Introduction

Getting beyond Chattel Slavery

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OLD AND NEW ABOLITIONISTS: SYMMETRIES OF PAST WITH PRESENT

The 2016 Global Slavery Index's annual *Report* declared that close to 46 million people the world over had been forced into human bondage, a disputed but nevertheless deeply dismaying figure. Of course, it is notoriously difficult to ascertain and process definitive data regarding a trade that is wholly illegal and underground; however, whatever the exact numbers may be, it is clear that as we advance further into the twenty-first century, an ever increasingly large host of oppressors continues exploiting an ever larger number of their fellow humans by reducing them to slavery. How can we obliterate these morally repugnant and socially debilitating practices, or at least limit their spread? This question, as obvious as it is urgent, continues to be pressed by governments, activists, business, labor, and religious leaders, academics, and concerned citizens all over the globe.[1]

The same question should rightly preoccupy the readers addressed by this volume, particularly scholars, teachers, students, and activists interested in the histories of Great Britain and the United States, two nations with histories deeply tainted by centuries of enslavement, ennobled by the Western world's most powerful abolitionist movements, and noteworthy for their dramatic acts of mass emancipation. Great

[1] Please see www.globalslaveryindex.org/findings/ for more about the 46 million figure. A critique of this claim can be found in www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2014/nov/28/global-slavery-index-walk-free-human-trafficking-anne-gallagher.

Britain's "emancipation" came to pass in 1833 when compensated emancipation approved by Parliament liberated over 800,000 people. In the United States, the moment arrived in 1865 when freedom for roughly 4 million enslaved people was ratified by the Constitution's 13th Amendment. Thus it was that long ago, slavery embedded itself deeply within both nations' histories – and so did slavery's abolition. It is therefore not surprising that Anglo-American antislavery activists today equate the slaveries they seek to destroy with the kind of slavery that their forebears abolished; take inspiration from epochal figures such as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Olaudah Equiano, and William Wilberforce; and refer to themselves collectively as the "the new abolitionist movement."[2]

Such close identification with this deeply inspirational antislavery past goes far to explain the modern-day, or "new" abolitionists' accomplishments and why they are closely emulating the work of their ancestors. Today their non-governmental organizations (NGOs) number in the hundreds and continue proliferating; many are deservedly praised for their sophisticated approaches and impressive results. Over a century and a half ago, their forebears likewise created networks of antislavery societies that linked them closely together even as they crisscrossed the Atlantic. Today, in libraries all over the country, one encounters in increasing numbers the new abolitionists' gripping exposés of enslavement, along with analytical studies by serious academicians and governmental reports of all sorts. The original abolitionists likewise published innumerable rhetorical tracts and substantial volumes with damning testimony from escapees from slavery. Today, documentary films of widely varying quality for which new abolitionists are responsible continue multiplying, some narrated by high-profile media personalities and almost all having some testimony from a survivor of modern-day bondage. Before the Civil War, the original abolitionists turned themselves into speechmaking celebrities, performed popular antislavery

[2] For typical examples of this attribution that can be multiplied many times over, see https://thesocietypages.org/sexuality/2009/10/21/the-new-abolitionists-and-their-critics-second-in-a-series-on-anti-trafficking-efforts/; www.facebook.com/nynewabolitionists/; Joy James, ed., *The New Abolitionists: (Neo) Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005); www.christianpost.com/news/in-the-new-abolitionist-movement-to-stop-sex-trafficking-christians-are-still-key-players-97004/; www.vsconfronts.org/blog/we-are-the-new-abolitionists-an-education-and-action-event-to-end-human-trafficking-in-new-york-city/; www.antislavery.org/english/what_you_can_do/set_up_or_join_an_antislavery_group/join_an_existing_antislavery_group.aspx.

music, and developed eye-catching antislavery art work and ear-catching poetry. Responding (at least in part) to today's abolitionists' demands, our politicians design and our governments enact stringent laws against slavery and human trafficking. More than a century and a half ago, their predecessors flooded the halls of Congress and Parliament with antislavery petitions signed by tens of thousands of ordinary people.[3]

Propelling all this activism is the grass roots energy of everyday citizens, who behave in very similar ways as did their abolitionist predecessors when learning and teaching others about slavery, pressuring local officials, demanding action from their churches, synagogues, and mosques, monitoring their neighborhoods for evidence of enslavement, and taking care to consume as few goods produced by enslaved people as possible. It feels almost as if the new abolitionist movement has us living our antislavery history all over again. In a burst of zeal (never mind the daunting statistics), one particularly over-promising NGO, Not for Sale, goes as far as to exhort the new abolitionists that "Together we can end slavery in our lifetimes!"[4] Over 150 years ago, William Lloyd Garrison and Joseph Clarkson were given to making similar pronouncements.

The response of any serious historian to such over-the-top predictions is "simply impossible" – for this very good reason. As David Richardson makes clear in his contribution to this volume, "Contemporary Slavery in Historical Perspective," and as will be discussed more extensively later on, from at least biblical times, if not before, the heavy influences of slavery are documented throughout recorded history, leaving no assurance that it will ever be "ended," let alone "in our lifetimes." Richardson's essay also offers thoughtful assessments for modern abolitionists of how to respond constructively to slavery's persistence.

At the same time, the value of such embellishment is hard to deny. Not so long ago, in defiance of massive white hostility, it directly inspired the epochal Civil Rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States,[5] much as it fires the imaginations and undergirds the endurance of

[3] James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 51–125.

[4] Michelle Garza, "Not for Sale: End Human Trafficking and Slavery," Texas A&M Corpus Christi Wiki, www.tamucc.edu/wiki/MichelleGarza/NotForSaleEndHumanTraffickingAndSlavery.

[5] The classic formulation of these historical connections is Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists: Racism and Civil Rights* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Press, 1964; reprinted 2013). That racists have just as easily elided a vision of the antebellum Southern past with their sense of the present by turning themselves into "Neo-Confederates" when opposing

abolitionists today in the face of truly dismaying material circumstances. When specifying these dismaying circumstances, historical analogies continue to ring true.

Much as was the case during the nineteenth century, powerful social and economic forces are combining today to drive a staggering number of people into circumstances that make them highly vulnerable to enslavement, far more in raw numbers than at any previous time in history. Back in Frederick Douglass's day, the drivers of enslavement were basic commodities: cotton, rice, sugar, and tobacco traded in huge volumes across the greater Atlantic basin. The population vulnerable to enslavement was a seemingly limitless supply of West Africans, mostly from present day Congo, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Ghana, and Angola.[6] In our day, the drivers are goods and services of every kind imaginable and seemingly from everywhere (reflect on any Walmart store's inventory).[7] The vulnerable population is now spread across the globe and almost too enormous to calculate. The United Nations, for example, reported in 2016 that among the world's population are over 63 million refugees, more than were displaced by the Second World War, and that around 795 million people in the world do not have enough food to lead a healthy life. The continuing degradation of the natural environment caused by hyper-development all over the globe has been closely linked to spreading patterns of enslavement.[8] During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, slavery's environmental scourge was severe deforestation and all but unrelenting soil exhaustion. Just as was true then, the plain fact today is that the new abolitionist movement is exactly the

black civil rights is amply demonstrated in David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[6] The essential source for all aspects of the African slave trade is David Eltis and David Richardson, *The Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

[7] For a highly useful study that examines modern slavery in depth and transnationally, see Louise Shelley, *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Limitations of space do not allow descriptions of the many goods and services that are most commonly associated with enslavement or detailed information on demographics, profitability, and so forth. Such limitations also make it impossible to offer detailed descriptions of specific new abolitionists' programs and initiatives. Three websites are particularly useful sources of such information: www.endslaverynow.org/, www.walkfree.org/, and https://polarisproject.org/.

[8] Kevin Bales, *Blood and Earth: Slavery, Econocide and the Secret to Saving the World* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2016).

proper response to one of our time's most agonizing and multifaceted moral and ethical challenges.

Thus far, the parallels between past and present seem straightforward, and so does the inspiration they offer today's abolitionists. As we continue to explore them, however, they mutate into conundrums that challenge the new abolitionists. As is usually the case, history, when deeply studied, complicates and (one hopes) deepens our understanding of our current circumstances. The goal of our volume is precisely this.

OLD AND NEW SLAVERY: COLLISIONS OF PAST WITH PRESENT

History's complications for today's abolitionists originate in this one deeply disruptive fact: the forms of enslavement found across the world today have almost nothing in common with nineteenth-century plantation slavery. Apart from their inherent brutality and enrichment for enslavers, plantation slavery "then" and slavery "now" reside in seemingly alternate universes. The antislavery work accomplished by Frederick Douglass and William Wilberforce went forward under circumstances almost wholly at odds with those facing today's abolitionists.[9]

Unimpeachable legal codes, massive capital investments, and unswerving state power undergirded all aspects of nineteenth-century plantation slavery. Overturning it required abolitionists to demand an entire body of existing law be overthrown and a staggering amount of private (human) property be alienated from its owners. When they demanded precisely this, they provoked explosive controversy, disrupting politics and religious denominations and vastly multiplying their influence on public opinion.[10]

Today's abolitionists enjoy none of these advantages because modern slavery enjoys no legal protections. Instead, it is criminal enterprise, outlawed (in theory) all across the globe. Suppressing it requires abolitionists to demand the stringent application of existing laws, the enactment of more effective laws and the cooperation of multinational

[9] Important examinations of the history of abolitionist movements and their evolution are Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and Joel Quirk, *The Antislavery Project: From the Slave Trade to Human Trafficking* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

[10] Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 51–96. Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

agencies and businesses of all sorts. In perhaps the most revealing contrast to the situations of their controversial forebears, abolitionists today find that most everyone already gives lip service to such laws and that businesses sensitive about their public images do the same as well.[11] In brief, they lack powerful proslavery opponents who would fan the flames of controversy and help them to generate headlines. Who is today's John C. Calhoun? Who, today, openly defends slavery, as did Calhoun in his infamous 1837 speech before the US Senate entitled "The Positive Good of Slavery"?[12] This question raises one of modern abolitionism's most daunting problems: the fact that modern slavery remains difficult for the vast majority of scholars to define exactly, and for abolitionists' fellow citizens to respond to with empathy and a sense of urgency.

Deeply aware of this problem, modern abolitionists often lament that most of their country people truly believe that slavery ended forever in 1833 or 1865, strongly denying its ongoing existence in a variety of forms into the present time. Highly promoted films such as *Amazing Grace* (2007) and *Lincoln* (2012) simply ratify the deeply embedded historical memories which maintain that Great Britain and the United States triumphed in glorious moral wars that swept the scourge forever from the face of the Earth.[13] And why should not ordinary citizens believe exactly this? For Great Britain and the United States, as historians have told them time out of mind and quite correctly, emancipation marked truly epochal moments not only for those liberated (a combined total of 4,800,000) and for their former slaveholders, but also for practically everyone alive at the time. The costs included a catastrophic 750,000 Civil War casualties for the United States and an expenditure of as much as a jaw-dropping 2 billion, 180 million inflation-adjusted pounds for the British.[14] As the powerful myths and memories generated by such watershed events

[11] A useful introduction to this problem and efforts to address it is found in www.cips.org/Documents/About%20CIPS/Ethics/CIPS_ModernSlavery_Broch_WEB.pdf.

[12] J. C. Calhoun, "Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions, Delivered in the Senate, February 6th, 1837," in R. Cralle, ed., *Speeches of John C. Calhoun, Delivered in the House of Representatives and in the Senate of the United States* (New York: D. Appleton, 1853), 625–33. Retrieved from www.stolaf.edu/people/fitz/COURSES/calhoun.html.

[13] For illuminating analyses of the Civil War in American historical memory, consult Blight, *Race and Reunion*, and Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause and the Emergence of the New South* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[14] See www.in2013dollars.com/1833-GBP-in-2016?amount=20000000 for calculations approximating those above based on 20 million 1833 pounds adjusted to 2016 rates.

reverberate into our time, is it a surprise that many find it hard to believe that slavery persists?

In the United States, for example, mention of slavery today leads Americans to fasten instinctively on Abraham Lincoln, Robert E. Lee, Frederick Douglass, or Jefferson Davis; some may extend their thinking to include Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, or the 1964 Civil Rights Act; and even the presidency of Barack Obama. Little wonder, then, that people enslaved in so many differing circumstances remain all but unrecognizable to most Americans and so challenging for scholars to generalize about: manacled woodcutters in Manaos, Brazil; children peering through barbwire fences on West African cacao plantations; multiple generations of Indian families held in debt bondage; Pakistani children chained to carpet looms; profoundly traumatized child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo; enslaved vegetable pickers in the Florida "panhandle"; kidnapped South Asian men and boys enslaved on Thai fishing boats; and prostituted people of every age, gender, and sexual orientation put up for sale in Bangkok, Minneapolis, and London. Indeed, these staccato descriptions illustrate perfectly why modern slavery defies easy generalization and straightforward definitions.

Powerful as it is, historical memory is but one of several factors that explain why mobilization of antislavery knowledge and opinion is so much more difficult now than it was in the nineteenth century, and also why slavery today is so much more challenging to describe.[15] To explain: back in the nineteenth century plantation slaves were reflexively lumped together by a racist white society into a single "black race." Exposed to outside observation, the lives and work of those enslaved were regionally centered over several generations. They resided in familiar places. They were openly bought and sold. They sustained their own communities, built their own cultural defenses, engaged in

[15] Exceptions to these generalizations about modern slavery's invisibility are long-sanctioned slavery systems such as those found in Mauritania, India, Pakistan, and other locales where tradition has sustained the practice with very little change, deeply rooting it across generations. For different reasons, exceptions also include locations where sexually enslaved individuals are put on public display for commercial purposes. Although these forms of enslavement are easily visible, for most citizens of Great Britain and the United States the lived experiences of those enslaved remain worlds away. As emigration from slavery-ridden regions to Great Britain and the United States continues, however, it is likely that these "worlds away" will begin to converge. For descriptions of these locales and explanation of their forms of enslavement see Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: The New Slavery and the Global Economy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

day-to-day resistance, organized collective rebellion, and liberated themselves and one another. In short, they lived in plain sight, made endless trouble, created headlines, and brought still more attention to their abolitionist allies. Today's enslaved and their exploiters, by contrast, are all but invisible to anyone other than themselves and the activists working directly with them.[16] Because they represent every imaginable race and nationality, and are geographically dispersed and highly mobile, the enslaved cannot be lumped into a single racial stereotype. Since slavery is everywhere illegal, they are bought and sold in secret and forced to live "under the radar," where it is next to impossible to sustain multigenerational communities that support individual and collective solidarity and resistance, let alone mass rebellion. By the same token, many of today's enslavers live as marginalized outlaws. Back then, they sat in Parliament or resided in the White House.

With today's slavery virtually outlawed and operating only in the form of criminal conspiracies, anything goes. In absolute contrast to the old plantation complex, slavery today involves no fixed rules, no shared understandings of limits, no guiding precepts or precedents, no long-term planning and no accountability. It's all up for grabs. Many decades of improvisation and untrammeled entrepreneurship under widely varying conditions have caused modern slavery to mutate into multiple forms of exploitation as distinct from one another as they are from the nineteenth-century plantation complex. Attorneys, activists, scholars, and public policy experts often disagree over legal definitions of slavery today and, as a result, an opaque legal and cultural curtain shields the realities of modern slavery from the lived experiences of most white people in America, as well as from straightforward legal codification.[17]

Back in John C. Calhoun's day, everyone knew slavery when they saw it; abolitionists also knew how to litigate over it, which was frequently. Whatever one's ethical views of the institution, it was easy to define its standing in law and its substance in social reality. Today, all these certainties have vanished, as has the myth that emancipation in 1865 meant the end of slave systems in the United States. In considering modern slavery, then, scholars must attend both to its perpetuation as a global system *and* to its transformations in the United States into reconstruction-era

[16] Kevin Bales, *Ending Slavery: How We Free Today's Slaves* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 51–2.

[17] For an incisive analysis and critique of current definitions of slavery, see Julia O'Connell Davidson, *The Margins of Freedom: Modern Slavery* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 28–55.

debt bondage and convict leasing; Jim Crow segregation and racial terror backed by lynching; and mass incarceration, the prison-industrial complex, the school-to-prison pipeline, and racialized policing.[18] Clearly, then, a description of modern slavery that is easily grasped by average citizens and firmly fixed for legal experts and makers of public policy can seem as difficult to pin down as trying to capture a blob of mercury with a teaspoon as it darts across a highly polished dinner table.

CATCHING MERCURY: RULES AND REGULATIONS

A wise historian might suggest that cornering this blob of mercury requires holding simultaneously to two quite contradictory approaches to slavery in the British and American past, observing what each reveals about modern slavery. The first contends that looking deeply into nineteenth-century Anglo-American slavery and weighing it against slavery today yields a wealth of understanding. The second holds precisely the opposite, insisting that focus on the plantation complex seriously hinders coming to grips with slavery in its current forms; hence, we should banish it from our attempts to mobilize historical knowledge in service of ending current oppressions.[19] Which approach succeeds more fully in removing the legal and cultural veil? Happily, both have great value. For all their differences, both render today's forms of slavery highly visible and far more open to critical analysis and generalization. And both are guided by the axiom emphasized thus far – that the old plantation slavery and modern human bondage have little in common beyond cruelty and exploitation. Whether weighing comparative profitability, methods of enslavement and slave trading, the biological and

[18] To trace the transformation of plantation slavery in the US into disparate forms of oppression, brutality, and exploitation over time see Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Dennis Childs, *Slaves of the State: Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Talitha LeFlouria, *Chained in Silence: Black Women and Convict Labor in the New South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[19] Bales develops these contrasts in *Disposable People*, 7–11, and in Kevin Bales, Zoe Trodd, and Alex Kent Williamson, *Modern Slavery: The Secret World of 27 Million People* (New York: Oneworld Press, 2009), 27–34. Joseph C. Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History: A Global Approach* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 1–35, elucidates these contrasts with great clarity – and then recommends banishment of the descriptor "slavery" for reasons discussed in the following pages.

social reproduction of the enslaved, or slavery's ideological justifications, in this respect, contrast overwhelms commonality and, for this reason, there is much to learn from it. Precisely because the contrasts between "now" and "then" are so undeniable, they help to render modern slavery starkly visible, shredding the curtain that camouflages modern slavery and obliterating the tidy narrative of progress from slavery to freedom. Thus, the importance of fixing on the plantation complex in order, by contrast, to describe modern slavery is essential.

Just as important – perhaps more so – comparing and contrasting nineteenth-century race-based plantation slavery and slavery as practiced today directly addresses one of the modern abolitionist movement's most consequential failures. Its problem, bluntly, is that while contemporary abolitionists constantly mine nineteenth-century abolitionism for symbols that legitimize their cause, they seem unable to recognize that the history of African enslavement and liberation is powerfully implicated in their mission. Close inspection of high-profile websites reveals no leading African American intellectuals or activists among their spokespeople, and they demonstrate no observable interest in attracting African American supporters. The slavery that fires their opposition leads them to no substantial engagement with the slavery so central to African American history. The problem, then, is not academic; instead, it involves the new abolitionists' racial astigmatism, and, crucially, the obligation of historians is to offer remedies. At the same time, it is also about the integrity of this volume. Having promised to take its readers "beyond chattel slavery," our book will do so only by grappling with the African American past and its pertinence for the problem of slavery today, at least in terms of British and American interest and involvement. As with any such massive historical wound, getting "beyond chattel slavery" first requires dealing directly with it.[20]

CATCHING MERCURY: A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

The following thought experiment addresses this welter of problems, illustrates the value of our two antithetical approaches to modern slavery, and simplifies the task of introducing our volume's essays.

[20] The problem of racial blindness within "new abolitionism" is detailed at length in James Brewer Stewart, "'Using History to Make Slavery History': The African American Past and the Challenge of Contemporary Slavery," *Social Inclusion* 3, no. 1 (2015), 125–35. www.cogitatiopress.com/ojs/index.php/socialinclusion/article/download/…/pdf_21.