



ited supplies were available, it was very expensive, and it was used as a medicine and as a spice, but not as a food as it is today.¹³ First the Portuguese and then the Spanish established their earliest colonial outposts beginning in 1418 as sugar plantations on Madeira, the Canary Islands, São Tomé, and the Cape Verde Islands in the Atlantic waters off the west coast of Africa. The location of the Atlantic island sugar plantations established and institutionalized the west coast of Africa as the primary source for slave labor.

As European empires colonized Caribbean and tropical American lands, they established much larger sugar (and later other) plantation economies with African slave labor. In the tragic course of recorded human history, it seems clear that slavery has existed in many different cultural contexts and been practiced in many different ways. Slavic people gave their name to the ancient institution of *slavery*, and contemporary accounts allege that slavery persists into the twenty-first century on the cacao plantations of the Ivory Coast.¹⁴

But it was the sugar trade that established the systematic global racism of African slavery. As innovations in the refinement of sugar yielded a whiter and whiter product, the system of its production dehumanized people on the basis of dark skin. In symbol and in flesh and blood, sugar gave birth to the racist world order. Sugar and its associated fermented stimulant commodities also gave birth to colonial rule on a global scale.

It does not make any kind of sense for the people (or the land) of any place to grow massive quantities of stimulants for export rather than nutritious food for local consumption. It only happens by the exercise of force and the alienation of people from the land. Initially this was accomplished through slavery and direct colonial administration. In our time, the primary mode of domination has shifted to subtler instruments of global capital such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, Third World debt, transnational corporations (a more descriptive name than multinational, I think, because these behemoths have come to transcend and supersede nations), and the World Trade Organization. If the people who work the fields had any measure of control over the land they worked, they would be growing food to eat, not luxury stimulants for people on other continents.

“The first sweetened cup of hot tea to be drunk by an English worker was a significant historical event, because it prefigured the