

# SLAVERY AND THE SLAVE TRADE: New Comparative Approaches

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- THE OVERTHROW OF COLONIAL SLAVERY, 1776–1848.* By Robin Blackburn. (London: Verso, 1988. Pp. 560. \$19.95.)
- THE RISE AND FALL OF THE PLANTATION COMPLEX: ESSAYS IN ATLANTIC HISTORY.* By Philip D. Curtin. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Pp. 222. \$39.50 cloth, \$10.95 paper.)
- THE SUGAR CANE INDUSTRY: AN HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY FROM ITS ORIGINS TO 1914.* By J. H. Galloway. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Pp. 266. \$44.50.)
- HAITI'S INFLUENCE ON ANTEBELLUM AMERICA: SLUMBERING VOLCANO IN THE CARIBBEAN.* By Alfred N. Hunt. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988. Pp. 196. \$25.00.)
- SLAVERY AND AFRICAN LIFE: OCCIDENTAL, ORIENTAL, AND AFRICAN SLAVE TRADES.* By Patrick Manning. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Pp. 236. \$47.50 cloth, \$14.95.)
- THE DUTCH IN THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE, 1600–1815.* By Johannes Menne Postma. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Pp. 428. \$54.50.)
- LIVES IN BETWEEN: ASSIMILATION AND MARGINALITY IN AUSTRIA, BRAZIL, AND WEST AFRICA, 1780–1945.* By Leo Spitzer. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.)
- SLAVERY IN THE CIRCUIT OF SUGAR: MARTINIQUE AND THE WORLD ECONOMY, 1830–1848.* By Dale W. Tomich. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990. Pp. 353. \$46.50.)
- SLAVE LAW IN THE AMERICAS.* By Alan Watson. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990. Pp. 179. \$25.00.)

Historians, never immune to the changes transforming the world around them, have been caught up in recent globalization trends. They have developed modern international approaches and methods in a number of new books on slavery, the slave trade, plantations, and the sugar economy. Moreover, the subjects themselves assume a continually enlarging historical dimension in a world where the intellectual and cultural distances separating the continents are steadily shrinking.

When Frank Tannenbaum wrote at the end of World War II what he

called his “little book upon a great subject,” *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas*, he was preoccupied, quite understandably, with ethical and moral issues. Slavery had to be fitted in with these concerns: “Slavery was not merely a legal relation; it was also a moral one.” Tannenbaum held up the moral value placed on the individual as the chief legacy of the Western European world, and he saw nothing improbable in trying to resolve the contradictions of New World slavery within this larger philosophical premise. He even developed a hypothesis of freedom from slavery based on the recognition of the moral value of the individual: “Whenever the law accepted the doctrine of the moral personality of the slave and made possible the gradual achievement of freedom implicit in such a doctrine, the slave system was abolished peacefully. Where the slave was denied recognition as a moral person and was therefore considered incapable of freedom, the abolition of slavery was accomplished by force—that is, by revolution.”<sup>1</sup>

Two generations of intensive historical scholarship have revealed the flaws in Tannenbaum’s theory, but his pioneering study of comparative slave systems continues to stimulate new work. Alan Watson’s *Slave Law in the Americas* is one of these new books. Watson acknowledges his debt to Tannenbaum but claims to reach very different conclusions using many of the same materials. Watson eschews moral philosophy for legal history. He argues that a discussion of slave law will not in itself uncover the dynamics of slavery. He does suggest, however, that the laws of slavery have a life of their own that is worthy of study.

Castilian law, with its antecedents in Roman law, was transplanted to Spain’s New World territories as part of the conquest. As Watson comments, there were laws regulating slavery “before there were slaves to be regulated except for the Indians captured by Columbus and brought back to Spain” (p. 47). Spain’s slave laws had been shaped by a European and Mediterranean tradition that reached back to Roman law as set out in the Justinian Code and was subsequently given Spanish legitimacy in *Las siete partidas*. These laws were not framed for the New World, but once transported across the Atlantic, they lived on and dictated the legal bounds of Spanish colonial slavery. Watson and Tannenbaum agree that the heritage of Roman law facilitated manumission in the Spanish colonies, but Watson underlines how this long tradition of Spanish slave law did not prevent Spanish American slavery from developing into a racist institution.

The main thesis of *Slave Law in the Americas* is the central importance of Roman law in the slave laws of the New World, except in the English American colonies. Even there, if the legislatures ignored Roman law precedents, the judges borrowed from Roman legal antecedents when

1. Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York: Random House, 1946), p. viii.

it suited their purposes. Watson finds Roman law surviving in nineteenth-century Brazilian slave law. By contrast, in the English colonies, "a law of slavery had to be made from scratch" (p. 63). The result was statute law constructed by local legislatures.

Watson is particularly interested in the degree to which slave laws determined the racist nature of slavery. Did reliance on Roman law reduce the racism in slave laws? His conclusion is clear: "English America was a very racist society, and this is very much reflected in the law. And the law of slavery in English America was largely made without a preceding model. In contrast, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and French America all had slavery based on racism but had a law of slavery that was not so overtly racist as that of English America" (p. 127). The relation of slave law to the degree of racism in a slave society is certainly one of history's most tangled webs. Alan Watson appears confident of his conclusion, but he does not develop either his argument or the historical evidence sufficiently to build an irrefutable case.

David Brion Davis reminds readers of his *Slavery and Human Progress* that the Africanization of the New World "was the result not of concerted planning, racial destiny, or immanent historical design but of innumerable local and pragmatic choices made in four continents."<sup>2</sup> The real question is whether legal history by itself can provide the answers. Watson judiciously avoids the economic and social dynamics of slavery while admitting that "law is a distorting mirror" for anyone who wants a clear picture of how slave societies functioned (p. 109). He does find a significant contrast in certain areas between English slave law and slave law in the Spanish or Dutch colonies rooted in Roman law. English slave law forbade owners to teach their slaves to read and write, compelled slave owners to fix penalties for runaway slaves who were recaptured, and erected difficult obstacles to manumission. Spanish and Dutch slave law did not contain these restrictions, and the Roman slave-law tradition incorporated the formal possibility of manumission.

But do these differences shed light on the racist nature of these slave societies? Elsa Goveia's early pathbreaking study on eighteenth-century West Indian slave laws made the shrewd point that the laws as enforced in Europe's Caribbean colonies were different from the laws enacted. The actual enforcement of the laws in specific local contexts may well reveal more about the reality of slavery than a comparison of laws as enacted.<sup>3</sup> This possibility raises a key question about one of Watson's premises. Is it easier to discover both what slave law was and how racist it

2. David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, paperback ed., 1986), 52.

3. Elsa Goveia, "The West Indian Slave Laws of the Eighteenth Century," in *Slavery in the New World*, edited by Laura Foner and Eugene D. Genovese (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 134.

was than to uncover other conditions of society, or should historians who wish to pursue this issue further concentrate their attention on social conditions and enforcement of slave laws? Watson himself concludes that it is very difficult “to deduce much about a society from an examination of its legal rules” (p. 129). One of his summary propositions also reiterates that legal rules are no guide to determining “whether English America was more racist than Latin or Dutch America” (p. 133).

Philip Curtin’s comparative framework in *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* ignores slave laws but encompasses the whole Atlantic world. He examines what he labels “the plantation complex” in a series of essays with a world historical perspective. In a work that may be intended as an introductory text on the plantation system and the role of slavery, Curtin concentrates on areas outside the United States to assist U.S. readers in placing their own history within this broader, comparative world view.

Any book by Philip Curtin is worth a careful reading, and this one is no exception. His essays span the medieval period to the nineteenth century. Nuggets of fascinating information continually turn up on subjects as diverse as trade, disease, soils, sugar cultivation, slaves and the slave trade—even camels—as he elucidates the historical evolution of the plantation economies.

Although Fernand Braudel classified plantations as “capitalist creations *par excellence*,”<sup>4</sup> Curtin does not dissect the capitalist nature of plantations. He is content to offer a brief analysis of feudalism and capitalism, while signaling his desire to avoid the Marxist debate altogether. Nor does he directly address Eric Williams’s argument about the relation of capitalism to slavery except to deny in the conclusion or retrospect that the plantation complex was “in any direct sense a *cause*, much less *the cause*, of the Industrial Revolution” (p. 204, Curtin’s emphasis).<sup>5</sup> According to Curtin, the plantation complex was a key component of the preindustrial economy that the Industrial Revolution displaced. How and why the plantation complex crumbled is more controversial than Curtin implies, although he stresses the link with the democratic revolutions of the late eighteenth century. The process was a prolonged one, extending through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Some elements of the complex lived on even after the abolition of slavery in the Americas. Just what the relationship was between the decline of the plantation complex and the emerging world industrialization is a much larger question than Curtin can deal with adequately in this set of essays.<sup>6</sup>

4. Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, vol. 2, *The Wheels of Commerce* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 272.

5. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964).

6. See, for example, David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 207–22.

Curtin's major purpose in *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex* is to provide a conceptual structure of the plantation complex over the whole period of its history. His skeletal foundation is a theoretical model of the "full-blown" plantation complex with six defined characteristics. All plantation societies possess Curtin's characteristics to a greater or lesser degree, but how helpful an interpretive tool is the idea of a unified plantation complex? It certainly has a theoretical appeal, and it may assist students who are trying to make sense of plantations in varying colonial societies across three or four centuries. Curtin communicates a sense of the plantation complex advancing inexorably across the Atlantic and across the centuries: "Each time the complex moved to a new place, it had brought on a new sugar revolution" (p. 73). In places in the book, it appears as a biological organism—growing, reaching maturity, and then dying. Curtin claims the complex grew by adding one feature after another and then came apart by dropping one after another (p. 173), leaving an image in the reader's mind of coral polyps slowly constructing an undersea atoll and then gradually disintegrating. But how organic was this plantation complex, and is a historical model of growth and decay the most apt way to characterize it? Is there not a risk that in imposing what may be an artificial uniformity on societies that clearly differed markedly, Curtin will seduce his readers into looking only for similarities when in fact the differences might be more suggestive? These are historiographical conundrums that he does not address in this beguiling and very informative set of essays.

J. H. Galloway illuminates much of the same historical landscape covered by Philip Curtin, but from a geographer's perspective. He describes *The Sugar Cane Industry: An Historical Geography from Its Origins to 1914* as "a contribution to the historical geography of the tropical world" (p. 10). In it he traces the growth of the sugarcane industry from its origins in India to its domination by large corporations on the eve of World War I. By analyzing sugarcane as a tropical agricultural crop with its resulting product of sugar, Galloway fashions a tale not of biological growth and decay but of constant change and adaptation. Sugarcane cultivation did not disappear following the abolition of slavery, nor did it wilt before the nineteenth-century challenge of beet sugar. Galloway shows how the Brussels Convention of 1902 marked a new phase of the sugar industry by bringing it under international regulation. Even in the late 1980s, sugarcane still commanded more than 60 percent of the world's sugar consumption.

The basic ingredients of Galloway's story of the spread of sugar cultivation are well known. Before Columbus brought the plant to Hispaniola on his second voyage, it had already spawned a unique form of plantation agriculture in the Mediterranean. But in the New World, as Galloway notes, "with an abundance of land, an ideal climate and a sup-

ply of slave labor, sugar production found scope to flourish" (p. 47). The sugar industry became "an instrument of European imperialism" (p. 48). As enormous growth occurred in the amount of tropical land under cultivation, sugar became more readily available to wider segments of the European and American peoples, both in price and quantity, and demand for sugar steadily rose. Even before the eighteenth century, sugar became "an American crop" (p. 83), and during the eighteenth century, it was the major cash crop in the American tropical world from Louisiana to Rio de Janeiro.

Except for referring briefly to a model to explain why and when planters embraced innovative methods or technology, Galloway avoids theoretical speculation and concentrates on bringing together succinctly the details of cane sugar's spread and its astonishing durability. He stresses the vulnerability of the planter regime at the beginning of the nineteenth century, challenged by beet sugar, fearful of both slave revolt and slave emancipation, and confronted by pressures for technological change. Instead of focusing on the collapse of plantation agriculture, Galloway sets the changes of the nineteenth century in a larger context, in which "the slow evolution of a thousand years was to give way to rapid transformation" (p. 119). Just before World War I, the sugarcane industry of the Americas was producing more sugar than ever. Slavery had been abolished, but little if any economic freedom had been gained by the workers who still toiled in backbreaking labor in the tropical cane fields. The growing industry had spread beyond the Americas to the Pacific islands and to Asia. In the Americas, Galloway concludes, the nineteenth-century changes were enormous, but they "produced neither true individual freedom for the rural workers nor economic freedom for the countries" (p. 194).

Two books highlight the importance of the French Caribbean. Alfred Hunt's *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America* is a thoroughly researched and well-written monograph that tries to correct what Hunt perceives as the invisible "presence and influence" of Caribbean peoples, including Haitians, on U.S. culture and society. Hunt argues that their contributions have been invisible to white Americans "because they are dark-skinned, predominantly poor, speak patois, and come from a southern culture without a strong European tradition" (p. 192). He traces Haitian influence in the United States from the St. Domingue revolution to the American Civil War and identifies New Orleans and the lower South during this era as "the northern extremity of Caribbean culture" (p. 1).

As French colonies, St. Domingue and Louisiana were dependent on each other. But the French cession of Louisiana to Spain in 1762, followed nearly thirty years later by the outbreak of revolution in St. Domingue, dramatically changed the Caribbean strategic equation. St. Domingue's transformation into the black republic of Haiti had momentous consequences for the United States, beginning with Napoleon's failure to reconquer the island and restore slavery. Toussaint L'Ouverture's victories

made him “the most powerful black symbol of his time” (p. 101). According to Hunt, inhabitants of the United States viewed Toussaint’s success as a “victory of the New World over the Old” (p. 87), and in defying Napoleon’s armies, the Haitians inadvertently paved the way for the success of American westward expansion through the acquisition of Louisiana and control of the Mississippi River.

The Haitian Revolution caused an exodus of planters, their slaves, and many free blacks from the new republic. After Spain expelled all Haitian refugees from Cuba, thousands crossed the Gulf to New Orleans. Hunt reports that approximately six thousand St. Domingans fled to New Orleans in 1809, the largest single migration to come to the city from the former French colony. The majority were black, and the two thousand free blacks doubled the free black population of New Orleans. Hunt credits these St. Domingans with the “cultural flowering of New Orleans” (p. 83) and the introduction of “a Gallic-American” cultural element into American theater, architecture, folk religion, dance, and music. He has done an excellent job of rediscovering the contributions of these migrants, especially the blacks, to the unique Creole blend of New Orleans.

The remainder of *Haiti’s Influence on Antebellum America* probes the profound effect of the Haitian Revolution on southern slave society, northern abolitionists, and American blacks in the years leading to the Civil War. Hunt uncovers the “lessons” of St. Domingue being repeated over and over again by southern slaveholders. What were they? The South had “to maintain slavery unequivocally, watch the freedmen carefully, and show a united front against attacks on the institutions; otherwise, race war was inevitable” (p. 127). By the mid-nineteenth century, these false lessons were embedded into the Southern white consciousness as firmly as articles of faith. Hunt counters them and his accompanying explanation of the economic decline of Haiti with the real lesson of St. Domingue, which the Southern planters were incapable of comprehending: “They could not see that the institution of slavery as a system of oppression, not the character of blacks, had led to the decline of Haitian society. Slavery’s legacy was little literacy, no schools, no commercial traditions, no banks, no political stability—a situation from which Haiti has in fact never recovered” (p. 139).

The Southern planter reaction to the Haitian Revolution reverberated in Cuba, the British West Indies, and other slave societies of the Americas. Hunt would find an even broader basis for comparison were he to extend his investigation into the Caribbean itself, let alone further south. *Haiti’s Influence on Antebellum America*, however, makes an eloquent plea for a more enlightened understanding of what remains the hemisphere’s poorest country, whose history of poverty occurred “in part because it gave much and received little” (p. 191).

Dale Tomich’s *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World*

*Economy, 1830–1848* uses Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system approach as a tool to explore the transformation of Martinique's sugar plantation complex during the first half of the nineteenth century. Following Wallerstein's argument regarding one capitalist world system,<sup>7</sup> Tomich classifies the sugar plantation as "a pioneer institution of capitalist development" (p. 2). What Tomich is really trying to do is "to *unite* the local history of plantation slavery in colonial Martinique with the history of world capitalism" (p. 6), or at least the history of world capitalism in the early nineteenth century.

To accomplish this daunting task, Tomich intersperses chapters of theoretical analysis with others specifically focused on the Martinique plantation economy and its metropolitan connections with France. Tomich acknowledges that going from one chapter to the next is "a movement from one methodological level of specificity to another": "Like a set of Russian dolls, the chapters are contained within one another" (p. 7). How snug is the fit? For some readers, the theoretical underpinning may become an opaque distraction from an excellent and solidly researched monograph on Martinique's plantation economy. From such a perspective, the theoretical chapters will be viewed as a tangled thicket of intellectual underbrush that the reader must clear away to reach the main path. For those who find Wallerstein's "unity and interdependence of the world economy" (p. 6) a necessary or challenging prerequisite to studying Martinique's place in it, the theoretical chapters will indeed be integral to the argument of the book. The larger issue raised but not developed by Tomich and his theoretical model is the model's possible utility for reinterpreting the history of slavery "throughout the Americas" (p. 6).

Tomich's discussion of French tariff policies on sugar, credit, and debt among the planter class, the production processes of the sugar plantations, and the role and life of the slaves is admirable in its detail and breadth of scope. He argues convincingly that twin interrelated crises of slavery and the sugar plantation economy fed on each other on the French island. Tomich explains, "From the early 1830s onward, a structural crisis gripped the slave plantation in Martinique as a productive enterprise and as a form of the social organization of labor; this crisis exacerbated the already precarious condition of the entire circuit of French colonial sugar" (pp. 283–84).

Tomich does not attempt, however, to fuse his own economic analysis with a larger political explanation of the emancipation of slaves within the French colonial empire in 1848 other than to deny that these structural crises "caused" slave emancipation. In disagreeing with Robin Blackburn's

7. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, vol. 3, *The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World Economy, 1730–1840s* (San Diego, Calif.: Academic Press, 1989), 189.



explanation of French emancipation, Tomich advises historians to interpret “the political event of emancipation in relation to the social and economic processes that transformed the nature of slave relations” (p. 286).

Robin Blackburn, too, reveals large ambitions in *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848*. It is the first of a projected two-volume Marxist narrative of what he terms “liberation struggles” freeing slaves throughout the Americas. Beginning with the impact of the American Revolution and concluding with the European revolutions of 1848, Blackburn charts the political leverage of an industrializing Britain and the economic effects of the revolution occurring in the thirteen colonies and then those of the Haitian Revolution and the Latin American independence movements on the slave systems of the New World. He finds “popular class struggle as well as bourgeois revolution” operating first to enrich but ultimately to destroy the slave holders. Discarding what he considers to be Eric Williams’s outmoded dialectic, Blackburn tries to substitute another by establishing “to what extent anti-slavery, either in intention or result, transcended the bourgeois democratic or capitalist dynamic” (p. 27). The strength of Blackburn’s narrative is his melding of metropolitan and colonial events in each of the slave regimes; its weakness lies in its Marxist harness.

Blackburn has nevertheless woven a fascinating tapestry that crosses and recrosses the Atlantic like the slavers on their unrelenting voyages. In bringing the abolition movements in the various slave regions together with the European events that made up the historical context, if not the cause, of abolition, he has made it easier for the discerning reader to encompass the dimensions of a complex historical process. The ideological framework Blackburn provides will doubtless stimulate further historical debate.

Patrick Manning’s *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trade* does not consider Eric Williams’s thesis to be outmoded. It simply requires reformulation to highlight the connection between capitalism and slavery in the Atlantic World as part of a process “to integrate slavery into World history” (p. 170). Manning suggests a possible reformulation that rests on the productivity of slave labor and the contribution of slavery to the economic development of New World societies. He urges the application of this “expanded and reformulated Williams thesis” not just to the Atlantic world but to African and Oriental areas, wherever slave systems dominated (p. 173).

Manning’s desire to restate Eric Williams’s thesis in a more contemporary way is a by-product of his attempt to enhance students’ understanding of “the Atlantic heritage of slavery” (p. 24). This undertaking encompasses a more realistic estimate of how much slaves contributed to the societies of the Americas and Europe and greater knowledge of the real costs of slavery for African societies. In an introductory text, Manning can only hint at the reformulation he has in mind. He outlines his

restatement in the form of a proposition: “Slave exports generated an expansion of African slavery, slavery in Africa and the Americas was an important contributor to capitalist construction, and capitalism brought about the end of slavery” (p. 20). The apparent simplicity of this proposition will appeal to harried students who either lack the time or do not want to explore all the complexities underlying it. But real dangers of historical distortion inhere in its oversimplification, and in this instance, Manning may achieve the opposite of what he intends.

Manning’s *Slavery and African Life* is a general survey of slavery and its impact on Africa aimed at undergraduates. Although he focuses on the economic history of Africa, he has deliberately integrated what he calls “spiritual and dramatic terms” into his account of slavery’s economic costs and benefits. The prologue and conclusion are worth reading on their own for anyone who does not want to tackle Manning’s demographic models of African population estimates. He asks profound and enduring questions that must continue to engage historians and students of history alike. Manning devotes a chapter to exploring reasons for African complicity in the slave trade but also documents the elements of the African tragedy in a precise clinical diagnosis.

Manning explains that the Bight of Benin suffered a continuous population decline from 1690 to 1850 due to the Atlantic slave trade. The total African population “was held in check during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the slave trade” (p. 23). African sex ratios were substantially distorted. In Angola because of the endemic nature of the slave trade, the domestic slave population also grew steadily. Manning estimates that without the slave trade, the population of sub-Saharan Africa might have ranged between seventy and one hundred million in 1850—possibly double the estimated fifty million Africans living there in 1850. Manning also eloquently confirms how Westerners continue to live with the heritage of slavery, including one of its most pernicious legacies, racism. Manning reminds readers that “slavery was a sacrifice of Africans for the transformation of the wider world, and slavery was a tragedy for the people of Africa” (p. 1).

Johannes Postma offers another international perspective in his book, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1815*. It ties together the variegated strands of “a true triangular commercial enterprise” that embraced three legs and three different continents (p. 297). Postma moves readily from Holland to Brazil to the Caribbean and to Africa in order to incorporate all its dimensions. His detailed and comprehensive study of Dutch participation in the Atlantic slave trade from 1600 to its end in 1815 is based on years of thorough research in Dutch archives. In the course of this research, Postma developed a rich data bank on Dutch slaving voyages from which he created the statistical tables and appendices.

The Dutch were the fourth-largest of the European countries carry-

ing on the Atlantic slave trade, after the British, the Portuguese, and the French. Although the Dutch share of the overall trade amounted only to 5 percent (far behind the first three), the Dutch dominated the slave trade at several points during the seventeenth century and transported an estimated 10 percent of the slaves exported to the Americas during the peak years of the trade, between 1760 and 1773. Dutch achievements, especially in the seventeenth century, are normally associated with maritime commercial preeminence or cultural florescence and are praised accordingly. Postma, in contrast, fills in the details of an obscure part of this canvas: the extent to which Dutch commerce and wealth derived from the slave trade. He concludes that the trade itself did not have much effect “on the domestic Dutch economy, but as an integral part of the total Dutch economic system it cannot be ignored” (p. 302).

For all his success in laying bare the statistics of Dutch slave voyages—profits, losses, and mortality rates that he calculates at 15 percent—Postma has not been able to give names and personal identities to the victims of this mass forced migration. The records classify them solely as groups or statistics. One of the few identified by name was an Asanti slave, Essjerie Ettin, who led an unsuccessful slave revolt aboard the slaver *Guineese Vriendschap* in 1770 and was savagely executed after the uprising was suppressed. The hundreds of thousands of other victims are known to us only as numbers on specific slave ships carrying them across the Atlantic. But if Postma cannot uncover their individual identities, he does offer much enlightenment about the conditions aboard the Dutch slave ships, including disease and its relation to mortality rates on both sides of the Atlantic and in the Middle Passage of what he terms “the cycle of suffering and death” (p. 235).

The newly independent Dutch Republic became a place of refuge for many Europeans forced to flee their homes during the two centuries following its emergence. But Dutch participation in the Atlantic slave trade ensured that Holland was no haven for Africans. Postma recounts, with studied understatement, how the estimated half million African slaves carried across the Atlantic by Dutch slave traders must have remembered the Dutch “in a more negative way” (p. 10).

The historical consequences of slavery and emancipation, short and long term, may also be clarified via comparative approaches. Leo Spitzer adopts an innovative technique in *Lives in Between: Assimilation and Marginality in Austria, Brazil, and West Africa, 1780–1945*. He examines the lives of three individual families in the post-slavery era in a cross-cultural comparison of assimilation into new societies. Spitzer’s choice of families poses intriguing questions for comparative historians. He chose the Afro-Brazilian Rebouças family, the West African Creole May family from Sierra Leone, and the Austrian-Jewish Zweig-Brettauer family. What do these families have in common? At first sight, very little, the author

candidly admits: "All seem worlds apart, so exotic to each other, as well as to us today, as to exclude common terms" (p. 4).

By the mid-nineteenth century, the members of each family were trying to assimilate themselves "into the dominant culture" of their respective societies, and they were encountering a variety of barriers. Although Spitzer traces their progress through the second generation, not one of the stories has a happy outcome. He nevertheless claims that historical exploration of the barriers in each society and individual responses to these barriers will yield "a more profound sense of the connecting thread between the individual and collective society" (p. 7).

If emancipation as a collective action, stimulated by the rapid spread of industrial capitalism, characterized the nineteenth century, Spitzer's cross-cultural comparison of these families from three far-removed societies personalizes the reality of assimilation and marginality in this newly industrializing world. His own background influenced the choice of countries and the selection of the Jewish Zweig-Brettauer family. This choice, in turn, raises another issue with both moral and historical overtones. Were the journeys "out of the ghetto" and "up from slavery" really comparable? Does such a comparison illuminate the meaning and results of emancipation? How all-encompassing a historical term is the word *emancipation*? Spitzer is convinced that the journeys were comparable. His study, in addition to providing fascinating biographical vignettes of the families themselves and the changing societies in which they lived, lays out his theoretical case supported by an impressive range of scholarly argument.

In Spitzer's and the other books reviewed in this essay, the historical investigations stand on their own. The theories underlying them are more controversial and will continue to stimulate responses and rebuttals. What is indisputable is the rich yield of historical results in this field coming from the new comparative approaches.