

Introduction

Atlantic/Africa

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This book explores the connections between two bodies of scholarship that have developed separately from one another. On the one hand, the “second slavery” perspective has reinterpreted the relation of Atlantic slavery and capitalism by emphasizing the extraordinary expansion of new frontiers of slave commodity production—cotton in the US South, sugar in Cuba, and coffee in Brazil during the nineteenth century—and their role in the economic, social, and political transformations of the nineteenth-century world-economy. On the other hand, Africanist scholarship has demonstrated the expansion, redirection, and restructuring of slavery in Africa and its role in the formation of new, and in some instances, revolutionary states associated with the end of the Atlantic slave trade.

Despite their independent development, these two historiographical approaches raise a number of problems that are deeply interconnected. In order to facilitate and structure the integration of these two literatures, this introduction sketches out a conceptual framework that engages the problems posed by the interrelation of their historical interpretations. The approach presented here is not a simple comparison between two independent slave systems. Rather, it examines the changing position of each slave complex within the capitalist world-economy and their interrelations in the economic and political transformations of the nineteenth century. By examining these two bodies of scholarship from the perspective of the capitalist world-system, we are able to trace the inner connections between the second slavery,

slavery in Africa, and what Karl Polanyi has termed the “Great Transformation” of the European economy. Through this procedure it is possible to situate these particular regional histories in world-economic processes. We may then spatially and temporally specify local slave systems in Africa and in the Americas as parts of the historical transformation of the nineteenth-century world-economy while at the same time delineating the constellation of structures and processes historically forming the world-economy itself.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the widening and deepening of industrial production; urbanization and population growth; new patterns of consumption by middle-class and working-class consumers; the development of competitive mass markets for industrial goods, raw materials, and food products; the introduction of railroads, steamships, and canals; decolonization and the consolidation of national states on both sides of the Atlantic as well as colonial expansion in Africa and Asia; and the rise of abolitionism and liberalism reconfigured the capitalist world-system. The Congress of Vienna of 1815 and the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 frame the economic and political conjuncture of this “Great Transformation.” Vienna established the European state system under British hegemony. It provided the political-legal framework not only for relations among states but also for the development of the world market and industrialization. The Berlin Conference provided a global division of territorial control and influence that consolidated that world order.

Both the African and Atlantic slave complexes underwent transformation as part of the profound geographical, economic, and political expansion and restructuring of the capitalist world-economy in the course of the nineteenth century. They had been deeply implicated in one another through the Atlantic slave trade for several centuries. Nonetheless, they remained distinct systems. Atlantic slavery had been an integral part of the European world-economy since its inception, while Africa was not incorporated into the European world-economy except as a source of unfree labor. Even though Africa had provided enslaved manpower for European colonization of the Atlantic since the sixteenth century, factors of production in Africa were not configured in ways that subordinated the continent to the control of European capital and state power as a space of commodity production, exchange, and consumption. African economic and political structures retained their regional integrity and autonomy in the face of the Atlantic slave trade, and the internal African slave trade and slavery operated to a large extent independently from it. Africanist scholarship has nonetheless established the importance of slavery and

slave trading in Africa to the political, economic, and social organization of African societies during the nineteenth century. In Africa slaves were deployed in a variety of economic, social, and political roles. They were key to the acquisition of power, wealth, and prestige for African polities and they played a central role in long-distance trade, both as a means of transport and as merchandise. Slavery within Africa coexisted with the Atlantic slave trade. However, the internal slave trade and slavery enabled African economic and political structures to maintain their integrity and autonomy in the face of the Atlantic slave trade.

In the Americas industrialization, free markets, and decolonization created the conditions for the second slavery and the strengthening of the transatlantic slave trade to Cuba and Brazil. The old zones of colonial slavery declined relative to the expansion of the world-economy, and slavery was abolished in them sometimes progressively and other times through abrupt violent change. They were superseded by new, extended geographical zones of slavery that presupposed and further developed the emergent industrial division of labor. Slave relations in the US cotton frontier, the Cuban sugar frontier, and the Brazilian coffee frontier were restructured as masses of slaves were transported to these new zones and incorporated into new labor processes. Between 1815 and 1850 the transatlantic slave trade approached the highest level in its history, but enslaved Africans were transported overwhelmingly to the new commodity frontiers in Brazil and Cuba, while US expansion was fed largely through domestic migration. The scale of production in each zone increased continuously. New industrial production and transportation technologies were adopted. They kept pace with ever-increasing demand and drove down the price of these key industrial raw materials and foodstuffs. Atlantic trade was restructured. Raw cotton from the United States was exported to Britain and to a lesser extent retained within the domestic economy, while the US became the leading importer of Cuban sugar and Brazilian coffee. The volume of production and trade and the restructuring of markets and states integrated the new slave zones more closely than ever into the new industrial division of labor. Beyond the Atlantic, commodity production was reorganized in the Dutch East Indies in ways that were analogous to the second slavery in the Americas and were part of the same movement of world-economic expansion.

However, abolition of the slave trade was also integral to the transformation of the nineteenth century. As part of the Congress of Vienna, Britain insisted that ending the international slave trade was a key provision of the new order. The destruction of the colonial system and the formation of independent states

in the Americas meant the nationalization of the slavery issue. Consequently, the abolition of slavery became a problem of national, not colonial politics. Cuba, of course, remained a colony, but with considerable autonomy with respect to Spain, and after 1815 the slavery issue in colonial Cuba became analogous to a national question. Britain's strategy of abolishing the slave trade put pressure on the internal slave regimes of Cuba and Brazil. At the same time, securing abolition of the trade by the consent of the slaveholding states was a means of establishing stable market relations and a political-legal order between sovereign states under British hegemony. After mid-century, the suppression of the Atlantic slave trade severed the direct ties between the Americas and Africa and produced opposite effects on each slave complex on the two sides of the Atlantic.

In the Americas, the ending of the transatlantic slave trade to Cuba and Brazil in combination with the violent destruction of slavery in the US Civil War and the depression of the 1870s marked the crisis and decline of the second slavery. Cuba and Brazil were cut off from renewed supplies of manpower from the African trade, while political, economic, and social pressures made the reproduction of the slave system in each country more difficult and contested. The rate of expansion of sugar and coffee production slowed. In the US reconstruction of cotton production after the Civil War was oriented toward the expansion of a national market rather than the export market. Slave emancipation first in Cuba in 1886 and then in Brazil in 1888, the last country in the western hemisphere to end chattel slavery, brought the conjuncture of the second slavery to an end. With the end of slavery in the Americas, the countries of the second slavery were firmly integrated into the world division of labor through the state system and the world market, which provided the framework for the further growth of commodity production. Each was able to develop new internal commodity frontiers and restructure the labor force—migrant labor in Brazil, tenancy and sharecropping in US cotton cultivation in the South, and a racialized rural proletariat in Cuba. Each continued to be a major producer of its particular crop well into the twentieth century.

In Africa the progressive suppression of the Atlantic slave trade had stimulated the growth of slavery and the reorientation of the internal slave trade and other commercial activity toward North Africa, East Africa, and the Indian Ocean, and most importantly toward internal domestic employment as African elites attempted to compensate for the loss of the Atlantic trade. In West Africa this expansion and restructuring of the slave trade supported the rise of the Sokoto Caliphate and other Muslim states formed in jihad, each of which attempted to restrict the

slave trade to non-Muslims. Other polities in both West Africa and East Africa diverted their participation in the slave trade as well as slave production into new commodity markets. African political elites, particularly in West Africa, promoted peasantization in order to take advantage of new commercial opportunities presented by the “legitimate trade” that followed the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. The growth of independent African states and an African slave system was, however, an obstacle to the further expansion of the European world-economy. The incorporation of Africa into the capitalist world-economy entailed dismantling the independent initiatives taken in Africa after the abolition of the external slave trade. It was achieved through the imposition of formal colonial control and the subordination of African societies to the economic and political interests of the colonizing powers of Europe. The need to suppress slavery in Africa was then used as a justification of European colonialism. Abolitionist ideology was mobilized against slavery in Africa and became a part of Europe’s “civilizing mission.” The agreement that nominally partitioned Africa among the European powers took place at the Berlin Conference in 1884–1885, which immediately preceded the abolition of slavery in Brazil.

The second slavery consolidated the processes of decolonization and the integration of the Americas into the new world division of labor, state system, and world market. In Africa the growth of the internal slave trade and of independent states was the justification for European colonial expansion and the forced integration of Africa into the European world-economy. These two distinct but interlinked processes provided the platform for the New Imperialism and the Second Industrial Revolution of the 1870s and 1880s. The approach presented here at once situates particular histories in global processes and reconstructs the temporal rhythms and spatial configurations forming the world-economy itself. Taken together, these two movements enable us to delineate the processes forming the capitalist world-economy, establish its specific geographical and historical structure, and reintegrate Africa into the transformations in the world-economy. The chapters in this volume explore this paradigm at diverse levels ranging from state formation and the reorganization of world markets to the creation of new social roles and identities.

This volume grows out of a conference held at Binghamton University’s Fernand Braudel Center to honor Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, a pioneering historian of Africa whose commitment, passion, and generosity have made her an inspiration, example, and mentor to others, including many of those who have contributed to this volume. We wish to thank Sven Beckert and Michael Zeuske for their help in

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