Preface

At one level this book is a sequel to my *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, published almost a quarter-century ago. A large part of it takes up the story of the emerging anti-Black prejudice that made four hundred years of transatlantic slavers drawing on Africa possible. It carries the narrative of this prejudice through the slave trade era and into the period of virulent racism that has shaped Black lives in the Americas down to the twentieth century. But in a more important sense it is an attempt to persuade fellow-scholars and the general public to recognize the enormous advances in knowledge represented by www.slavevoyages.org, only a sliver of which existed in the form of a CD-ROM when *The Rise of African Slavery* first appeared. Since then, slavevoyages has not only dramatically expanded its coverage of the transatlantic slave trade, but, more significantly, added four completely new databases to the 36,200 transatlantic ventures, and is about to extend coverage into the Indian Ocean.

Nevertheless, many traditional interpretations have yet to be questioned. To address all of these would require a much longer book than this one. But as slavery and the slave trade have moved closer to the center stage of public interest in the last half-century, the gap between public awareness of the horrific traffic and what the sources now reveal has tended to widen rather than shrink. At the scholarly level the new information has enriched the work of those writing micro-histories rather than reconfiguring the larger canvas. In geographic terms, it is true that the weight of scholarship has shifted slightly to the South Atlantic. Nevertheless, historians continue to focus too heavily on West Africa as the major source of slaves, as well as Europe as the starting point of most slave-trading voyages, and North America or the Caribbean as the major recipients of their human cargoes.

The databases on the peoples associated with slaving voyages have generated new information about participation in the business. We already knew that several Liverpool families were each responsible for carrying off 50,000 enslaved people from Africa and that each of the major organizational centers on both sides of the Atlantic also had major families, albeit dispatching somewhat smaller numbers. What we now know is that almost all ports in Europe and the Americas had many smaller investors with a wide range of occupations. These included clerks, apprentices, and businesses often in related maritime activities such as rope- and sail-making. In the huge Brazilian trade, ownership stakes might be held by crew. If we add to these the firms and their workers who made the trade goods, awareness of and participation in the slave trade was very broadly based. This same pattern holds true for Africa. The Enslavers database also includes Africans who appear in slave ships' trade books as sellers of the enslaved in a wide spectrum of African ports. Typical sales involved one to five captives and many different sellers. Yet the current literature still stresses the role of major merchants and African rulers colluding in the expulsion of millions across the Atlantic. This view needs qualifying. Acceptance of the trade in all three continents was broadly based.

The second new database is for the enslaved. A treasure trove of the names of Liberated Africans for the nineteenth century written down by officials of courts established to suppress the slave trade allow us to identify the language to which the name belonged. This in turn enables us to indicate the approximate geographic origin of the enslaved individual. This new data allows us to argue that captives could well have begun their horrific journey somewhat closer to the coast than is often claimed in the literature.

In this work, I first provide a wider context for the slave trade era with an overview of slave trading around the globe in the millennium preceding the first slave ship to cross the Atlantic from Africa. The point here is to locate the slave trade among the many cataclysmic events that humans have inflicted on each other. Steven T. Katz has exhaustively made the comparative case for modern times with his work on the twentieth-century Holocaust, but no one has taken on the period preceding

[1] Steven T. Katz, *The Holocaust and New World Slavery: A Comparative History*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 2019–21). Also, David E. Stannard, "True Believer: The Uniqueness of Steven T. Katz," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 22 (2020): 391–409, doi: 10.1080/14623528.2020.1719734.

European expansion to the Americas.[1] For slavers, much like warmongers, the basic drive to extend one's power over others was always present, but technological advances – in this case the ability to cross oceans – made the consequences of this impulse so much more devastating than the huge transcontinental land-based slave trafficking that existed in Eurasia in the preceding centuries. Similarly, the extensive maritime slave trading that existed across smaller bodies of water such as the Mediterranean, Black Sea, Baltic, North and Irish Seas may have lasted longer than their later transatlantic counterpart but was certainly smaller in volume. The traffic in the so-called "Mediterranean Atlantic" beginning in the early fifteenth century comprised a stepping stone toward transatlantic slave trading in terms of geography, organizational structures, and of course scale. Nevertheless, it is certainly possible for scholars to draw useful comparisons between the Mongols in medieval Eurasia and the Europeans in the later Atlantic world.[2]

The chapters that follow take on a structure that differs from the typical scholarly monograph on the traffic in enslaved people. Chapter 2 argues that the Americas constituted the keystone of the transatlantic slave trade. After Australasia, the Americas easily comprised the most lightly populated landmass on Earth. They then experienced major population declines in the aftermath of European conquests, brought about by the introduction of Old World pathogens and the conquerors' exploitation of native populations. For the occupiers this meant there was a labor problem that steadily worsened in the two centuries after 1492, given that the Americas also had abundant natural resources together with high land-to-labor ratios in global terms. Therefore, while Europeans initiated the Atlantic slave trade, what was for Europeans the New World comprised the source of demand for labor that sustained the movement of people around the Atlantic for nearly four centuries. The Americas were not only the source of a massive increase in demand for labor in the sixteenth-century Atlantic world, but they also had a major role in increasing supply. I refer here not to the enslavement of Indigenous Americans – though that, too, occurred on a grand scale – but rather to the organization of transatlantic slave-trading voyages. No less than seventy ports in the Americas, from Portland, Maine, in the north to Montevideo in the south dispatched at least one slave voyage to Africa. Three of the four busiest organizational slave-trading ports in global history, Rio de Janeiro, Baía de Todos os Santos (now Salvador) and Pernambuco (now

[2] See the twenty-three essays in *CWHS*, vol. 2.

Recife) were all located in the Americas, not Europe. Moreover, measured by total exports the most valuable colonies for most of the slave trade era were not English, French, or Dutch, but rather Spanish. Even prerevolutionary St. Domingue's sugar, coffee, and indigo could never surpass the value of gold and silver extracted by Spain from its American possessions.

While Europe's role in the slave trade may have been secondary it can scarcely be described as minor. The traffic was broadly based, with ninety-six European ports dispatching at least one voyage to Africa. Almost every port large enough to initiate transoceanic trade participated in the business. Owners, their employees and, most important, the public had unquestioning support for the business until the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The Portuguese and Spanish created the Atlantic slave-trading system, and they were the last to abandon it. They dispatched more voyages and carried off far more enslaved women and men than did the British throughout the era. As firstcomers, the Portuguese expanded south and west from the so-called Mediterranean Atlantic and occupied the choicest locations for obtaining and selling captives, from which these Iberians were never dislodged. Such locations allowed the Portuguese to accumulate more of their captives on land rather than on ships, reduced rebellions and mortality, and enabled them to dominate the shortest route from Africa to the Americas, namely to Brazil. Their major loss, the fort at Elmina on Africa's Gold Coast, was never a major source of captives. Spain had a much smaller African presence – a few coastal slaving stations – but its domination of the intra-American slave trade meant that it received more slaves than all the British Caribbean possessions together. And in Africa, late-starting north European slave traders had to find new regions and longer routes over which to conduct their business rather than supplanting the Portuguese. A central result of the new data is to question the old idea of the more capitalist-driven northwest Europeans taking over from precapitalist Iberians.

Overturning one trope leads to the questioning of another. Iberian dominance in the colonial Americas as indicated by colonial trade figures (including the number of slaves traded) inevitably undermines the argument that the economic development of Western Europe depended on the slave systems of the Americas. It was Britain, not Spain or Portugal, that led the Industrial Revolution, even though the American possessions of both Iberian countries separately extracted and exploited far more African captives than did the British or the French. Rather than Atlantic slave systems stimulating European economic development, it was the growth of Britain, the Netherlands, and France that allowed these nations

to establish their own slave systems in the face of Iberian competition. As argued below, paradoxically, the Portuguese always remained the most efficient and overall the largest of the national groups of slave traders.

The successful Iberian systems were rooted in the organization of the voyage as much as having first choice over places to buy and sell captives. Contemporary illustrations and new documentary sources allow us to examine conditions on board during the passage to the Americas. It extends the analysis of the differences between the Portuguese and their competitors to the conditions experienced on the voyage. Those familiar only with the northwestern European business will find it surprising that most Portuguese slaving voyages had enslaved or formerly enslaved Africans among their crew. Many of these held a small financial stake in the captives, often as part-payment of wages. Because of the specificity of the African regions on which the Portuguese drew, there were usually some crew members on board who were able to interact with those confined to the slave deck. Thus, not only did the enslaved spend less time on board but they were also less likely to believe they were to be eaten by their captors or deposited in a completely strange environment. A close analysis of resistance and onboard defensive measures suggests that the northwestern Europeans never came close to matching the efficiencies, in effect the lower costs, of the Portuguese system of buying Africans and putting them to work in the Americas.

The discussion of Africa does not offer a big-picture alternative to what readers can find in the existing historiography. Rather, it more modestly examines some of the better-known interpretations of Africa's role in the external traffic in the light of the new data. Modesty, however, does not preclude expressing disappointment with some of the current findings. With one or two major exceptions, currently accepted interpretations largely reflect the ideas of the great Africanist scholar, Walter Rodney, formulated well before the dramatic increases in available information on the slave trade. Much of the current literature does not provide sufficiently for African agency. Generally, the new data reveals a sense of equality between buyer and seller on the African littoral, at least until late in the slave trade era. It now seems unlikely that European slave traders were able to "dump" cheap goods on gullible African consumers in exchange for human merchandise. More important, Africanists have yet to take on board new population estimates for African regions in 1850 and match these with new estimates of the exodus of people that are now available. It now seems unlikely that outside influences transformed the nature of slavery in Africa.

A major subtheme of the book is the widely based support for the slave trade apparent on all the continents involved in it. Surviving trade books show that capturing and selling captives in Africa were activities that involved large numbers of Africans beyond just the ruling elite. Modern commentators have too often mistaken the natural desire of an individual to avoid enslavement with reservations about slavery itself. Anti-slavery, much less abolitionism, was scarcely widespread. Before this era the myriad of workers in both the slave trade and in industries supplying it, as well as investors, government officials, and the great majority of intellectuals, all saw little difference between buying people and buying commodities such as wheat, whale meat, or other products made accessible by long-distance commerce. Differences of opinion on slavery throughout all continents involved in the business were confined to eligibility for enslavement rather than whether slavery itself should exist, at least prior to the late eighteenth century.

This brings us to the question of the ending of the traffic taken up in Chapter 6, which does offer an alternative approach to abolition. Drawing on thousands of references in English newspapers in the century after 1688, it establishes the gradual shift from a preoccupation with the enslavement of Europeans, largely in North Africa, to one that focused on enslavement of Africans on both sides of the Atlantic. This trend was reinforced by the fact that much of the newspaper coverage of Black slavery comprised graphic reports of very violent revolts on board slave ships. Chapter 6 also tracks patterns in the naming of slave ships over a century and a half – now readily available in the slavevoyages database – to establish the increasing engagement of slave traders with a range of African rulers. These patterns were well established by the mid eighteenth century and show the erosion of the concept of Africans as outsiders, a critical prerequisite to recognizing that Africans should not be enslaved. As for the political execution of abolition, the chapter downplays the importance of the St. Domingue slave rebellion and the emergence of Haiti, but carefully tracks the interplay between revolts in the Caribbean and the initiatives of British abolitionists at the metropolitan center. Counterfactually, abolition of both the slave trade and slavery itself could not have happened without these two key elements.

For more than 200,000 Africans, attempts to suppress the slave trade by armed intervention had serious implications. Found on board intercepted slave ships, and adjudicated by British and international courts, the "re-captive" Africans were not freed, but rather distributed across the Atlantic world under encumbrances ranging from "apprenticeships" to,

in some cases, a status analogous to full chattel slavery. For the latter group, release from a slave ship was truly meaningless. The final chapter tracks the wide range of outcomes for re-captive people and compares these to the experiences of the nearly 6 million people of African descent in the Americas who were emancipated in the century after the 1791 outbreak of the St. Domingue Rebellion. A second comparison group is the millions of poor whites who began to migrate to the Americas en masse after 1830. Such comparisons contextualize what freedom meant to survivors of the slave trade. The chapter delineates the expectations of the governments that declared the captives emancipated and compares these with the aspirations of the newly released Africans and African Americans themselves. It finds that neither the officials administering emancipation, nor most of its supposed beneficiaries came close to getting what they wanted. The reason for this, as the comparison with European migrants makes clear, was the persistence of the same anti-Black attitudes that initiated the transatlantic slave trade in the sixteenth century.

So, the argument returns to its starting point. Of course, those who were emancipated avoided a remaining lifetime of forced labor (except for a few thousand "rescued" by Brazilian and Cuban cruisers prior to their quick and permanent absorption into slave plantations). Twenty-six years after abolition in the District of Columbia, Frederick Douglass declared, "I denounce the so-called emancipation as a stupendous fraud."[3] And indeed, no person of African descent had the rights of a poor European migrant arriving in New York or Quebec City. In one sense this volume is about the decline of anti-Black racism over four centuries, but in another sense, as a modern audience should know well given today's Black–White disparities in income, incarceration rates, life expectancies, and police shootings, there are yet many miles to travel.

[3] For the full speech, see www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/douglassfraud.html. The argument here is similar to that in James Walvin, *A World Transformed: Slavery in the Americas and the Origins of Global Power* (Berkeley, CA, 2022), though I have a different view of the slavery in the millennium preceding 1500.