scene: Contemporary Views*, 1697–1774, ed. H. Roy Merrens (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1977), 162.

22. From 1735 the textiles that slaves in South Carolina could wear were restricted by a kind of sumptuary law. The list of permissible fabrics comprised “Negro cloth, duffils, coarse kerseys, oznabrigs, blue linnen, checked linnen, coarse garlix, callicoes, checked cottons or scotch plaidis.” It is cited in Audrie Hadow Michie, “Goods Proper for South Carolina: Textiles Imported 1738–1742” (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1978), 19.

23. ANQM, Fonds Chateau de Ramezay P 345, Monière, Journals 3 and 4; Montreal Merchants Records Project (henceforth MMR), microfilm ed., Historical Society of Minnesota, St. Paul, 1971–75, “Trade goods.” The value of the numerous linen shirts and considerable amounts of woolen clothing (mainly greatcoats and other pieces of outerwear) and blankets (often used as draped garments) that were also in the cargoes has been included in these proportions.

24. MMR, “Trade goods.”


26. Ironically, we know about these shipments because they were regularly seized by the Indian allies of the French, who claimed the area; see Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Philadelphia, Etting Collection, vol. 40, dossiers 7, 17, 29, 30.

27. HSP, Cox-Parrish-Wharton Family Papers, box 18, folder 13; HSP, Etting Collection, vol. 40, dossier 36. Given relative prices, the dominance of woolens would have been higher than the amounts cited imply.

David Franks, HSP, Ms. Am. 0684. Franks outfitted numerous fur traders, so his sales—of which woolens comprised 61 percent by value, linens 30 percent, and cottons and calicoes 8 percent—likely reflect Native American preferences.

29. My calculations are based on W. L. McDowell, ed., Documents Relating to Indian Affairs 1754–1765 (Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 1970), 457–58. Nine separate groups of presents were distributed in all in April and May. That these distributions were typical is suggested by gifts bestowed on the Chickasaw nation in September and October 1757 by Jerome Courtonne, agent of the South Carolina provincial government; on these occasions, too, the textiles included only woolens (duffel and stroud) and shirts (ibid., 445–46). Gifts awarded to headmen were even more heavily dominated by woolens. Thus “a Present for the Head Warriour” of the Chickasaws on March 30, 1756, once again given by Courtonne, included “1 Pr. Strouds, 1 Suit Scarlet Cloaths, 20 Yards of Embroidered Serge, 2 Shirts”—all of it woolens save the last (ibid., 114). In neither of these cases is it stated what material went into the shirts, but if the 1758 information is any guide, they would have been tailored of check linen.

30. Native American preference for woolens made them discerning and demanding consumers, as French officials repeatedly acknowledged; see MMR, “Ecarlatines.” In the Southeast, for instance, both merchants and trading post garrisons sought British woolens for their trade with Creeks and Choctaws; see Gregory Waselkov, “French Colonial Trade in the Upper Creek Country,” in Calumet and Fleur-de-lys: Archaeology of Indian and French Contact in the Midcontinent, ed. J. Walthall and T. Emerson (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), esp. 42–43. Price played some role in this preference: in 1718, for example, some French traders operating in the South demanded twenty deerskins for a blanket, the English eight. See Patricia Dillon Woods, French-Indian Relations on the Southern Frontier 1699–1762 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1980), 40, in which, in general, she claims (210–11 n. 48) that English traders in the South could sell their goods for half the price the French charged. Again, in 1741, a French official admitted that French limbourg cost twice as much as stroud, though he assured his Cherokee interlocutors that limbourg was much more durable; see “Journal of Antoine Bonnefoy, 1741–1742,” in Travels in the American Colonies, ed. Newton D. Mereness (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 250.

Not all French officials agreed with Bonnefoy’s quality claims. In the 1730s Governor Bienville of Louisiana, acknowledging that the Indians showed a marked preference for better English blankets, tried to have the English ones copied in France; see Woods, French-Indian Relations, 117. This policy of learning from (or at least imitating) the competition was still being urged in 1757 by Bougainville, though he believed that Indian objections rested less on the intrinsic excellence of the cloth than on taste (goût), Carcassonne manufacturers not understanding how to dye satisfactory black bands on their blankets; see Louis Antoine de Bougainville, “Mémoire sur l’état de la Nouvelle-France, 1757,” Rapport de l’archiviste de la province de Québec 4 (1923–24): 63. In his (wistfully defensive but not necessarily incorrect) words, “Ce n’est pas que les draps [de Carcassonne] n’en fussent meilleurs et n’en fussent aussi beaux pour les couleurs, mais on n’a pu encore y faire les bandes d’un beau noir; en général nos marchandises valent mieux pour la qualité que celles des Anglais, mais les Sauvages préfèrent les leurs.” Bougainville also admitted (ibid.) that in times of war, prices at the fur trade posts became “very excessive” (trop excessif). Although I cannot pursue this subject here, Bougainville’s comments,
like those of Bienville, demonstrate how widely across imperial boundaries knowledge of textiles was diffused.

Quality is a more controversial issue among modern historians. Braund, no admirer of French goods, nevertheless reports that limbourg was “reputed to be of better quality than [stroud]” (Deerskin & Duffels, 123). For a more generally favorable verdict, see Wilbur R. Jacobs, Wilderness Politics and Indian Gifts: The Northern Colonial Frontier, 1748–1763 (1950; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 69: “During the 1750s, the Indians desired French fabrics because they were of a better quality than the British merchandise.” In a later article, however, Jacobs’s judgment is more reserved. While noting that one British colonial official “considered the French blankets to be superior to those made in England,” he concedes that “French cloth used for gifts was often poorly dyed and of an inferior grade”; see Wilbur Jacobs, “White Gift-Giving: French Skills in Managing the Indians,” chap. 4 of his Dispossessing the American Indian: Indians and Whites on the Colonial Frontier (New York: Scribner, 1972), 52.

31. The data in Mancall, Rosenbloom, and Weiss, “Indians and the Economy of Eighteenth-Century Carolina,” table 16, suggest that Amerindians, although numbering around thirty-seven thousand individuals, constituted less than 15 percent of the Lower South’s population in the 1760s. Although no other area has benefited from a similarly careful and detailed study, there is no doubt that Native American populations across North America declined relatively and absolutely during much of the eighteenth century. Problems such as those in the South Carolina deerskin trade must have depressed Indian demand even further, in particular making it difficult for native people to purchase expensive fabrics such as woolens or even cottons, both of which cost more than linens. For the deerskin trade, see Peter Coclanis, The Shadow of a Dream (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 62–63, 80–81.

32. Ely Kershaw Account Book 1769–74, South Carolina Historical Society (SCHS), Charleston, MS 34/613.

33. If references are needed, see John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, The Economy of British America, 1607–1789, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 112 (table 5.3), 220, 221 (figs. 10.2, 10.3); Egnal, New World Economies, 138 (fig. 8.7).

34. It is likely, for example, that some of the change noted in the shipments to Detroit resulted from the rise of the settler population there rather than shifts in Amerindian demand, for already by the 1740s Detroit had become the largest of the western colonial settlements; see Norman Caldwell, The French in the Mississippi Valley 1740–1750 (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1941), 37.

35. Whereas in 1651–1700 woolens had constituted (by value) 78 percent of Montreal decedents’ outerwear and cottons none, in 1770–74 the proportions were 26 and 38 percent, respectively. For more details on clothing, based on Montreal-area inventories, which are by far the most complete, see DuPlessis, “Was There a Consumer Revolution?”

36. This statement should not be taken to suggest that imports of woolens, much less any other type of fabric, declined in absolute terms. Calculating from the figures in Davis, “English Foreign Trade, 1700–74,” 302–3, between 1722–24 and 1772–74 English exports of woolens to the Americas and West Africa grew 3.8 times, linens 31 times, silks 3.5 times, and cottons 11.7 times; reexports from England to “America” expanded 1.3 times for linens, 1.8 times for silks, and 1.9 times for calicoes (woolen reexports are not listed). Total exports of manufactures grew 5.9 times between those dates; total reexports of manufactures grew
1.4-fold. These figures make it obvious, however, that British linens and cottons, not woolens, were the growth sectors.

37. On slave populations, see Coclanis, Shadow of a Dream, 64–65 (tables 3–1, 3–2); and Mancall, Rosenbloom, and Weiss, “Indians and the Economy of Eighteenth-Century Carolina,” table 16, who suggest that the number of slaves rose from 26,000 in 1730 (26 percent of the total population of the Lower South) to 94,000 in 1760 (38 percent) and 155,000 in 1770 (41 percent). White population was also growing absolutely and relatively, whereas Native American numbers, as we have seen, were falling sharply, especially in relation to total population.

38. Calculated from James Poyas Account Book, Charleston Museum, Charleston, S.C. Another 40 percent of his cloth sales consisted of linens, while cottons added up to just 10 percent.

39. Based on the five yards of white plains per slave per year specified in “C.W.,” “The Economics of a Plantation Venture, 1755,” 162, the 1770 slave population in the Lower South translates into annual plantation consumption of 775,000 yards just of that one cloth. The letters of Charleston merchants are filled with references to the purchase and sale of large quantities of plains. On May 9, 1768, for example, Henry Laurens, a prominent merchant who also had several large plantations, ordered 1,200 yards of white plains from William Cowles & Co. at Bristol, specifying that he needed them “for my own use, so that any disappointment in these will prove injurious to my planting affairs”; see Papers of Henry Laurens, 5:678. The quantity cited would have clothed 240 slaves. When plains were unavailable, Laurens substituted stroud; see his letter to Abraham Schad, at Wambaw (plantation), October 7, 1765, ibid., 5:19. In another letter to Schad (ibid., 4:665–66), Laurens sends both white plains and stroud, with instructions to use the plains first.

40. For just two references among many devoted to “the moth,” see Edgar, Letterbook of Robert Pringle, 1:33; Papers of Henry Laurens, 3:253.

41. In a 1764 letter to the manager of his Mepkin plantation (Papers of Henry Laurens, 4:319), Laurens cites a figure of three yards of osnaburg and five yards of plains per slave, together with a kerchief (probably linen), blanket (almost always duffel), and hat (most likely woolen).

42. Together with the apparent disappearance of woolens from slave wardrobes, the fact that slaves formed a diminishing proportion of the Louisiana population across our period probably helps explain the decline of woolens in merchant stocks despite demand generated by the Indian trade and consumption of fancy woolens by planters. For the falling slave proportion, see Ingersoll, Mammon and Manon, 95.

43. The predominance of these fabrics, and the virtual absence of woolens of any sort, is clear in the sale of the effects of the planter and merchant Sieur Lalande in LHC, FSC, doc. 80 (undated, circa 1758). Our understanding of clothing in early Louisiana will be immeasurably advanced by the publication of the University of London doctoral dissertation recently completed by Sophie White, “Trading Identities: Cultures of Consumption in French Colonial Louisiana (1699–1769)”; for a foretaste, see White, “Dress in French Colonial Louisiana, 1699–1769: The Evidence from Notarial Sources,” Dress 24 (1997): 69–75.

47. Roche, *Culture of Clothing*, 127, 138 (tables 10, 14).
48. In the late seventeenth century high-wealth Montreal decedents (15 percent of the total inventoried) possessed 57 percent of the silk clothing; by 1770–74 this group (still 15 percent of the total inventoried) owned 29 percent of all silk garments. In 1770–74 those in the lowest wealth category (57 percent of all inventoried decedents) also had 29 percent of all silk garments, while the middling (28 percent of inventories) had acquired the remaining 42 percent. *Habitants* (farmers) and artisans had just over half of all silk items, lower than their proportion in the decedent group (84 percent), and the lowest proportion of all types of cloth composing the garments they owned.
49. See n. 27, above.
50. Compare *Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade, September 20, 1710–August 29, 1718* (Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 1992), 124, 204, 269, 281; with W. L. McDowell, ed., *Documents Relating to Indian Affairs May 21, 1750–August 7, 1754* (Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 1958) (no entries); and McDowell, *Documents Relating to Indian Affairs 1754–1765*, 568 (only citation).
51. See Lathan A. Windley, *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790*, vol. 3 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1983).
52. In South Carolina planters and merchants (often the same individuals practiced both occupations) particularly fancied woolen garments, although if the examples of Robert Pringle or Henry Laurens are any guide, they were likely to order them ready-made from London tailors. See, for instance, Pringle to the London tailor David Glen, January 22, 1739, in Edgar, *Letterbook of Robert Pringle*, 1:63–64, in which Pringle ordered several garments made up from very expensive varieties of woolen fabric: a riding coat and vest “of the Best superfine Drabb,” “a Best superfine Scarlett Broad Cloath Jackett or Waist Coat,” a banyan (loose gown) “of a very fashionable worsted Damask of the finest & best sort,” and a “superfine fashionable broad Cloth Fly Coat & Breeches.” See also ibid., June 11, 1744, 2:706–7; or *Papers of Henry Laurens*, 1:195, December 26, 1748. These intercolonial similarities lend some credence to the claim by Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon*, 122 (which is based on other considerations altogether), that early Louisiana was much more like “coastal South Carolina” than St. Domingue, to which it is usually compared.
53. Besides the fabrics already cited, it is worth noting that if tiretaine was used for slave clothing in Louisiana, it never showed up in free decedents’ inventories.
55. LHC, FSC, docs. 1765101001, 1765101102.
57. The research for this chapter was supported by a Fellowship for College Teachers and Independent Scholars from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by faculty research grants from Swarthmore College.