

TRANSATLANTIC TIES:
Recent Works on the Slave Trade, Slavery, and Abolition

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- THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY IN BRAZIL: THE "LIBERATION" OF AFRICANS THROUGH THE EMANCIPATION OF CAPITAL.* By David Baronov. (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000. Pp. 236. \$62.50 cloth.)
- NEGROS, MULATOS, ESCLAVOS Y LIBERTOS EN LA COSTA RICA DEL SIGLO XVII.* By Rina Cáceres. (México, DF: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 2001. Pp. 130. N.p.)
- HONOR Y LIBERTAD: DISCURSOS Y RECURSOS EN LA ESTRATEGIA DE LIBERTAD DE UNA MUJER ESCLAVA (GUAYAQUIL A FINES DEL PERÍODO COLONIAL).* By María Eugenia Chaves. (Göteborg: Avhandlingar från Historiska Institutionen I Göteborg, 2001. Pp. 311. N.p.)
- THE VIRGIN, THE KING, AND THE ROYAL SLAVES OF EL COBRE: NEGOTIATING FREEDOM IN COLONIAL CUBA, 1670–1780.* By María Elena Díaz. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000. Pp. 440. \$49.50 cloth.)
- THE RISE OF AFRICAN SLAVERY IN THE AMERICAS.* By David Eltis. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp. 353. \$59.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)
- CAETANA SAYS NO: WOMEN'S STORIES FROM A BRAZILIAN SLAVE SOCIETY.* By Sandra Lauderdale Graham. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. 183. \$50.00 cloth, \$18.00 paper.)
- CENTRAL AFRICANS AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE AMERICAN DIASPORA.* Edited by Linda M. Heywood. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. 400. \$65.00 cloth, \$23.00 paper.)
- "LICENTIOUS LIBERTY" IN A BRAZILIAN GOLD-MINING REGION: SLAVERY, GENDER, AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SABARÁ, MINAS GERAIS.* By Kathleen J. Higgins. (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1999. Pp. 236. \$55.00 cloth, \$22.50 paper.)

- THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE*. By Herbert S. Klein. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp. 234. \$49.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)
- EMPIRE AND ANTISLAVERY: SPAIN, CUBA, AND PUERTO RICO, 1833–1874*. By Christopher Schmidt-Nowara. (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999. Pp. 239. \$50.00 cloth, \$22.95 paper.)
- NA SENZALA, UMA FLOR: ESPERANÇAS E RECORDAÇÕES DA FAMÍLIA ESCRAVA—BRASIL SUDESTE, SÉCULO XIX*. By Robert W. Slenes. (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1999. Pp. 229. N.p.)
- A CAPOEIRA ESCRAVA E OUTRAS TRADIÇÕES REBELDES NO RIO DE JANEIRO (1808–1850)*. By Carlos Eugênio Libano Soares. (Campinas: Editora da Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP), 2001. N.p.)

This diverse collection of books, dominated by social and cultural historians, reveals major trends of recent scholarship on the slave trade, slavery, and abolition. Newly available data on all known slave trade voyages is significantly revising our understanding of this massive forced migration. Most of these historians focus on slave life and culture, leaving behind older questions about the nature of slave labor, the structure of the slave system (*escravismo*, as it is known in Brazilian scholarship), and the impact of the familiar forms of resistance such as flight and revolt. They reveal the depth and intensity of transatlantic connections and offer more sophisticated understandings of the experience and culture of the millions of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Americas. Historians cannot now ignore African and creole slaves as active agents in shaping American cultures, nor can they ignore the complex social relations that shaped slavery. Bracketed by brief discussions of books on the slave trade and abolition, this review focuses primarily on the studies of slave life and culture.

THE SLAVE TRADE

Since Philip Curtin's classic *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (1969), demographic and economic historians have dominated work on the trade, and the two books under review here are no exception. Herbert Klein's *The Atlantic Slave Trade* is a most welcome synthesis and an equally valuable presentation of preliminary results from the database on 27,000 slave trade voyages compiled by him and his colleagues.¹ Without footnotes but with a long bibliographical essay, this is a book

1. David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert S. Klein, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1562–1847: A Database on CD-Rom* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

designed for classroom use. The author is particularly concerned with bridging “the gap between popular understanding and scholarly knowledge” which, he argues, remains as profound today as it was in the eighteenth century (xvii). Numerous “myths,” repeated even in university-level textbooks, are subjected to the scrutiny of this skilled demographic and quantitative historian. Slaves were costly to acquire and African sellers drove hard bargains for their human goods; European buyers struggled to keep up with changing African demands and tastes (chap. 5). There was no exchange of baubles and trinkets for virtually costless slaves; indeed, outbound cargo accounted for two-thirds of the cost of eighteenth-century French slave-trading voyages (86). Furthermore, the textbook model of a triangular trade (voyages from Europe to Africa to the Caribbean and back to Europe) inadequately describes the course of this commerce. By the 1700s, the great century of slaving, slavers were specialized ships, relatively small, most of which returned from the Caribbean to Europe in ballast or with token cargoes; voyages in the largest slave trade of all, that to Brazil, generally had no European leg at all (97, 144). Middle-passage mortality rates declined steadily from an average of 20.3 percent in the seventeenth century to 8.8 percent in the last years of the legal slave trade (1808–29), rising thereafter to 11.5 percent (139). While these may seem low rates, Klein notes that they were significantly higher than those for European convicts, troops, and emigrants carried in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the death of 5 or 10 percent of a group of young adults during a 30- to 60-day period constitutes “a severe mortality crisis situation” (151).

Klein is quick to point out where assumptions about the trade have been made in the absence of quantitative evidence, but he is sometimes overly selective in his use of qualitative sources. For example, noting that there are no reliable data on mortality during slaves’ journeys in Africa, he cites Olaudah Equiano’s account of his experience from kidnapping to sale, to suggest that mortality was quite limited before slaves reached the coast (154–56). But to generalize from the experience of one West African to an entire continent is dubious methodology.² Joseph Miller’s exhaustive study of the Angolan slave trade provides, for example, convincing qualitative evidence of massive mortality in that region.³ Similarly, there are simply not enough data to assert that positive

2. Interestingly, Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua, another West African who left an account of his journey, also experienced a relatively easy passage to the coast some seventy-five years after Equiano. See *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua: His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa and America*, ed. Robin Law and Paul E. Lovejoy (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2001), 136–48.

3. Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

growth rates in the “main regional slave populations” of Brazil were “wiped out by very high rates of manumission” (170) for any period. To be sure, Brazilian manumission rates were higher than elsewhere, but the only hard figure that we have is the 0.63 percent per annum rate calculated for 1874,⁴ and countless observers noted the high death rates on Brazilian sugar plantations.

David Eltis’s masterful *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, although focused on the Anglo-American world, has much to say to historians of Latin America when he takes on the fundamental question of why Europeans turned to African slavery. While Klein presents a conventional economic explanation—“for all intents and purposes, the costs of attracting European workers to America were too high” (15)—Eltis moves beyond the economic realm to analyze the mostly European cultural constraints within which slavery developed. By asking counterfactual questions, such as why Europeans did not enslave other Europeans (who could have been transported to the plantations much more cheaply than Africans) or put European women into plantation gangs along with male indentured servants (again, they would have been cheaper than African women, especially had they been enslaved), he shows how “the profit-maximizing model of human behavior makes little sense unless it is placed within a cultural framework” (85). By the 1500s, European definitions of protected insiders (free-born Englishmen, for example) and outsiders (eligible for enslavement) and assumptions about gender roles, both quite different from Africans’ views on these matters, made possible the slave trade. So did the rise of “possessive individualism” in Europe; the greater the individual rights for Europeans, the more rigid and absolute the chattel slavery for outsiders (England and the Netherlands were, he argues, the most extreme European cases) (chap. 2). The expansion of Europeans’ definition of insiders in turn made abolition possible.

In keeping with the well-known argument of John Thornton and others,⁵ Eltis underscores African elites’ significant influence on their relations with Europeans. They prevented the establishment of any significant European-controlled production in Africa, notwithstanding Europeans’ interests in doing so (140–45), forcing production to the New World. They sold, for the most part, many more women than European buyers wanted. The gender ratios in the trade (a compromise worked out between buyers and sellers) meant that far more African than European women made it to the Americas, which had important implications for Africans’ long-term demographic and cultural presence in the

4. See Slenes, *Na senzala, uma flor*, 200–201 (reviewed in this essay).

5. John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

New World (97–104). Africans affected the course of the trade in numerous other ways and Europeans were constantly scrambling to keep up with changing conditions on the coast. Like Klein, Eltis sees the slave trade as a hard-driven bargain among equals, slave traders and African elites.

Eltis describes the incredible wealth of Barbados, which around 1700 had a per capita income higher than that of Britain (even when slaves are included in the calculation). Crucial to the success of Britain's plantation colony was the "value system that made exploitation on this scale possible," in other words the decision to maintain a rigorous separation between African gang laborers and the Anglo-American population (223). He also takes on major economic questions, offering still more critiques of Eric Williams's thesis that Britain's extraordinary sugar and slave-trade profits made industrialization possible. In 1792, the busiest year of the slave trade, slavers accounted for less than 3 percent of Britain's merchant marine by tonnage (relatively speaking, the trade was far more important to Portugal's economy than to Britain's) and at least fifty different domestic industries generated profits comparable to those earned in sugar. Sugar and slavery were simply too small a part of the British economy to make much difference (264–73).

In broad brush strokes, Eltis delineates the ethnic origins of slaves in the early British Caribbean, two-thirds of whom came from within 150 miles of a 200-mile stretch of coast between Whydah and Cape Coast Castle. Given the concentration of the British trade on this area and the significant number of women (far more than among indentured servants), Eltis joins those who argue that the trade brought, not a crowd of isolated individuals, but people who shared cultural affinities, and could form families and pass on culture. Jamaica and Barbados, then, began with two core cultures, one southern English (mostly from around London), the other Akan/Aja. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the colonies saw greater diversity in the origins of their populations, but more homogeneity in their social constructions as ethnicity was defined in terms of a black-white dichotomy (chap. 9).

While scholars less interested in counting slaves and more concerned with describing the experience and culture will find Eltis's and Klein's works dry, they both deserve a wide readership. Eltis asks the big questions, and while not all will agree with his answers, they must be taken into account. Both books have already come under criticism from Africanists for their portrayal of the trade's impact on Africa.⁶

6. See Joseph E. Inikori's lengthy reviews of Eltis, *American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (December 2001): 1751–53; and Klein, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82, no. 1 (February 2002): 130–35.

Nonetheless, they offer important analyses of the forces that brought slaves to the Americas and the ways in which the slave trade shaped slaves' lives and cultures in the New World.

SLAVE LIFE: GENDER, POWER, AND CULTURE

Most of the books under review here focus on slaves' lives in the New World. Kathleen J. Higgins's *"Licentious Liberty" in a Brazilian Gold-Mining Region: Slavery, Gender, and Social Control in Eighteenth-Century Sabará, Minas Gerais* offers English-language readers the first book-length study of slavery in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais. Focusing on Sabará, one of the principal mining towns, she draws a compelling portrait of the disorderly society generated by dispersed placer gold production. Authorities could do little more than lament slaves' "licentious liberty" or the "free and easy ways" in which colonists lived (175, 108). The colonial state could not effectively tax gold production nor provide security. Masters routinely armed their slaves to protect their claims; slave flight and maroon communities (*quilombos*) were a chronic problem. Nonetheless, Minas Gerais was one of the major slave societies of the Americas, with a population of 400,000 by 1800, slightly more than half enslaved. While this is familiar enough, at least to specialists, Higgins makes a notable contribution in her analysis of gender relations in this society. The "single most important determinant" (13) of Mineiro society was the male colonists' decision to purchase overwhelming numbers of male Africans. The result was a slave population with male-female ratios that averaged more than 4:1 and reached as high as 8:1 among Africans, far outstripping the average sex ratios of the slave trade (74–75).

White male colonists' determination to maintain their power led to several distinct features of Mineiro society. In the absence of white women (especially rare during the boom years), male colonists maintained slave concubines and tended to free their mixed-race children, who in turn became their heirs. By eschewing marriage to their children's enslaved mothers, white men excluded them from control of property (Luso-Brazilian law mandated community property in marriage) and maximized the inheritance of their children. These concubines rarely received manumission from their masters. Although women obtained freedom at far higher rates than men during the boom, they typically purchased it from the proceeds of their work in petty commerce and marketing. In this respect, a gendered division of labor favored the small number of women in this society. While male slaves too could, with luck, accumulate wealth through the contractual nature of mining labor (after providing their master with a fixed quantity of gold, they could keep whatever else they might find), masters were

reluctant to free men who knew where the best gold deposits lay or who had served them as thugs. In short, almost all of the apparently peculiar features of this society can be understood in the context of gendered power relations. In this respect, Higgins offers an effective critique of the “persistent myths about affectionate relationships between free men and enslaved women . . . and the purported influences that enslaved women derived from such liaisons” (9). White male masters’ strategies for preserving their power during the mining boom led to an unintended “demographic transformation” in both the patterns of slaveholding and the composition of the free population: By the end of the century, some two-thirds of the free population consisted of non-whites, many themselves slaveowners (39–40).

While Higgins makes gender the central analytical tool in her study of Minas Gerais, Sandra Lauderdale Graham’s effective microhistory, *Caetana Says No: Women’s Stories from a Brazilian Slave Society*, explores gender and patriarchy through two women’s stories from nineteenth-century Brazil’s coffee plantation regions. Caetana, a creole domestic slave, forced into marriage by her master, refused to accept her slave husband in 1835. In the face of her adamant rejection, her master had a change of heart and petitioned for an annulment, a case that dragged on for five years, with the Church courts finally upholding the original marriage. The second story describes the consequences of the efforts of an aged, unmarried woman from a planter family, Inácia Delfina Werneck, to bequeath most of her property to a family of slaves (Bernarda and her sons), whom she freed. The woman’s nephew and executor, a powerful coffee baron, ultimately upheld his aunt’s will, but subjected Bernarda’s family to an unusually harsh tenancy contract. In a remarkable achievement of archival research, Graham links scattered and diverse notarial and judicial records to reconstruct these stories and present them in a book designed for classroom use. Indeed, it derives from an undergraduate seminar that she taught for many years at the University of Texas at Austin. She skilfully weaves analysis of the documents with discussions of the historiography of Brazilian slavery.

Throughout this book, Graham is interested fundamentally in power and in challenging our notions about who held it and how it was wielded in this slave society. Despite gendered power structures, Caetana and Inácia, women at opposite ends of the social hierarchy, sought to shape their own lives and enjoyed important, if ultimately limited, successes. Complex, unexpected, and sometimes surprising social ties bound master and slave in the intimate world of the plantation. The author revels in these ambiguities and in the impossibility of bringing either story to a neat and tidy conclusion. For her, conclusions are less important than the stories themselves, for “they make of slavery and patriarchy not abstract systems of labor or power in which individuals blur

into mere types” but reveal “identifiable persons in lived relationships, grounded in the peculiarities of time, place, and situation” (158). The ultimately inconclusive nature of both stories—we cannot know for sure why Caetana said no, what became of her and her groom, nor what motivated Inácia and her uncle—will no doubt serve as the starting point for many a classroom discussion.

Like Higgins, Rina Cáceres examines slavery in a region. Unlike eighteenth-century Minas Gerais, however, seventeenth-century Costa Rica was a marginal area with a stagnant economy and a tiny slave population. Through an exhaustive analysis of the 502 notarial registrations involving 843 slaves during the century (sales, wills, dowries, gifts, mortgages, and manumissions), she discerns an increase in slavery’s importance after about 1650 and a quickening of the slave market in the last three decades of the century, attributable to the expansion of cacao cultivation. Slaves were expensive; healthy adults cost almost as much as a grist mill and few of the 150 or so haciendas at mid-century had many slaves. Although not far from the trade route that brought significant numbers of Africans to Peru at this time, Costa Rica’s slave population was overwhelmingly creole (only 11 percent of the slaves in these transactions were African-born) and exhibited a balanced sex ratio. Most of this is what one would expect to find in such a region—a society with slaves rather than a slave society.

In some of the book’s more tantalizing passages (91–97), Cáceres traces the incorporation of “negros, mulatos y pardos libres” into militia companies and the government’s efforts after to settle free coloreds near the capital of Cartago in Puebla de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles (Puebla de los Pardos). The founding of the brotherhood in 1653 marked an important step in the institutionalization of the devotion to this Marian image (later Costa Rica’s patron saint). Against formidable difficulties, residents of the *pardo* town built a community that nurtured a public corporate identity around their contributions to the state through military service and gainful employment in trades.⁷ Cáceres’s arbitrary decision to limit her study to the seventeenth century leaves the tale of Puebla de los Pardos and other threads hanging in the air.

Much more satisfying in this respect is María Elena Díaz’s remarkable account of the royal mining slaves of El Cobre in eastern Cuba. The story began in 1670, when the Spanish king confiscated a moribund copper-mining concession, complete with 217 slaves. For the next 110 years, these people and their descendants wrangled with the crown

7. For a more detailed examination of a similar community in Mexico, see Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 190–98.

over what it meant to be royal slaves. Exhaustively mining every nugget and flake of information from the limited sources available, Díaz traces the social imagining and practical construction of a particular slavery and the building of a “*pueblo*, or a village community, constituted almost exclusively by royal slaves and free people of color” (9) whose patroness was the Virgin of Charity of El Cobre (later symbol of the Cuban nation). By the early eighteenth century, royal slavery was a slavery unlike any other. Cobreros gained the status of *pueblo*, a village, complete with the attendant corporate rights: a *cabildo* (municipal council) and a formally demarcated land allocation. Its men constituted a militia yet most remained slaves, subject not to regular labor but only to periodic drafts for work on the fortifications of Santiago and the other strong points of the region, levies reminiscent of the *corvées* (*mita*) imposed on the indigenous peoples of the Spanish empire. The men supported themselves by farming, while women dominated surface mining. Díaz traces some successful royal slave families and their property-holdings (including slaves) over several generations. The book ends in 1780, when heirs of the original concessionnaire regained control over the population and sold off some eight hundred slaves to the booming sugar plantations of the island (five hundred free descendants remained in El Cobre, and finally won a royal grant of freedom for their dispersed fellow Cobreros in 1800).

Díaz’s interest is less in the outcome of the Cobreros’ struggle than in the process by which these “slaves” imagined themselves as royal slaves and worked out the meaning of that category in practice. Rather than present a narrative, she offers a series of linked essays on the major aspects of the royal slaves’ century of ambiguous status. They engaged in a long, drawn-out struggle that reveals the remarkable degree to which “marginalized sectors of the population” found spaces for negotiation in the “enveloping imperial culture” and “used dominant discourses to formulate and push their entitlements to the limits possible in a slave society” (14, 320). Time and again, they subverted and negated their status by representing themselves as something other than socially and politically “dead” slaves. Since they did not receive rations from their master, they claimed *estancias* and *conucos* (provision grounds) as rights, for they needed to support their families. In return, they promised to be available for military service should the crown need it. Twice during this period, in 1709 and in 1784, representatives from the village made their way to Madrid to argue their case. One of this book’s great strengths is the author’s ability to flesh out the difficult struggles in which the Cobreros engaged: “It took years of protests, conflict, court action, uprisings, and even work stoppages—not just ‘everyday forms of passive resistance’ to work out the terms” under which the Cobreros labored (228), all of which she describes in fascinating detail. In short, Díaz offers

a compelling portrait of a unique community situated on the contested terrain between slavery and freedom.

María Eugenia Chaves's book also deals with the spaces between slavery and freedom, focusing on an individual's struggle for liberty. The core of *Honor y libertad: Discursos y recursos en la estrategia de libertad de una mujer esclava (Guayaquil a fines del período colonial)* is a close analysis of María Chiquinquirá Díaz's five-year freedom lawsuit (1794–99) in Guayaquil. The case turned on the status of her African mother, María Antonia, who, suffering from leprosy, was allegedly abandoned by her owners. To survive, the elder María turned to begging and prostitution, during which time Chiquinquirá was born; after her mother's death, she was taken in by her mother's "owner." She accepted her life as a slave, she claimed, because she had been well-treated; after the death of her "mistress" some forty or fifty years later, she came into the possession of a presbyter who repeatedly insulted her and her daughter and refused to support them. Instead, they depended on her husband, a free tailor, who resided in the basement of the cleric's house. The legal question was quite straightforward: If María Antonia had really been abandoned, which implied manumission (a principle that dated back to Roman law), then her descendants were in fact free people.

One of the six hundred or so female slaves who enjoyed the relative freedom of life in Guayaquil (whose lives are described in the book's first chapters), María Chiquinquirá built up an impressive social network that made it possible for her to bring suit against her putative owner. Chaves suggests that intra-elite conflicts facilitated Chiquinquirá's access to the courts; there are indications that the ambitious and upwardly mobile scribe espoused her case but slave lawsuits cannot be attributed solely to the interests of such men. Although they brought the cases to court, the entire process depended on the slaves' initiative and skill (while enjoying court-ordered freedom pending the disposition of her case, Chiquinquirá rounded up her own witnesses and explained the questions that they would have to answer). After almost five years of legal jockeying, the Guayaquil court ruled against Chiquinquirá, but she immediately appealed to the audiencia in Quito, at which point the paper trail stops.

Chaves's principal interests lie in the discursive realm, and the core chapters analyze the rhetorical strategies pursued by both parties in the litigation. Judicial conventions required both litigants to construct their identities according to colonial ideals of honor, slavery, liberty, and the respective obligations of slaves and masters. Concepts such as honor, race, and property "established the limits within which slaves' . . . social and legal identity could be defined" (15). In the face of the insults that she suffered, Chiquinquirá claimed a right to defend her and her daughter's honor, an important assertion of her free status and a skilful

use of honor codes. Similarly, she turned the presbyter's failure to protect and provide for his slaves—a key part of masters' ideology—against him. Chaves thus demonstrates that court records obeyed strict conventions that limited the range of possible discourse yet provided surprisingly large spaces for slaves to pursue their interests.

The studies of slave life and culture reviewed up to this point pay relatively little attention to African culture—sometimes justifiable. Chiquinquirá, after all, used Hispanic legal and honor codes to fight her court case; what she might have learned from her African mother was not germane to her case (and might even have weakened it). Similarly, the *Cobrerros* (overwhelmingly creole by the eighteenth century) worked within a Hispanic cultural framework as they defined themselves as free. Other times, the lack of attention to African culture is more problematic. Higgins casts her insightful analysis of gendered power relations entirely in a Luso-Brazilian framework, even though the majority of the population in the early years of Minas Gerais's mining boom was African. While Caetana was a creole and her annulment case, of course, followed ecclesiastical procedures, half of the slaves on her owner's plantation were Africans, many newly arrived. These Africans' understandings of gender and power relations go unexplored in these otherwise valuable books.

Robert W. Slenes's *Na senzala, uma flor: Esperanças e recordações da família escrava—Brasil Sudeste, século XIX* places Africans at the center of the plantation society in which Caetana lived. This book is the first installment of the author's study of African and Afro-Brazilian culture in the nineteenth-century coffee plantation districts of Brazil. The first half of the book surveys the historiography of the slave family and documents the surprisingly high marriage rates found on slaveholdings of more than ten slaves in São Paulo. Here, as many as seven in ten women aged fifteen and older were married. Rates for men (the majority of the primarily African slave population) were considerably lower and, given the customary prohibition of off-plantation marriage, slaves on small properties had far fewer opportunities for marriage. In this booming coffee economy, planters rarely sold slaves and couples could expect relatively long marriages, at least as long as their masters lived. Slaves apparently valued marriage and had relative freedom in the choice of partners on the plantation (Caetana's master was certainly an exception). Up to this point, Slenes's argument responds to an older literature that saw a lack of family life as one of the pathologies of slavery; for decades historians have been documenting the existence of slave families in Brazil.

In the second half of the book, Slenes seeks to elucidate how the slave family nurtured a community that undermined masters' hegemony and reflected an Afro-Brazilian culture with strong roots in

Central Africa, the provenance of most coffee-plantation slaves. A careful reading of passing remarks in travellers' accounts (usually dismissive of slaves' private lives) allows the author to construct an argument about the meaning of family life for slaves. The word for slave quarters (*senzala*) derives from a Kimbundu word for village (*sanzala*). Marriage offered slaves greater control over their sustenance and residential arrangements. Slave huts resembled Central African housing; even their small size and lack of windows (usually taken as a measure of slaves' poverty) is consistent with African preferences. The puzzling (at least to masters and foreign visitors) determination of slaves to keep a fire lit in their cabins, summer heat and lack of chimneys notwithstanding, is consistent with Central African understandings of the home fire as a symbol of family and ancestors. Besides the practical purposes of heating, lighting, drying out their huts, driving away insects, and preserving thatched roofs, domestic fires "served as a tool in the formation of a shared identity. By linking the home to the ancestral 'homes,' they contributed to structuring the community—the *sanzala*—of the living and the dead" (252–53). The family, in short, formed the basis for slaves' identity and culture. This point made, the book stops abruptly, without a conclusion; we will have to wait for his next book to learn more.

The thirteen essays edited by Linda M. Heywood in *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* constitute a significant contribution to our knowledge about diasporan cultural dynamics. Despite accounting for nearly half of the eleven or so million Africans carried to the Americas (and the vast majority of those brought to Brazil), Central Africans have seldom received their due, especially in Brazilian scholarship, which has paid more attention to the West African minority's culture (Slenes's work notwithstanding). This book, the product of a 1999 conference at Howard University, begins to set the record straight.⁸ Most of the essays depart from several key propositions: Central Africans shared relatively greater cultural homogeneity than West Africans and, given the more substantial Afro-European community there (as well as the presence of Christianity), experienced an earlier process of creolization, skilfully analyzed in Heywood's essay. Chapters by Joseph Miller (on Central Africans' experience of the

8. Heywood's book can be read as a companion volume to the collections of essays produced by scholars associated with the UNESCO-sponsored Nigerian Hinterland Project at York University in Toronto, now part of the Harriet Tubman Resource Centre on the African Diaspora (<http://www.yorku.ca/nhp>), which focus primarily on West Africans. See, for example, Paul E. Lovejoy, ed., *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery* (London: Continuum, 2000) and Kristin Mann and Edna G. Bay, *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil* (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

slave trade) and John Thornton round out the first part of the book. The latter argues that people in the region shared a stable religious system, whose biggest change came from the introduction of Christianity in the late 1400s, not disruption caused by the slave trade.

The remaining essays focus on regions of the Americas, ranging from Brazil to South Carolina. Mary Karasch uses mostly quantitative sources to document the presence of Central Africans in the remote Brazilian frontier of Goiás and suggests that the relatively small numbers of Africans and their isolation mitigated differences among them; oral traditions stress all Africans' unity. Elizabeth Kiddy examines the custom of crowning African kings and queens in the lay brotherhoods, a constantly evolving tradition and "a ritual memory tied to an African past, but one that is distinctly and uniquely Brazilian" (153). In a sparkling essay that offers some indication of what to expect from his next book, Slenes illuminates the shared cultural assumptions about *basimbi* (water spirits) that led a group of slave sailors to strike rather than let their naturalist-employer bring a porpoise skull into their boat in December 1816. Three essays deal with Haiti and all argue that we must pay more attention to Kongolese influences on that society. Wyatt MacGaffey identifies traces of traditional Kongolese religious beliefs in Haitian popular religion while both Hein Vanhee and Terry Rey explore the influence of Kongolese Christianity in Haiti. Jane Landers surveys the presence of Central Africans in Spanish-American maroon communities and suggests that their ability to absorb different people from different cultures drew on their experience in Africa, particularly the Imbangala *kilombo* or war camp, organized through initiation. Ras Michael Brown writes about Central Africans' understandings of the forest in the South Carolina and Georgia low country, while Monica Schuler analyzes the cultural impact of some 13,500 liberated Africans (60 percent Central African) on nineteenth-century Guyana, where they were taken as contract laborers after British abolition. Finally, T. J. Desch-Obi surveys the "living traditions" of martial arts (353), many of which derive from Central African practices, but have taken root even in places such as Martinique which received few slaves from this region.

Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora is more than the sum of its parts. Together, the chapters underscore the importance of crossing the Atlantic, not just with the slavers but also with the slaves. Although few historians still hold to the old view that the middle passage so traumatized slaves that they were incapable of building a new culture in their new environment, not many on either side of the Atlantic are truly comfortable with that conclusion. Rather, we are trained as historians of Africa or of a country or region in the Americas. Paul E. Lovejoy's lament that "scholars who study slavery in the Americas . . . usually do not examine the specific historical

contexts from which the enslaved came," despite acknowledging Africa's importance in passing, is certainly well taken,⁹ but both Africanists and Americanists need to spend more time talking to each other. Like Slenes's book, Heywood's anthology reveals the rich harvest that awaits those who take on the task of understanding cultures on both sides of the African Atlantic world.

Carlos Eugênio Líbano Soares's massive but sometimes rambling *A capoeira escrava e outras tradições rebeldes no Rio de Janeiro (1808–1850)* marks an important counterpoint to the cultural approach of Slenes's and Heywood's contributors.¹⁰ *Capoeira* is the Afro-Brazilian martial art, derived from Angolan sources, which shares affinities with similar practices elsewhere in the Americas. While Desch-Obi focuses on these transatlantic connections in his chapter in Heywood's volume, Soares argues that the "origins of capoeira must be sought in urban slavery, and Rio de Janeiro certainly played a fundamental role as [capoeira's] source, notwithstanding evident African ancestry" (126). The capoeira that emerges from the Brazilian capital's police sources with which Soares worked consisted of often violent groups of men (mostly slaves in the beginning of the century) who fought to defend turf against the police and against rival gangs. Not surprisingly, the police were less interested in the forms that capoeira fighting took than in maintaining order. In this light, Soares's study is a detailed analysis of policing in the Brazilian capital, the eruptions of capoeira violence into the political struggles in the 1820s and 1830s, and capoeira's role in slave resistance.

In a number of respects, however, Soares's evidence is suggestive of the cultural processes that Heywood and her colleagues trace. Few of those arrested for capoeira were recently arrived Africans, and already in the 1810s a significant minority were creoles; at that time, however, most were ladininos from Central Africa. The ethnicity attributed to those arrested evolved in close tandem with the changing origins of Rio de Janeiro's slave and Afro-Brazilian population, with rising numbers of creoles, Mozambicans, and West Africans (who usually arrived via Bahia) falling into police hands by mid-century (130–34). Although Soares does not pursue the point, these data are consistent with an evolving Afro-Brazilian culture that absorbed newcomers into its ranks. When read alongside Heywood's and Slenes's books, *A capoeira escrava's* limited attention to African culture stands out, yet Soares's book serves as a useful reminder that local conditions also shaped African-American culture. In this case, the unusually large concentration of slaves in a

9. Paul E. Lovejoy, "Identifying Enslaved Africans in the African Diaspora," in *Identity*, ed. idem., 12.

10. This book is a companion volume to Soares's *A negregada instituição: As capoeiras na Corte imperial, 1850–1890* (Rio de Janeiro: Access, 1999).

city environment with its attendant freedoms for them (80,000 out of a population of about 200,000 at mid-century) facilitated the development of a capoeira subculture.¹¹

ABOLITION IN THE SPANISH AND BRAZILIAN EMPIRES

Finally, two of these books focus on abolition in the Spanish and Brazilian empires, the two areas of Latin America where slavery lasted the longest. Christopher Schmidt-Nowara traces the campaign against slavery from the 1830s to Puerto Rican abolition in 1873, paying special attention to the Sociedad Abolicionista Española (SAE), founded in 1865, which he characterizes as an “essentially hybrid form of political organization” (123). The “peculiar structure of capitalism in the Spanish colonial empire,” heavily reliant on an unequal protectionism and slavery, produced a “counterhegemonic abolitionist movement” (12), in which the SAE and other anti-slavery activists responded to political pressures in Spain and the two colonies. The society’s origins lay in Puerto Rico, where creole elites’ response to the end of the slave trade in the 1840s and the sugar industry’s difficulties led to a greater willingness to countenance reform than in Cuba. The SAE also formed part of the new public sphere that emerged in Madrid in the middle decades of the century. Middle-class reformers engaged the social question and bitter debates over political economy wracked the country, with free traders advocating abolition and protectionists defending the colonial status quo. Abolitionists wrestled with race, a problem for Spanish liberals since the *cortes* of 1810–14, which (like subsequent parliaments) excluded people of African descent from the franchise; most saw the Spanish nation as a white one, and many advocated European immigration as the solution to the colonies’ problems. Abolitionists’ successes, the 1870 Moret (or Free Womb) Law that applied to Cuba and Puerto Rican abolition, came during short-lived liberal and republican regimes.

Schmidt-Nowara frequently compares Spanish abolitionism to the British anti-slavery movement and effectively brings this part of the European campaign against slavery into the larger story. His decision to stop in 1874, however justifiable from the perspective of Spanish politics (the Bourbon restoration occurred in that year), leaves out the last dozen years of Cuban slavery. To be sure, others have recounted the institution’s final collapse on the island, but all of the issues that the

11. For suggestive comments on the importance of urban centers in African-American culture, see Philip D. Morgan, “The Cultural Implications of the Atlantic Slave Trade: African Regional Origins, American Destinations and New World Developments,” *Slavery and Abolition* 18, no. 1 (April 1997): 140–41.

SAE and its allies debated—labor relations, the relationship between Spain and its colonies, and the nature of society—remained unresolved. Still, Schmidt-Nowara's book is a useful demonstration of abolitionism's complex, transatlantic dimensions.

Less successful is Baronov's historical sociology of the ending of slavery in Brazil. This last abolition in the Americas is, in fact, not the main subject of his book; rather, observing that Brazilian abolition "did not result in (nor was it intended to result in) a transition from slave-labor to wage-labor" (117), he criticizes "the fable of a single, homogenous history of global working-class formation" that draws on the "narrow conceptualizations of this process" (200), dating back to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political economists such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Karl Marx (to whom he devotes two chapters). He concludes with a call for a rethinking of the concept of working class to include "the full breadth and scope of a multifaceted collection of labor forms that has included slave, serf, indentured servant, wage-labor and a number of other forms directly employed by capital" (200).

That abolition did not overnight turn slaves into undifferentiated members of an ideal-type proletariat is hardly news, nor is it any longer novel to argue that class society has failed to do away with racial discrimination. Indeed, a generation of scholars has devoted itself to analyzing these aspects of Brazilian history, tracing the marginalization of Afro-Brazilians after abolition, their complex and varied strategies of subsistence, their efforts to gain a foothold in the urban industrial economy, and the persistence of racial hierarchy.¹² Baronov's book is marred by significant misconceptions about Brazilian society and the abolition process. In contrast to his efforts to grasp a complex working class, he fails to recognize the Afro-Brazilian population's heterogeneity, referring to them all as Africans, which leads him to use incoherent categories such as "freed, nonmulatto Africans" (158) and to assert that the country had "4.2 million freed slaves" in 1872 (120) instead of a handful of freedpeople and about four million free-born people of African ancestry. Brazil's division of labor was never so "rigid" that it "relegated Africans to slave-labor, Native Americans to tribute-based labor and Europeans to indentured labor" (137). The Paraguayan War did not lead to the emancipation of 200,000 slaves (177), nor did the government free its slaves in 1866 "to serve in the army, in large part, to

12. Two recent English-language works, among many others, serve as useful introductions to these questions: George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888–1988* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Kim D. Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in Post-Abolition São Paulo and Salvador* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

capture runaway slaves" (169, n. 12). Free Africans (the *emancipados* liberated by the British anti-slavery squadron) were released from servitude in 1864, not 1888 (148). In short, Baronov brings nothing new to Brazilian history and misleads newcomers to the field.

CONCLUSION

A collection of books for a review commissioned by the *Latin American Research Review* is never a fully representative sample of literature in the field, but these books underscore recent developments in the historiography of slavery. While there is still much to be learned from quantitative analyses of the slave trade, Eltis's concern with cultural questions suggests the beginnings of a marriage (or at least a courtship) between students of the slave trade and scholars of culture in the African Atlantic. Much remains to be done before we have a satisfactory understanding of the complex transatlantic connections (and much will inevitably remain obscure), but Heywood's collection and Slenes's book lay an important groundwork. At the same time, scholars must not neglect the Euro-American cultural environment in which slaves lived and will have to strike the appropriate balance between African and Euro-American influences on slaves' lives, cultures, and identities.

There is a noticeable lack of attention in these books to the experience of the majority of the Americas' slaves—plantation labor—indicative of the overwhelming interest in slave society and culture. The books under review also demonstrate historians' interest in the exceptional and the unique, be it the "licentious liberty" of Minas Gerais, El Cobre's struggle for community and freedom, or individual life stories such as those of Caetana and María Chiquinquirá Díaz. To be sure, one can learn much about the larger society from an exceptional individual, but we must not lose sight of the fact that slaves spent most of their waking hours at work. Díaz explains that an excessive focus on labor reproduces the "logic of slavery" (13) by confining slaves to their productive activities but Stuart Schwartz's remark that disembodied slave culture from its labor context amounts to "ethnographic fantasy" remains a valid warning.¹³

Finally, a word about documents and iconography. Both Sandra Lauderdale Graham and María Elena Díaz reproduce key primary sources, but the latter failed to translate them into English, reducing their utility for students. Numerous wonderful contemporary illustrations of slavery are present but only some of these books handle them well. While

13. Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 39.

the reproductions in Slenes's book are of relatively poor quality, they are effectively integrated into his analysis. Higgins's black-and-white photographs simply do not do justice to the spectacularly gilded interiors of Minas Gerais's churches (and add little to her argument). Several of Graham's well-chosen contemporary images are so dark as to be virtually useless. And anachronisms are annoying: The cover of Cáceres's book on seventeenth-century Costa Rica bears one of Jean-Baptiste Debret's watercolors of early nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro. We need to insist that our publishers do better.