

***Slavery, Freedom, and Abolition in Latin America and the Atlantic World*** by Christopher Schmidt-Nowara. University of New Mexico Press, 2011, 222 pages. ISBN 978-0-8263-3904-1, Paperback, \$28.95

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Why were Cuba and Brazil the last New World countries to finally abolish slavery? Why, for instance, did slavery persist in Cuba despite the harsh criticisms and public outrage expressed by the members of the Spanish Abolitionist Society, which pointed out the 'violence and lawlessness that thrived on the Cuban plantations in the form of unchecked corporal punishment'? (p.1). Why was slavery so resilient in Brazil, which maintained the institution until 1888, and how was it resisted and fought against across the Americas? These are just a few of the questions Christopher Schmidt-Nowara poses in his new work.

The author sets out to organize 'a narrative of slavery's uneven rise and fall in Latin America and those parts of the Atlantic world to which the region was inextricably connected' (p.5). Albeit short, the compelling introduction stakes the claim that 'Slavery was the historical residue of abolitionist regimes in which power was arbitrary and capricious and unfree labor and monopolies dominated the colonies' (p.3). Offering a glimmer of hope, however, Schmidt-Nowara then states that viewing such events as progress, readers should understand that slavery then 'must give way to the imperatives of individual liberty' (p.3). Lastly, the introductory chapter establishes that the boundaries of the Atlantic World were fluid, refuting typical perceptions of the region. It resonates with the work of scholars like Jack D. Forbes, who sought to demonstrate in *Black Africans and Native Americans* the significant level of contact between Africans, Americans and Europeans before Columbus. In his introduction, Schmidt-Nowara too deconstructs our understanding of the Atlantic slave trade as isolated and separate from other parts of the globe.

Chapter one, 'Slavery and Iberian Colonization,' begins by exploring the relationship between Iberian empires and the Atlantic world. It explains how religious warfare drove Iberians into the Atlantic and down the coast of Africa, intertwining the spirit of warfare with that of commerce in the fifteenth century. The author goes on to examine the early slave trade to Spanish America, in which indigenous people of the Antilles were forced into labor through colonization, and to Brazil colonized by the Portuguese Empire in the sixteenth century. Furthermore, Schmidt-Nowara explores why African slavery was more prevalent. He concludes by considering Don Quixote's dismay at the sight of a galley of slaves in Spain, which he sees as indicative of the rallying against the institution of slavery to come. He surmises that the commitment to slavery, particularly within the American empires of Spain and Portugal, for the sake of colonial expansion - coupled with the legal and religious culture of Iberian empires - helped to continue the expansion of the slave trade. This was especially the case with the Dutch, English, and French when staking their own claims in the Americas (p.47).

The next chapter opens with would-be conquistador Àlvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's report of four men (out of hundreds) surviving a Spanish expedition to Florida. The leniency of some forms of bondage and the class structuring of colonial slave societies is demonstrated by de Vaca's detailing of the lineages and journeys of the four men (one traveled from Morocco to New Mexico). Schmidt-Nowara concentrates on the story of Estevanico, whose 'origins in a Moroccan city within

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the Portuguese orbit show the close links between Iberian expansion in the eastern Atlantic and the subsequent transatlantic expeditions' (p.50). This then leads into the main subject of the chapter, which is the expansion of the slave trade and the increase in African slavery as European rivals began establishing colonies in America.

Chapter two concludes with the questioning of slavery in the Caribbean and Spanish America, coinciding with the British Empire's desire for colonial expansion and consolidation of power. Chapters three and four turn to the primary focus of the author's study: revolution and emancipation across the Americas, as well as the resurgence and destruction of slavery in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Brazil. Here Schmidt-Nowara discusses the impact of revolution and independence on slavery as being "far from homogenous" and how after independence in many republics, abolition became a political issue. He then carefully traces the process of abolishing Cuban and Brazilian slavery in 1886 and 1888, respectively.

What Schmidt-Nowara ultimately offers readers is a far more comprehensive and globalized view of the Atlantic slave trade than we are used to seeing. His intention to detail the interconnectedness of the globe so long ago remains clear throughout. The book is therefore reminiscent of other influential works that have sought to make new connections between history and social conflict, like Susan Buck-Morss' *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (2009). While the reader is sometimes overwhelmed by the innumerable historical facts and background that often begin a chapter, the author's success in establishing a reinterpretation of human conflicts and the significant impact of slavery on the modern world far outweighs the occasionally convoluted presentation of historical information. Other recent titles on slavery have also attempted to establish very early connections between nations across the globe, such as Jeremy Black's *Slavery: A New Global History* (2011). However, Schmidt-Nowara's particular focus on Brazil, Africa and the Caribbean allows him to give a great deal of specificity to regions previously marginalized in the study of world history. It contributes to a rich and growing body of interdisciplinary work on Caribbean history, literature, and culture.

Throughout his study, Schmidt-Nowara details the shifts in the Atlantic and global markets, plantation societies, as well as the 'long history of rebellions, covert acts of resistance, flight, and maroon communities'. He thus demonstrates the many ways in which the Atlantic, South and North America were intricately connected with Africa, parts of Europe, even China. The author reveals a globalized economy that existed long before once thought while he tells many of the stories about slavery, rebellion and colonialism that have previously been uncovered, as well as the 'forms of social, political, and cultural solidarity created...that could at times countervail the stubborn colonial inheritance and the scientific racism and belief in white supremacy that would grip much of the western world in the modern age' (p.163).