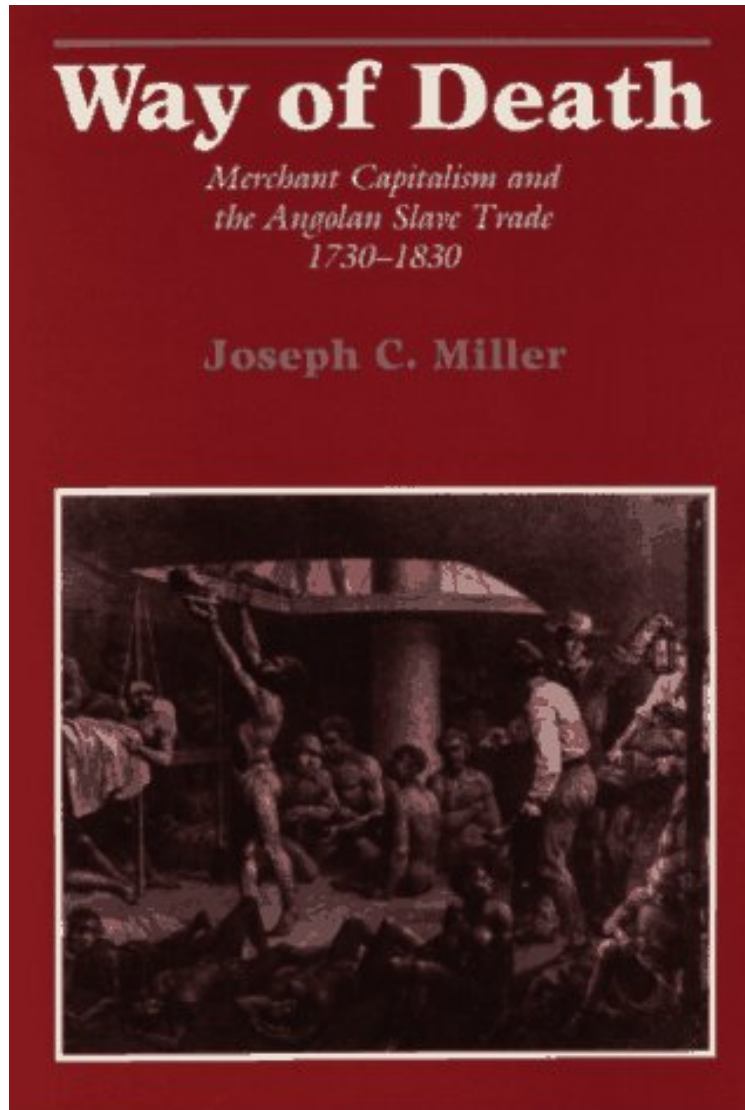


(Ebook pdf) Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 17301830

Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 17301830

Joseph Calder Miller

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Joseph Calder Miller : Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 17301830 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 17301830:

15 of 16 people found the following review helpful. Title not hyperboleBy A CustomerJoseph Miller's Way of Death is an exhaustingly long volume for a non-academic reader, but a rich and rewarding one, if you like your history

deeply rooted in archival sources. The title (and headings such as "Floating Tombs" and "Merchants of Death") make the book sound like popularization, though they actually are more a reflection of Miller's penchant for metaphor, which gives the book an almost Tolstoyan quality. Indeed, the division of the book into discrete sections that view the Angolan slaving economy as it affected those involved (native African individuals and polities, mixed-race "Luso-African" traders, Brazilian ship and plantation owners, Lisbon-based merchants, Portuguese governors) lets you see his subject with a depth and complexity reminiscent of good fiction. But it doesn't make *Way of Death* easy to read-the section most like a narrative account, which ties together a number of the previous threads, doesn't come till well after the 500th page. Miller feels no need to summarize political history, so I recommend as background an earlier short work such as David Birmingham's *Trade and Conflict in Angola* (though its economic history needs correction in the light of Miller's research). Trained as an Africanist, Miller is particularly sensitive to the Central African sense of wealth as people rather than as goods or specie, and the different political economies leading from one kind of wealth to the other-a linkage that passes from the traditional elders and lineage systems, in which control of land and women's fertility was power, to the monarchs and warlords who used material goods to acquire dependents, to the merchant princes who stockpiled goods and slaves rather than dependents, to Luso-African traders who provided the link between textiles, muskets, and rum from Europe, Asia, and Brazil and the slaves given up by Africans. The boundaries were not stable, and the "slaving frontier" moved east from Luanda and the coast in jumps, partly in response to periodic war and drought. After three and a half centuries, this "catchment zone" for captives spread across a vast expanse of Central Africa from the Congo to the upper Zambezi and the edges of the Kalahari. From the perspective of Atlantic economies, the financial basis of 18th-century Luso-Brazilian slaving was very rickety. Exchange of precious metals for slaves was rare. Those most immediately concerned on the African end took European goods to sell on credit and only saw reimbursement after the surviving slaves were sold-at more or less fixed prices-in Brazil. The chronic undercapitalization of Angolan slaving and the dependence of both the Angolan and Brazilian side on credit extended by Portuguese and (indirectly) British merchants is a major theme of the book. The appalling death rate among captives between point of capture and delivery in Brazil made slaves a highly perishable commodity and considerable financial risk. Those seeking to wrest a profit engaged in "tight-packing" on slave ships, which meant cheating on official capacity and reducing space for water and food in order to fit more slaves on board-which raised the death rate on ships even higher. Miller's title is no hyperbole-between the long trip from the hinterland, the dreadful conditions in Luanda barracoons, and the middle passage, a minority of those who began the "way of death" reached Brazil. A must-read for anyone seriously interested in Central Africa or the Atlantic slave trade.

This acclaimed history of Portuguese and Brazilian slaving in the southern Atlantic is now available in paperback. With extraordinary skill, Joseph C. Miller explores the complex relationships among the separate economies of Africa, Europe, and the South Atlantic that collectively supported the slave trade. He places the grim history of the trade itself within the context of the rise of merchant capitalism in the eighteenth century. Throughout, Miller illuminates the experiences of the slaves themselves, reconstructing what can be known of their sufferings at the hands of their buyers and sellers.

A landmark study in the history of the Atlantic slave trade. It will be an essential reference for anyone who writes on the trade, from whatever perspective, for years to come. . . . This book is full of rich data, especially concerning the passage from the interior to the coast, the role of Luso-Africans and Europeans in Angolan port cities, and conditions on the floating tombs that carried their deathly cargoes across the Atlantic. Phyllis M. Martin, *African Economic History*