Foreword

DAVID BRION DAVIS

he transatlantic slave trade, which persisted for 366 years and resulted in the forced deportation of 12.5 million Africans to the New World, ranks as one of history's greatest crimes against humanity. Unlike the Nazis' five-year Holocaust in World War II, it was not driven by hatred and a desire to exterminate an entire people—although one of slavery's long-term effects was a widespread contempt and even racist hatred for people of African descent. The overriding motive that lay behind the uprooting, enslavement, and coerced long-distance transport of millions of sub-Saharan Africans was greed—the desire of European colonizers, including Spaniards, Portuguese, Dutch, British, French, Danes, Swedes, Brazilians, and North Americans, to find the cheapest labor for the production and export of precious metals, sugar, rum, rice, tobacco, cotton, coffee, indigo, and other luxury goods.

The magnitude of the slave trade conveys at least a hint of the magnitude of human suffering. By 1820 African slaves constituted some 80 percent of all the people who had embarked for the Americas since 1500, and mortality on the slave ships averaged at least 15 percent, to which we must add the numerous deaths that occurred as slaves were marched from the African interior to the coast and as they waited to sail, jammed into castle prisons or on board ships. Yet it can hardly be denied—especially in view of the economic dominance of the colonial Caribbean and the essential cotton exports of the American South—that this original black majority of surviving workers became indispensable in creating the prosperous New World that by the mid-nineteenth century began attracting millions of voluntary European immigrants (who, ironically, tended to choose the "freest soil," since free white migrants never wished to compete with slaves in tropical or semitropical regions where plantation agriculture flourished).

Not until the 1400s did the Portuguese and the Spanish construct the kind of ships, and utilize the compass and other navigational instruments, that enabled them to master the major ocean currents and wind systems of the North and South Atlantic—natural forces that had protected the Western Hemisphere from earlier invasions and had isolated it from the deadly diseases of Eurasia and Africa. The sixteenth-century Atlantic slave trade was a product of this larger European breakout that before 1500 had sent Bartolomeu Dias to the Cape of

Good Hope, Columbus to the Caribbean, and Vasco da Gama to India. Columbus himself, a seaman from Genoa who shipped some 500 enslaved Amerindians back to Spain, was part of a larger picture that included colonies of Italian traders, bankers, and sailors in Lisbon, Seville, and other Atlantic ports, men who became deeply involved with black slaves and sugar plantations on the Atlantic islands off the African coast. The connections extended to great German and Italian merchant-banking families who were skilled at raising capital, selling insurance, and handling bills of credit—all of which later became essential for the lengthy transatlantic slave-ship voyages that delayed any return of profit for several years.

Even in its first centuries, what we can term the Atlantic Slave System foreshadowed many features of our modern global economy. We see international investment of capital in distant colonial regions, where low-cost, highly productive gang labor by slaves produced commodities for a transatlantic market. With respect to consumerism, we now know that slave-produced sugar, tobacco, coffee, chocolate, and other luxuries not only altered the European diet but, by the late 1700s, had helped to shape a consumer mentality among the masses, especially in Britain, so that workers became more willing to accept factory discipline in order to afford luxury stimulants and, later, factory-produced cotton clothing, made possible by the cotton gin and slave labor. The long-range effects of slave-based globalization extend even to many aspects of modern culture, as can be seen in the profound impact of the African diaspora on modern popular music.

It is difficult to comprehend the slave trade and the Atlantic Slave System it created without a highly detailed collection of maps. For a considerable period of time, for example, the winds and currents of the North and South Atlantic resulted in two mostly separate slave trades: a southern counterclockwise current or circle connected southwest Africa with Portuguese Brazil, and a northern clockwise circle connected Europe, the Caribbean, and African sources of labor north of the equator. Only maps can accurately convey the changing African origins of slaves, their New World destinations, and, no less important, the degrees to which different European and American nations participated in the slave trade. Only maps can fully illustrate the startling discovery that the region that became the United States, home in 1860 to the largest number of black slaves ever assembled in the New World, imported less than 4 percent of the total migration.

During the past decade specialists led especially by David Eltis and David Richardson, editors of this volume, have made unprecedented empirical discoveries regarding virtually every aspect of the Atlantic slave trade. Beginning with a continually expanding demographic census, they have extended their examination of the slave trade from such topics as the frequency and consequences of slave-ship revolts to an appraisal of the historical consequences of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807–1808 by Britain and the United States. With respect to slave-ship revolts, which occurred on about 10 percent of all voyages, usually when still near the African coast, it is worth noting that such resistance prevented still more African slaves from being shipped to the New World. The fear of revolts significantly increased the cost of the African trade—in terms of added crew, guns, and insurance—and also induced ship captains to move toward African coastal regions,

usually farther south, where captives were thought to be less rebellious. Meanwhile, other scholars have greatly enriched our understanding of the political, social, and cultural history of racial slavery in the New World. This landmark atlas is an attempt to combine much of this new information, supplementing 189 maps with literary and artistic material.

Since Brazil and the Caribbean formed the very heart of the Atlantic Slave System, attracting some 90 percent of all the slaves imported from Africa, and since the production of sugar dominated the economies of both regions, even a brief summary of slave-trade history should mention the ancient westward migration of sugarcane cultivation from Asia to the medieval Middle East and then the Mediterranean. Italian merchants were at the forefront in developing sugar production in regions of Cyprus, Crete, and Sicily and finally in helping the Iberians extend the system for slave-grown sugarcane to Atlantic islands off the west coast of Africa in the 1400s: the Madeira Islands, the Canaries, the Cape Verdes, and São Tomé. By coincidence, after the capture of Constantinople in 1204 in the Fourth Crusade, Italians had established slave-trading ports along the northern coast of the Black Sea, much as later European merchants would do along the western coast of Africa. Over the course of nearly two and a half centuries the Genoese and the Venetians purchased thousands of captive Armenians, Circassians, Mingrelians, Tatars, and Bulgarians—peoples whose vague ethnic status as "Slavs" became the origin of the words for slave in western European languages. "Slav" slaves were highly prized from Muslim Egypt and Syria to Sicily and eastern Spain, and some were used for the production of sugar, a labor-intensive industry favored by few free workers.

In 1453 the Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople and soon diverted the flow of Black Sea and Balkan captives to Islamic markets. Although this conquest sharply reduced Europe's supply of both sugar and slaves, the Portuguese had already begun importing significant numbers of black African slaves (who by 1550 constituted 10 percent of Lisbon's population), and even in Sicily, Naples, southern France, and Mediterranean Spain the slave population began to "blacken," in part owing to the Arab caravan trade across the Sahara, which led to black slave exports from Libya and Tunisia. In Sicily a notary's record in Latin referred to *sclavi negri*, literally "black Slavs," who outnumbered white slaves there by the 1490s. In short, as the production of Europe's sugar moved westward into the Atlantic and increased in volume—although consumption was still limited to a medicinal and upper-class market—it became almost wholly dependent on black slave labor.

Despite the strong lines of continuity from Mediterranean plantation colonies to the sugar plantations of the New World, the European settlers had no blue-prints or master plans for slavery or sources of labor. The first African slaves who arrived in the Americas, in the early 1500s, departed from Europe, not Africa. Not until the mid-1520s did the first slave ship sail directly from Africa; until the early 1600s the sugar plantations in northeastern Brazil relied mainly on Amerindian slave labor. As late as the early 1700s, Indians made up one-third of the slave labor force in South Carolina. The British were unusual in being able to draw on large supplies of white British indentured laborers for the cultivation of tobacco—in the

Caribbean until the 1640s, when Barbados led the way with a revolutionary transfer to sugarcane; and in Virginia until the 1670s, when white immigration began to decline and large planters turned to Africans for their field work. In the late 1670s white servants in Virginia still outnumbered black slaves four to one, but by the early 1690s black slaves outnumbered servants four to one.

In 1492 no one could have predicted the disastrous effect on American Indians of what are called virgin soil epidemics. Millennia of isolation had made them fatally vulnerable to Old World smallpox, influenza, measles, and other contagious diseases. If millions of Caribbean Indians had not died off as the result of pandemics, Spanish cruelty, and the loss of their food base, they might conceivably have provided a significant labor force for later sugar plantations. The near extermination of many native populations hastened the Spaniards' seizure of fertile land from Hispaniola to Peru and the Portuguese seizure of land in Brazil. But in many regions the invasion left only a skeletal native population that could be coerced to perform heavy labor. The more humanitarian leaders, such as Bartolomé de Las Casas and Manuel da Nobrega, called for the importation of many more black slaves as a way of counteracting the Spanish and Portuguese oppression of Indians. Such arguments were reinforced by the familiarity that many West Africans had with large-scale agriculture, labor discipline, and even the manufacture of iron and steel tools. Throughout the New World, colonists agreed that the labor of one black was worth that of several Indians.

The strength and capacity of most West Africans brings us to a subject that is both surprising and upsetting to many uninformed readers: the indispensable complicity of Africans in creating and maintaining the slave trade. Even in the earliest history of the trade, the Portuguese discovered the extreme hazards and counterproductivity of trying to capture and enslave West Africans on their own. West Africans could and did attack and sink some European ships in retaliation; the rulers of Kongo, Benin, and some other regions succeeded at times in temporarily stopping the trade in slaves. Yet the crucial point was the eagerness of African rulers and merchants to sell slaves. Similarity in skin color and other bodily traits, as Europeans viewed them, brought African rulers and merchants no sense of a common African identity with the captives sold. And the sellers of slaves profited immensely from the acquisition of textiles, hardware, bars of iron, liquor, guns and gunpowder, tools, and utensils of various kinds. Between 1680 and 1830, when the trade had its most devastating impact on African societies, the price paid for slaves in Senegambia rose tenfold.

If Africans were themselves divided into many ethnic groups—or, above all, into family or clan lineages based on highly respected ancestors—they quickly learned how to play off one group of Europeans against another and how to maximize the inflow of European and Asian goods. European ship captains soon discovered the need to present ceremonial gifts to African rulers; to pay fees and taxes even to anchor and engage in trade; and to employ black interpreters, often trained in Portugal or São Tomé, who went ashore with the captain to haggle and bargain with local rulers over the price of slaves. Europeans very seldom gained access to the Africans' networks and procedures for producing gold and slaves. The

Portuguese did, however, purchase gold on the Gold Coast in exchange for black slaves whom they had purchased farther east and south, where slaves were cheaper. Moreover, some men of mixed black and white descent commanded Portuguese slave ships, and a few African slave traders journeyed all the way to Brazil and Barbados, where they viewed the western side of the system.

I began by affirming the collective criminality of the Atlantic slave trade, surely one of history's most extreme examples of humanity's inhumanity. In recent years there has been some understandable reaction against the reckless overuse of the word <code>evil</code> and its implied dualistic struggle between the supposed Children of Light and Children of Darkness. Yet the sheer evil of the slave trade is difficult to deny, at least today. Nor can we fail to recognize great virtue in the successful antislavery movements that have enabled us to make such historical judgments.

Despite this moral liberation, our Western culture tends to worship the magic of the free market, the invisible hand that allegedly promotes the common good. Yet it was *uncontrolled* market forces that determined how many African slaves could be crammed into the hold of a ship—with the chained and padlocked males lying together for five weeks or more, hunched on their sides and wedged like spoons locked together, unable to stand or stretch out, surrounded by feces and urine-drenched floors— to satisfy consumer demand for sugar, rum, tobacco, and coffee. As it happened, these stimulants did little to improve the world or enhance human health and well-being. Although Britain's first highly contested step toward "regulating" the slave trade, Sir William Dolben's bill of 1788, slightly restricted the number of slaves who could be carried on a ship, the British public launched a boycott of slave-produced sugar when the humanitarian lawmakers initially failed to overcome the defenders of market forces.

The slave trade, though devastating to Africa, was immensely profitable and was in some ways even "progressive." Defenders of the commerce stressed that each slave ship carried a doctor or surgeon; that for marketing reasons captains became increasingly intent on minimizing mortality; and that in good weather slaves were brought up on deck for exercise—indeed, they were flogged if they refused to dance, jump, and sing. The trade reached its all-time peak toward the end of the Enlightenment, in the late 1700s, and was certainly not declining in 1807 and 1808, when Britain and the United States outlawed it. Much mythology about the "backwardness" of slavery notwithstanding, abolitionists were forced to confront the growth and vitality of the New World slave economies. Some 3 million Africans, or about one-fourth of the grand total exported, were shipped off to the Americas after 1807, despite the militant efforts of the British navy. As David Eltis has observed, we can easily imagine the increasingly powerful and steam-driven British and American merchant ships expanding the flow of African slaves not only to Cuba and Brazil but to the kind of markets many Southerners dreamed of by the 1850s. What prevented such an expansion was not the operation of supply and demand but a major transformation in Anglo-American public moral perception, spearheaded by a small group of abolitionist reformers.

I do not mean to question many of the benefits of the free market, but if history can teach us some unexpected lessons, here is one: we should recognize

that Britain's 1807 law, which ended the country's 130-year dominance of the slave trade and led to the economic decline of the British Caribbean, was a revolutionary move toward *regulating* the global market. That step was followed by a series of treaties and expensive naval interventions aimed at ending the free market in slave labor. This antislavery campaign was complex and acquired more mixed meanings when incorporated in nationalistic and imperialist causes. But there is still much to be said for the historian W. E. H. Lecky's famous conclusion, following the American Civil War, that England's crusade against slavery "may probably be regarded as among the three or four perfectly virtuous acts recorded in the history of nations."

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