

The trans-Atlantic slave trade, which lasted over three hundred and fifty years and inextricably linked four continents, constituted history's largest forced migration and one of the seminal events in global history. Over twelve million Africans, mostly from coastal West and Central Africa and transported primarily on European ships, were landed in the Americas, primarily Brazil and the West Indies. Whereas less than five percent of the total number came to the British North American colonies, including what would become the southern United States, and despite having been abolished over one hundred and fifty years ago, the issues of the slave trade, slavery and racism dominate much of the current discourse in the United States. The Atlantic slave trade played a fundamental role in the creation of American societies and exercised a crucial and central role in the modern histories of Africa, the Americas, and Europe. This crucial and emotional topic thus interests not only global historians but also African, American and European historians, and commentators and activists concerned with the contemporary Third World. Some observers directly attribute many of sub-Saharan Africa's problems today to the continent's active participation in the slave trade. The trade's economic, cultural and social impacts on the Americas are still evident, if often minimized, obscured, or ignored. Others have examined the correlation between Europe's, and especially Britain's, involvement in the trade and the rise of the industrial revolution in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A heated and emotional debate over reparations, both for peoples of African descent in the Americas as well as the areas that supplied slaves to the trade, occurs periodically in the United Nations and elsewhere. Previously unknown data bases and records emerge constantly, permitting new interpretations and calculations. Additions to the literature are always welcome, and these two volumes make substantial contributions to the historiography of the Atlantic slave trade while simultaneously opening up new avenues for future research and interpretation. One of their common strengths is that both books deal with a range of aspects of the trade, and not just one issue or period. Following a roughly chronological framework, they also cover an array of perspectives and interpretations.
Slavery and slave trades have existed for much of recorded history. Virtually every agricultural society in the pre-modern world had a legal and codified system of slavery or servitude. Rather than being a "peculiar institution," slavery was a common practice throughout most of the globe and throughout history. Slaves often accounted for half or more of the population in any given society, state, kingdom, or empire. Male and female slaves were used, to cite only a few occupations, as farmers, servants, porters, miners, monument builders, entertainers, soldiers, sailors, guards, advisers and courtesans. Many slaves held positions of considerable authority, power and influence. In addition to slavery, slave trades existed in many parts of the world. Masters desired slaves from other regions, without nearby family ties, to insure loyalty and to prevent escape. States often exchanged prisoners of war to have foreign-born slaves. Local, regional and long-distance, overland and overseas slave trading has been documented in many pre-modern societies. For example, the trans-Saharan slave trade, involving slaves from sub-Saharan Africa exported to the Islamic world, India and beyond, consisted of a well-developed system of exchange, well before the arrival of Europeans off the coasts of West and Central Africa in the late 1400s. When the trans-Atlantic slave trade began, Africans were well-acquainted with slavery and slave trading. Europeans tapped into an existing network of trading people for commodities. What is unique about the Atlantic slave trade in global history is its scale, length, and impacts.

The volume, From Chains to Bonds: The Slave Trade Revisited, contains papers presented at a 1994 conference held in Ouidah, Benin, West Africa, which launched UNESCO's international Slave Route project. This ambitious multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary undertaking created a framework to understand the underlying causes, mechanisms and impacts of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from West and Central Africa to the Americas. Numerous initiatives, including memorials, museum exhibitions, conferences, and this current book, were proposed by several different member states and organizations. The goal was to retrieve the slave trade from historical neglect and the loss of memory, and restore it to its rightful place at the forefront of modern history and contemporary issues. This volume, although appearing seven years after the initial meeting which renders some of the pieces hopelessly out-of-date, represents one of the first and most visible, tangible results of the Slave Route project. It also successfully draws attention to the critical importance of the trade in global history, economics, politics, and society. Forty authors from eighteen countries on four continents contributed to this diverse and complex work. Chapters range from one to forty pages, and include scholarly essays, poems, and personal reflections. Many of the articles are useful as they sum work done by the authors over the preceding years. Because of the study's length and the predictable varying quality of the chapters in such a large collection, a careful selection of entries will be considered in this review essay.

The introductory section sets the collection's tone by including a moving poem concerned with memory by Mohammed Kacimi, the editor's description of and justification for the conference, and Ibrahima B. Kake's argument for the need for the popularization of the history of the slave trade. Part One, titled "History, Memory and Archives of the Slave Trade," consists of seven chapters utilizing diverse sources and covering various historical subjects. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch examines the issue of women,
marriage and slavery in Africa during the precolonial period in a much too brief chapter to do justice to the topics. She has published extensively on these subjects elsewhere and a summary of her major findings and conclusions would have been much more valuable than this cursory overview. Slavery existed in Africa prior to the arrival of Europeans, and women played a dominant role in indigenous slavery. Female slaves were valued for their integrative and productive functions in a wide spectrum of work activities, as well as for their reproductive role. Women also helped integrate male slaves. While many women were sold into the Atlantic slave trade, the overwhelming majority were men, owing primarily to African societies valuing female over male slaves, and the higher prices for female slaves. More chapters on women, indigenous slavery and the impacts in Africa of the export of slaves into the Atlantic system would have considerably strengthened the collection, especially since much interesting and insightful research has been done in these fields recently.

Robin Law, in a particularly solid essay, summarizes the transition from slave trade to legitimate commerce in West Africa, a complex subject he has explored much more in depth in other articles and an edited volume. Abolition of the Atlantic trade system did not signal the end of trade between Europeans and West Africans but rather initiated a shift to trade in agricultural and other primary products required by an increasingly industrializing Europe. West African merchants and producers made the transition quite smoothly. In an original but now dated piece, Max Guerout stresses the importance of submarine archaeology in collecting artifacts to augment the written record. Further maritime exploration would greatly enhance our understanding of the trade and its practice, and considerably enlarge and enliven museum exhibits on the subject. Jean-Pierre Tardieu investigates the archiepiscopal archives of Lima, five of which are reproduced in the text, to trace the origins of slaves in the Lima, Peru region. Certainly, much more could be gleaned from these records than is stated here in this scanty, twelve page account. Tardieu concludes that under-utilized religious sources, such as parish records, provide accurate and reliable sources on the origins of slaves from the Atlantic shore to as far as the Pacific coast. Bellarim Codo, in a welcome chapter on the neglected topic of African descent peoples from the Americas returning to West Africa, considers Afro-Brazilians in Benin. Usually, Afro-Brazilians in Benin engaged in trading, including the slave trade. They often acted as middlemen between the Portuguese or Brazilian traders and European trading companies. Dieudonne Gnammankou speculates briefly and not very effectively on the sparse African presence in Czarist Russia from the late seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

Part Three proceeds chronologically from earlier sections and considers the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. In one of the volume's most thoughtful and comprehensive essays of the volume, Joseph Miller deals with the historical foundations of abolition. His extensive and most welcome notes and bibliography display a wide-ranging reading of the documentary record and the secondary literature. Some scholars have speculated that humanitarian concerns in Britain were the primary reason for the suppression of the slave trade, while others have argued that the growth of capitalism and additional economic factors rendered the slave trade expensive, risky, and obsolete. Miller concludes that the social and political results of the industrial revolution in late-eighteenth and early-
nineteenth century Britain promoted and permitted the abolition of the slave trade, and eventually slavery in the West Indies and elsewhere. Abolition globally followed the integration of different world regions into Europe's growing economic sphere. Several brief and very cursory essays follow in this section, barely managing to skim the surface of such topics as the return of slaves to the Upper Guinea Coast, West Africa; slavery in European law codes; the African heritage in Guadeloupe; an examination of the concept of slavery in Fon (Benin) proverbs; and the minimal role of Christian churches in promoting abolition. The section ends with a summation of a conference held in France in 1994, under the auspices of the UNESCO Slave Route program, on the suppression of the slave trade and slavery, especially in French colonies.

Part Four centers on the contribution, legacy and cultural dynamics of the African diaspora in the Americas. Some of the chapters overlap and become annoyingly repetitive. Only a couple do justice to the complex and important issue of the African presence in various aspects of American life and culture. Sheila Walker demonstrates that the African cultural presence in the Americas, and especially in the United States, is not merely a marginal part, but an integral component, of the hemisphere's culture. Nina Friedemann focuses on the African presence in Colombia, a subject worthy of further consideration, whereas Kabengele Munanga briefly examines the role of Africans in Brazil, a field that has received much more nuanced and careful study elsewhere. Joseph Adande sketches African influences on traditional and contemporary American visual art. Kazadi wa Mukuna covers the familiar territory of African musical elements in Latin America music, while Yolande B.-J.-Noet considers slave dance and its vestiges in the Americas. Guerin C. Montilus and Jacqueline Roumeguere-Eberhardt both analyze the vestiges of Africa in American religions, and Olabiyi Yai and Luz Martinez-Montiel treat general African influences on the Americas. This section provides a flavor of some of the research being done and that which needs to be undertaken, but only offers a small, superficial glimpse into the diversity of the African presences and continuing influence on American society and culture. It is a tantalizing introduction to this complex and diverse topic, and not a conclusion or summation.

The final section attempts to link the slave trade and modern-day international cooperation. In an interesting piece on the teaching of the history of the slave trade to young students, Jean-Michel Deveau proposes several useful and thoughtful approaches to this difficult but important task, based on his teaching primary school in France. He also proposes the formation of an international team of researchers and teachers to devise materials suitable for different age-groups; to initiate a dialogue across national and continental borders; and to organize conferences and sessions to facilitate and coordinate research. He suggests UNESCO as the only organization capable of accomplishing such an undertaking. It is clearly an idea that commands thoughtful consideration and implementation by scholars, governments, and nongovernmental organizations. Roger Some attempts to establish a parallel between slavery, genocide and holocaust, suggesting that detailed comparative studies of different forms of historical tragedy could be instructive and might shed light on some neglected examples of genocide and slavery. An all too brief essay by Clement Lokossou seeks to encourage cultural tourism of slave trade sites, especially in Benin. Tourism brings people from diverse cultures and
backgrounds together, and promotes development and understanding. Some work has been done recently on the establishment of tourist sites related to the slave trade, and the impacts of tourism on slave origin areas. The UNESCO Slave Route project should clearly sponsor such cultural exchanges and visits. Ecotourism has become quite popular and profitable in some developing regions. Tourism of sites associated to the Atlantic slave trade might likewise serve a similarly useful educational and financial purpose.

From Chains to Bonds suffers from weaknesses common to and perhaps unavoidable in edited volumes that attempt to include every paper submitted, and with little or no editorial vetting or oversight. It is highly likely that these papers were not reviewed by knowledgeable outside readers. The quality of the essays varies markedly, and some are too short, out-dated or superficial to be of any interest or use to non-scholars, not to mention experts. Others are based more on emotion and reverie than historical evidence. Only a handful deal at all with the existing historiography or state of the literature. Some of the sections do not hold together very well, a weakness that could have been mitigated by including a brief introduction to each section, linking the articles together. The book lacks a comprehensive bibliography, although the chapters by Miller, Law and Lovejoy have useful individual bibliographies. The book also lacks an index. Despite these omissions and drawbacks, the volume does address a critical topic in global history and includes authors whose work has been unavailable elsewhere.

David Northrup has edited a valuable and relatively short book titled The Atlantic Slave Trade as part of Houghton Mifflin’s "Problems in World History" series. This volume is a collection of essays designed primarily for use in undergraduate classes, and works especially well in survey courses in global, African diaspora, and African history. Northrup's book, half the length of the Diene collection, is the much more valuable of the two for classroom use and as an introduction to the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery in Africa. The Northrup volume serves extremely well as a basis for class discussion as well as for written assignments, with students comparing and evaluating the effectiveness of each selection, and choosing the most convincing. Each of the six sections opens with a brief quote from each of the contributors to the section that focuses on the main conclusion reached by the author. Each selection is then briefly introduced and placed in context. Most of the pieces are excerpts from much longer primary or secondary works, most quite familiar to experts on the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in general. The twenty-six selections are sufficiently detailed and lengthy to present distinct arguments and points of view, but not overly long or obscure. The goal is to present succinctly a variety of opinions in the fields of African and American slavery, and the Atlantic slave trade.

In a sophisticated and wide-ranging essay, David Brion Davis, the noted scholar of global slavery in all its guises, takes a broader view of the roots of slavery than either Williams or Jordan, who focus primarily on English colonies in the Americas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Davis demonstrates that slaves from Africa were used on sugar plantations in the Mediterranean prior to the Atlantic trade. As the West Indies, Brazil and other parts of the Americas opened up to sugar cultivation, the system of using African slaves spread across the Atlantic. According to Davis, innumerable local and
pragmatic choices, as well as historical precedents, were far more important than prejudice or racism in determining the nature of the trade. David Eltis, another respected scholar of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade, focuses on the cultural roots of African slavery, postulating that Europeans were predisposed, owing to a variety of cultural factors, to purchase Africans on a large scale for plantation and mine work in the Americas. These four essays raise interesting and provocative discussions, especially for American undergraduates who are familiar with racism, its legacy in the United States, and its destructive and divisive consequences even today.

Section Two addresses a critical and often misunderstood topic, i.e., slavery and the slave trade within Africa, prior to, during and after the Atlantic trade. The first piece, an excerpt from one of the earliest and most informative accounts of European explorations in Africa by the famous traveler Mungo Park, vividly describes the slave trade within the Senegambian region of West Africa in the 1790s. Men and women became slaves when taken as prisoners of war or in raids, although others lost their freedom as a result of famine (sometimes voluntarily selling themselves and/or their families into servitude), debt, or crimes (judicial enslavement). They were then either kept in the region, especially the women, or sold abroad. Park notes that such practices most likely predated the European presence along the coasts. P.E.H. Hair analyzes several slave narratives collected in the early nineteenth century by a German missionary in Sierra Leone which confirm many of Park's observations about indigenous slavery and enslavement. Joseph Miller's selection is from his acclaimed study of the Angolan slave trade, and provides a gripping and mesmerizing account of the long, painful and deadly trek from the interior to the coastal ports where enslaved people were held awaiting the arrival of the slave ships. He emphasizes the loss of life within Africa, a figure that cannot be calculated, owing to the lack of records and reliable demographic data, but which, considering the conditions, was unquestionably massive. Joseph Inikori addresses the fundamental and controversial issue of the "gun-slave cycle" and its role in the slave trade. Many European manufactured goods were traded for slaves, but especially in the eighteenth century as the slave trade reached its peak, guns became the most commonly traded commodity. In certain instances, Europeans would only trade guns, much in demand by coastal African kingdoms seeking to spread their hegemony inland and also capture more people, for slaves. In other cases, Africans dictated the terms of trade, demanding guns from European traders for the much sought after slaves. In either scenario, firearm imports stimulated the intense warfare to obtain slaves that paid for the guns. The most important slave-exporting region in the eighteenth century, the Slave Coast, was also the largest firearm importer.

The subject of warfare and slavery is also taken up by John Thomton in an excellent excerpt from his larger and influential work published elsewhere. Warfare and slavery existed in Africa prior to the introduction of the Atlantic slave trade. Once the trade expanded and the demand for slaves increased dramatically, some observers have speculated that African rulers led expeditions primarily for the purpose of gathering slaves, while others have stipulated that slaves were a by-product of raids and warfare that would have occurred regardless of whether or not there was an external trade. Thornton demonstrates convincingly that African participation in the trade was voluntary
and under the control of Africans who responded to the seemingly inexhaustible European demands for slaves. African economic concerns, rather than European pressure or policies, contributed to increased warfare and use of firearms in the eighteenth century.

Part Three presents various views of the actual Atlantic crossing, or the Middle Passage. The first selection is from the celebrated eighteenth-century account of Olaudah Equiano, a West African boy kidnapped by other Africans in the interior and eventually carried to the coast for sale into the Atlantic trade. Equiano was one of the few enslaved people to gain his freedom, return to West Africa and write a published narrative of his ordeals and ultimate triumph. His immensely popular and most readable narrative works extremely well in undergraduate classes. Here he describes in riveting and first-hand detail his experience of the Middle Passage. The next selection is by a nineteenth-century British abolitionist, Thomas F. Buxton, whose grisly account, based on eyewitnesses and official sources, was designed to turn public sentiment against the trade. Philip Curtin, more than any previous historian, examined available records to offer an estimate of the number of Africans landed overseas in the Americas, and their origins and destinations, during the duration of the trade. His estimate of between twelve and fifteen million, based on reliable data rather than raw emotion or speculation, has generally withstood constant attempts at revision. His piece reveals well for students how a historian works with primary sources, especially official records and figures, rather than relying on earlier, secondary speculations. Herbert Klein likewise relies on solid, primary data to propose that the financial losses and profits from the slave trade were much smaller than the rough guesses of earlier historians. David Eltis and David Richardson, also working directly with primary sources, confirm the accuracy of many of Curtin's conclusions, and also show that deaths on the Middle Passage were lower than many abolitionists had estimated. As with Curtin and Klein, these two authors use careful calculations based on contemporary documents and figures in their conclusions.

Part Five continues the examination of the trade's effects by focusing on Europe and the Americas. Eric Williams argues forcefully that the industrial revolution in late eighteenth-century Britain was directly attributable to its participation in the slave trade and the investment of profits in newly emerging industries. He also links the abolitionist effort to the rise of a new industrial class in Britain. Seymour Drescher directly addresses William's thesis and concludes that the data and subsequent research do not support a direct link between the rise of an industrial Europe and the Atlantic slave trade. On a much different note, Gwendolyn Hall examines a Bambara, West African community in Louisiana that retained a close national identity under both French and Spanish rule, while Philip Morgan suggests that the vast majority of African slave communities in the Americas were too diverse to recreate a single cultural identity. He emphasizes dynamic cultural innovations and borrowing over retention. These two readings offer several points for discussion on the topic of how "African" modern-day African-American culture and identity have remained.

The final part deals with abolition. Adrian Hastings rightfully insists that Africans and African Americans, including Olaudah Equiano, played much more significant roles in the abolitionist effort than previously understood or documented. The next selection
presents excerpts from the correspondence of two West Africa leaders, Osei Bonsu of Asante and Evo Honesty II of Old Calabar, who vigorously protested the British abolition of slavery. Students find these impassioned pleas for the continuation of the slave trade unexpected and startling. Both West African leaders argue that Europeans introduced large-scale enslavement and that their power rested on the ability to capture and sell slaves to Europeans.

Like the Diene volume, this book does not have an index or comprehensive bibliography but it does contain a very useful section on suggestions for further readings that is invaluable for undergraduates interested in doing further research on particular topics. In conclusion, both these edited volumes contribute to the discussion of the various aspects of slavery in Africa and the Americas and, most importantly, the origins, course and impacts of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. These collections are not the last word on the subject, nor should they be. Much work remains to be done on this critical issue in global history and Third World studies.

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