

People who possess what Uslaner calls “moralistic trust” see little risk in putting their faith in strangers, because they “believe that . . . other people are generally well motivated” and share the same underlying moral values. Such optimists become active in their communities, tackling civic problems large and small, and giving time and money to charity—but not necessarily taking part in social clubs, fraternal organizations, bowling leagues, and the like.

Their kind of trust is waning, writes Uslaner. Surveys indicate that the proportion of Americans who believe that “most people can be trusted” has plummeted in recent decades—from 58 percent in 1960 to 36 percent in 1998. Why? Putnam ultimately points a finger at TV and the dangerous world it presents to viewers. But while television viewing “has leveled off in recent years,” observes Uslaner, there has been no rebound in trust.

He blames the trust deficit on other culprits, including the simultaneous rise in

the numbers of Christian fundamentalists and the “unchurched.” “Religion has been the source of much of American civic life. Half of charitable contributions . . . and almost 40 percent of volunteering are based in religious organizations,” he notes. But fundamentalists “are more likely to put faith only in their own kind.” They are twice as likely as other believers to join only religious groups. The unchurched are almost 20 percent more likely than believers to join no groups at all.

But the main reason for the trust deficit, Uslaner believes, is that Americans have become more pessimistic about the future. The proportion of Americans who told pollsters that their children would have better lives than they themselves did fell from 60 percent or more in the 1960s to around 15 percent in the 1990s. Why? Uslaner blames growing economic inequality. Until that trend is reversed, he says, many Americans will continue to be wary of their fellow countrymen.

## *Resisting Slavery*

“Shipboard Revolts, African Authority, and the Atlantic Slave Trade” by David Richardson, in *The William and Mary Quarterly* (Jan. 2001), Box 8781, Williamsburg, Va. 23187–8781.

It’s now well known that Africans sometimes violently resisted enslavement by Europeans, but historians have focused almost entirely on slave revolts in the Americas. Recently amassed data from European shipping records on more than 27,000 voyages show that many Africans also fought back on the African coast and at sea.

Between about 1650 and 1860 there were at least 485 collective acts of violent rebellion, including 392 shipboard revolts and 93 “attacks from the shore by apparently ‘free’ Africans against ships or longboats,” says Richardson, an economic historian at the University of Hull, in Great Britain. More than 360 ships were involved, some more than once.

Ninety percent of the shipboard revolts occurred in (or shortly before or after) the 18th century. Despite gaps in records and a lack of data on ships other than those of the French, Dutch, and British, Richardson estimates that as many as 10 percent of the

ships in that period may have experienced an insurrection.

The revolts rarely succeeded, he says, but they were common enough to induce traders to take preventive measures, including doubling the number of crew members, which increased the pecuniary costs of the Middle Passage. Had there been no revolts, the number of slaves shipped across the Atlantic—at least 11 million embarked at the African coast, including more than six million between 1700 and 1810—would undoubtedly have been considerably greater. Richardson estimates that the resisters “saved perhaps 600,000 other Africans from being shipped to America in the long 18th century and one million during the whole history of the trade.”

Enslaved Africans from the Senegambia region (the basins of the Senegal and Gambia rivers) appear to have been especially likely to fight back.

America was hardly the only market for

slaves from Senegambia, Richardson notes. “For centuries before contact by sea with Europeans, Senegambia was an important source for the trans-Saharan slave trade as well as for the trade in the desert.” There was also a substantial local demand for slaves.

Most of the slaves shipped to America from Senegambia had been captured in warfare or by slave raiders, usually employed by Muslim states in the far interior or by “warrior states” near the coast. Historians have tended to think that most slaves shipped to America from Senegambia in the 18th century came from the far interior. As the American demand grew after 1750, slavers probably worked the coastal areas more intensively, instead of moving inland, as they did elsewhere in Africa.

That, Richardson says, may well have contributed to a breakdown in political order. It, in turn, may have led to more warrior regimes and perhaps to a new willingness among the Africans there to sell previously protected domestic slaves



*Shipboard revolts helped depress the 18th-century slave trade.*

and other persons to the Europeans. The explosive end result, now newly visible in the amassed shipping records: more attacks on ships and more shipboard revolts.

## *Thinking the Unthinkable*

“Let Them Drop Out” by Jackson Toby, in *The Weekly Standard* (Apr. 9, 2001), 1150 17th St., N.W., Ste. 505, Washington, D.C. 20036-4617.

Why has the rash of school mass murders afflicted stereotypically “good” suburban schools, such as Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, rather than wretched inner-city high schools? In the answer, argues Toby, a Rutgers University sociologist, lies a practical way to prevent some of the massacres.

The disruptive students responsible for the everyday (but usually less lethal) violence in inner-city schools are able to escape, he says, before their frustration with being

trapped in the classroom “reaches a flash-point.” They become chronic truants or actual dropouts; schoolwork does not enjoy sufficient parental or peer group support to keep them in class. But for kids in excellent suburban schools, Toby says, dropping out is unthinkable: “Their parents would be horrified. Their friends would be bewildered. Their teachers would be shocked.” Though students in such schools can feel trapped and miserable for what adults would consider trivial reasons—“the teasing