

The Making of New World Slavery

From the Baroque to the Modern
1492-1800



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VERSO

London · New York

For Barbara Webber

Cross Campus
HT1048
B56X
1997
LC

First published by Verso 1997
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Verso
UK: 6 Meard Street, London W1V 3HR
USA: 180 Varick Street, New York NY 10014-4606

Verso is the imprint of New Left Books

ISBN 1-85984-890-7

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Blackburn, Robin
The making of New World slavery : from the Baroque to the Creole /
Robin Blackburn.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 1-85984-890-7
1. Slavery--America--History. I. Title.
HT1048.B56 1996
306.3'62'097--dc21

96-45603
CIP

Typeset by CentraCet, Cambridge
Printed by Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn

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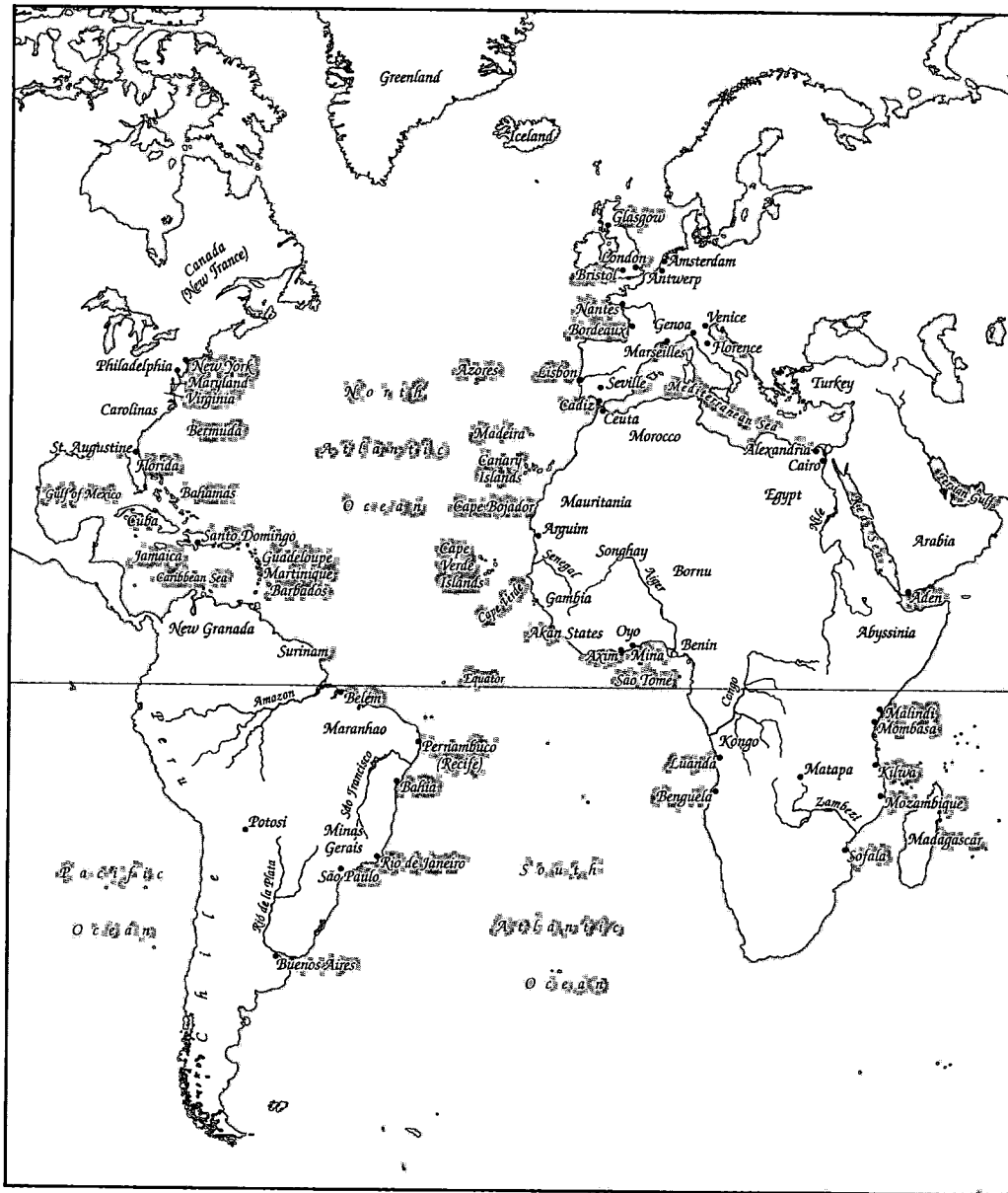
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This book furnishes an account of the making of the European systems of colonial slavery in the Americas, and seeks to illuminate their role in the advent of modernity. These slave systems were themselves radically new in character compared with prior forms of slavery, yet they were assembled from apparently traditional ingredients. They became intensely commercial, making Atlantic trade the pacemaker of global exchanges from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, yet within the plantations money played an apparently modest – even negligible – role. Slave-grown tobacco, sugar and cotton facilitated the birth of an expansive new world of consumption – one that was antithetical to slave rations and self-provision. The enterprises which batted on slave labour and produce embodied, as I will try to show, apparently advanced forms of technical and economic organization.

The acquisition of some twelve million captives on the coast of Africa between 1500 and 1870 helped to make possible the construction of one of the largest systems of slavery in human history. The Atlantic slave trade itself was to become remarkable for its businesslike methods as well as its scale and destructiveness. Over a million and a half captives died during the 'Middle Passage' between Africa and the New World; an unknown, but large, number died prior to embarkation; and once in the New World, between a tenth and a fifth of the slaves died within a year. Those who survived found their life drastically organized to secure from them as much labour as possible. The slaves met their own subsistence needs in one or two days' work a week, working the remainder of the time for their owners – a rate of exploitation or surplus extraction with few parallels even among other slave systems. In most parts of the Americas overwork, malnutrition and disease took a grim toll, and the slave labour force had to be replenished by further slave purchases. During the eighteenth century the slaves of British North America, unusually for any enslaved population, registered a positive natural growth rate, for reasons to be explored in Chapter XI. The total slave population in the Americas reached around 330,000 in 1700, nearly three million by 1800, and finally peaked at over six million in the 1850s, probably exceeding the numbers of slaves in Roman Italy, who were most numerous in the first century BC.

African slaves were brought to the Americas in the first place at a time when the indigenous population was suffering a terrible catastrophe. Thousands of Africans helped to strengthen the colonial apparatus and perform both menial and supervisory tasks. Once plantation development was under way, the slavery of the New World batted principally on those of African descent, with Indians being dispossessed and thrust to the margins, and Africans becoming highly concentrated in the most arduous employments. The slavery of the Ancient World had been far more diversified, both in the pattern of employment and in its ethnic composition, with Greek slave tutors, Egyptian slave administrators, English slave servants, German slave labourers and many more (though very few black



The Atlantic in the early colonial period

Africans). And while slave status was transmitted by inheritance in the Ancient World, and in other slave societies, there were two constraints on this as a source of reproduction of the slave labour force. First, slaves had few children; secondly, where they did have offspring there was usually a gradual improvement in the status of their descendants: later generations acquired some rights, or even benefited from manumission. Manumission did occur in the New World colonies, though it was most unusual where plantation development was strongest. So far as the overwhelming majority was concerned, New World slavery was a curse that even the grandchildren of the grandchildren of the original African captive found it exceedingly difficult to escape. This was a strong, even unprecedented, species of enslavement.

But the slavery of the Americas not only presented many novel features. Its development was associated with several of those processes which have been held to define modernity: the growth of instrumental rationality, the rise of national sentiment and the nation-state, racialized perceptions of identity, the spread of market relations and wage labour, the development of administrative bureaucracies and modern tax systems, the growing sophistication of commerce and communication, the birth of consumer societies, the publication of newspapers and the beginnings of press advertising, 'action at a distance' and an individualist sensibility. The Atlantic world of this epoch was ~~subject to rapid~~, uneven but combined development. People separated by an ocean were brought into vital relationship with one another. The demand for sugar in London or Amsterdam helped to bring into being plantations in the Caribbean, which in turn were supplied with provisions from North America and slaves from Africa. The dynamic of the Atlantic economy was sustained by new webs of social trust, and gave birth to new social identities. It required business planning and methods for discounting risk; it was associated with distinctive modern traditions of reflexive self-consciousness.

Exploring the many ways in which American slavery proved compatible with elements of modernity will help to dispel the tendency of classical social science – from Adam Smith to Ludwig von Mises, Auguste Comte to Max Weber – to identify slavery with traditionalism, patrimonialism and backwardness. Weber raised interesting questions, but supplied the wrong answers: he did not realize that the slave population of North America became naturally self-reproducing, while he believed that the slave colonies had made a negligible contribution to European economic advance (these errors are tackled in Chapters XI and XII).¹ The colonial slave systems were closely associated with the mercantilist epoch, and this helped to nourish the view that they were inherently rigid and dependent on state patronage. Of course slavery is indeed a very ancient human institution, but it has also been highly flexible, and a great facilitator of social mobility

and adjustment or transition. The role it played in the transition to modernity was not, therefore, out of character.

Anthony Giddens has written that modernity characteristically effects a 'disembedding' of individuals and institutions, which tears them away from their traditional contexts. He sees money, as well as power or ideology, as a potent lever in this disembedding. Paul Gilroy has urged that some of the most distinctive structures and mentalities of modernity are already evident in New World slavery.² The Atlantic slave trade effected a protracted 'disembedding' process, plunging the African slave into a new and unexpected system of social relations. Slavery existed in Africa prior to the Atlantic trade, and long continued to have a social meaning there which was very different to that prevailing in the Americas. In Africa slaves were often soldiers, for example, or recognized concubines. But the 'new' slave could be sold, a circumstance which permitted a transformation in slavery, both in the Americas and, eventually, in many parts of Africa too, as the transatlantic traffic grew in volume. Thus both institution and individual were disembedded, as they were inserted into a new set of social relations. The slave trade itself employed a battery of economic devices ranging from sophisticated patterns of credit and insurance to complex forms of barter. The New World slave was caught up in systems of social identification and surveillance which marked him or her as a black, and closely regulated their every action. The slave's kinship identity was wiped out, and new ties to 'shipmates', partners and relatives were vulnerable, since the slave could be sold at any time.

While the slaves were subordinated to a rigid new role, the vortex of Atlantic economy threw up disruptive new patterns of wealth and power. Control of the commodities produced by the slaves conferred great economic power – a power distributed between, and disputed by, states, merchants, bankers and slaveholders. The slaves were driven to work long hours and an intense rhythm; the appropriation of the fruits of their labour required the construction of an elaborate apparatus of supply, supervision, transport, processing and distribution, much of this engaging free labour. There was ample scope here for conflicts between different would-be appropriators, and between exploiters and exploited.

Civil Slavery and the Colonial State

The link between modernity and slavery gives us good reason to be attentive to the dark side of progress. Modern social powers, as we now have many reasons to know, can conduce to highly destructive and inhuman ends. Given the history of the twentieth century, it might seem that this lesson needs no further elaboration. After the slaughter of the First World War, the grim record of colonial repression, the horrors of Stalinism and the genocidal projects of Nazism, there can be few who believe that history is a

simple forward march. From several points of view the history of the slavery of the Americas nevertheless merits our attention. We have yet to slough off all the ideologies and institutions produced in the era of racial slavery. Then again, the history of New World slavery, as I will try to demonstrate, shows that civil society, in a modern sense of the term, can itself powerfully – and, as it were, ‘spontaneously’ – contribute to highly destructive patterns of human conduct. Writers of quite varied allegiance have identified the disasters of modernity with a disorder of the state. Such phenomena as totalitarian violence and colonial war can be traced to the alienation of the state from civil society, to a fatal conjunction of bureaucratic rationality and fantasies of total power. In different ways this has been argued by the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman and the then Sartrean-Marxist Ronald Aronson, in analyses of Nazism and Stalinism (Bauman) or Nazism, Stalinism and imperialism (Aronson) seen as forms of pure state power. It can even be shown that the most destructive modern famines have resulted as much – if not more – from state negligence as from the working out of market forces.³

The tradition of writing about slavery in the Americas, from Adam Smith to Eric Williams, which associates it with the policies of ‘colonial mercantilism’ can also encourage a view that it was essentially a product of state voluntarism. These mercantilist policies owed much to the commercial principles of the Absolutist states and to the mimetic response of their commercial rivals. So it could be concluded that the slave systems of the Americas show, in an early form, the perils of state alienation from civil society. But the impressive scholarship on American slavery which has accumulated over the last half-century shows that this would be a quite misconceived conclusion. The message of this history is, I will argue, that the spontaneous dynamic of civil society is also pregnant with disaster and mayhem.

For a considerable time the conjunction of slavery, colonialism, and maritime power permitted the more advanced European states to skew the world market to their own advantage. What has been called the ‘European miracle’⁴ in fact depended not only on the control of intercontinental exchanges but on the profits of slavery. The latter also helped to furnish some of the conditions for a global industrial monopoly. The enormous gains achieved were based on the opportunities opened up by transferring forced labourers to parts of the globe under European control, and favourably situated for supplying European markets with exotic produce. But monopolies decreed from European capitals were of limited efficacy unless they were backed up by a host of independent merchants and planters, displaying entrepreneurial qualities.

In the account which follows, it will be shown that the early modern states bore their share of responsibility for the cruelties of the Atlantic slave traffic and for the subsequent merciless and inhumane operation of the slave systems. The Portuguese monarchs promoted and licensed slave

trading in Africa from the mid fifteenth century. The Spanish authorities formally regulated the slave traffic via the *asiento* from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth. The Dutch, the British and the French all set up state-sponsored slave trading concerns, with forts and trading posts in Africa, in the seventeenth century. Once the captives arrived in the Americas their conditions of life were – supposedly – regulated by public legislation. Rather more effectively, governments sought to regulate, and profit from, the commerce in slave produce.

But this state sponsorship of slavery was closely linked to the dynamic of civil society – and as slavery flourished, so the state was confined to a more restricted role. It was not based on the abstraction or alienation of the colonial state from the dominant forces in colonial society. Quite the contrary. The public authorities were responding, in ways I will explore, to the insistent and specific prompting of powerful social actors. In Chapter II the royal regulation of Portugal’s spice trade with the East is contrasted to the incipiently autonomous plantation and slave trade of the Atlantic. A recent account argues that the first Atlantic sugar colony achieved takeoff in the late fifteenth century because of commercial and settler initiative: ‘The plantations of Madeira . . . developed independently of Portuguese national authority.’⁵ If we turn to Spanish America, the introduction of some thousands of African slaves each year from the middle of the sixteenth century was a response to the eagerness of colonial planters, manufacturers and mine concessionaries to employ them – a process explored in Chapter III. Referring to the use of African slaves, as well as other forms of labour not controlled by the colonial state in sixteenth-century Spanish America, Steve Stern writes:

These relationships had emerged in ‘civil society’, as expressions of ‘private’ relations and coercions relatively free of direct sponsorship by the formal political structure of the state. . . . Slavery, personal lordship and contracted labor . . . bound exploiter and exploited directly to one another. The colonial state, at various times and in different degrees, legally sanctioned, encouraged, and even purported to regulate such relationships. But the initiation, internal dynamics and socioeconomic significance of these relationships reflected private or extra-official initiative more than state edict.⁶

In Spanish America the colonial state was to play a large and intrusive role, but – as we will see in Chapter III – this was greatly to cramp the development of plantation slavery. Matters turned out differently in Portuguese Brazil, but here – as I seek to explain in Chapter IV – the state was less active in ordering colonial society – especially when it came to slavery. As Stuart Schwartz writes: ‘in the matter of slavery, the state and its officers are notably absent’.⁷

The process of colonization itself was to a greater or lesser extent state-sponsored, and so were some ancillary varieties of enslavement. The Castilian state acquired a mandate from the Pope to validate its conquest

of the New World. The Papacy sponsored the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), which divided the world beyond Europe into separate spheres of Castilian (Spanish) and Portuguese colonization. Tordesillas ratified the Portuguese monopoly of the African slave trade and endorsed Spain's claim to the lion's share of the as yet still barely 'discovered' Indies (North East Brazil was to fall just inside the Portuguese sphere). While the Papacy allowed the Portuguese to sell African slaves to the Christian kingdoms of Spain, it did not countenance their sale to Muslims, since enslavement was meant to lead to conversion. The Spanish doctrine of conquest affirmed that native peoples who resisted Castile's divinely appointed role could be condemned to slavery. However, the scope of enslavement practised by Spanish colonists was to become the subject of a famous controversy; as we will see, the monarch and his officials distrusted the greed and rapacity of their own colonists. Eventually (as is described in Chapter III), the Spanish monarch forbade the enslavement of the native inhabitants (though loopholes were left, since rebellious Indians could still be reduced to bondage). The imperial state also issued licences permitting the introduction and sale of African captives. If the slave plantation systems of the New World had been constructed on the basis of a Spanish model, as some have wrongly supposed, then it would be necessary to acknowledge a much larger degree of state sponsorship than there actually was. In fact the slave plantations of Spanish America made only a very modest contribution to Atlantic commerce in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is true that Brazilian plantations became major producers in the last decades of the sixteenth century, and that the Portuguese Crown was at this time united with that of Spain. But (as is explained in Chapter IV) Brazilian growth was tolerated rather than promoted by Madrid, and was anyway soon interrupted by a Dutch invasion which the Spanish connection helped to provoke – circumstances recounted and analysed in Chapter V.

The real takeoff of the plantation economies, it will be argued, took place in the seventeenth century. The New World ambitions of France, the Netherlands and England challenged the Iberian monopolies, and the Papal rulings on which they were based, with Protestant captains and colonists often playing a leading role. Neither France nor Britain could accept the Papal demarcation made at Tordesillas. Under the terms of the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559 France, Spain and England made peace in Europe while leaving open the precise status of territories 'beyond the line' – that is, beyond the prime meridian passing through the Azores or South of the Tropic of Cancer.⁸ While Spain continued to assert its claims, French and English privateers, many of them Protestant, disputed its commercial monopoly. By this time a swarm of French adventurers and would-be colonists were staking their claim to trade or territory in the New World. The English soon followed. By the 1580s and 1590s the Flemish and Dutch 'sea beggars' joined them without even respecting the line. Down to the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697 the territory 'beyond the line' – the whole of the

Americas and most of the African coast – was to continue to be excluded from the terms of European peace treaties. The inability of the European states to come to terms concerning these crucial areas meant that they remained a battleground, a sort of 'wild West' in which traders and colonists founded a new order, eventually being obliged to defer to one or other of the colonial sheriffs. Without the tenacity and resources of these colonial entrepreneurs, little or nothing could be achieved.

The theory of empire which the Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch and English came to expound appealed to God-given rights, but with interesting differences of emphasis. The Portuguese emphasized their rights as 'discoverers' not so much of the land as of the sea routes between Europe and the newly discovered coast; Portuguese captains were required to register navigational details of their discoveries as well as marking them with a stone cross. The Spanish monarch claimed to rule the Americas by a God-given right of conquest, so long as the ceremony of the 'Requirement' demanding peaceful submission had been observed. Supposedly the Aztec and Inca rulers, having failed to respond and having obstructed the Spaniards' free movement, had been conquered in a 'just war'. The French believed the Spanish 'Requirement' and conquest were a mockery of Christian behaviour and violated the God-given natural rights of the indigenous peoples. The French, therefore, appeared in the New World as the friends and allies of the natives, and supposedly established colonies only with their unforced consent. The Dutch asserted their right not simply as navigators but principally as traders; in contrast to the Iberian powers, they believed that there was a God-given natural right of all to sail the high seas in pursuit of trade, and to the better life that commerce brought with it. Finally, the English laid stress on the fact that their colonists, as cultivators or 'planters', were making better use of the land than native hunters-and-gatherers or colonial rivals, and thus enjoyed Divine sanction.

This bare summary simply picks out the most salient feature in each imperial ideology; in practice the various powers constantly sought to imitate one another's successes and learn from their mistakes.⁹ But their competitive success naturally depended upon the resources and institutions each could dispose of. While the Spanish approach, at one extreme, was highly dependent on state initiative and control, the English formula, at the other, critically depended upon the initiative and competence of the colonists themselves, albeit within the terms of some royal charter or bequest. In the various chapters of Part One it will be shown that African slaves could be introduced to boost each and every one of these colonial projects, though by far the most rewarding was to be the use of slaves in plantation agriculture.

The workings of the slave systems were terribly destructive and oppressive, but they came to display the routines of regular business. The slave traders and their crews, and the slave masters and their overseers, worked in the expectation of earning a salary or making a profit. They proved

capable of sadistic ferocity, and sought to crush slave resistance with displays of exemplary cruelty. But research into the impressively detailed records which the planters and merchants left behind reveals a convergence on average rates of profit and standard methods of procedure. The pressures of commercial competition helped to diffuse new techniques and to discipline the wayward or self-indulgent planter. While most of the free employees implicitly consented to the degradation of black people, they did not have to be motivated by racial hostility. Episodes of gratuitous violence were far from unknown, because of the vulnerability of the slaves, but the successful slave systems harnessed coercion to production and the maintenance of order in a systematic way. Handbooks of plantation management generally stressed that punishment should be meted out in a methodical and predictable way. The overpacking of the ships in the Atlantic slave trade, and the inadequate food and water provisions for the captives, produced much higher mortality rates than were found among free migrants. But such methods were more profitable, since larger numbers of slaves could be delivered on each voyage. The average workings of the slave systems displayed something of the impersonality and functional logic of modern organization. Yet the slave plantations themselves were based on the distinctive face-to-face relationship between overseer, driver and slave crew.

The thoroughly commercial character of most New World slavery differentiates it from earlier practices of slavery. At the high point of slavery in the Ancient World – roughly 200 BC to AD 200 – very large numbers of slaves were captured by Roman armies, then distributed or sold in ways that reflected the policy of the state or a particular general rather than the play of economic forces. One might say that many Roman slaves were sold because they had been captured, while many African slaves entering the Atlantic trade had been captured so that they might be sold. Likewise, the estates of the Roman Empire generally marketed less of their output and relied less on purchasing inputs than was the case for the plantations of the Americas. Consequently, accounting methods and financial instruments were less elaborate. The slaves of Rome also had a much better chance of ending up in some non-menial job. Roman slavery was highly geared to the capacities of the imperial state, a point to which we return in the next chapter; in the New World the colonial states strove to batten upon a ‘civil slavery’ geared to commercial networks spread across and beyond the Atlantic – and eventually this civil slavery was emancipated from metropolitan tutelage. Despite all this the slavery of Ancient Rome came closer to the New World experience, for which it furnished important legal formulas and justification, than did other slave systems outside Europe.¹⁰

That the real dynamic of the Atlantic slave trade was not statist or mercantilist was to be shown in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the instruments of mercantilist regulation were dismantled or suppressed. The volume of the Atlantic traffic vastly increased as more

concerns entered it and the official slave trading companies were forced to the margins. John Thornton writes of the early period: ‘although the states of the Atlantic persistently sought to direct and control the trade, their purpose was really more to enhance their revenue by marginally distorting the market’.¹¹ Thornton’s judgement is intended to apply to both European and African states which, despite their different capacities, ultimately shared an inability to dominate the slave traffic in a monopolistic fashion. It was the private initiative of merchants and planters that led to the successively larger-scale employment of slaves on the plantations on the Atlantic islands, in Brazil and in the Caribbean. The formula of American plantation slavery achieved its most potent expression on the islands of the Eastern Caribbean in the mid seventeenth century, at a time when none of them was effectively regulated by the metropolis, as we will see in Chapters VI and VII. At this time Dutch mercantile skills, Portuguese and Brazilian knowledge of sugar-making, and the enterprise of English and French planters and settlers created and multiplied large-scale plantations, relying on African slave labour and harnessing the latest advances of commerce and manufacture. Karl Polanyi ascribed the ‘explosion of the slave trade’ to this ‘epochal event as specific as the invention of the steam engine by James Watt some 130 years later’.¹²

Recent research shows that even the large chartered slave trading companies, such as England’s Royal African Company, found that they had to respect market principles, and learn the precise wants and needs of hundreds of suppliers on the African coast and thousands of purchasers in the American colonies. After scrutinizing details of some eighty thousand transactions recorded in the archives of the African Company, David Galenson concludes:

This study has provided strong evidence of diligent and systematic behaviour aimed at profit maximisation by English slave traders and West Indian sugar planters in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. These traders and planters were hindered by severe handicaps, yet the evidence shows they responded to these energetically and intelligently. The evidence of rational responses to market stimuli comes from both quantitative evidence on aggregate outcomes in the slave trade and qualitative evidence that affords a rare glimpse into the internal operation of a large company operating in the late seventeenth century. What emerges overall is a picture of a series of closely connected competitive economic markets, in Africa and America, in which large numbers of traders and planters responded promptly and shrewdly to economic incentives.¹³

The trade in plantation goods was somewhat more amenable to regulation, since the route between colony and metropolis was easier to invigilate. There was probably more smuggling between the colonies of different powers than between the different metropolitan markets, since most European states had an apparatus for controlling the latter. Nevertheless, the trade in tobacco, sugar, rum, cotton and other plantation products had

a spontaneous momentum that could take the authorities by surprise. Tobacco smoking became widespread without any official support – and despite fitful attempts to suppress it.

Once flourishing slave colonies existed, rival colonial states certainly saw the advantage of controlling them. And since other colonial states constituted a lively threat, they were able to offer military protection. The colonial state could also offer to protect the slaveowners against their own slaves. But American slaveowners, from an early period, aspired to control their own means of defence, in the form of militia and patrols. Metropolitan garrisons were sometimes remote and often under strength; their role was as much to control the wayward impulses of the colonists as to protect them. The planters' need to recruit support from free persons without slaves was to shape the racial structure, as we will see.

The racial character of New World slavery was invented by European traders and settlers with little prompting from state functionaries. The early Spanish and Portuguese authorities justified slavery as a means to the conversion of Africans. European traders and colonists of the early modern period had few qualms about the enslavement of heathens, whether Native Americans or Africans or – if they could get away with it – Asians, while they rarely displayed any eagerness to convert them. But some slaves converted none the less, putting a strain on both official and popular conceptions. In the English colonies specific legislation was to be enacted by the local assemblies stipulating that conversion did not confer freedom on the slave. A religious sanction for enslavement was available. As we will see in Chapter I, early modern Europeans found in the Bible sanctions for the enslavement of strangers, with some believing that Africans, as 'sons of Ham', had been singled out for this fate, even if they became Christians. In subsequent chapters examples are given of the use of this myth to justify a system of enslavement that had come increasingly to focus exclusively upon those of African descent. This doctrine represented one expression of a burgeoning Christian, European or 'white' racial consciousness which both protected fellow Europeans from the rigours of full slavery and designated Africans or blacks as its proper victims. The need for such an ideology became acute in the wake of the plantation revolution, since there were many more hugely exacting and unpleasant tasks to be carried out.

Shifting Identity and Racial Slavery

In practice, slaves were conceived of as an inferior species, and treated as beasts of burden to be driven and inventoried like cattle. Yet like all racist ideologies, this one was riddled with bad faith. The slaves were useful to the planters precisely because they were men and women capable of understanding and executing complex orders, and of intricate co-operative techniques. The most disturbing thing about the slaves from the slavehold-

er's point of view was not cultural difference but the basic similarity between himself and his property. Africans could procreate with Europeans, and occupied the same ecological niche. As Benjamin Franklin was to observe, slaves, unlike sheep, could rise in rebellion. The great world religions all registered the anthropological fact of common humanity. And while they might aspire to the brotherhood of man and comity of nations, their attitude to infidels often revealed an awareness of humanity's greatest enemy. As Jean-Paul Sartre pointed out:

Nothing – not even wild beasts or microbes – could be more terrifying for man than a species which is intelligent, carnivorous and cruel, which can understand and outwit human intelligence, and whose aim is precisely the destruction of man. This, however, is obviously our own species as perceived by each of its members in the context of scarcity.¹⁴

The American planter who treated his slaves like subhumans would typically reveal a fear and surplus aggression towards them which stemmed from a belief that they could take over his plantation and his womenfolk if they were given the slightest real opportunity to do so. Sartre's insight links up with Foucault's thesis that racism is an expression of permanent social war. In his 1976 lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault actually identified the origins of racial consciousness in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with popular antagonism to the aristocratic element in the pre-modern state, itself based on racial conceits (Saxons against aristocratic Normans in England, Franks against aristocratic Goths in France, and so forth). In this conception, however, the racial feeling which could challenge the aristocracy could also be deployed against outsiders.¹⁵

Oceanic migration, both voluntary and forced, bringing previously distant human groups into intimate contact with one another, created the need to work out new systems of ascribed identity. In the world of Atlantic exchange and confrontation, the given and fixed quality of all traditional social identity was threatened by flux and intermixture. Jack Forbes has shown that even such apparently clear terms as 'Negro' were remarkably labile in the sixteenth century, often referring to those later called 'Indians' or to a variety of ethnic mixtures.¹⁶ The world opened up by the 'Discoveries', as Vitorino Magalhães Godinho has observed, plunged Europeans into a vertiginous sense of novelty wherever they looked, with new plants, new fruits, new animals, new customs, new peoples and a new sky at night.¹⁷ In North America in the 1530s the would-be *conquistador* Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, together with his African slave Estevanico and two companions, were captured by Indian peoples following the foundering of an expedition of which he was treasurer. His fascinating account of their subsequent fate – of the Indians' insistence that they were possessed of the power of healing, of their travels among a succession of Indian peoples, and of their disillusioning return to the rapacious and brutal world of Christian slave hunters – conveyed to a wider public the strange moral reversals which

could take place at the borderlands of empire and beyond.¹⁸ The *Peregrination* of the late-sixteenth-century Portuguese seafarer Fernão Mendes Pinto furnished further astonishing and unsettling stories of this type.

Michael Pietz gives an example of shifting identities in an anecdote relating to a time and place where they were, perhaps, at their most fluid. It is told by a Portuguese, and relates to an encounter with the slave of a friend of his in the Gambia river in 1624:

I met a black Mandinga youth, by name Gaspar Vaz. The black was a good tailor and button maker. As soon as he knew that I was in port he came to see me and paid a call on me with great enthusiasm. He embraced me, saying he could not believe it was me he saw, and that God had brought me there so that he could do me some service. For this I gave him thanks, saying that I was very pleased to see him too, so that I could give him news of his master and mistress and acquaintances, but that I was distressed to see him dressed in a Mandinga smock, with amulets of his fetiches (Gods) around his neck [*com nominas dos seus feitiços ao pescoço*], to which he replied: 'Sir, I wear this dress because I am nephew of Sandeguil, Lord of this town, whom the tangomaos call Duke, since he is the person who commands after the King. On the death of Sandeguil, my uncle, I will be inheritor of all his goods, and for this reason I dress in the clothes that your honour sees but I do not believe the Law of Mohammed, rather I abhor it. I believe in the Law of Christ Jesus, and so that your honour may know that what I say is true' – he took off his smock, beneath which he wore a doublet and a shirt in our fashion, and from around his neck he drew out a rosary of Our Lady – 'every day I commend myself to God and the Virgin Our Lady by means of this rosary. And if I do not die, but come to inherit the estate of my uncle I will see to it that some slaves are sent to Santiago and when I have found a ship to take me I will go to live in that island and die among Christians.' It was no small advantage to me to meet him in the Gambia, because he was of service to me in everything, and what I bought was at the price current among the people themselves, very different from the price they charge the tangomaos. And he served me as interpreter and linguist.¹⁹

While this was evidently a happy accident, the ambivalent identities it revealed were not those to be required by slaveowning planters who needed labourers fixed to one spot and one role. Skin colour came to serve as an excellent and readily identified marker which everyone carried around on their face and limbs, ruling out any hope of imposture or dissimulation. If necessary, some systems of racial classification could give importance to different shades or phenotypes; in other cases skin could be 'lightened' by paying fees to the authorities. But the baseline of this system of racial classification was simply pigmentation. New World slavery was peculiarly associated with darker pigmentation or 'black' skin. Not every black was a slave, but most blacks were, and on this assumption every black could be treated like a slave unless they could prove free status – and even then, they would still be treated worse than white colonists. In the colonies of the Catholic and Latin powers the racial hierarchy was a little more complex

and baroque, in ways to be mentioned below. But skin colour remained a vital social marker, one highly correlated with enslavement.

Thus, in the racial theory which became peculiarly associated with plantation slavery, the abstracted physiological characteristics of skin colour and phenotype come to be seen as the decisive criteria of race, a term which had hitherto had a more ample sense of family or kind, nature or culture. The reduction at work met practical tests. It furnished an identity document in an epoch when many were illiterate. It also corresponded to a fetishistic logic which Pietz's essay seeks to unravel. The European traders and travellers believed that Africans were victims of a strange category mistake and an inability to grasp general concepts; instead they had their 'fetishes', assortments of strange objects which were imbued with supernatural powers. The word fetish was not taken from any African language but simply derived from the Portuguese *feitiço* – from the verb to make, but in this form usually referring to witchcraft.

Just as skin colour and phenotype helped to fix race, so the complex systems of trade and barter helped to produce a schedule of equivalents, reducible to gold or silver, or shells or currency, or – as was often to be the case by the eighteenth century – by notional iron bars used as a *numéraire*. Such currencies were general equivalents in terms of which anything, most especially slaves, could be valued. But slaves themselves were increasingly, and then exclusively, acquired as a means to the production of other commodities. To begin with, the Portuguese were mainly interested in gold dust, spices and modest consignments of dyestuffs, sugar and chocolate. The Dutch, the French and the English merchants or planters eventually took the lead with larger quantities of sugar, rum, molasses, tobacco, indigo, cotton, and coffee. And in a new Atlantic – indeed, global – dance of commodities, European and Eastern manufactures moved in a reverse direction: to the colonies and the African coast.

The elaborate and competitive processes of exchange which led to these diverse goods being presented in the marketplace helped to obscure their conditions of production and minimize the sense of social or moral responsibility of all those involved. Thus the planter or merchant could say to himself: if I refuse to buy the slave, then someone else will. This logic of atomization and serialization, in which each feels obliged to mimic the other in himself, has also been theorized by Sartre.²⁰ Given the manifold uncertainties and frequent obscurity of the new market society, and the novel encounters on which it was based, it is not surprising that it bred new anxieties and truncated perceptions. Thus early modern Europeans, encountering Native Americans or Africans, believed them to be living outside culture and morality in some 'wild' and 'natural' state. This aroused both phobic fears and fantasies, and utopian longings and projections.²¹ The ideologies of enslavement found ways to mobilize the former – though, as will be argued below, it was by no means clear that it was either prudent

or profitable to acquire and rely on wild savages, depraved cannibals, murderous devils, and the like. In fact the identity of the slave had to be domesticated, normalized or naturalized. Their reduction to the status of a chattel was a decisive element in this process.

The social relations of unsupervised economic exchange have sometimes been thought to promote a rough-and-ready equality between buyer and seller. In fact this was to be the case both on the African coast and in the Americas, though pointedly excluded from its scope were to be those captives who were themselves to be traded. In an influential essay on the origins of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century abolitionism Thomas Haskell has argued that the new world of long-distance trade promoted a sense of human interconnectedness, and of the efficacy of long-distance action, which spontaneously undermined the legitimacy of slavery. On the other hand Ellen Meiksins Wood argues that the formal equality implied by the new salience of capitalist relations in the early modern period was more likely to have exactly the opposite consequences, fostering new doctrines of race, ethnicity and gender to explain and justify substantive inequality and exclusion. While the slavery of the Ancient World had not denied the basic humanity of the slave, the emergent capitalist societies of seventeenth-century Europe could only recognize the humanity of those who had something to sell – of the African merchant or monarch, but not the African captive.²²

Thomas Holt has argued that American slavery had its roots in a new configuration of the everyday, so that the decision of a consumer to buy a pound of sugar refers us to the global social relations which made this possible:

A woman buying a pound of sugar . . . has a doubled aspect: hers is at once a simple gesture but one within which are inscribed complex social relations. Her action not only expresses but makes possible a global structure of imperialist politics and labor relations which racialize consumption as well as production.²³

It is part of the purpose of this book to explore how these structures were established, and to locate the role of the everyday in their elaboration and reproduction. At a certain level the consumer did indeed have a critical part to play. Early modern Europe witnessed the emergence of a cash demand for popular luxuries, fuelled by the larger numbers of people who now received rents, salaries and wages. Those with money – who included new poor as well as new or old rich – had recourse to the market to add sugar and spice to their existence. Carole Shammas observes:

The changeover made by so many people [to foreign groceries] completely reorganized trade and promoted colonization and slavery. . . . Since Keynes it has been customary to ask about the impact of the state on consumer demand. But in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the causal order was the reverse; consumer demand's effects on the state.²⁴

But Shammas's consumers are not all sovereigns, since she also identifies new proletarianized populations separated from traditional sources of food – the family cow or garden plot – finding in the new sweetened beverages and confections solace and badly needed calories. The dynamics of civil society were, in fact, shot through with class as well as racial hierarchies. It is also clear that the new exotic products could be produced in a variety of ways. For over half a century tobacco was cultivated mainly by free farmers and European indentured servants. Most of what became the typical slave plantation crops – cotton, indigo, coffee and even sugar – could be grown and/or processed using free or indentured labour. It was merchants and planters above all who decided how the demand for plantation produce would be met, and in contexts they had helped to shape. In Chapter VIII I ask whether they could have chosen any differently. Independent small producers, native communities, free or indentured migrants generally lacked much influence on governments or the sort of help or protection that might have given them leverage against the merchant and planter elite.

One way of securing social inclusion and fixing identity in early modern Europe was national allegiance. But national sentiment does not fully explain why some could be enslaved and others not. The traders and the New World colonists felt their way towards new systems of racial classification, inventing not one but several racisms, as we will see, successively refining the identity of the colonial and slaveholding community as 'Christian', 'European', and 'white'. While national identities came to mobilize one European people against another, they were not thought to justify the enslavement of the subjects of another monarch or the citizens of another state; and under normal conditions the same consideration was even extended to the subjects of a Muslim monarch. By contrast the new racisms furnished critical principles of domestic subordination within the civil society of the colonies. African captives were deemed stateless and acquired as chattels; they then became part of the slaveholding household. Once a slave was acquired by a new owner then they also acquired their owner's national belonging, becoming, in common parlance, 'an English Negro' or 'a French Negro'. In the early modern period many suffered degrees of social and political exclusion and only a minority of adult males, together with a few widows, could exercise the rights of a head of household. The status of the slave was thus a limiting case of a species of exclusion to which women, minors, and those with little or no property were subject. And the racial sentiment animating it can be linked, as Benedict Anderson suggests in a similar case, to class rather than nation.²⁵

The conjunction of modernity and slavery is awkward and challenging since the most attractive element in modernity was always the promise it held out of greater personal freedom and self-realization. The late medieval communes produced an aspiration to citizenship which gave early expression to this notion of civic freedom; it was often claimed that the 'free air' of the municipality dissolved the bonds of servitude. The Refor-

mation yielded a religious version of this promise with its notion of the role of individual conscience. The rise of distinctive 'nations', first among students and merchants and then among wider layers in the population, gave birth to the idea that the people realized their freedom in the creation of a national community. National sentiment, promising a notional liberty, or even share in sovereignty, to each member of the nation, was to be part of the structure of modernity as it emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But property and patriarchy qualified this promise and effectively excluded slaves from it altogether. Free blacks were inclined to claim civic rights but when they did so had to contend with white colonists; the colonial state sometimes deemed it appropriate or convenient to accord at least some rights to free people of colour as a way of stimulating their loyalty. But the slave was effectively beyond the reach of the colonial state.

Within the new secular space opened up by modernity, slavery was thrown into dramatic and negative relief. From some time in the seventeenth century this word became among the most frequently used in the vocabulary of social or political agitation. It is therefore all the more puzzling that slavery was developed to its greatest extent in the New World precisely by the peoples of North Western Europe who most detested it at home. They saw in slavery a notion of intense and comprehensive domination that was the antithesis of citizenship and self-respect. Of course, the notion of the free wage labourer was at an early stage of development, with many aspiring to the role of independent small producer or artisan. The labourer who was able to depend on regular wages to meet all his or her subsistence costs, and hence able to live without independent means of existence or other claims to support, represented a particular outcome of a lengthy and contested social development. In the sixteenth century the hired servant might have some land or instruments of a trade; on the other hand, they might owe service for years at a time. The master often had the right to administer physical punishment; on the other hand, the labourer could appeal to a variety of customary rights *vis-à-vis* an employer. The popular notion of the condition of the slave was one in which he or she was stripped bare of all customary rights and independent means of existence, and thus subordinated to the naked, perpetual and comprehensive domination of the master. In the course of this book it will be shown that this was indeed the formal statute of enslavement in the Americas, but that other opposed or different tendencies were also at work, many of them difficult to identify with the aid of the formal juridical concepts of European chattel slavery. The African captives brought with them skills and expectations that helped them to survive, adapt and ultimately challenge or undermine the modern European notion of enslavement. The innovation of colonial slavery was launched by European merchants and planters, then ratified by jurists or statesmen; ultimately, it created new identities and new solidarities which different jurists and political leaders saw advantages in recognizing.

The social relations of colonial slavery borrowed from an ancient stock of legal formulas, used contemporary techniques of violence, developed manufacture and maritime transport on a grand scale, and anticipated modern modes of co-ordination and consumption. Slavery in the New World was above all a hybrid mixing ancient and modern, European business and African husbandry, American and Eastern plants and processes, elements of traditional patrimonialism with up-to-date bookkeeping and individual ownership. The key crops – maize and manioc as well as tobacco, sugar, coffee, indigo, and so forth – had been unknown in Europe, and the means of producing, processing and consuming them had to be learned from others. These borrowings necessarily involved innovation and adaptation, as new social institutions and practices, as well as new crops and techniques of cultivation, were arranged in new ensembles. The tests of war and market survival brought about a 'natural selection' of social institutions and practices – one which, for a considerable time, favoured plantation slavery.²⁶ The institution of colonial slavery furnished a potent if unstable momentum to the whole complex – for a while.

The intricate and enforced co-ordination of labour required by the production of the new plantation staples – the art of sugar-boiling, with its seven different copper basins – had about it a baroque complexity and art. The versatility and luxury of white-sugar confections became a staple of aristocratic display; as plantation production brought down the price, the consumption of sugar spread to broader layers of the population while continuing to supply the icing to ceremonial cakes on special occasions. Polite rituals such as the taking of sweetened coffee, tea or 'baroque chocolate' (a brew made with spices) also spread down the social scale.

Nevertheless, because the new exotic products were associated with the advent of new popular pleasures, there was also movement in the other direction. The particular drugs and stimulants that flourished were not necessarily those approved by the authorities – most of whom disapproved of tobacco until they tumbled to its revenue-raising possibilities. The taste for smoking, chewing or snuffing tobacco was brought back to Europe by seamen and adventurers. It was the first exotic luxury to become an article of mass consumption. At the same time, the pleasure principle was seemingly disciplined by a need for self-control. Tobacco, like tea or coffee, was stimulating without befuddling or numbing the senses. In Chapter VI it will be suggested that such stimulants were eventually selected because they were compatible with alertness and control, and allayed the appetite.²⁷ The plantations also produced cotton and dyestuffs that soon influenced middle-class and even popular apparel – especially in the Netherlands and Britain, which were the pacesetters in the new bourgeois world of consumption. Although the new civility often aped the Court, its dynamic spread the consumption of plantation produce into every crevice of the new money economy. The growth of capitalism in Europe thus sucked in a stream of

exotic commodities, which themselves helped to sugar the often bitter pill of wage dependence.

From the Baroque to the Creole

One term for evoking the ethos and aspirations of early European colonialism is 'the baroque'. This word, originally referring to a misshapen pearl and then applied to tortuously elaborate demonstrations in scholastic logic, became attached to the discrepant, bizarre and exotic features of post-Renaissance culture. It was finally adopted to evoke those principles of power and harmony which could reconcile such discordant elements. The baroque appears in a Europe confronting Ottoman might and discovering the material culture of Asia, Africa and America. It is first sponsored by the Jesuits, the Counter-Reformation and the Catholic monarchs and courts in an attempt to meet the challenge of Puritans, though subsequently some Protestant monarchs also adopted aspects of the baroque. Xavier Rubert de Ventos, writing of the consequences of the colonization of the Americas, observes:

The baroque generally – and more singularly in Spain – seems to be an attempt to retain the classical ideals in a world in which everything seems to overwhelm them: a portentous effort to contain elements from overflowing any figurative perimeter. Against all the odds, baroque artists try to offer a tangible translation of a world torn apart by Christianity, aggrandised by the Church and disjointed by the State, disqualified by monetary economy, and thrown off centre by cosmological and geographical discoveries.²⁸

In a similar way, Carl Friedrich links the baroque to the world of colonial slavery:

Looking back upon this period of colonial expansion, it is not difficult to perceive that the spreading of the Gospel, the lure of gold and silver, strategic considerations, the need for outlets for surplus population, the search for raw materials and markets, the effort to increase governmental revenue and naval training, together with the psychology of adventure and escape, all played their roles, in fact and in propaganda. The lust for power, the basic motif of the baroque age, was involved in all of them. But not only the lust *for*, but even more perhaps the revelling *in*, the gorgeous feeling *of*, power were most wonderfully at work in this field. If one confronts the slave trader and the Puritan, the 'get-rich-quick' speculator and the Quaker mystic and pacifist as they sailed the seven seas and expanded Europe until it circled the globe, one beholds once more the basic polarities of the baroque. Both the search for inward and outward power propelled the colonial expansion of Europe . . .²⁹

Expanding the concept of the baroque to embrace also the Puritans and Quakers gives an undue latitude to the term, since – José Maravall has argued – the baroque really represented an alternative modernity to that

associated with the Puritan ethic, and exulted in species of display that the Puritans detested.

Since the baroque had a special link to the Counter-Reformation, it loomed larger in Catholic than in Protestant countries, and everywhere it was associated with royal and aristocratic display, focusing on a utopia of harmony, a cornucopia of abundance and a diorama of elegance. It is in baroque painting that the figure of the black page is often found, gazing gratefully at the master or mistress, or placidly at the viewer. The baroque favoured a sanitized and controlled vision of civil society. While Louis XIV's *Code Noir* sought to instantiate a species of justice within the world of slavery, the Portuguese Jesuit – and sometime royal chaplain – António Vieira delivered a masterpiece of baroque prose denouncing the cruel slaveowners and exalting their victims. Ultimately the courtly baroque wished to tame the wilful slaveowner rather than yield him all the power he craved. While the baroque as spectacle retained a link to the world of colonial slavery, it exhibited a public entrepreneurship, the positive face of mercantilism, which contrasted with the private enterprise that was the driving force behind the New World's civil slavery. Vieira was also the architect of the Brazil Company, a chartered body which helped to save the colony for Portugal.

The planters of the English Caribbean and North America, where slavery proved most dynamic, were plunged in a workaday world and made fewer concessions to their subject peoples than the kings of Spain and Portugal. But they saw themselves as sovereigns of all they surveyed, and occasionally patronized the diversions of their people. The Great Houses of the planters received African adornments, while echoing the Palladian mansions of the English or French aristocracy, the latter in their turn being influenced by Versailles. Since plantation cultivation destroyed the forests, the planters had little difficulty finding sites with commanding views. They built not fortresses or castles but theatres of gracious living. The religion and culture of the Protestant and Anglo-Saxon slave colonies were resistant to cultural admixture – though, as we will argue in Chapter XI, this was by no means absent, even in Virginia. While the planters supplied the necessary ingredients of the new bourgeois lifestyles, they themselves cultivated the dignity of gentlemen. There were not a few learned colonial planters, connoisseurs of Indian customs and artifacts, whose explorations can be seen as projects of a cultural mastery or, more sympathetically, as efforts to transcend European models and to discover an American identity.

Tzvetan Todorov has argued that the Spanish *conquistadores* combined an ability to enter the world of the pre-Colombian societies, playing ruthlessly and skilfully on their internal fault lines, with a lust for gold and cultural arrogance which repressed the basic humanity of the conquered.³⁰ Typically, the European colonists portrayed themselves as engaged in a mission of civilization, saving the 'good' natives from the 'bad' natives who preyed upon them. In this splitting of the 'Other' the bad native was

inherently vicious, given to cannibalism (a word derived from the name of the Carib people) and other unspeakable practices; the 'good' native, on the other hand, still required the tutelage as well as the protection of the Conqueror. The subsequent process of building colonial systems retained many of the characteristics identified by Todorov, but involved a proliferation – a baroque proliferation – of identities built up by polyphonic counterpoint.

The African slave was different from the conquered Indian, and within both categories many distinctions were made. The Spanish permitted – or even encouraged – the Indians and Africans of different *naciones* to parade in distinctive dress, sometimes an adaptation of Spanish peasant costumes with Indo-American or Afro-American folkloric elaboration, on royal feast days. Within the plantation system the planters liked to distinguish different African peoples, to whom real or imagined skills and temperaments were attributed. Thus English planters favoured 'Coromantins' – their term for the Akan peoples of West Africa – for their initiative, hardiness and bravery, but also feared their propensity to revolt. At least twenty different African peoples were regularly distinguished by French planters in Saint Domingue, and there were significant differences in the kinds of work assigned to them.³¹ These African 'nations' were conceived of roughly on the model of European nations, without registering the complex of kinship relations, thus actually bringing about the reduction of a complex identity to a simple one. The mixed or mulatto populations were elaborately classified: the French planter-*philosophe* Moreau de St-Méry produced a table of separate terms distinguishing 128 different categories of mixed blood. The Portuguese authorities organized the following separate companies of free persons of colour in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais: *pardos e bastardos forros* (free mulattoes and half-castes), *pretos e pardos forros* (free blacks and mulattoes), *pretos e mestiços forros* (free blacks and free mixed-bloods), *indios e bastardos* (Indians and half-castes). Colonial slavery was thus typically accompanied by a complex hierarchy of Others, and the stance towards the enslaved Other was that of instrumentalization rather than simple suppression or exclusion, fates which were reserved for the incorrigible 'bad native'.

The category of the baroque illuminates the transitional character of colonial slavery, allowing it to be seen as an ancient and traditional form of domination transformed and thrown forward. It helped to propel the forward movement, while those who contributed the motor energy were confined to a narrower space than ever before. The slave plantations were enormously productive, but some of the methods of cultivation were needlessly laborious. If the planter wished to remain in control, and to appropriate a prodigious surplus, then everything had to be adapted to the slave gang or to a labour process that could be easily overseen. On the other hand, the planters continually relied on the slaves' craft and skill, their ability to build with local materials and live on local flora and fauna.

The baroque sought to address the impact of other cultures upon Europe, a feature that was particularly pronounced in the Americas. The colonial baroque generally acquired a syncretistic and popular character by comparison with the metropolitan baroque of Versailles or a royal procession on the Thames, though the public display of power was common to both.³² In the Andes, Mexico and Brazil, indigenous or African themes were incorporated in objects of religious devotion; gold and silver were plentifully applied, asserting a primacy of symbolic value over exchange value. The baroque even promised an aestheticized and transfigured world beyond that of an oppressive mundane reality.

Those elements of the baroque which implied any restraint on the commercial dynamic of plantation slavery were gradually whittled away by the relentless pressure of military and economic competition between rival slave systems. The slave systems of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became attuned to more industrial rhythms, losing first their baroque and then their colonial features. But these processes also brought into view the informal work of cultural and productive synthesis underlying the productivity of the slave systems. The colonial version of the baroque anticipated elements of the creole. The creole mixtures thrown up by plantation development became increasingly confident and coherent, escaping beyond European forms and models. The African coastal depots, the Atlantic island provisioning points, the American ports, plantations, marketplaces and backlands were new spaces, and they gave rise to new languages, new musics, new religions and new laws. They gave birth to the creole, to mixtures of European, African and Amerindian elements. While the colonial baroque articulated and qualified slavery 'from above', the creole sometimes did so 'from below'. The term creole was used of the American-born, whether white or black or every shade between, though the emphasis was to shift according to place and period. The word itself was thus close in meaning to that of 'American' as used in England's North American colonies. It originated, however, from the Spanish *criada*, or nurse, thus implying that the *criollo* was suckled as well as born in the Americas, very possibly by an Indian or African nurse. It seems appropriate that the new forms of life born in the colonies are often called creole, with the more or less conscious realization that they represented a new synthesis or mixture, arrived at through the struggles within and between the various components of the colonial population. Within narrow limits creolization could qualify slavery. But without some more or less revolutionary emancipation, the creole impulse was caged.

The servitude of the slaves, imprisoned on a tiny patch of soil and forced to devote nearly all their waking time to furnishing the conveniences and luxuries of a diverse metropolitan population, was the transatlantic complement of European economic advance. Captive Africans and their descendants paid with their blood and sweat and incarceration for the phenomenal expansion of human possibilities in the Atlantic world. This is how it

happened. But was it the inescapable and 'necessary' price of economic advance? If it was a necessary price, then it might even appear, at this distance in time, a price worth paying.

The problem with such a view is that the human costs of slavery continue to be paid in the poisonous legacies it bequeathed. The slavery of the colonial epoch was associated with a new species of racialization, a predatory and destructive mode of production and an oblivious and irresponsible mode of consumption. I believe we must scrutinize all the various causal links in the chains of American slavery. Their complexity and counterpoint could have yielded a variety of outcomes. At each moment in the construction of the slave systems there were forms of resistance, queries and objections, even proposals that matters be arranged differently. Because of the fact that these systems of slavery had to provide for the reproduction of some human resources, as well as wastefully consuming them, new social subjects were produced in the Atlantic zone, with their own proposals and forms of life. New sources of productivity were being tapped, new needs met, and new motivations discovered. Would it not have been possible to combine these in ways which avoided the systematic, onerous and destructive coercion of American slavery and the Atlantic slave trade? The history reconstructed below will on occasion seek to identify signs and possibilities that other paths of development were considered, and might have been chosen. Even if some such clues can be detected, we are left with what happened. Yet some daylight is admitted to the modernity-slavery couplet by acknowledging the possibility that there might have been a path to modernity that avoided the enormity of enslavement and its contemporary legacy.

In pursuing this idea, I will critically refine the work of those classical and Marxist economists who always stressed the inherent limitations of slave labour and the projects of 'merchant capital'. Ultimately merchant capital, with its reliance on tied labour, was conservative and rigid, and the slave plantations it sponsored raised output mainly by multiplying units of production, not by raising labour productivity. In *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, G.A. Cohen urged that unfree labour could not, in the long run, be compatible with cumulative improvements in the forces of production.³³ Marx fully acknowledged that New World plantation slavery had played a critical role in exploiting natural monopolies, imposing a new scale of co-operation and furthering an extended process of 'primitive accumulation'. But he saw nothing 'premature' in the defeat of the Confederate South at a time when its planters were still producing the cotton needed by capitalist industry. The work of such distinguished historians of slavery as Eugene Genovese, Elizabeth Fox Genovese, Jacob Gorender and Manuel Moreno Fraginals, influenced by classical political economy and Marxism, has sought to view the spectacular advances of the plantations from the standpoint of the *longue durée* of the modern epoch taken as a whole. From this perspective the blockages and costs of the slave

systems appear more clearly than they do in the New Economic History.³⁴ In Chapter VIII and Part Two I will show that it is possible to reconcile the classical critique of the slave plantations with a recognition of their modernity. While I seek to outline new patterns and perspectives it will, I hope, be clear that the work of synthesis attempted here owes everything to the multitude of scholars, and smaller number of witnesses, upon whom it draws.

This book is divided into two parts. In Part One I confront the paradox that slavery had become marginal or non-existent in Western Europe at the time of the Discoveries. I then trace, country by country, the emergence of forms of colonization and enslavement in the course of which a new slave trade from Africa was developed, the institutions and ideologies of a racial slavery were established, forms of commercial organization were tested, and the slave plantation itself was perfected as a productive enterprise. The period 1492 to 1713 can be seen as one of a ruthless struggle for survival between early modern states which tested their capacity to tap new sources of economic and military strength. Britain's precarious lead in colonial development in 1713 was the prize of challenges to Spain and the Netherlands, alliance with Portugal and an arduous and unfinished struggle with France.

By 1713 plantation slavery had been established on a racial basis in Brazil, the Caribbean and North America. Statesmen who had always been preoccupied with gold and silver gradually realized that the plantation trades could be vastly more valuable. Part Two of the book explores the prodigious growth of the various slave systems, set in the context of the eighteenth-century commercial boom and the onset of the Industrial Revolution. Then, country by country and colony by colony, it explores how such a destructive system made a vital contribution to industrial and military success, and accumulated many of the social and political antagonisms which were to engulf the Americas and Europe in an age of revolution.

Notes

1. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Oxford 1976, p. 96; Max Weber, *General Economic History*, London 1927, pp. 300-01. But see also pp. 80-84, 298-9.
2. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford, CA 1990, pp. 21-9, 55-78; Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford, CA 1991, pp. 14-15; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London 1993, especially pp. 41-71.
3. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, London and Ithaca, NY 1989, p. xiii; Ronald Aronson, *The Dialectics of Disaster*, London 1983; Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen,