

A Rhetorical Continuum? How Representations of Antebellum Slavery Endure in Post-War Culture

The economic, social, political and cultural legacy of chattel slavery in the United States in the era immediately following the end of the Civil War has been explored by scholars for at least a century, and the magnitude of the tremors caused by abolishing the system, and by the military conflict required to do this, cannot be underestimated. In this chapter, the evolving intersection between labour and race are explored, because the seeds of post-war discourse often had their origins in the ways that the concept of slavery was contested in the antebellum era. After the war, the United States as a nation, and white and black Americans as communities and individuals, had to come to terms with the fact that chattel slavery was no longer legal in the country and was now outlawed in the document that had become the repository for the nation's identity: the Constitution. As the Thirteenth Amendment stated, 'neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as the punishment of a crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States or any place subject to their jurisdiction'. However, amending political and legal frameworks to outlaw chattel slavery could not change, overnight, the attitudes of American people who had been mired in the rhetorical and military struggle to such an extent that radical positions on both the pro- and antislavery sides had, in less than a generation, become firmly entrenched. As chattel slavery and the abolition movement became part of history and thus increasingly embedded in the realms of nostalgia and memory, they simultaneously remained a live issue, because their legacy impacted on emerging labour systems and race relations to such an extent that many Americans, of various ethnic backgrounds who were victims of white hegemonic power, experienced the continuation of slavery-like

systems of control and organisation, variously depicted as a symbolic slavery, as akin to slavery or worse than chattel slavery. Along with nostalgic views of antebellum chattel slavery, these combined to let white Americans off the hook, allowing them to avoid adopting an anti-slavery ideology and leading to a nadir in race relations.

Antebellum chattel slavery operated as an archetype with which all other forced labour systems were compared. Its symbolic language of whips, auction blocks, bloodhounds and chains was co-opted by commentators debating the moral and economic advantages and disadvantages of new forced labour forms. Antebellum abolitionist ideas also had a long afterlife in the post-war period, morphing into new campaigns about other types of injustice, or recycled to discuss the painful legacy of chattel slavery in the United States. For some commentators, slavery was a rhetorical tool with which, through comparison, to evoke horror about the worst sorts of violence a human being could perpetrate on another, or to justify a particular type of labour because, while problematic, it was not as bad as chattel slavery. For others, despite legal and political changes, its horrors still stalked the nation. Importantly, these uses showed that chattel slavery for many, not all, became an outdated form of labour relation, an example of behaviour that now 'others', and not Americans, did. However, ambivalent views existed, as after the Civil War not all Americans rejected the use of chattel slavery in its entirety, but, increasingly, its use on American soil was seen as unacceptable in the present and consigned to the past.

Echoes of chattel slavery permeated post-war conceptions of free and forced labour in two areas: in discussions of domestic and of international labour systems. The domestic impact of the rhetoric of chattel slavery and abolition was threefold. First, mentions of slavery appeared in literature in general terms, evoked by authors discussing the potential for cultural and social reconciliation of the once-slave-holding states within the United States, to create a new post-war nation as, for the people of all races and both genders, the boundaries of the concept of freedom were tested. Second, the rhetoric of chattel slavery was deployed by campaigners and victims, and defenders and perpetrators, of the forced labour systems that formed part of the pernicious legacy of distorted relations between the races: debt bondage and convict labour. Campaigners and victims compared these labour forms to slavery, saying that they were equivalent to slavery, worse than slavery or proved that slavery itself had never been abolished. Perpetrators and defenders used the model of chattel slavery to distance their own behaviour or beliefs from those seen as

heinous following the Thirteenth Amendment. Third, the rhetorical legacy of chattel slavery appeared in discussions about immigration to frame anti-immigrant discourse, especially regarding Chinese labour. In this case, the choice to label migrants as slaves or victims of slavery was made in order to deter their entry to the United States. Using the idea that the nation now wanted to define itself as a bastion of antislavery, alongside Britain and other European nations, commentators suggested that allowing bonded labourers such as the Chinese into the country would racially and economically degrade the United States. Here, antislavery was used rhetorically to defend the racial status quo, to exclude workers, most of whom were not forced labourers, and to promote nativist causes.

In debates over labour systems outside the continental United States, chattel slavery was used to redefine the position of the post-war nation in a global context. Far from refusing to acknowledge the United States' slave past, many imperialist writers were keen to fashion a nation emerging from the pain of the Civil War with its legacy of slavery and abolition adopting a new role as an international antislavery power. Activists anticipated the evolution of a new humanitarianism, built on campaigning models from prior to the Civil War. Protests and discussion about slavery in Egypt during the 1840s informed the types of activism seen in the post-Civil War era, and during the Congo crisis at the turn of the twentieth century. For writers about slavery in these parts of Africa, and elsewhere, the transatlantic slave trade and antebellum chattel slavery were models for comparison and archetypes through which discussions might be encouraged about forced labour in all other times and places. Despite a hesitant interest in Africa, the United States came of age as a world power during this era, and its contact with new forms of labour and systems of racial control in the settler colony of Hawaii, and its imperial conquest of the Philippines, was influenced by an understanding of forced labour in the light of antebellum chattel slavery. As in the domestic context, comparisons were used to either justify American complicity in coercive labour, or to 'other' particular racial groups as perpetrators of slavery and therefore uncivilised compared to the Americans who had so recently jettisoned their own ties to the system.

This chapter will trace the ways in which chattel slavery and its abolition movement became rhetorically both part of history and yet still alive in discourse within the United States. It will follow how modes, symbolism and themes concerning slavery and abolition were deliberately deployed following the war to make a symbolic new nation, to enable white Americans to reconcile as a community while excluding

and alienating others, and to allow African Americans to come to terms with a different type of belonging, not to a master but to community and nation. Starting with abolition, the chapter explores how memories of the movement were manipulated by those seeking, after the war, to campaign in new ways and that while, in some ways, abolitionism was brought to a close by the Civil War, its messages and modes were reframed by new activists. There is also a continuum in the anti-abolitionist rhetoric, as ongoing accusations of abolitionists' selective compassion targeted campaigners working after the Civil War, as well as before.

After the war, the continued stridency of anti-abolition rhetoric is only one example of the power of pro-slavery ideas. Nostalgic and distorted memories of antebellum slavery had tremendous power and served an important function of healing the wounds of the Civil War, of granting the south authority in dealing with 'race problems' and of creating a new sense of unity defined by race, in effect creating a new community of whiteness. This was done by focusing on the romanticised plantation past in which the significance of place, more than people, echoed across time, but also by deploying stereotyping that elevated African American servitude to mythic levels. Pro-slavery rhetoric both before the war and since also served to challenge the binary between free and bonded labour, suggesting that free labour was often akin to enslavement. After the war, especially in the south, law enforcement and legislative systems of control responded to extreme abuses, such as murder or re-enslavement of African Americans, in similar ways to how sadistic violence against the enslaved had been treated under slavery. Morally upstanding southerners wanted to be seen to root out transgressors without overtly challenging the system that allowed such abuses to happen. Underpinning these trends are Social Darwinist views about racial hierarchy that also represented a continuum from the antebellum era. By the later nineteenth century, polygenesis was broadly discredited, but the roots of Jim Crow racism can be traced to influential antebellum literature on polygenesis such as that by anthropologist Samuel Morton and slave owner Josiah Nott, and by Louis Agassiz on enslaved individuals in South Carolina. After the Civil War, such views were also applied to new groups domestically and globally. Thus, chattel slavery informed the work of these theorists, which was then applied to other racial groups, domestically and globally, when theorising the necessity of forced labour or their tendency to trade in slaves because of racial weakness. The significance of this discourse will be explored more fully in Chapter 3; here the focus is on antebellum and postbellum continuities.

THE LEGACY OF ABOLITION

The discourse and rhetoric used on both sides of the Atlantic by the abolition movement had an important afterlife through its impact on the nascent international humanitarian movement. The practical legacy of the abolition movement is contested; much of the campaigning impulse dissipated after the American Civil War, with only a nostalgia for the heyday of the movement remaining, as activists, triggered by pamphlet or newspaper journalism, turned their attention away from slavery and towards other causes. But in other ways, within the United States, the perceived relevance of the abolition movement never entirely evaporated and throughout the post-emancipation period many reformers continued to acknowledge abolition of slavery, whether domestically or globally or both, as a live issue. Many abolitionists stopped talking about slavery-like working conditions in the United States but continued to see the movement's relevance as the United States' sphere of influence expanded in both the Pacific and Atlantic regions. An example of this is the important impact of antebellum-era abolitionist rhetoric and its anti-imperialist adaption in American discussions of the Congo, calling for reform of a colonial system that permitted torture and enslavement of black Africans. Especially pertinent is the reporting of missionary activities exposing the situation in the Congo in 1903. The *Lexington Gazette* proudly reprinted a report from London concerning a Lexington missionary, the Reverend W. M. Morrison, whose travels 'fully confirms the story of the abuses in the Congo Nation ... his personal investigation shows that the situation is growing daily worse ... as a result of the rubber monopoly's introduction of forced labour, virtually amounting to slavery'.¹ However, it is too simplistic to consider the change of use of abolitionist rhetoric during the nineteenth century from addressing domestic slavery prior to the Civil War, and then global slavery following it. Antebellum activists, influenced by the British antislavery activism of organisations such as the British and Foreign Antislavery Society, recognised that the struggle against slavery, while predominantly focused on the United States, always had to take into consideration the pernicious presence of slavery everywhere.

Moderate abolitionists' ideas were rhetorically distorted for conservative or radical purposes before emancipation and this continued in the

¹ *Lexington Gazette*. (Lexington, Va.), 06 May 1903. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/n84024716/1903-05-06/ed-1/seq-2/>.

era after the war. The themes of the definitions of enslavement and freedom, the boundaries of coercion and the limits of different labour types were manipulated by commentators to show that many abolitionists had been hypocritical, too selective or lacking ambition. The conditions and experiences of enslavement of antebellum chattel slavery were compared favourably to other labour types in order to show that abolitionists had been deliberately or subconsciously in error to target it. Also, the persistent rhetoric about slavery almost always contained explicit or implicit commentary about the abolition movement, sometimes laudatory, sometimes critical. As William Green has argued in the case of abolition in the British Caribbean, the abolition movement continued to be relevant and contentious throughout the nineteenth century, because the success or failure of the movement was not judged on whether slavery had indeed been eradicated, but rather on whether the labour regime and systems of economic distribution that succeeded plantation slavery met the global trading needs.² The significance of the legacy of the abolition movement, the revivification of the memories of its antebellum activities, which for so long had been discredited and perceived as on the radical fringe of American political life, is that it helped frame most late nineteenth-century American discourse about slavery.

ANTISLAVERY CONTINUITIES

In the late nineteenth century, antislavery rhetoric was adopted by those campaigning for both increased and decreased American involvement in overseas territories. The broad church of abolitionism was welcoming to those of dichotomous political persuasions. As Ian Tyrrell has shown, post-Civil War reformers increasingly began to view their activism in terms of imperial rather than national agendas. He views the antislavery impulse as an unimportant part of the American reform tradition after the Civil War, as abolitionist aims were transferred to the women's movement.³ In Chapter 5 of this book, I explore how the rhetoric of race and enslavement was an important part of anti-trafficking

² William Green, 'Plantation Society and Indentured Labour: the Jamaican Case 1834-1865', in P. C. Emmer, ed., *Colonialism and Migration: Indentured Labour Before and After Slavery* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), p. 165.

³ Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: the Creation of America's Modern Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 4, 19.

campaigning, as 'white slavery' became the chosen term for campaigners seeking to motivate the American public to act against forced and voluntary prostitution. Jane Addams, a prominent campaigner from Chicago against 'white slavery', explicitly drew parallels between her work and that of abolitionists, suggesting that the model of a first wave of extremists demanding immediate abolition who were then gradually joined by a second wave of moderates was repeating itself in the attempts to abolish 'white slavery'.⁴ John Cumbler concurs with Tyrrell, showing that only Wendell Phillips saw a continuum between pre- and postbellum activism and argued that conditions required the persistence of an American abolition movement.⁵ Evidence from the 1874 'Committee of the Anti-Slavery Reunion', proposed in Chicago, suggested that many former abolitionists saw their role as an historic rather than contemporary one. The organisation sent an announcement to abolitionists in London, explaining that they intended to hold a reunion encouraging them to 'embrace a review of the past ... a discussion of the lives of abolitionists ... recital of reminiscences ... singing the songs of liberty'.⁶ Other scholars have argued that in the post-Civil war period, the people of the United States grew less concerned with Africa and its slave trade and that a conceptual break occurred at the moment of the demise of chattel slavery.⁷ But while abolitionist activists and their cause may have waned in importance after the war, the influence of their methods and rhetoric, and memories of their successes and failures, continued to be felt.

One important flourishing of abolitionism in the late nineteenth century was the Congo Reform movement. It was led in the United States by campaigners such as the African American activists George Washington Williams and Booker T. Washington, the latter of whom was vice president of the Congo Reform Association and was also the American with the greatest interest in Africa during this period. According to Edward Chester, the most significant influence of the abolitionist tradition was an anti-imperialist one.⁸ Much of the anti-imperialist discourse was racist

⁴ Jane Addams, *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil* (New York, 1912), p. 7.

⁵ John T. Cumbler, *From Abolition to Rights for All* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 1.

⁶ Announcement from Committee of the Anti-Slavery Reunion, Chicago 28/3/1874, MSS Brit Emp. S. 22/G 85, United States 1853-97 folder, Bodleian Library Special Collections.

⁷ Edward Chester, *Clash of Titans: Africa and US Foreign Policy* (Orbis Books, 1974), p. 22; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Verso, 1998), p. 55.

⁸ Michael Patrick Cullinane, *Liberty and American Anti-imperialism* (Palgrave, 2012); Chester, *Clash of Titans*, p. 176.

and exclusionary, but Williams and Edmund Morel employed the language of egalitarianism, emphasising the humanity of the African victims of Leopold's regime, calling for legislative and political change to help the weak, as well as deploying abolitionist tactics describing the dehumanising effects of such a regime on its white perpetrators, just as campaigners had had to do when confronting antebellum chattel slavery.⁹ Morel, for example, recollected the heroism of the abolition movement, and the way that 'that wickedness' had been terminated by those 'few men who after incredible difficulty, heart breaking set-backs and soul-tearing toil, with pen and voice succeeded in raising the conscience of the world'; nonetheless, he wrote, 'the virus has spread'.¹⁰

However, it is wrong to assert, as did early historians of Anglo-American abolitionism Annie Abel and Frank Klingsberg, that while the British abolition movement was wide ranging in scope, the American focus was 'narrowly provincial'.¹¹ During the antebellum period, while mostly focusing on its own internal turmoil, the United States' abolition movement did attend to slavery in a global context and a sense of the transatlantic brotherhood of abolition persisted after the end of the Civil War, although some British abolitionists feared the waning of interest in the United States. In 1880, British abolitionist Joseph Cooper wrote, 'we must feel grateful to our few American friends who are exerting themselves, but those who thus act are a small minority. I think many do little and fear that more do nothing'. These concerns were shared by some African American correspondents. In 1893, Archibald Johnson wrote that 'the American colored is having a very hard time of it just now', and that he 'will like to hear that their old English friends stand by them and are true and faithful'.¹² The fear that African Americans were being abandoned by some of their white American abolitionist friends was exacerbated by the creation of myths of resistance such as the Underground Railroad that were entirely predicated on white heroism, with little attention paid or credit given to resistance of the enslaved.¹³

⁹ George Washington Williams, *A Report upon the Congo State and Country to the President of the Republic of the United States of America* (n.d.).

¹⁰ Edmund D. Morel, *The Congo Slave State: A Protest against the New African Slavery* (Liverpool, 1903), p. 5.

¹¹ Annie Abel and Frank Klingsberg, eds., *A Side Light on Anglo-American Relations 1839–58* (Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1929), p. 111.

¹² Letter dated 13 Jan. 1880 from Joseph Cooper, Essex Hall, Walthamstow, to 'My Dear Friend', and Letter dated 1 Aug. 1893 from Archibald Johnson to 'Dear Sir', MSS Brit Emp. S. 22/G 85, United States 1853–97 folder, Bodleian Library Special Collections.

¹³ Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: the Legend of the Underground Railroad* (University of Kentucky Press, reprint edition, 1996).

This crafting of an heroic white abolitionist narrative was one of the domestic contributory factors to the new pro-imperialist antislavery ideology, complementing the European-driven humanitarian impulse mimicked by the Americans.

Through an examination of consular correspondence and travel narratives, Ahmed E. Elbashir has shown that the United States' diplomats and newspaper readers had a lively interest in slavery and its abolition in East Africa and the Ottoman Empire prior to the Civil War.¹⁴ Despite Elbashir's acknowledgement of the ingrained ideas of rigid racial and class hierarchy which meant that travellers were often repulsed by the sight of the slaves themselves and not by the institution of slavery, the influence of antislavery thinking on some of the authors he surveys was compelling. One such was American explorer John Lloyd Stevens, who, in the 1830s, recognised the basic humanity of the enslaved men and women he encountered at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.¹⁵ This type of humanitarianism persisted after the Civil War, often involving a direct remembrance of pre-war abolitionism. James Blount's historical account, published in a pamphlet in 1913 on the American occupation of the Philippines, issued a call to Americans to take up their imperial burden, and also made an explicit call to remember the abolitionist example, reminding his readers that Abraham Lincoln 'kept vigil for four years at the bedside of a sick nation through all the long agony of its efforts to throw off from its system the inherited curse of slavery. Of course human slavery was a relic of barbarism'.¹⁶ But abolitionism was not only a powerful force in the minds of those who supported its cause. Its legacy remained alive for more conservative commentators, too.

ANTI-ABOLITION CONTINUITIES

Rhetoric deployed to challenge the methods or ideology of the abolition movement also existed in a continuum linking the periods before and after the Civil War, and writers in both eras contextualised this anti-abolition agenda using international labour concerns. George Fitzhugh was one of the most influential of the pro-slavery writers working prior to the Civil War. He was beloved by his fellow defenders of the peculiar institution

¹⁴ Ahmed E. Elbashir, *The United States, Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Nile Valley* (University Press of America, 1983).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁶ James H. Blount, *American Occupation of the Philippines 1898–1912* (Putnam's, 1913, reprint Malay Books, 1968), p. 693.

and attacked vociferously by abolitionists. Much of the work focuses on Fitzhugh's arguments about the benefits of slavery to global economies and its superiority to so-called free labour, which he calls 'White Slavery', as a labour system.

But it is Fitzhugh's vilifications of abolitionist aims in a global context that are crucial, because these ideas, though often under-represented by scholars, became an important feature of the conservative stories told about the role abolition played in America's past. Fitzhugh based his critique of abolitionism on a challenge to the personal morality of those espousing its cause. He called them 'infidels', ethnically othering them because since the early modern period the term had been applied by Christians predominantly to those of other faiths in the Islamic and Jewish worlds. But the usage also reached back to the medieval etymology of the word meaning 'unfaithful' or 'not to be trusted'.¹⁷ Fitzhugh challenged the selective compassion of abolitionists, who, he said, focused on American chattel slavery for their own nefarious political purposes, and did not pay any attention to forced labour scenarios elsewhere:

Abolition never arose till negro slavery was instituted and now abolition is only directed against negro slavery. There is no philanthropic crusade attempting to set free the white slaves of Eastern Europe and of Asia. The world then is prepared for the defense of slavery in the abstract – it is prejudiced only against negro slavery.¹⁸

In a moment of foresight, Fitzhugh predicted that the abolitionists' activities would cause 'a civil and fratricidal war', but also suggested that neglect by abolitionists of the cause of global slavery would lead to the perpetuation of it as a system of labour elsewhere: 'whilst they are engaged in this labour of love, Northern and English merchants are rapidly extending and increasing slavery by opening daily markets for the purchase and sale of Coolies, apprentices and Africans'. Thus, he lamented, 'abolitionists have become the most efficient propagandists of slavery and the slave trade'.¹⁹ Writing a generation later, revealing that many seemed to have short memories regarding slavery, Francis Newman concurred with Fitzhugh's assessment, stating that, by 1889, many people knew little of 'negro slavery' and they assumed that abolition had been a failure because it had led to the emergence of 'modified slavery' such as indentured labour.²⁰ Also building on Fitzhugh's themes, J. A. Moloney, a British

¹⁷ George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All! Or Slaves without Masters* (originally 1857, this edition Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 35.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 200. ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 232–3.

²⁰ Francis Newman, *Anglo-Saxon Abolition of Negro Slavery* (London, 1889), pp. 2, 36.

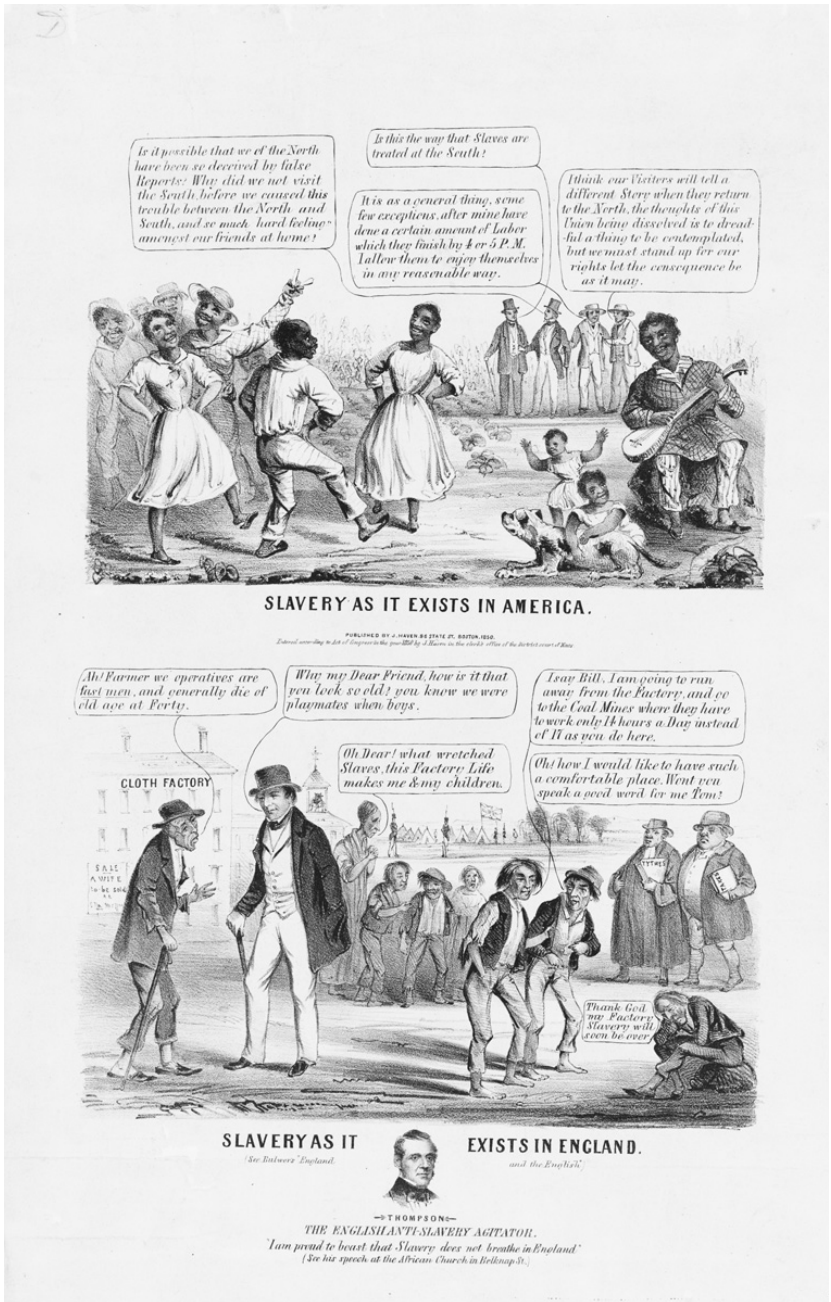


FIGURE 1 'Slavery as it exists in England, Slavery as it exists in America', lithographic print by John Haven, printed Boston 1850. Library of Congress.

traveller in Africa, observed what he considered to be a tolerable form of slavery in which 'the slave of a powerful Arab will frequently own numerous drudges of his own'. Moloney, writing in 1893, showed the long-term influence of antebellum abolitionism because he blamed writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and her seminal work *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for misleading the public as to the nature of slavery. '*Uncle Tom's Cabin* should be banished from the mind', argued Moloney.²¹ Henry Nevinson, usually a sympathiser with the abolitionist aim to end all forms of slavery, argued that not only was the rhetoric of some abolitionists misleading, but they were also hypocritical, because they were willing to abandon their principles for profit. Those who used to be abolitionists, he wrote, 'have all become tamer now and more ready to show consideration for human failings, provided they pay'.²²

A generation later, the same themes are evident in the work of Marxist thinker Walter Wilson, who also used the flexible definitions of slave and free labour to criticise what he saw as the hypocrisy of the abolition movement. Wilson's overriding aim was to defend the Soviet Union against accusations of the use of forced labour by showing how prevalent it was elsewhere, and, in doing so, he conducted an important expose into the types of unfree labour still existing in the United States in the 1930s. However, as a Marxist, he felt that any form of labour exploitation amounted to slavery and, in neglecting to challenge the capitalist system, antislavery activists, prior to the American Civil War and after, had been naïve and left a job unfinished. In every capitalist country, he argued, 'free' wage labour and direct forced labour exist side by side.²³ But he went further and accused antislavery campaigners of consciously behaving hypocritically by seeming to launch humanitarian campaigns for the rights of the most vulnerable, while their true motivation was to source the 'more efficient type of labour . . . needed to man the new industries in the colonies'.²⁴ As explored in Chapter 2, this critique of the post-emancipation antislavery movement owed much to the new imperialist conditions emerging during this period as the United States sought to build an international reputation for itself partly modelled on that of the European nations such as Britain. But crucially, it also built on a long tradition of anti-abolition rhetoric that emerged in the 1850s and

²¹ J. A. Moloney, *With Captain Stairs to Katanga* (London, 1893), p. 69.

²² Henry W. Nevinson, *A Modern Slavery* (London & New York, 1906), p. 43.

²³ Walter Wilson, *Forced Labour in the United States* (London, 1933), p. 18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

persisted in the post-Civil War era, which argued for the inadequacy, duplicity and insincerity of the abolition movement. By 1927, the global humanitarian campaign to address the continued existence of slavery and slavery-like labour acknowledged that the words of the heroes of abolition had a hollow ring, given the incomplete nature of their abolition, and showing the error of the view that 'brought up on the history of Wilberforce and Lincoln, most of us had comfortably assumed that slavery was a thing of the past'.²⁵ Explicitly anti-abolition discourse was but one of the tools used by writers to pursue a broader pro-slavery agenda before 1860, and there is also an important broader rhetorical continuum between antebellum pro-slavery writing and the themes that emerged after emancipation in the debates about slavery and forced labour.

THE LEGACY OF PRO-SLAVERY THINKING

As already shown, crucial to the rhetorical arsenal of pro-slavery thinkers was the idea of a mutable boundary between slave and free labour. They furthered the perception that the accepted definition of slave and free labour as dichotomous was misleading and erroneous, put forward by abolitionists who wished to dismantle successful and acceptable systems of control and order that had operated for generations. Robert Steinfeld has shown that commentators, in the United States and beyond, grappled with the evolving and often troubling idea of free labour, over the *longue durée*. He traces their struggle to conceptualise slavery from its evolution in the eighteenth century as an unusual labour form, involving far smaller numbers compared to indentured servitude, to its role, through the work of nineteenth century abolitionists, as the perceived opposite of freedom.²⁶ As explained in Chapter 4, during the mid to late nineteenth century, indentured servitude and other systems such as peonage were increasingly identified as forced labour types akin to slavery, but also prior to the Civil War, pro-slavery advocates, such as Fitzhugh, resisted the stark distinction between free and slave labour, using two rhetorical methods. By using comparison, showing that the lived experience of the enslaved was more comfortable than that of free labourers, which will be

²⁵ 'Slave or Free? Native Labour: An International Problem', Official Paper of the League of Nations, no. 23, Nov. 1927.

²⁶ Robert Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture 1350-1870* (University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 4-6.

explored in detail in the comparisons section later in this chapter, and also through trying to decontaminate the concept of slavery as a moral evil and render it as a preferable labour choice among many, all of which in some senses shared the characteristics of coercion. He argued that ‘free society asserts the right of a few to the earth – slavery maintains that it belongs in different degrees to all’.²⁷ His conception of the cyclical nature of history and the inevitability that the flawed era of emancipation would soon have to run its course led him to suggest that ‘the world will only fall back on domestic slavery when all other social forms have failed and been exhausted’.²⁸

George Fitzhugh was among many pro-slavery advocates who worked with the Freedmen’s Bureau after emancipation, and the influence of men such as he led Norbert Finzsch to suggest that both northern and southern military men were keen to find a quick solution to the labour problem of the south after the war and to find new ways to put the formerly enslaved to work. Thus, the Freedmen’s Bureau, while maintaining the conventional rhetorical dichotomy between slave and free, blurred the lines between the two labour systems as, after the war, many of the labour contracts secured for African Americans inaugurated a system of ‘compulsory free labour’: debt bondage reinforced by an extra-legal system of intimidation.²⁹ Debates over the definition and reality of freedom after emancipation also had a gendered aspect, as the ‘regime of contract’, as Amy Dru Stanley called it, also extended to enforcing new ideas of marriage and proper female roles in the newly freed population.³⁰ Many freedmen and women resisted the imposition of these notions, but other formerly enslaved men believed that their freedom was confirmed by the new possibility of subjugating their wives, a power that, despite the existence of monogamous relationships with the permission of some masters, had largely been denied them under the system of chattel slavery.³¹

The system of extra-legal intimidation that, in the eyes of southern whites, kept the African American population under control had its

²⁷ Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All*, p. 19. ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁹ ‘The End of Slavery, the Role of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the Introduction of Peonage’ in Ulrike Schmieder, Katja Füllberg-Stolberg & Michael Zeuske, eds., *The End of Slavery in Africa and the Americas. A Comparative Approach* (LIT Verlag, 2011), pp. 142–4.

³⁰ Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labour, Marriage and Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 36.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

origins in the antebellum period. Sally Hadden has shown that throughout the chattel slavery period slave owners employed white representatives to patrol, monitor and punish their enslaved property, but when, in the later years of the antebellum period, such mechanisms of control escalated into sadistic violence, the slave-owning hegemonic power wanted to show its paternalistic side and began to prosecute the white transgressors.³² South Carolina law enforcers demonstrated to one another their modernity and their civility by undertaking trials such as the prosecution and conviction of Thomas Motley and William Blackledge for the murder of an enslaved man in South Carolina in 1854.³³ Similarly, in the period after the war, acceptable controlling behaviour by the white population was rigidly defined by custom and shared assumptions. While few plantation owners challenged the appropriateness of black peon labour, and most considered their land to be their own fiefdom where they might enforce control, when such forced labour situations escalated into unwarranted extreme violence to the labourer, a line was drawn by the federal government. In Covington, Georgia, in 1921, in a still-insular plantation world in which white neighbours could turn a blind eye, and black peon labourers rarely left the property, John Williams became the first southern man to be convicted of first degree murder of a black man, although in fact he murdered ten, some of whom were killed by Clyde Manning, Williams's black overseer, forced to kill in order to save himself.³⁴

Such horrors were obviously underpinned by the virulent racist ideology of the Jim Crow era, which saw African Americans and people of many other races dismissed as inferior to whites in the rigid racial hierarchy. This system, although bolstered by new scientific thinking in the post-emancipation era had its origins in the racial ideology upon which chattel slavery was predicated. Mid-century works such as *Types of Mankind* published by Gliddon and Nott in 1854 were crucial to the thinking of pro-slavery apologists such as John C. Calhoun, but, after the war, also influenced popular, elite and intellectual attitudes towards other races, within the new United States imperial territories, on the continent itself and when observing the behaviour of 'others' across the

³² Sally Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Harvard University Press, 2003).

³³ For more on this case, see my chapter on 'Slave Hunting as Sport' in Andrew Dix and Peter Templeton, eds., *So the War Goes On: Violence and Its Representation in African American History from Slavery to Black Lives Matter* (Routledge, 2020).

³⁴ Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South 1901–1969* (Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 115, 126.

globe. George Gliddon's thinking was developed during his time spent in Egypt, while his co-author Josiah Nott spent his career furthering such attitudes as the inherent suitability of black Africans, seen by him as a separate species, for labouring in hot climate.³⁵ In Chapter 3 the influence and evolution of these racial theories will be traced in more detail, showing how anti-imperialists borrowed such discourse to argue that slavery perpetuated by other races could not be allowed to pollute the United States. Here, in this chapter, the importance of ideas fermenting prior to the Civil War and their legacy in the postbellum era will be documented.

Prior to the Civil War, the significance of theories of racial hierarchy to the discourse of slave ownership was fundamental. Carter Wilson has shown that psychologically, slave owners had to dehumanise their slaves in order to be able to consider themselves as good Christians while simultaneously alienating and brutalising human beings, which was essential under the slave system to the maintenance of law and order.³⁶ Thus the ideas of scientific racism helped slavery function on a community and individual level. But this does not mean that such ideas were immediately abandoned following the emancipation of slaves in the United States. Rather these ideas became more entrenched than ever and served to justify a new ideology of racial separateness and non-white political inadequacy, and performed a new but similar function, that of bolstering the reputation of white Americans as representatives of the nation on a global scale; whites who were now at the top of a globally defined rather than domestically defined hierarchy.

Prior to the Civil War, concepts of race had evolved from enlightenment notions of the mutability of race into a form of scientific racial determinism. Much of this debate focused on the differences rather than the similarities of the races, as theories of polygenesis, common since the early modern period, were challenged for the first time. Academic theories, such as the Great Chain of Being, were adapted to the political expediency of the time. An example is the ongoing genocidal treatment of Native Americans throughout this period, which was often justified using racial determinism. But it was the destiny of African Americans that was most obviously affected by such intellectual debates, as discussions about the moral value of slavery were closely linked to those about human

³⁵ William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes towards Race in America: 1815-59* (University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 62.

³⁶ Carter Wilson, *Racism from Slavery to Advanced Capitalism* (Sage, 1996), p. 35.

origins. Anthropologists such as Louis Agassiz posited that humankind did not develop from a single human couple, while Alexander Winchell countered, arguing that while black races were inferior to whites, they were not descended from Adam but predated him. Prior to the Civil War, such ideologies were used to underpin the Christian justification of and support for slavery (abolitionist discourse was heathen, according to George Armstrong), but after the war they were moulded to a more useful and expedient end to emphasise separateness as, domestically, miscegenation became the great fear.³⁷ Even commentators who criticised American racism, such as British traveller W. Laird Clowes who opined that ‘he sits on the grave of the red man, he has shut the door in the face of the yellow man . . . what shall he do with the black man from Africa?’, also wrote ‘you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear’, and suggested that black Africans were inherently child-like.³⁸ Other sympathetic commentators who appealed for racial equality, such as Henry Ward Beecher, the son of abolitionists, acknowledged the powerful rhetoric of those dividing the races, and in some senses excused the behaviour of white southerners. In a speech in 1876 at Plymouth church, to mark the centennial of independence, Ward Beecher stated that it was difficult for men such as Wade Hampton ‘to go about among his late slaves canvassing for their votes. The question before that was, are they men or monkeys’.³⁹ But not all writers excused the racially deterministic attitudes of southerners. Albert Bushnell Hart argued that, while there were differences between races, such as in the issue of personal morality, ‘the negro is entitled to be measured not by brain calipers, not by two meter rods, but by what he can do in the world’.⁴⁰

While domestically, racial ideology concerning African Americans largely moved away from discussions of slavery and towards an emphasis on separateness, as the United States redefined itself in relation to slavery on a global scale, racial determinism was adapted for new imperialist and anti-imperialist purposes. As Walter Hixon has argued, this was most explicitly the case in the conquest of the Philippines, where, in 1901, the killing of forty-eight American soldiers at Balangiga revived memories of

³⁷ David Livingstone, *Adam’s Ancestors: Race, Religion and the Politics of Human Origin* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 145.

³⁸ W. Laird Clowes, *Black America: A Study of the Ex-slave and His Late Master* (London, Paris and Melbourne, 1891), pp. 160, 166.

³⁹ Henry Ward Beecher, *Patriotic Addresses in America and England, 1850–1885* (New York, 1888), p. 775.

⁴⁰ Albert Bushnell Hart, *The Southern South* (New York, 1910), p. 134.

Little Big Horn. Newspapers used striking headlines such as ‘catastrophe at Balangiga’, and depicted the defeat as a ‘surprise’ with the ‘several hundred Bolomen’ conducting ‘signs of awful butchery. Our men lay stark in the streets and public square far advanced in mortification and fearfully mutilated’.⁴¹ The model of racial stereotyping used by Americans in the Philippines was that which had been learned through warfare with the Native Americans in the continental United States. Direct comparisons were made with one Filipino military leader being compared to Geronimo. In contrast, the Hawaiian elite, such as the deposed queen Liliuoukolani, were increasingly depicted by the cartoonists of the popular press as negroid, sending out the dual message of racial inferiority and political ineptitude.⁴²

Immigration to the United States was another issue taxing the racial determinists and, in the second half of the nineteenth century, they used discourse borrowed from antebellum slavery to render some of the new immigrants as ‘other’. Najia Aarim-Heriot has shown that the Chinese were victims of this rhetorical link of their destiny with American negro-phobia. She argues that from 1848 onwards, the labour of both blacks and Chinese was seen as ‘degraded’ and could never be part of the sphere of free labour.⁴³ Pro-slavery activists argued that the use of black labour was justified because, unlike the Chinese, by this period almost all black labour was American-born and therefore influenced by the positive values of the nation.⁴⁴ Following the war, both races were still seen as degraded labour, justifying the debt bondage systems that arose in the southern states to control the African American population, and justifying the exclusionary policies against the Chinese. Ideas of racial hierarchy, so instrumental under slavery, were merely adapted after emancipation to a different purpose. Stuart Creighton Miller showed that until the Chinese began to arrive in California in great numbers, American attitudes towards them were relatively benign. The migration coincided with the increased popularity of scientific racism and germ theory, thus making the anti-Chinese rhetoric particularly vicious. But Creighton Miller argues that it was the

⁴¹ *Evening Star*. (Washington, DC), 12 Dec. 1901. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1901-12-12/ed-1/seq-17/>.

⁴² Walter Hixon, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (Palgrave, 2013), pp. 156, 171–4.

⁴³ Najia Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans and Racial Anxiety in the United States 1848–82* (University of Illinois Press, 2003), pp. ix, 10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

link with slavery that was also timely, stating that, as after 1865 chattel slavery was 'a dead issue', more attention was paid to the 'coolie' trade.⁴⁵ I disagree with this assessment of the significance of chattel slavery post-1865, but do acknowledge, as he does, that the rhetoric about the arrival of coolies centred on their labour representing a new form of slavery. This will be explored further in Chapter 4.

The most important way that chattel slavery rhetorically influenced the post-war world was through the deployment of cultural rather than scientific tools: the use of memories and nostalgia of slavery to create and defend a sense of white community and sense of place. The plantation, the site of many of the horrors of slavery, was recreated under this use of myth as a place of joy and comfort for both races, while the formerly enslaved population were fashioned as docile and loyal. Newspapers serialised so-called 'moonlight and magnolia' stories such as that by James Franklin Fitts, *In Dixie Land Before the War*, spreading the romanticisation of the slave past to wide audiences.⁴⁶ Both of these myths (slavery as benign, slaves as happy) were instigated as a psychological coping mechanism for the southern white population who, having suffered the deprivations of the Civil War, were then unable to accept the freedmen and women as equals. The myths also served to heal the divisions within the United States as, after 1877, bringing together the white northerners and southerners in a shared national identity was judged more important than the search for justice for the formerly enslaved. As Thomas McCarthy put it, 'race lost out to reunion' and so for political reasons the memory of slavery was configured and deployed by the community.⁴⁷ In 1891, W. Laird Clowes was rather overoptimistic when he asserted that no one in the United States 'regrets that slavery has been abolished or which would restore it tomorrow even if it were able to do so by the stroke of a pen'.⁴⁸

This nostalgic refiguring was less about the enslaved themselves and more about the places in which they worked, as after the war white southerners felt a strong desire to feel at home again in their landscape,

⁴⁵ Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: the American Image of the Chinese 1785-1882* (University of California Press, 1969), p. 150.

⁴⁶ *Baxter Springs News*. (Baxter Springs, Kan.), 30 Dec. 1893. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lc/sn83040592/1893-12-30/ed-1/seq-7/>.

⁴⁷ Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 111.

⁴⁸ Laird Clowes, *Black America*, p. 20.

and to do this they harkened back to the supposedly lost plantation world. In reality, many plantation owners rebuilt their lives and livelihoods on the same land as their forefathers had occupied before the war, with the same labourers and their descendants working that land, but the myth of the ruined, abandoned plantation, the lost heyday, the place in the past where everyone was truly happy was a powerful one. Typical of the depictions of the abandoned plantation as a visual type was in the art of French-born George David Coulon, an example being 'Ruins of Versailles Plantation, Chalmette, Louisiana' from 1885. The title of this painting ironically referenced the grandeur of the original French Versailles, while depicting a ruined plantation house with grandeur now lost, standing alone facing the encroaching natural world.⁴⁹

These romantic landscapes formed a central tenet of the broader, lost cause, myth. Even though the grand plantation house was only one of many landscape experiences of antebellum white and black southerners, it became, in the Jim Crow era, *the* southern experience of slavery, to such an extent that historians of slavery have only recently begun to focus on the lives of slaves who worked and lived in off-plantation spaces.⁵⁰ Literature and art constructed this myth for white consumers, but it did not emerge fully formed until after the Civil War, as the most famous mythical portrayal of southern plantation life shows. Eastman Johnson's 'Old Kentucky Home – Negro Life in the South' painted in 1859, originally depicted a scene of urban slavery but was co-opted as part of the romanticisation of the southern rural landscape. It shows racial mixing taking place, and its results in the presence of mixed-race individuals in the scene, but crucially its theatrical construction of the plantation community affected the construction of the post-war myth of a life of ease and happiness, rather than the reality of back-breaking work. Its literary equivalent was the work of Thomas Nelson Page, such as the novel *In Ole Virginia*, published in 1887, which reinforced the twin aspects of contentment of the plantation. Not only did the enslaved people there live well, but they were happy to be there and to serve their white masters.⁵¹ Contemporary commentators recognised a distinctive southern mindset

⁴⁹ Alexis Boylan, 'From Gilded Age to *Gone with the Wind*', in Angela D. Mack & Stephen G. Hoffus, eds., *Landscape of Slavery: the Plantation in American Art* (University of South Carolina Press, 2008), p. 121.

⁵⁰ See Lawrence Aje and Catherine Armstrong, eds., *The Many Faces of Slavery* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020) for a series of essays confronting the plantation paradigm.

⁵¹ Kenneth W. Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping* (Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 10.

created, according to Albert Bushnell Hart, the son of abolitionist parents, because of the late abolition of slavery in the region. He argued that this myth of 'a prosperous happy and glorious community' had emerged because of 'the obstinate maintenance of slavery' in the region.⁵² As well as art and literature, theatre made the plantation myth especially accessible to white Americans from all social orders, through performances of shows such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, derived from Harriet Beecher Stowe's popular antebellum novel but often as pastiches rather than true versions.⁵³ Throughout the late nineteenth century it was popular as a stage show, perpetuating a number of iconic myths of slavery such as the happy slaves, the tricky runaways who triggered a dramatic pursuit with hounds, often using live dogs in the production. Such performances, along with figurines, toys and Uncle Tom wallpaper, were also popular in Britain, although there was less shyness about admitting the novel's abolitionist origins in Britain.⁵⁴ Minstrelsy, which was popular before the Civil War as well as after, also used crude stereotyping of the formerly enslaved as well as employing white actors in blackface.

John Denis Mercier and Steven Dubin both argue that stereotyping of emancipated African Americans into types created in slavery was so culturally powerful that it acted as a form of 'symbolic slavery'.⁵⁵ Dubin examined the prevalence of stereotyping in articles of material culture such as greetings cards or homeware and argues that the unconscious use of these articles around the home once again renders African Americans in the supporting role to whites and denies them a voice, just as under slavery. Therefore these objects symbolically depicting black servitude are invisible and taken for granted.⁵⁶ The nature of the black characters made them safe for whites, as the 'auntie' and 'uncle', the 'mammie' and the 'sambo' never challenged white hegemony, but more than that, they acted as collaborators and allies. When white Americans looked back at chattel slavery and saw it through the lens of these characters, they were able to convince themselves that although a key part of the historic landscape of the nation, slavery had done neither race any harm and,

⁵² Bushnell Hart, *The Southern South*, pp. 81–2.

⁵³ William van Deberg, *Slavery and Race in American Popular Culture* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 48.

⁵⁴ Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Cornell University Press, 2012), p. 21.

⁵⁵ Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose*, p. 20; Steven Dubin, 'Symbolic Slavery: Black Representations in Popular Culture', *Social Problem*, April 1987.

⁵⁶ Dubin, 'Symbolic Slavery', p. 127.

implicitly, it might even have been preferable to the race problem of their present day. The message was also designed for African Americans, to control and subjugate the newly emancipated and to reinvent the history of chattel slavery, denying its horror.

In this period, artefacts of African American origin such as the stories and myths told under slavery were also reconstructed with the goal of rewriting the slave past, and Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus tales were part of this trend.⁵⁷ Harry Nevinson, a British investigative journalist employed at the turn of the twentieth century by *Harper's Magazine* to write an exposé on African slavery, also mentioned the Uncle Remus tales in order to rewrite the United States' troubled history with slavery. Mindful of his American audience, Nevinson blamed European colonialists and their African collaborators for the continued existence of slavery in West and Central Africa and used his narrative to call upon Americans to take up the 'white man's burden'. He wrote 'from here we can turn only to America. There the sense of freedom seems to linger. America's record is clean compared to England'.⁵⁸ He went on to give evidence of the closeness and affinity of the Congolese with the African American, arguing that the Umbundu proverbs, such as the Lion who needs no servant, were very similar to the Uncle Remus folktales. Levinson did not make explicit his argument here, but he is not suggesting that both black Africans and those within the African diaspora deserve sympathy, but rather that white Americans are making a very good job of managing the 'race problem' at home, and therefore should be encouraged to turn their attention to the issue on a global scale.⁵⁹

Not all cultural artefacts that recalled a slave past reconstituted chattel slavery in such a positive light. A few moments of resistance can be spotted, such as in George and Huestis P. Cook's photographs of the late-nineteenth-century lives and places of the formerly enslaved in the Richmond, Virginia, area. Huestis, who took over his father's business, was especially interested in depicting African Americans in realistic settings, and therefore photographed them at work, at church, and at home, giving them agency by refusing to apply the romanticised Lost Cause filter to their lives. An example of this is the photograph 'Possum am Sweet' of 1898, depicting the home of a black couple who appear old enough to remember slavery, and therefore one of whom may have grown up in that cabin under slavery. However, while the image recalls a timelessness, a sense of the presence of the ghosts of chattel slavery within the home, it also observes that the

⁵⁷ Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose*, pp. xix, 9. ⁵⁸ Nevinson, *A Modern Slavery*, p. 208.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

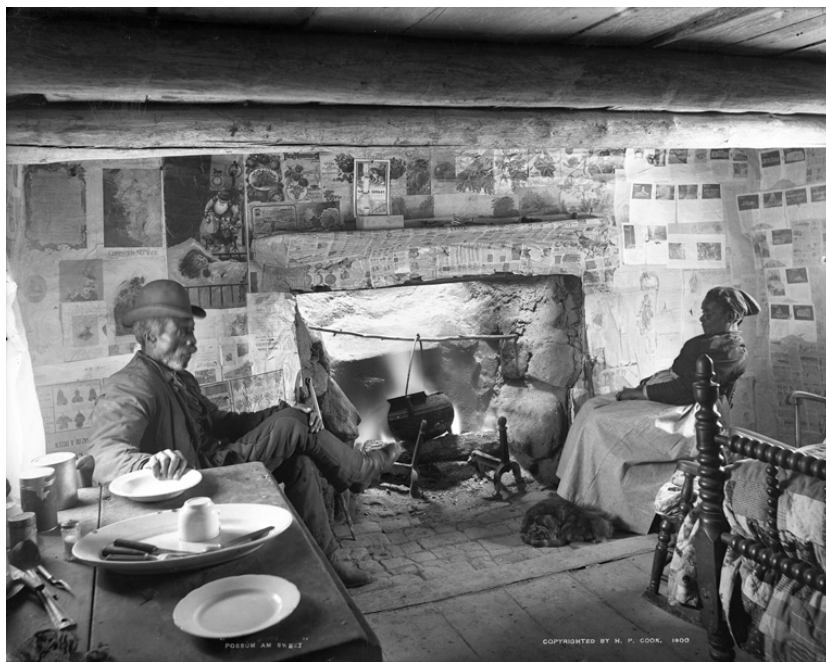


FIGURE 2 'Couple at fireside: Possum am Sweet', photograph by Huestis Cook, 1900. © The Valentine, Richmond.

formerly enslaved have created their own domesticity and sense of family and self.⁶⁰ The power of the memory of antebellum slavery for black and white Americans is significant, and this further reveals itself in the extent to which this type of slavery became the archetypal slavery for all discussions after the Civil War, and became the point of comparison for those debating slavery and forced labour in its domestic and global forms.

CHATTEL SLAVERY AS ARCHETYPE

This chapter has explored the ways in which, in the period after the Civil War, the historical antebellum chattel slavery and the collective memory

⁶⁰ For more on Huestis Cook, see Leslie King-Hammond, 'Identifying Spaces of Blackness: the Aesthetics of Resistance and Identity in American Plantation Art', in Mack & Hoffus, eds., *Landscape of Slavery*, p. 73.

of it, impacted the conceptions of race and slavery, as the United States both examined its own cultural history and attempted to imagine itself as a new player on the global stage and, in doing so, borrowed from anti-slavery rhetoric of the European powers. Now the rhetorical power of chattel slavery will be explored in more depth, with an examination of the ways in which authors explicitly referred to this unique and, in the language of the time ‘peculiar’, forced labour form, linking it to other types of slavery and forced labour in the United States and in the wider world.

RHETORICAL SYMBOLISM

After emancipation, the memory and sense of awareness of antebellum slavery was invidious. The symbolism and iconography of slavery were deployed by writers for a variety of authorial purposes in the knowledge that readers of English almost anywhere in the world would be able to understand the reference. This shows how, even in the late nineteenth century, United States antebellum chattel slavery had become the archetype of slavery globally, to which authors might refer only obliquely, confident that their meaning would still be divined by their audience. The word ‘slavery’ had tremendous rhetorical power, and its significance was enforced by its being coupled with the symbols and icons of the recently abolished chattel form. That the language of this particular type of slavery was so powerful shows not only the dominance of the plantation form in rhetorical discourse, despite it not being the sole experience for American enslaved, some of whom served in different places and economic relationships. This reveals the powerful memories and legacies of the romanticised view of plantation life under antebellum slavery, but also the significance of the abolition movement, which was even more important than the pre-war pro-slavery ideologues in creating a lasting sense of what antebellum southern slavery was. Their rhetorical symbols – bloodhounds, chains and whips, and slave auctions – form the precise iconography of slavery that survived into the period after the Civil War and was used to such important effect when describing and defining other forms of forced labour.

Campaigners observing types of forced labour within the United States had a pre-ordained rhetorical toolkit from which to select in order to encourage their readers to rekindle in their minds the horrors of antebellum slavery. Forced labour often took place in the same landscapes, with the same victims (or their descendants), practised by the

same perpetrators (or their descendants) as the chattel slavery form had decades earlier. To draw readers' attention to the pernicious nature of forced labour in the United States, it was natural and easy for authors to draw on the symbolism and iconography of the earlier model. Sometimes symbols of chattel slavery such as the whip were used explicitly to encourage the reader to draw a comparison, as in the case of Walter Wilson who wrote that convict labourers in the South after emancipation were 'whipped into signing contracts ... just as surely as Negro slaves were whipped to their tasks'.⁶¹ Elsewhere in his book, comparisons were implicit as he described the conditions in which many convicts were kept by the brutal guards who 'knew how to handle niggers and bloodhounds', undertaking 'manhunting – the favourite sport of the southern ruling classes'.⁶² These comments refer back to the continuity of the systems of slave patrolling before the Civil War and night-riding after it, but Wilson is also implying that an intimate familiarity with the long history of white hegemony under slavery in the south had prepared those white men in charge of convicts in the Jim Crow era to perform their duties successfully. It is also an interesting use of the term 'manhunting' as a considerable amount of European antislavery literature of the period seeking to justify imperialist intervention also referred to the still-extant Arab-African slave trade as 'manhunting'.⁶³

The convict labour system's borrowing of the symbolism of slavery encouraged campaigners to make this rhetorical connection. John L. Spivak's novel, based on real life accounts, entitled *Georgia Nigger*, explored the role of the white overseer, showing that control of the victim's time by another was common to both: 'an hour before sundown the overseer blew his whistle', narrated the character, David.⁶⁴ He also used the shared icon of the chains of the chain gang and the chains of slavery so as to leave readers in no doubt about the pernicious nature of both systems, describing his time on the chain gang at Buzzard's Roost in stark terms. He recalled in the cage where convict labourers spent the night that the weight of the chains made it impossible to sleep and

⁶¹ Wilson, *Forced Labour*, p. 15.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 72–3. Wilson may have been referring here to the white supremacist James Vardaman, sometime governor of Mississippi, who enjoyed spending time at Parchman prison setting a prisoner free to run, and then pursuing him as prey on horseback.

⁶³ For example, 'The Brussels Conference and the Congo State', from the *Paris Memorial Diplomatique 6/9/1890*, bound in a collection of African pamphlets, 1884–95, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

⁶⁴ J. L. Spivak, *Georgia Nigger* (London, 1933), p. 83.

described his fellow prisoners as ‘the chained things’, utterly dehumanised by their experience.⁶⁵

Rhetorically claiming an abusive situation as ‘slavery’ was an important tool in the campaigner’s arsenal, and those trying to promote legal and political action over prostitution in the United States in the early twentieth century used the term ‘white slavery’ to great effect in mobilising public concern through a series of popular pamphlets and newspaper exposés. More on this will appear in Chapter 5. Some writers went beyond merely using the word ‘slavery’ and also used the imagery of slavery to provoke a response in their readers. Jane Addams suggested that young children were being enticed into prostitution by procurers and, at that moment, ‘vice seared their tender minds with red hot irons’.⁶⁶ Surely she had the branding of the antebellum African American enslaved, a common punishment under chattel slavery, in mind when she used this metaphor.

This use of the symbolism of chattel slavery also occurred in debates about global forced labour. At the turn of the twentieth century, many of those alerting the American public to the horrors of the Belgian Congo saw themselves as neo-abolitionists and borrowed many of their rhetorical methods and chosen words from the earlier campaign. Edmund Morel was one of those; he referred to the ‘cannibal troops’ of Belgian King Leopold’s *Force Privée* as ‘the bloodhounds of the company’ that kept the forced labourers working collecting rubber through fear of extreme physical violence.⁶⁷ George Washington Williams also used the symbolism of antebellum slavery to instil concern in his readers about the Congo horror. In his pamphlet ‘An Open Letter to His Serene Majesty, Leopold II’, Williams described the labour system that he encountered on his travels in Congo using the icons of American chattel slavery: the use of chain gangs, the prevalence of the whip as a method of punishment and inducement to work, and the offer of rewards if runaways were captured and returned to their place of work. He also described the practice of dislocation of the enslaved person, by their being transported a long distance from their place of origin, an aspect common to many types of slavery across time. Williams described this process as being ‘sent down the river’, referring in this case to the Congo

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 174–6. ⁶⁶ Addams, *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil*, p. 124.

⁶⁷ Morel, *The Congo Slave State*, p. 64.

River, but with strong echoes of the nineteenth century practice in the United States of internal slave trading where enslaved people feared being transported down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to the newly opened cotton fields of the deep south.⁶⁸

The language of slave corralling and sale emerging first from the wider Atlantic world context and then later the domestic United States slave trade, was adopted by those commenting on other types of bonded labour. G. B. Densmore wrote a pamphlet designed to encourage the tightening of immigration controls against Chinese arrivals in California, and he quoted from General John Miller who depicted all Chinese as 'slaves' and the nation itself as 'the great slave pen from whence labourers for this country are being drawn'.⁶⁹ Reverend Gibson also used memories of the abuse of female slaves at auction to excoriate the Chinese for their treatment of immigrant women who supposedly became concubines or sex slaves. He wrote that 'the girls were critically examined after the manner of the African slave dealers not many years ago'.⁷⁰ As seen here, recalling the imagery of slavery was most potent when it was accompanied by a direct comparison between present labour injustice and memories of past abuses.

COMPARISON WITH ANTEBELLUM SLAVERY

The most effective way that an author called to mind the archetypical example of American antebellum chattel slavery was by making a direct comparison with it, a very common rhetorical tool in the literature of the period. This was done in three ways. First, by claiming that a system of forced labour was, in fact, slavery, the exact moral and practical copy of chattel slavery. Some commentators reinforced this assertion by arguing that slavery had never truly been ended. Second, some authors claimed that particular labour situations were like slavery: 'virtually slavery' is the form of words often used. Finally, the direct comparison of two labour systems made the argument that the subject of discussion was better or worse than antebellum chattel slavery.

⁶⁸ 'An Open Letter to the His Serene Majesty Leopold II by Col. The Honourable Geo. W. Williams of the United States of America', bound in collection of Africa Pamphlets 1885-94, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

⁶⁹ G. B. Densmore, *The Chinese in California: a Description of Chinese Life in San Francisco* (San Francisco, 1880), p. 121.

⁷⁰ Rev. O. Gibson, *The Chinese in America* (Cincinnati, 1877), p. 138.

Using the term ‘slavery’ in discourse for a United States audience when referring to a system of forced labour, gave it a particularly significant meaning precisely because of the memory and legacy of antebellum chattel slavery and abolition explained earlier in this chapter. Douglas Blackmon entitled his book about convict labour *Slavery by Another Name* to highlight his view of the continuation of the conditions under which slavery flourished even after emancipation. In the subtitle to his book, Blackmon does suggest that the phenomenon of convict labour was itself ‘slavery’ by referring to ‘the re-enslavement of Black Americans.’⁷¹ Daniel Novak concurs and states that the post-war peonage system was a ‘simple and effective substitute’ for slavery.⁷² In some ways Blackmon’s title is misleading because it was precisely by calling convict labour by the name of ‘slavery’ that antislavery activists sought to challenge the existence of that system. It was the choice of the specific *name* of *slavery* that was crucial. The deployment of the word with such rhetorical power was resisted by those who wished to defend the use of particular labour forms, and they appealed for strict boundaries of the definition of what constituted slavery and what did not. In 1888, Booker T. Washington was aware of this when he referred to the southern labour system as ‘a kind of slavery’.⁷³ British neo-abolitionist Henry Fox Bourne reported the attitudes of Cecil Rhodes and his confederate Mr. Rudd, who argued that their intended use of compulsory *corvée* labour in British South Africa was not the same as slavery: ‘there is constant misuse of the word “slavery” by those who want to use it as a bogey’, Mr Rudd is quoted as saying by a disapproving Fox Bourne.⁷⁴ Similar disagreements took place between those defending and those exposing the forced labour practices of the Belgians and their allies in the Congo. The mutable definition of slavery became part of the weaponry of antislavery writers such as Morel, who named his most famous tract on the subject ‘the Congo Slave State’, suggesting that slavery was not merely a feature of the region, but fundamental to the way that it was being governed.⁷⁵ On the other side of the argument, like many pro-Belgian authors who resorted to *ad hominem* attacks on Morel’s character, Demetrius Boulger took issue with Morel’s

⁷¹ Douglas Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: the Re-enslavement of African Americans from the Civil War to World War Two* (Anchor Books, 2008).

⁷² Daniel A. Novak, *The Wheel of Servitude: Black Forced Labour after Slavery* (University Press of Kentucky, 1978), p. xv.

⁷³ Booker T. Washington quotation from Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery*, p. ix.

⁷⁴ H. R. Fox Bourne, *Blacks and Whites in South Africa* (London, 1900), p. 88.

⁷⁵ Morel, *The Congo Slave State*.

chosen title for his work and at the same time used the typical anti-abolition attack, accusing him of hypocrisy. Boulger said that ‘the title [of Morel’s pamphlet] itself is an aggression, it also implies a falsehood . . . it is not more true to say that there are no slaves in any of the British colonies and possessions in East Africa’. In an unambiguous way, Boulger entitled his own response *The Congo State Is Not a Slave State*, in case any reader should be in doubt of his position.⁷⁶

Equally controversial was the choice of the term ‘slavery’ in the phrase ‘white slavery’ to describe forced prostitution and sex trafficking. Campaigners seeking to expose an organised international ring of procurers and traffickers saw parallels with the slave trade and were not shy of defining the phenomenon as ‘slavery’. Jane Addams saw it as ‘the twin of slavery, as old and outrageous as slavery itself and even more persistent’.⁷⁷ The Dillingham Commission saw the naming of prostitution as ‘white slavery’ as appropriate, not because it should be considered the equivalent of slavery or as slavery itself, but because like slavery, it was a trade and ‘in naming the business of importing women the white slave traffic, the public has instinctively stated the fact that the business is maintained for profit. It is probably no exaggeration to say that if means can be devised of stripping the profits from it, the traffic will cease.’⁷⁸

Newspaper journalists challenged the concept of ‘white slavery’ on the grounds that the evidence pointed to many of the rescued girls having entered into prostitution voluntarily and therefore this practice could not possibly be termed ‘slavery’. As one reporter suggested, harking back to an important synecdoche of chattel slavery, there were no ‘clanging chains’ in white slavery.⁷⁹ Secondly, others criticised the term because of its tone, being sensationalist and not measured. The *Fergus County Democrat* of Lewistown, Montana, a progressive weekly paper founded in 1904 to cover state and national politics, called it ‘ridiculous and melodramatic’.⁸⁰ The term was criticised as a concept dreamed up by those with political ulterior motives or those hoping to make money. The famous fundamentalist preacher Billy Sunday was named by one newspaper as guilty of using the

⁷⁶ Demetrius C. Boulger, *The Congo State Is Not a Slave State* (London, 1903), p. 2.

⁷⁷ Addams, *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil*, p. 4.

⁷⁸ *Importing Women for Immoral Purposes, 1909 Report Presented by Mr Dillingham at 61st Congress. Senate Document no. 196*, (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1909), p. 28.

⁷⁹ *Idaho County Free Press* (Grangeville, Idaho Territory) 18/8/1913.

⁸⁰ *Fergus County Democrat*, (Lewistown, Montana) 28/10/1913.

idea of white slavery to line his own pockets. The reporter at the *Golden Valley Chronicle* wrote ‘the subject of white slavery is a favourite with sensational exhorters like Billy Sunday who is set to have added \$70,000 to his fat bank account this season. They seldom or never mention the slavery of white men and white children, those forms of slavery being more prosaic and commonplace and less calculated to move their listeners to indignation and tears which results in a loosening of the purse strings’.⁸¹

This pattern of deploying the term ‘slavery’ to draw attention to the system’s heinousness was used effectively in other parts of the Atlantic world. It was undertaken by Joseph Beaumont in his description of the Indian and Chinese coolie trade and lived experiences in British Guiana, which was published in 1871 and entitled the *New Slavery*. Beaumont’s work was illustrated with images depicting plantation culture such as overseers beating workers and fat owners enjoying a leisured life in the big house, but instead of the typical slaves of the African diaspora, he depicted plantations peopled with labourers from China or India.⁸²

An even more common mode of comparison linking post-war labour to antebellum slavery claimed that the system under discussion was like slavery or ‘virtually slavery’. As well as being debated within pamphlet literature and the intellectual and popular press, this was also framed in the post-war era by case law as the legal definition of what type of labour was not permitted in the United States evolved. A federal anti-peonage law had been passed as early as 1867, in response to the specific conditions in New Mexico, but its applications to the southern systems of debt bondage and sharecropping that emerged over the coming decades encompassed a number of court cases. In a 1902 case in Pensacola, Florida, concerning the turpentine industry, defence attorneys claimed that the 1867 act referred only to the type of peonage then existing in New Mexico, and that their clients’ treatment of labourers was lawful. In a case the following year in Montgomery, Alabama, the judge directed the jury to leniency and emphasised that ‘peonage is not slavery and a peon is not a slave’ determining that peonage was only an offence when it was involuntary.⁸³ This decision was tested later the same year in a Georgia law court which cited twelve violations of the 1867 act. The judge

⁸¹ *Golden Valley Chronicle* (Beach, North Dakota), 11/8/1911.

⁸² Joseph Beaumont, *The New Slavery: an Account of Indian and Chinese Labourers in British Guiana* (first published 1871, The Caribbean Press, 2011), p. 20.

⁸³ William Wirt Howe, ‘The Peonage Cases’, *Columbia Law Review*, April 1904, pp. 283–4.

explained that physical force and violence was used in the case at hand and explained that the victim 'is now virtually held in a condition of slavery or involuntary servitude'.⁸⁴ Thus, the legal boundaries of slavery and peonage, evolving through case law, were used by judges to control the more extreme behaviour of white masters without challenging the fundamental status quo.

Trained at Harvard, not in law but in history, Albert Bushnell Hart was especially well placed to comment on comparisons between contemporary southern labour systems and those of the antebellum era. He suggested that little had changed in cotton plantations of the south: 'conditions of the old slavery times are more nearly reproduced in the cotton field than anywhere else in the south. The old idea that the normal function of the African race is field labour is still vital'.⁸⁵ However, although he drew comparisons between the experiences of agricultural labourers in both eras, he fell short of describing the post-war system as 'slavery'. When examining the convict labour system of chain gangs, he was committed to recognising this as 'a virtual chattel slavery'.⁸⁶ Walter Wilson agreed that there was little fundamental difference between convict labour and chattel slavery, but further asserted that the capitalist system stripped even freemen of such rights, rendering them almost slaves. He illustrated this point with a quotation, taken entirely out of context, delivered in 1777 by John Adams: 'the difference as to the state [between freemen and slaves] is imaginary only'.⁸⁷

Most frequently, writers used comparison to rank conditions in incidents of forced labour as less or more severe than chattel slavery. Their authorial purpose in undertaking these comparisons is instructive in highlighting the myriad ways in which slavery was used conceptually. Far from harking back to a mythical golden age of plantation slavery, George Holmes argued that the labour system needed to change because southern agriculture had not undertaken to modernise, and innovation and energy had seemed to pass the region by. He argued that because they had done little to change the situation, the African American labourers were partly to blame, trapped by their lack of 'instincts' and of sufficient foresight to better themselves. The black tenant farmer was worse off than under slavery, Holmes said, because 'as a slave he was better fed and better housed than he is now, he had the best medical attendance in the country and if he was disposed to neglect his master's interest, which would have been his own as well had he been free, he was

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 286. ⁸⁵ Bushnell Hart, *The Southern South*, p. 261. ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁸⁷ Wilson, *Forced Labour in the United States*, p. 16.

restrained. Now he is almost as helpless as a child and thoughtless of the morrow'.⁸⁸ Holmes remade the classic pro-slavery argument of writers such as Fitzhugh and Ulrich B. Phillips, both of whom asserted the essentially benevolent nature of the institution because it saved the black population from the negative consequences of its own supposed inherent weaknesses. Taking the opposite tack and working to defend the African American population against the systemic racism they faced, the progressive journal *Nation* nonetheless also argued that the post-war peonage system was even more pernicious than slavery in order to trigger a response from campaigners.⁸⁹

In the late nineteenth century, as sections of American society turned their attention to labour conditions overseas, and especially the territories coming under US control for the first time, comparisons between bonded labour and slavery were made for very different authorial purposes. In her book on the Hawaiian revolution published in 1898, Mary Kraut set out both sides of the debate. She argued that when discussing the system of contract labour used on the sugar plantations of Hawaii, which were mostly run by American-born businessmen, 'opponents condemned it without reservation, declaring it to be but little improvement upon negro slavery as it prevailed in the southern states before the war'. But she went on to challenge these assertions: 'there was in reality a very great difference with all the advantage in favour of the Japanese field hand'.⁹⁰ In his ethnographic account of the Hawaiian Islands, John Musick criticised the indentured labour system, but did not blame the American sugar barons, such as the German-born Klaus Spreckels, whose plantation he visited, but rather labelled it a vestige of the former corrupt monarchical system: 'the system is far worse than absolute slavery. The owner of a slave had a personal interest in him and as a rule looked after his comfort, for on his health depended his value. But the contract labourer can have no such claim on his master'. Like George Holmes, whose argument Musick mirrored, he also excoriated the labourer for his role in the system, blaming his racial predisposition: 'a Chinaman will work at wages that would starve a Kanaka [Hawaiian native] or European to death, but a Japanese coolie can starve out even a Chinaman'.⁹¹

⁸⁸ George Holmes, 'The Peons of the South', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. IV, 1893–4 (Philadelphia), pp. 71, 74.

⁸⁹ Daniel, *Shadow of Slavery*, p. 49.

⁹⁰ Mary Kraut, *Hawaii and a Revolution* (London, 1898), p. 87.

⁹¹ John R. Musick, *Hawaii: Our New Possessions* (New York and London, 1898), p. 153.

Others highlighted the threat to white wages caused by labourers of other races and Samuel Gompers shared this motive for highlighting contract labour as worse than slavery: he hoped to protect the white labourer from competition, especially from the Chinese, as outlined in his famous 1898 speech about the Philippines ‘Imperialism: Its Dangers and Wrongs’. Later, in 1921, during a meeting with President Harding, he protested the plan to allow coolie labour into Hawaii.⁹² Gompers argued that imperialism hurt white American labour because it bound the United States to a system of contract labour in Hawaii which revolved around labourers who were ‘practically slave labourers’ and ‘semi-barbaric’. Similarly, South Dakota senator and anti-imperialist, Richard Pettigrew, argued that Hawaiian contract labourers were ‘the scum of the earth’ and ‘little less than slaves’.⁹³ Rather than being victims of a corrupt and corrupting system who deserved to be given a chance to get out of this dire situation, these contract labourers were described as slaves, or worse than slaves, because of their racial make-up, using a discourse about slavery which throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century underpinned conservative anti-imperialism. There will be more about this in Chapter 4.

Of concern in the parts of the world where the United States was practising new imperialism, Chinese labour also provided challenges domestically. Eric Love argued that it was the influence of working class concerns over labour rather than top down pseudo-scientific theories that motivated much of this discontent.⁹⁴ Comparisons of Chinese labourers to chattel slaves were often deployed to justify their exclusion from United States or their continuing prejudicial treatment. American diplomat Charles E. DeLong, contributing to debates in the 1870s over Chinese immigration, spoke as someone who had had experience of working in Japan, but had little respect for the Chinese. He dismissed the Chinese coolies as ‘more absolute slaves than ever the negroes of the south were’.⁹⁵ Many Americans at this time perceived all Chinese to be in a state of coolie-dom in China too. Opponents to Chinese immigration were essentially suggesting that their racial predisposition to slavishness

⁹² Samuel Gompers, “Imperialism, Its Dangers and Wrongs,” *American Federationist*, 5.9 (November 1898), 179–83. *Schenectady Gazette*, 19 July 1921 <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1917&dat=19210719&cid=aEshAAAAIBAJ&sjid=94EFAAAAIBAJ&pg=2884,1508426&hl=en>.

⁹³ Eric Love, *Race over Empire: Race and Imperialism 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill, 2004), pp. 121, 163.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xi. ⁹⁵ Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant*, p. 153.

underpinned Chinese labourers and their behaviour.⁹⁶ Some commentators, seeking to defend the Chinese, realised that much of the trouble over immigration was caused by a misunderstanding of the nature of Chinese labour, a labelling of coolies as the equivalent of or worse than slaves. H. C. Bennett, promulgating the notion that Chinese labourers might be good for the United States, stated that the word 'coolie' had been incorrectly used as a corollary of slavery, and in fact it simply meant 'a lower class of labourer', and not 'a slave or bondservant'.⁹⁷

In his book published in 1874 about travelling round Cuba, British author Frederick Trench Townsend compared the Chinese coolies he encountered there to African slaves and argued that the Chinese coolies were far worse off than the enslaved Africans. No admirer of slavery in any form, he wrote 'though the fate of the poor African slave in Cuba is horrible, that of the unfortunate Asiatic who is serving under contract, is even more pitiable. The wan face, feeble frame and dejected looks of the wretched Chinaman were painful to see'.⁹⁸ Unlike most commentators, Townsend was not writing in order to persuade the public of the necessity of exclusion of the Chinese from white society, but, rather, he was a British soldier and adventurer writing in order to sell his travel account, painting Cuba as an alien last vestige of slavery. Another soldier and adventurer writing about Chinese labour in a broader context was Russell Conwell, later a Baptist minister and founder of Temple University. He was the child of abolitionist parents, and his book from 1871 explores sympathetically, for the time, the motives and experiences of the Chinese labourers. He outlined motivations for Chinese migration by comparing it to that from Europe, considering what the 'push' factors might be in both cases and also examining the detrimental effect that the coolie trade had on China itself. He traced the use of erroneous propaganda in Europe and China in encouraging migration to the United States. But it was when describing the fate of coolies taken to Cuba that he brought out the direct comparisons with African slavery. He first suggested that Chinese slavery 'is said to be less irksome than was African slavery in America' – a strange choice of adjective; does he mean for the enslaved or the enslaver? But then he went on to say that Chinese coolie labourers were treated worse: 'the buyer has

⁹⁶ John Soennichsen, *The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882* (Greenwood, 2011) p. 92.

⁹⁷ H. C. Bennett, *Chinese Labor: a Lecture Delivered before the San Francisco Mechanics Institute* (San Francisco, 1870), p. 37.

⁹⁸ Frederick Trench Townsend, *The Wildlife in Florida with a Visit to Cuba* (London, 1875), p. 199.

exclusive and entire ownership . . . [coolies] see hardships that the African seldom or never saw in America'.⁹⁹ He asserted that slavery existed in China as well and that it is different to indentured servitude, saying of their status that they were 'just below that of coolies', and although it is mild, Chinese slaves are 'whipped, branded, put in stocks and pillories as often as were the American slaves in the Southern States of the American Union'. Worse than that, he claimed, women and children throughout Chinese society were seen as 'saleable things'.¹⁰⁰ Conwell further expanded his comparison between types of forced labour and argued that the racially driven form was morally justified: 'it would seem to me to be far more mild if the persons bargained away for such labour or for such vile uses [prostitution] were the people of an inferior or conquered race instead of being their own legitimate sons or daughters'.¹⁰¹

In his tract about the Chinese on the West Coast of the United States, Reverend O. Gibson picked up the theme of the treatment of women and girls and also criticised the tendency of the Chinese in China to buy and sell their daughters for debt, and husbands their wives. However, he explained that Chinese labourers coming to the West Coast were not slaves; even though they banded together in migrant organisations 'they are no more slaves than the members of a fire company or any other voluntary organisation'. While 'Chinese women are brought here as slaves for the vilest purpose' he wrote, the male migrants came of their own free will, and their situation was far better than enslavement because 'the Chinese people always regarded with horror the American system of African slavery'. Gibson went further to deny the validity of comparing coolies to slaves: 'this voluntary contract cannot in any way be called slavery nor can it be fairly compared to slavery'.¹⁰² Displaying irony and implicitly drawing a comparison with the type of slavery he assumed that his audience would use as a model, Gibson wrote:

These Chinese coolie slaves are a most remarkable class of slave. They go and come when and where they please, work or refuse to work at their pleasure; they use the proceeds of their labour as they choose, buy their own clothes, pay their own rent, go to the theatre, gamble, smoke opium, bring suits in our courts, send money home to parents and friends and act in all respects just like free men. And yet we are told that they are abject slaves.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Russell H. Conwell, *Why the Chinese Emigrate and the Means They Adopt for the Purpose of Reaching America* (New York and Boston, 1871), p. 181.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 226. ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 229. ¹⁰² Gibson, *Chinese in America*, pp. 258–9.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

Thus rhetorically, Gibson assumed his reader has knowledge of ‘true’ slavery and by allowing him to compare the lived experiences of Chinese migrants with this slavery, he taught his reader that, in the late-nineteenth-century United States, despite using it twice in the first sentence, ‘slave’ was not an appropriate term with which to describe Chinese immigrants.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has illustrated the tremendous rhetorical power held by chattel slavery in actuality and concept in the period following emancipation. The nature of this power was framed by abolitionists in the antebellum era and their activism had a potent legacy after the Civil War as their pattern of resistance inspired later antislavery activism, whether campaigning about domestic or global slavery. The cultural symbolism of slavery envisioned in novels such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was continuously revisited and explored in new editions, in pastiches and in theatrical performances. The ways that antebellum abolitionists imagined slavery and their resistance to it, taught new generations how to think about forced labour, and provided a model for conservative voices to challenge the notion that slavery-like labour should be eradicated. Presenting abolitionists as naïve at best and hypocritical at worst allowed commentators to challenge the supposedly accepted narrative of chattel slavery as a closed chapter in US history. In the period after emancipation, slavery and abolition were still live issues for many, through their legacy as points of comparison and also because, for many freedmen and women and their former masters, the end of the Civil War did not bring the dramatic change in condition that was anticipated.

The memory of abolitionism and its potential to act as a model for future activism was emphasised especially to encourage American intervention to prevent enslavement overseas, as well as the alleged global sex trafficking systems identified during the white slavery panic. In these cases, commentators identified themselves as heirs to abolitionism and identified slave owners and traders as the ‘other’, corrupted through greed or racial inadequacy. The power of the rhetoric of antebellum abolitionists shines through here, involving the presentation of unproblematic passive victimhood, especially in abolitionist propaganda during the 1860s in the depiction of white-seeming chattel slaves which was a direct antecedent of the white slavery discourse. Antebellum abolitionists also rhetorically othered the southern slave owner and trader, distancing them from upstanding American citizens and thus making slavery opposed to American values.

In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this pattern was copied by commentators discussing slavery in Africa, the Philippines and Hawaii, often invoking the figures of Abraham Lincoln and the transatlantic abolitionist community.

In the post-war era, antebellum abolitionists were most frequently criticised for their simplistic, dichotomous conception of slavery and freedom. Abolitionists were held up as a *bête noir* both by conservatives and Marxists, who felt that because African American chattel slavery dominated the discourse about free and forced labour no sensible discussion about labour options could be had. From a conservative view, abolitionists were hypocrites who, so obsessed by the fate of the African American, had neglected to expose labour abuses elsewhere. At the other end of the political spectrum, Marxists challenged the idea that slavery and free labour should be considered as diametrically opposed, and issued polemical statements that under a capitalist system all labour, including wage labour, was the moral and actual equivalent of slavery.

After emancipation, contested meanings of slavery and freedom were not merely intellectual exercises but had serious ramifications for African Americans and others. Despite attempts to bring the formerly enslaved population into the nation as full and free citizens, conceptions of racial suitability for labour and of the tainted nature of the labour force allowed pernicious systems of abuse to continue. As the southern white population negotiated boundaries of acceptable labour practice incorporating both custom and legal precedent, they stated the desirability of methods of control restricting the movement of labour, as long as such methods did not transgress norms of polite and civilised behaviour. Other campaigners identified peonage and convict labour as unacceptable by resorting to comparison with antebellum chattel slavery. But the power of the rhetoric of racial hierarchy continued in the post-war era unabated, and while under slavery it had acted as a tool of justification for paternalism, the same rhetoric was used after emancipation to justify racial separateness and the political incapacity of black Americans.

Culturally, the memory of chattel slavery was manipulated by conservative white southerners in order to control emancipated slaves and to keep them in a form of 'symbolic slavery'. By fabricating the myth of the happy slave, living contentedly in a benevolent plantation system, white Americans deliberately perverted the history of slavery for their own psychological and practical ends. They were still in denial about their own role in a violent and brutal system, and by binding the races together in a distorted community, their refusal to

acknowledge black pain also had the benefit of encouraging former slaves to tolerate the status quo.

After the Civil War, discourses underpinned by racial determinism were also deployed to comment on the labour situations in the imperial territories of the United States and on the roles of immigrants to the mainland. There are continuities between the antebellum rhetoric which described the labour of the African diaspora, and the later rhetoric targeting these new groups. The concept of slavery was used in two different ways. The first was to attack an ethnic group as inferior, being undesirable labourers (and by extension inherently racially weak and inadequate), by calling them 'slaves' when they were not. Labelling women and girls as 'white slaves' when they may have been prostitutes of their own free will, or merely young women acting independently of a male patron, fulfilled a similar rhetorical function. The second was to justify American intervention into a political theatre by manufacturing an humanitarian impulse to defend weak and inadequate 'slaves' from the threat of a more greedy, corrupt and powerful 'other'.

In the emancipation period, chattel slavery appeared as the archetypical slavery to which all others might be compared. The ways that chattel slavery was described by antebellum abolitionists also gave discussions of slavery their iconographical language of chains, whips and auction blocks. During this period the word 'slavery' itself also acquired a totemic power, as to name something as 'slavery' was compelling and controversial. Because even after abolition the very concepts of slavery and freedom were still being contested in the United States, deploying the rhetoric of slavery to talk about other labour forms was a deliberate and contentious act. Even claiming that a labour form was like slavery in a reader's mind rendered it immediately controversial. Such rhetorical tools were similarly used to entertain and to shock and titillate, as shown by travellers' accounts describing forced labour around the world, and by historical depictions such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at the theatre including live bloodhounds on stage.

Many commentators tried to rank slavery-like labour forms in terms of their heinousness. Stating that a system was worse than chattel slavery was done either to trigger immediate action among humanitarians who had hitherto been slow to take up that particular cause, or ironically by appealing to abolitionist sentiment to encourage a nativist agenda, thus elevating white labour above other possibly tainted ethnic groups. Among conservatives, it was designed to criticise those who had dismantled the

chattel slavery system, having little care for what might replace it, whereas writers arguing that a form of labour was less severe than chattel slavery sought to deflect activists' attention by suggesting that its reputation was undeserved.

In the period prior to World War I, discourse around slavery and abolition was highly contested because the liminal nature of the national legacy of slavery for the American people was still undetermined and extremely sensitive, and because naming contemporary labour forms as slavery was mutable and questionable. Dichotomous concepts of slavery and freedom did not work for many American writers remembering 'old slavery days' and determining the most appropriate new systems of labour.