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SUGAR

The dominant commodity of French-American relations from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

Control of sugar production was an important motivator for U.S. and French imperial policies. Until the mid-nineteenth century, both countries relied on slave labor for cultivation of cane as part of a triangular trade among Western Europe, West Africa, and the Americas' eastern coasts and Caribbean islands. With the rise of the beet sugar industry, however, trade between the Americas and France slowly diminished.

Columbus brought the first cane plants to the Americas in 1493, but Spanish settlers first introduced cane for commercial purposes on the American mainland in Florida in 1600; French settlers did likewise on the islands of Haiti in 1625; Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Saint Kitts in 1635; and Louisiana in 1751. From the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries, producers in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico supplied most of the world's sugar.

The main productive unit of cane sugar in the Americas through the mid-nineteenth century was the slave plantation, the annual rate of return being estimated at from 5 to 10 percent. The Civil War, which ended slavery in the United States, destroyed 90 percent of the U.S. sugar industry, heavily centered in Louisiana, but slowly rebuilt through sharecrop-

ping arrangements with tenant farmers (many former slaves); recruitment of laborers from Japan, China, and the Caribbean; transition from distributed mills to central factory systems; and the transition of sugar facilities from individual to corporate ownership. French abolition of colonial slavery declared by the revolutionary Second Republic in 1848 had a less dramatic effect on French sugar production in Martinique and Guadeloupe; Caribbean planters and French investors undertook postabolition measures similar to those of U.S. producers.

Sometimes sugar allied French and American sugar interests; at other times it set the two countries at odds. Among its attempts to control and raise revenue from its North American colonies, Britain in 1764 passed a Sugar Act. The Sugar Act prohibited the colonists from trading various goods, including sugar, with non-British territories. Acknowledging the illegal French-American trade, the act specifically banned colonial ships from visiting or trading with the French possession Saint-Pierre et Miquelon.

On the other hand, Haiti, occupied by France as a sugar colony, proved enormously significant in the question of competing American and French imperialism. Haiti, or Saint-Domingue as it was called in its colonial period, was the richest of all Caribbean colonies during the eighteenth century. However, inspired by the French Revolution, the vast slave majority on the island rose against the planters in 1791. Army troops ordered by Napoléon to the island failed to impose order, and in 1804 leaders of the former slaves proclaimed independence from France and established the Republic of Haiti. By the mid-1820s, the Haitian sugar industry had ceased to exist.



View of sugar mill in operation, Haiti, 1724. (Library of Congress)

The Jefferson administration of the United States, fearing a French foothold too close to its borders, sent arms and supplies to the slave rebels to assist in their defeat of the French. Jefferson exploited French preoccupation with war with Britain, as well as the Haitian Revolution, to negotiate with Napoléon for the purchase of Louisiana. Needing money, France sold the Louisiana Territory to the United States in 1803, heavily reducing French influence in the Americas. France recognized the Haitian republic in 1838 upon Haiti's commencement of payments to compensate for the losses of sugar planters driven out; the United States, influenced by the prejudices of its planter class in the South, would not recognize the Haitian republic until 1862.

In an interesting but less significant incident, France threatened the sovereignty of Hawaii in the 1840s, drawn by Hawaii's large-scale cane plantings commenced in 1825. French threats prodded the king, Kamehameha III, secretly to cede his islands to the United States. Secretary of State Daniel Webster ensured Hawaii's independence while instructing his minister in Hawaii to return the deed of cession to avoid antagonizing France.

Spurred initially by Louisiana production, sugar became a U.S. domestic product, and the United States became a major cane as well as beet sugar producer, consumer, and, to a lesser extent, exporter by the 1870s. Sixteen U.S. states would become cane or beet sugar producers. Although the sugar trade between the United

States and France gradually diminished, technology exchange between the two countries continued. For example, refugees from Haiti and French-educated scientists settled in Louisiana and influenced local sugar planters, and French technical journals influenced developments in the post-Civil War era.

When, during the Napoleonic wars, the British navy blockaded Europe and Napoléon retaliated by cutting off European maritime trade, French agriculturalists commenced sugar production from domestic sugar beets. During the nineteenth century, France shifted its national investment from Caribbean cane sugar to domestic beet sugar, and this product met the demands of French consumers. In the early twenty-first century, France annually exported nine times as much sugar as it imported. This development virtually eliminated the sugar trade between France and the Americas.

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See also: American Civil War; Antislavery Movements; Bonaparte, Napoléon; Florida; French Revolution; Guadeloupe; Haiti; Jefferson, Thomas; Louisiana; Louisiana Purchase; Martinique; Santo Domingo; Slavery; Saint-Pierre et Miquelon.

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SUPERVIELLE, JULES (1884–1960)

As a poet, dramatist, fabulist, essayist, and novelist, Jules Supervielle made an original contribution to twentieth-century French literature, particularly through his poetry, which is colored by his frequent voyages across the Atlantic Ocean between France and his native Uruguay. Indeed, these maritime journeys are chronicled in his works that communicate affectionately and meditatively images of seascapes and landscapes, rolling waves, and vast and treeless South American plains.

Supervielle's peripatetic life began in Montevideo in 1884, where he was born into a banking family. Several months later in France, the infant lost both parents to cholera and was subsequently raised by family members. This loss was to affect his sensibility throughout his lifetime, and it inspired works that evoke themes of longing, death, underprivileged individuals, and travel. Fluent in French, Spanish, English, and Portuguese, Supervielle was educated in France, where he discovered nineteenth-century French poets such as Leconte de Lisle, Victor Hugo, and Alfred de Vigny. In 1906, after completing his French military service—which left him with a serious cardiac condition—he received a bachelor's degree in Spanish from the Sorbonne.

In 1907 in Uruguay, Supervielle married Pilar Saavedra, for whom his love inspired a poetry collection titled *Comme des Voiliers/Like Sailboats*, published in 1910. In 1919, he published *Poèmes: Voyage en soi, Paysages, les poèmes de l'humour triste, Le Goyavier authentique/Poems: Travels within Oneself, Landscapes, Poems of Sad Humor, The Authentic Guava Tree*; the work, dedicated to his mother, creates compelling images of land and sea, trees, plains, and