

IRA BERLIN

GENERATIONS OF
CAPTIVITY

A History of African-American Slaves

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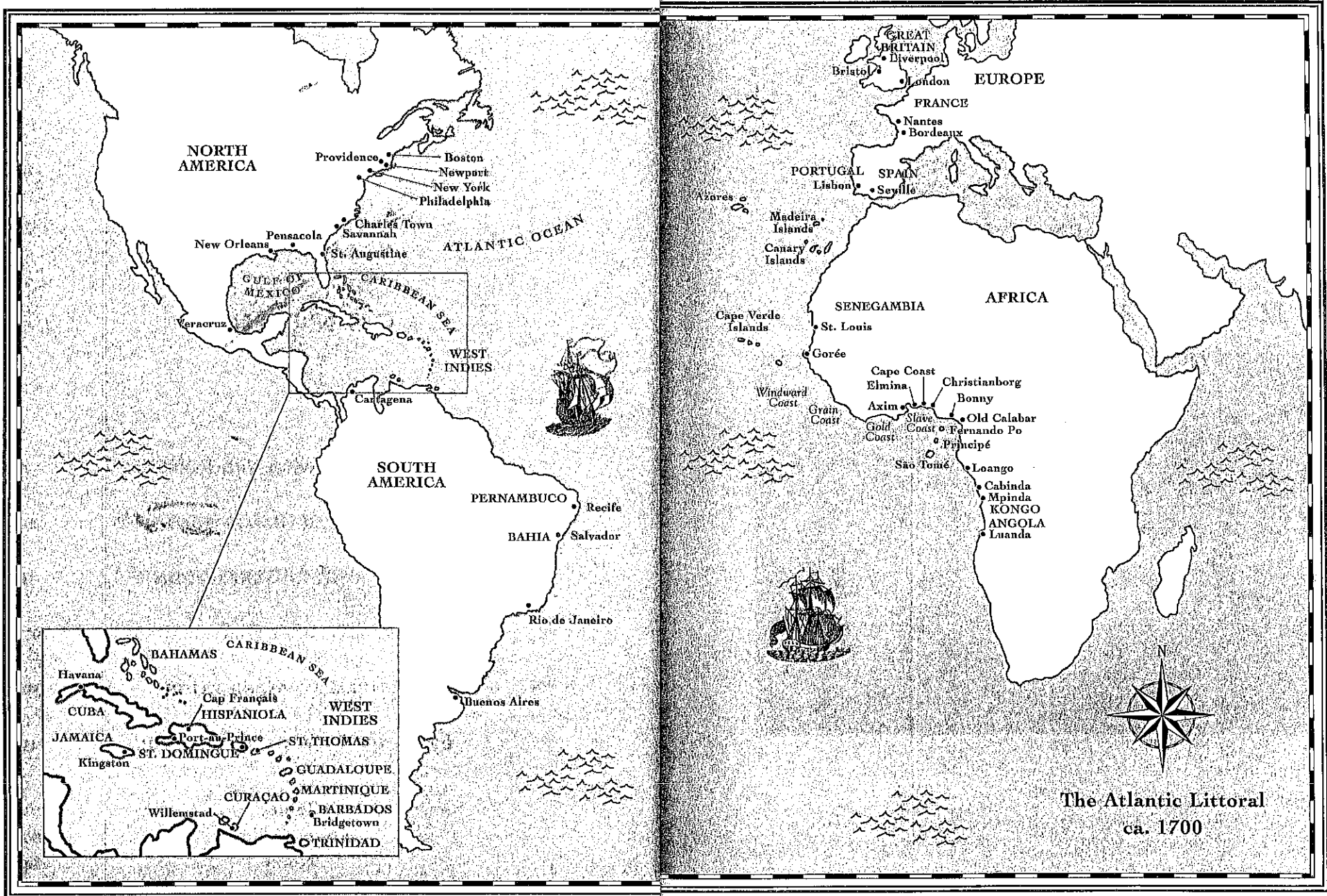
*For my brothers, Bruce and Alan
They ain't heavy*

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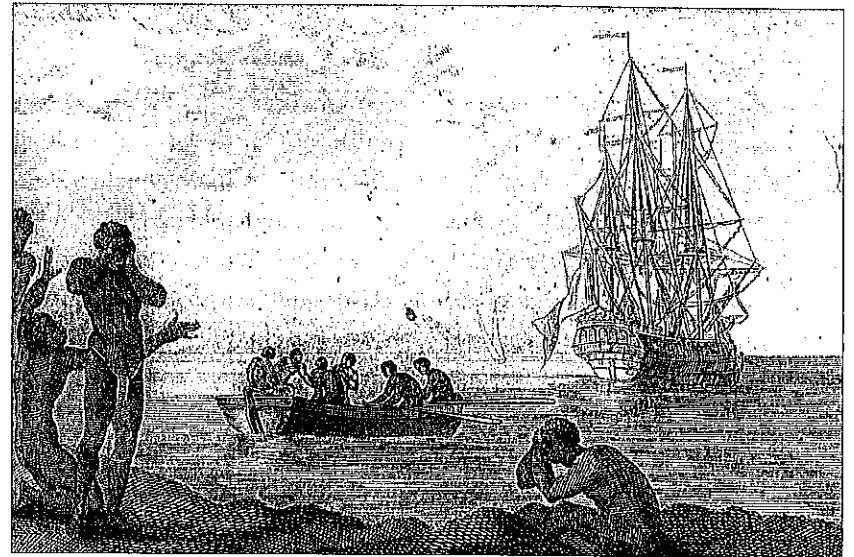
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The Atlantic Littoral
ca. 1700

PROLOGUE

SLAVERY AND FREEDOM



NO ONE KNEW SLAVERY better than the slave, and few had thought harder about what freedom could mean. In January 1865 General William Tecumseh Sherman and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton met in Savannah to query an assemblage of former slaves and free people of color on just these subjects. The response of Garrison Frazier, a 67-year-old Baptist minister who served as spokesman for the group, offers about as good a working definition of chattel bondage as any, and as clear an understanding of the aspirations of black people as can be found. "Slavery," declared Frazier, "is receiving by the *irresistible power* the work of another man, and not by his *consent*." While freedom, Frazier continued, "is taking us from the yoke of bondage, and placing us where we could reap the fruits of our own labor, take care of ourselves and assist the Government in maintaining our freedom."¹

Frazier's last remark—calculated to reassure the general and the secretary—spoke to the minister's appreciation of the political realities of the moment. But his definition of slavery—irresistible power to arrogate another's labor—drew on some three hundred years of experience in bond-

age on mainland North America. Slavery, of necessity, rested on force. It could be sustained only when slaveowners—who, with reason, preferred the title "master"—enjoyed a monopoly on violence, backed by the power of the state. Without irresistible power, slavery quickly collapsed—an event well understood by all those who came together at that historic meeting in Savannah.

Frazier also correctly emphasized the centrality of labor to the enslavement of himself and his people. Plantation slavery did not have its origins in a conspiracy to dishonor, shame, brutalize, or otherwise reduce black people's standing on some perverse scale of humanity—although it did all of those at one time or another. Slavery's moral stench cannot mask the design of American captivity: to commandeer the labor of the many to make a few rich and powerful. Slavery thus made class as it made race, and in entwining the two processes it mystified both.

No history of slavery can avoid these themes: violence, power, and labor, hence the formation and reformation of classes and races. The study of slavery on mainland North America is first the study of enormous, hideous violence that a few powerful men wielded to extort the labor of others and thereby attain a place atop American society. The history of slavery, as Thomas Jefferson observed, was "a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism."² Violence, as Jefferson also understood, begat more violence as slaves refused to surrender what they believed was rightfully theirs. Born of a violent usurpation, slavery would—and perhaps could only—die in the same bloody warfare.

The contest between master and slave proceeded on uneven terrain. By definition, relations between masters and slaves were profoundly asymmetrical, with slaveowners holding a disproportion of power and slaves having hardly any. For three centuries, slave masters mobilized enormous resources that stretched across continents and oceans and employed them with great ferocity in an effort to subdue their human property. Slaves, for their part, had little to depend upon but themselves. Yet even when their power was reduced to a mere trifle, slaves still had enough to threaten their owners—a last card, which, as their owners well understood, they might play at any time.

Despite the uneven nature of the contest, slave masters never quite carried the day. While slaveowners won nearly all the great battles, slaves won their share of skirmishes, frustrating the masters' grand design. Although denied the right to marry, they made families; denied the right to an independent religious life, they established churches; denied the right to hold property, they owned many things. Defined as property and condemned as little more than beasts, they refused to surrender their humanity. Their small successes and occasional victories, moreover, positioned them to win the last battle. In the end, it was they—not their owners—who sat at the table with the conquering general and triumphant secretary of war. Yet, even then—as Garrison Frazier and the others understood—the contest had not ended, for freedom, like slavery, was not made but constantly remade.

Generations of Captivity tells the story of the making and remaking of slavery over the course of nearly three centuries in the portion of North America that became the United States. The emphasis is on the slave. Although slavery was a relationship—hence understanding its working requires an appreciation of slaveowners (large and small), white nonslaveholders, free people of color, and Native Americans—the slave was central to drama. The emphasis is also on change. For too long, scholars have taken the slaves' legal status as chattel property and their social standing at the extreme of subordination as evidence that slaves stood outside history. Depicted as socially dead, they became "absolute aliens," "genealogical isolates," "deracinated outsiders," "prepolitical," or unreflective "sambos" who were known for who they were rather than what they did.³ Appreciating the ongoing struggle between slaves and slaveowners gives the lie to such assumptions. Knowing that a person was a slave does not tell everything about him or her. Put another way, slaveholders severely circumscribed the lives of enslaved people, but they never fully defined them. The slaves' history—like all human history—was made not only by what was done to them but also by what they did for themselves.

All of which is to say that slavery, though originally imposed and maintained by violence, was negotiated. Although disfranchised, slaves were not politically inert, and their politics—even absent an independent insti-

tutional basis—was as active as any. The ongoing contest forced slaveowners and slaves, even as they confronted one another as deadly enemies, to concede a degree of legitimacy to their opponent. No matter how reluctantly given—or, more likely, extracted—such concessions were difficult for either party to acknowledge. Masters presumed their own absolute sovereignty, and slaves never relinquished the right to control their own destiny. But no matter how adamant the denials, nearly every interaction of master and slave forced such recognition, for the web of interconnections necessitated a coexistence that fostered grudging cooperation as well as open contestation. The refusal of either party to concede the realities of master-slave relations only added to slavery's instability. No bargain could last for very long, for as power slipped from master to slave and back, the terms of slavery were negotiated and then renegotiated.

Central to those negotiations was the labor slaves performed, for when, where, and especially how slaves worked determined, in large measure, the course of their lives. But if the study of slavery is first a branch of labor history, it is also more. Slaves, no less than any other workers, did not live on bread alone. Family, language, and spirituality infused the patches of tobacco and the fields of rice and indigo, just as exploitation and compensation informed the spiritual language of brush-arbor sermons and the vernacular of field chants. The weight of time alone—whether calculated as a portion of a day, a year, or a lifetime—does not automatically elevate labor in the field or workshop over any of the other manifestations of human existence emanating from the quarter, household, and church. It is precisely in connecting the quarter, household, and church to the field and the workshop that the slaves' experience can be made comprehensible. Study of the workplace offers only a practical point of entry to their social organization, domestic arrangements, religious beliefs, and medical practices, along with their music, cuisine, linguistic and sartorial style, and much else.

Over time, slaves transformed their experience—drawn from, among other things, work habits, musical style, and religious beliefs—into a culture that joined them together as a class and distinguished them from their owners. The slave experience provided the basis of institutions that

had no standing in law but a powerful presence in life. It enfranchised leaders who articulated aspirations that reached beyond life's daily trials. It became the foundation of collective action, for it entailed both responsibilities and obligations. It nourished the hope that there would be something better—if not for the present then for the future.

The history of slavery in the United States—the republic and the colonies that preceded it—can be divided into five parts, here generously denominated as “generations.” It began with the charter generations, cosmopolitan men and women of African descent who arrived in mainland North America almost simultaneously with the first European adventurers. Their knowledge of the larger Atlantic world, the fluidity with which they moved in it, and their chameleonlike ability to alter their identity moderated the force of chattel bondage, allowing a considerable proportion of these initial arrivals to gain their freedom and enjoy a modest prosperity.

Those who followed—the plantation generations—were not nearly as fortunate. Stripped of family and kin, these peoples of the African interior faced the full force of the plantation revolution. Their catastrophic confrontation with large-scale staple production—tobacco in the Chesapeake at the end of the seventeenth century and rice in lowcountry South Carolina and Georgia at the beginning of the eighteenth century—debased African and African-American life. Members of the plantation generations worked harder, died earlier, and escaped slavery less frequently than their predecessors. Whether measured by the many who died or the few who survived, the plantation generations' history was one of impoverishment, degradation, and loss. Yet, in equal measure, it is also the story of survival, resistance, and cultural reconstruction amid the imposition of planter dominance.

Hope was restored at the end of the eighteenth century as a series of egalitarian revolutions spread through the Atlantic. But while thousands of members of the revolutionary generations secured their freedom, reconstituted their families, remade their religious life, and attained a modicum of prosperity, many more were condemned to yet another century of captivity.

The division between the enslaved many and the free few increased during the nineteenth century as members of the migration generations were propelled from the southern seaboard across the continent. Their divided history—as tens of thousands went south to construct a new slave society in the southern interior and hundreds fled north to create a free one—set the stage for the Great Jubilee and the emergence of the freedom generations.

Tracing the generations of African and African-American captivity across the centuries requires sensitivity to place as well as time. The geography of slave life changed with its history. Whereas the charter generations' history can be understood by viewing slavery from Dutch New Netherland, English Chesapeake, French Louisiana, and Spanish Florida, changes in American society—mostly in the eighteenth century—require that the plantation and revolutionary generations be viewed on a larger canvas: the North, the Chesapeake, lowcountry South Carolina and Georgia, and the lower Mississippi Valley. The westward expansion of the United States in the nineteenth century necessitates yet another geography of slavery. The migration generations are divided not merely north and south but between the old seaboard South and the new southern interior. As with many other aspects of American life, the Civil War created—perhaps for the first time—a common African-American experience.

Each chapter of *Generations of Captivity* begins with the region that best exemplifies the generational experience. Thus, “Charter Generations” (chapter 1) starts with black life in Dutch New Netherland (present-day New York), not because of any chronological primacy in the history of European and African settlement in mainland North America but because the character of the charter generations was most fully evident in seventeenth-century New Netherland. For like reasons, “Plantation Generations” (chapter 2) begins with the tobacco revolution in the Chesapeake, “Revolutionary Generations” (chapter 3) with emancipations in the northern states, and “Migration Generations” (chapter 4) with the cotton and sugar revolutions in the southern interior. By beginning where change was most evident and then inspecting various permutations, each chapter elaborates how the very same processes—initial settlement, the advent of

staple production, social revolution, forced migration, and civil war—followed a different course in different places; hence the use of the plural when discussing the various “generations” of people of African descent.

This complex matrix of space and time suggests that the idea of “generation” might be both too precise and too diffuse, as generations overlap in ways that militate against sharp boundaries. Slave children could no more escape the experience of their parents than they could deny that of their own children. Thus, the lives of the charter generations impinged on those of the plantation generations, just as the memories of the plantation generations echoed in the revolutionary generations, or the ideas of the migration generations invaded those of the freedom generations. But exploring these connections—the instinctive imitations, conscious reproductions, or determined repudiations—has some advantages. Such generational linkages expose the crooked path whereby slave life changed over the course of nearly three centuries. Slaves were different people in 1650 than they would be in 1750 or 1850, but they always carried something of their forebears into the future. Like all history, the generational experiences could be recalled, reformulated, or reconstructed to suit contemporary needs. In the 1770s, members of the revolutionary generations instituted freedom suits on the basis of the charter generations’ mixed ancestry. Members of the freedom generation recalled the promises made during the revolutionary years. No understanding of slavery can ignore the force of change or the ability of men and women to reconstruct the past in their own image.

Two theoretical distinctions undergird slavery’s ever-changing history and geography. The first, drawn from the study of slavery in antiquity, distinguishes between societies with slaves and slave societies.⁴ Societies with slaves were not societies in which, as one apologist for slavery in the North observed, “even the darkest aspect of slavery was softened by a smile.”⁵ Superficially, slavery in such societies might appear milder, as slaveowners—not driven by the great wealth sugar, tobacco, rice, or cotton could produce—had less reason to press their slaves. Moreover, slaveholdings in societies with slaves were generally small, and the line between slave and free could be remarkably fluid, with manumission often possible

and sometimes encouraged. But neither mildness nor openness defined societies with slaves. Slaveholders in such societies could act with extraordinary brutality precisely because their slaves were extraneous to their main business. They could limit their slaves’ access to freedom expressly because they desired to set themselves apart from their slaves.

What distinguished societies with slaves was the fact that slaves were marginal to the central productive processes. In societies with slaves, slavery was just one form of labor among many. Slaveowners treated their slaves with extreme callousness and cruelty at times, because this was the way they treated all subordinates, be they indentured servants, debtors, prisoners of war, pawns, peasants, or perhaps simply poor folks. In societies with slaves, no one presumed the master-slave relationship to be the exemplar.

In slave societies, by contrast, slavery stood at the center of economic production, and the master-slave relationship provided the model for all social relations: husband and wife, parent and child, employer and employee. From the most intimate connections between men and women to the most public ones between ruler and ruled, all relationships mimicked those of slavery. As Frank Tannenbaum observed, “Nothing escaped, nothing, and no one.”⁶ Whereas in societies with slaves slaveholders were just one portion of a propertied elite, in slave societies they were the ruling class. In slave societies, nearly everyone—free and slave—aspired to enter the slaveholding class, and upon occasion some former slaves rose into the slaveholders’ ranks. Their acceptance was grudging, as they carried the stigma of bondage in their lineage and, in the case of American slavery, color in their skin. But the right to enter the slaveholding class was rarely denied, because slaveownership was open to all irrespective of family, nationality, color, or ancestry.

Historians have outlined the process by which societies with slaves in the Americas became slave societies.⁷ The transformation generally turned upon the discovery of some commodity—gold being the ideal, sugar being a close second—that could command an international market. In pursuit of that market, slaveholders capitalized production and monopolized resources, muscled other classes to the periphery, and consolidated their

political power. The number of slaves increased sharply, generally by direct importation from Africa, and enslaved people of African descent became the majority of the laboring class, sometimes the majority of the population. Other forms of labor—family labor, indentured servitude, wage labor—declined, as slaveholders drove small farmers and wage workers to the margins. These men and women sometimes resisted violently, in the North American mainland most famously in Bacon's rebellion.⁸ But mostly they voted with their feet and migrated from slave societies, much as the "redlegs" deserted Barbados in the wake of the sugar revolution of the mid-seventeenth century, the small planters and drovers fled low-country Carolina in the wake of the rice revolution of the early eighteenth century, and the yeomanry abandoned the blackbelt for the hill country of the southern interior and the flatlands of the Midwest in the wake of the cotton revolution of the early nineteenth century.

In the absence of competitors, slaveholders solidified their rule. Through their control of the state, they enacted—or reinvigorated—comprehensive slave codes in which they vested themselves with near-complete sovereignty over their slaves, often extending to an absolute right over the slave's life. The new laws sharply reduced the latitude slaves previously enjoyed and extended the deference slaves must show to their owners at all times, without question. The prerogatives that slaves once openly maintained—to travel, to meet among themselves, to hold property, and to trade at market—were also severely circumscribed or abolished, although they survived at the pleasure of individual slaveowners. That done, slaveholders narrowed the slaves' access to freedom, so that the previously permeable boundaries between bondage and liberty became impenetrable barriers.

Finally, slaveholders elaborated the ideology of subordination, generally finding the sources of their own domination in some rule of nature or law of God. Since slavery in the New World became exclusively identified with people of African descent, the slaveholders' explanation of their own domination generally took the form of racial ideologies. But African descent and the pigocracy that accompanied it was only one manifestation

of the slaves' subordination. Even where slaveowner and slave admittedly shared the same origins, masters construed domination in "racial" terms.⁹

Whereas elements of the process by which societies with slaves were transformed into slave societies were everywhere the same, the process was always different, except for its inherent brutality. Some societies with slaves passed rapidly into slave societies, so that the earlier experience left hardly a mark. Others moved slowly and imperfectly through the transformation, backtracking several times, so that the process was more circular than linear. Yet other societies with slaves never completed the transition, and some hardly began it. Moreover, slave societies did not always stay slave societies. The development of slavery did not necessarily run in one direction; slave societies also became societies with slaves as often as the opposite.

As one marker of slavery's history, the transformation of societies with slaves to slave societies provides a clue to yet another. A second marker in the evolution of slavery—the arrival of freedom—had an effect that was as powerful as the first. Freedom came to American slaves in two great revolutionary climacterics. The first—the democratic revolutions of the late eighteenth century—hit slavery hard. The Declaration of Independence in the American colonies, the Declaration of the Rights of Man in France, and the emergence of an independent Haitian Republic on Hispaniola undermined the ideological foundation upon which slavery rested, and the wars that accompanied these ideological upheavals provided slaves with new leverage to contest their owners' power.¹⁰ Some slaves secured their liberty, and portions of the new United States became identified with freedom. But slavery was nothing if not resilient. It not only survived the egalitarian forces unleashed in the Age of Revolution but also grew strong on them. It would take another revolution—what Charles Beard called in another context the Second American Revolution—to finally bring slavery down.

The history of freedom, like the history of slavery, was never the same from time to time and place to place. Geography, demography, and economy informed the process of emancipation just as they tempered the

course of enslavement. Free societies were as different as the slave societies they replaced. But as with the transition from societies with slaves to slave societies, historians have identified general processes by which freedom supplants slavery.

Whether in Vermont or Barbados, Jamaica or Brazil, emancipation followed the same course. Evidence of slavery's weakening grip—in whispers of distant abolition or rumblings of military mobilization—emboldened slaves and panicked slaveowners. The conflict between slave and master intensified, as each bolstered the ideological foundations of its claim—freedom for slaves, mastership for owners. Seemingly harmonious relations between slaves and owners turned factious and violent. The patina of rationalizations that sustained the slave regime fell away. Complacent slaves became insolent, and benevolent masters turned vicious, as the irreconcilable differences that underlay slavery became manifest. Both declared themselves betrayed, charging the other with ingratitude.

With the arrival of freedom, former slaves seized the moment to remake their lives. They took new names, found new residences, reconstituted their families and churches, established new institutions like schools and benevolent associations, strove for material independence, and created the political organizations to protect and advance that independence. Against the onrushing tide of change, former masters hastened to reconstruct the old regime on new ground, sometimes conceding what they could not resist, sometimes asserting their old power in novel ways, and sometimes redefining the terms of conflict by creating new mechanisms of domination. Among the latter was a redefinition of the terms of superordination and subordination. In the color-coded slave societies of the Americas, these inevitably included new definitions of race. Without slavery to order society, blackness and whiteness gained in importance.

Meanwhile, the people caught between the former slaves and former masters hurriedly repaired to safe ground, trying to preserve what they once had even as they searched for ways to seize the moment. Former free people of color—adrift in a world that promised equality but stripped of their former privileged status—hedged between their old allegiance and the new possibilities that accompanied universal freedom. While some

moved into positions of leadership among the newly freed, others retreated to anonymity, waiting for the storm to subside. Similarly, white nonslaveholders—bereft of the special status their white skin once provided—watched the changes carefully, some seeing advantages in the defeat of the old planter class (scalawags in the American context) and some becoming the shock troops of revanchist masters (klansmen).¹¹

In the United States, the two emancipations—the partial liberation of the Revolution and the total liquidation of the Civil War—unleashed the latent egalitarian impulses in American society. But while the process by which slave societies were transformed into free ones followed the same course during these two uprisings, they were never precisely the same from place to place. After the American Revolution, freedom—and slavery—took different forms in the North, Chesapeake, lowcountry, and lower Mississippi Valley. After the Civil War, freedom—following slavery's final demise—took a different shape in the former free states and the former slave states. Indeed, within each of these vast domains, freedom gained new meanings dependent upon the demographic balance of white and black, the resilience of the old class structures, the nature of the crop, and the course of the military conflict by which freedom arrived. No less than slavery, freedom had a history that changed with time and place.

The coincidence of slavery's destruction with the revolutions that made the American Republic in 1776 and then remade it in 1861 reveals the extent to which slavery was woven into the fabric of American life. For most of its history, the American colonies and then the United States was a society of slaves and slaveholders. From the first, slavery shaped the American economy, its politics, its culture, and its most deeply held beliefs. The American economy was founded upon the production of slave-grown crops, the great staples of tobacco, rice, sugar, and finally cotton that were sold on the international market and made some men extraordinarily wealthy. That great wealth allowed slaveholding planters a large place in the establishment of the new federal government in 1787, as planters were quick to translate their economic power into political power. Between the founding of the Republic and the Civil War, the majority of presidents—from Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Jackson through

Tyler, Polk, and Taylor—were themselves slaveholders, and generally substantial slaveholders. The same was true for the Supreme Court, where two slaveholding Chief Justices—John Marshall and Roger Taney—ruled over a slaveholding majority. And so too with the Congress—indeed, politics during the antebellum period revolved around the struggle between North and South for control of Congress.

The power of the slaveholder class, represented by the predominance of slaveholders in the nation's leadership, gave it a large hand in shaping American culture and the values associated with American society. It was no accident that a slaveholder penned the founding statement of American nationality and that freedom became the nation's transcendent marker. Men and women who drove slaves understood the meaning of chattel bondage—as did the men and women who were in fact chattel bondsmen and bondswomen. Just as it was no accident that Thomas Jefferson wrote “all men are created equal,” it is most certainly no accident that the greatest spokesmen for the realization of that ideal—from Richard Allen through Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. DuBois to Martin Luther King, Jr.—were former slaves and the descendants of slaves. Only by understanding the generations of Americans who spent their lives in captivity can we fully appreciate the generations of Americans who struggled for freedom.

The historicization of slavery—and freedom—reveals how the critical changes in the nature of slavery have been employed to make history. Whether it is recalling the promises of the Revolution (“all men are created equal”) or the Civil War (“forty acres and a mule”) or remembering the Middle Passage from Africa or the Second Middle Passage from Virginia, the history of slavery has itself been used to make slavery's history. For some three hundred years, Americans have situated their own history in terms of the struggle between freedom and slavery—and freedom's triumph. It thus should not be surprising that even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, one hundred and thirty plus years after slavery's legal demise, slavery continues to play a part in American life, as Americans discover that their national buildings were constructed by slaves, their great cities are underlaid with the bones of slaves, and their greatest heroes

and heroines were slaveowners and slaves. Coming to terms with slavery's complex history is no easier in the twenty-first century than it was in centuries past.

In presenting a history of slavery in mainland North America from its ill-defined beginnings to its fiery demise, *Generations of Captivity* reprises and extends my earlier study, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. The short five years since the publication of *Many Thousands Gone* have witnessed a vast outpouring of new research in this field.¹² To take only the crudest of measures, more than two hundred books have been submitted for the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Frederick Douglass Award for the best study on slavery. The journal *Slavery and Abolition's* annual bibliography of scholarly articles and conference papers regularly runs over thirty tightly packed pages. *Generations of Captivity* draws on this new scholarship to deepen understanding of the charter, plantation, and revolutionary generations.

Generations of Captivity also addresses the large, and largely unanswered, question posed by recent studies of slavery in colonial and revolutionary North America, including my own. At the beginning of the nineteenth century (the point at which *Many Thousands Gone* concludes), the markers that are most closely identified with slavery's history in the United States—cotton cultivation, residence in the blackbelt, and African-Christian spirituality—hardly existed. In 1800 few American slaves grew cotton, few resided in the Deep South, and most did not identify with Christianity—no matter how latitudinous the definition of Christian belief. Yet in 1865, when with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution black people completed their wartime exodus from slavery, all of these elements were in place. Most slaves grew cotton, resided in the Deep South, and professed Christianity.

Little in the vast literature of nineteenth-century slavery in the United States explains the plantation revolutions that transformed tobacco and rice growers into cultivators of cotton and sugar, the Second Middle Passage that forcibly transferred nearly one million men and women from the seaboard to the interior, and the sudden willingness of men and women whose ancestors resisted Christianity for more than two centuries to em-

brace it and make it their own. Although there is a rich and growing monographic literature on each of these subjects—upon which much of this book rests—none of the great studies of nineteenth-century slavery make these rapid and often traumatic changes in black life the central element in slavery's history between the Revolution and the Civil War.

"The rigid and static nature of ante-bellum slavery, 1830–1860," wrote Kenneth M. Stampp nearly fifty years ago in his classic study *The Peculiar Institution*, "makes it possible to examine it institutionally with only slight regard for chronology." Eugene D. Genovese in his *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, another foundational text, and almost all other scholars—even those critical of Stampp and Genovese—have followed Stampp's lead. These seminal works—now more than a generation old, cons on the revisionist clock—have been elaborated and critiqued by a host of specialized studies of agricultural practice, domestic relations, manumission, material culture, plantation architecture, religious conventions, slave hire, underclass resistance, westward migration, and dozens of like subjects. While they are premised on a society in flux, the full force of these accumulated changes on slave society has yet to be measured. As a result, even the best recent overviews of antebellum slavery also remain riveted to the relationship between master and slave. Indeed, it was precisely such an attachment that sent scholars who were interested in slavery's evolution, including myself, to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, years in which free people were enslaved and Africans became African Americans. It now appears that the period of slavery's most rapid change in mainland North America was not its first two hundred years but the half century preceding the Civil War.¹³

Many Thousands Gone connected the evolution of slave life in mainland North America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to slavery's long transit from the eastern end of the Mediterranean across the Atlantic to the Americas. It viewed the charter generations as an outgrowth of the historic meeting of Africa, Europe, and the Americas. It considered the plantation generations to be an extension of the imposition of staple production first in the Mediterranean, then the Atlantic islands, Brazilian mainland, and the Windward and Leeward islands of the Caribbean. It understood the revolutionary generations as a product of the massive so-

cial upheavals that turned the Atlantic world upside down at the end of the eighteenth century.

Viewing the lives of nineteenth-century American slaves through this same Atlantic lens emphasizes how antebellum slavery remained part of slavery's long history and continued its Atlantic connections. For more than a millennium, the creation of new slave societies transformed old ones. The growth of plantation slavery in Madeira and the Canary Islands transformed slavery in the Mediterranean, just as the expansion of plantation production to São Tomé and Príncipe altered slave life in Madeira and the Canaries. Likewise, the rise of plantation slavery in seventeenth-century Barbados remade the lives of masters and slaves in Pernambuco, and its growth in Jamaica reconfigured slavery in Barbados.¹⁴

From this perspective, the lightning-like expansion of plantation slavery in the southern interior of the United States caused a thunderclap in the older slave-exporting seaboard states, north as well as south. It changed them in the same ways that the process of plantation succession had earlier transformed slavery in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Slaveholders transferred slaves to areas of greater profitability, which became slave societies par excellence. Older, less productive areas reverted to societies with slaves. As the level of exploitation increased in the former, labor discipline intensified, and slave mortality and morbidity increased. Manumission became increasingly selective and rare. Something of the opposite happened in the older areas, where labor discipline grew flaccid, the slaves' material circumstances improved, and the possibilities of manumission and even emancipation grew. Everywhere, slaves and slaveholders reformulated their lives, as both created new ideologies to deal with the trauma of change. And everywhere, as always, new definitions of race arose.

Incorporating the nineteenth-century United States into the history of Atlantic slavery also clarifies many of the issues central to the study of antebellum America. It provides a fuller understanding of the divisions within American slave society, especially the east-west division between the expansive southern interior and the declining seaboard South. It casts new light on everything from the transformation of slave law to the evolution of slave music. Most importantly, it illuminates how the struggle be-

tween master and slave moved onto new ground—articulated in the language of domesticity—during the nineteenth century. In short, it places the vexed matter of paternalism—or what Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese called “seigneurialism”—in the context not only of the historic affinity of traditional elites for familial metaphors but also in the context of the massive forced migration which informed every aspect of black life during the middle years of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ The Second Middle Passage shredded the planters’ paternalist pretenses in the eyes of black people and prodded slaves and free people of color to create a host of oppositional ideologies and institutions that better accounted for the realities of the endless deportations, expulsions, and flights that continually remade their world. The historicization of the study of antebellum slavery, like the historicization of its colonial and revolutionary antecedents, clarifies one of the great controversies of slave historiography, in seeing planters’ defense of slavery (and the slaves’ counter) as a product not of slavery itself but of a particular moment in slavery’s history.

In writing about antebellum slavery, I have also taken the opportunity to join the debate over slavery and freedom in the free states. New studies make it evident that the nineteenth-century North remained part of what Don Fehrenbacher called a “slaveholding republic” long after the region made a commitment to slavery’s liquidation. Indeed, after reviewing the evidence, I think it remains an open question when, prior to January 1, 1863, the North became a free society. For that reason, slavery is just as essential to understanding the history of the antebellum North as it is to understanding the history of the colonial and revolutionary North. By including the North in *Generations of Captivity*, I wish to suggest that the antebellum United States might be better understood not as a nation sharply divided between slavery and freedom but as a nation of slaves and slaveholders, one portion of which was undergoing a slow transformation to freedom. Although the triumph of free labor and its underpinning ideologies was critical to the transformation of northern society and the struggle between North and South, the slowness of its development reveals how deeply the “free states” were enmeshed in the slaveholding republic.¹⁶

Generations of Captivity concludes with a short reprise of the destruction of slavery and the emergence of the freedom generation amid the Civil War. While this epilogue hardly does justice to the complicated history of slavery’s end and the reconstruction of African-American life in the first years of freedom, it connects the expectations black people carried from three hundred years of slavery to the revolutionary possibilities presented by wartime emancipation. It demonstrates that former slaves had no desire to deny or escape their slave past but to use it to construct a better life for themselves and their posterity. That lesson, above all others, is the legacy of the generations of captivity.

ABBREVIATIONS

AH	<i>Agricultural History</i>
AHQ	<i>Alabama Historical Quarterly</i>
AHR	<i>American Historical Review</i>
AJLH	<i>American Journal of Legal History</i>
AR	<i>Alabama Review</i>
Catterall, ed., <i>Judicial Cases</i>	Helen Catterall, ed., <i>Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro</i> , 5 vols. (New York, 1926-1937)
CWH	<i>Civil War History</i>
Donnan, ed., <i>Slave Trade</i>	Elizabeth Donnan, ed., <i>Documents Illustrative of the Slave Trade to America</i> , 4 vols. (Washington, DC, 1930-1935)
EEH	<i>Explorations in Economic History</i>
FCHQ	<i>Filson Club Historical Quarterly</i>
FHQ	<i>Florida Historical Quarterly</i>
Freedom	Ira Berlin et al., eds., <i>Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867</i> (Cambridge, UK, 1982-)
GHQ	<i>Georgia Historical Quarterly</i>

Gray, So. Ag.	Lewis Cecil Gray, <i>History of Agriculture in the Southern United States</i> , 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1935)
HA	<i>History in Africa</i>
HAHR	<i>Hispanic American Historical Review</i>
HArch	<i>Historical Archeology</i>
HJ	<i>Historical Journal</i>
HJM	<i>Historical Journal of Massachusetts</i>
HMPEC	<i>Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church</i>
IRSH	<i>International Review of Social History</i>
JAAHGS	<i>Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society</i>
JAH	<i>Journal of African History</i>
JAmH	<i>Journal of American History</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Economic History</i>
JER	<i>Journal of the Early Republic</i>
JIH	<i>Journal of Interdisciplinary History</i>
JLS	<i>Journal of Legal Studies</i>
JNH	<i>Journal of Negro History</i>
JSH	<i>Journal of Social History</i>
JSL	Josiah Smith Letterbooks, Southern History Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
JSoH	<i>Journal of Southern History</i>
JUH	<i>Journal of Urban History</i>
LC	Library of Congress, Washington, DC
LH	<i>Louisiana History</i>
LHist	<i>Labor History</i>
LHQ	<i>Louisiana Historical Quarterly</i>
LHR	<i>Law and History Review</i>
LP	Legislative Petition, Virginia State Library, Richmond
LS	<i>Louisiana Studies</i>
MHM	<i>Maryland Historical Magazine</i>
MHW	<i>Military History of the Southwest</i>

- MVHR *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*
 NA National Archives, Washington, DC
 NGSQ *National Geneological Society Quarterly*
 NJH *New Jersey History*
 NY Documents E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York*, 15 vols. (Albany, 1853-1887)
 NYGBR *New York Geneological and Biographical Register*
 NYH *New York History*
 NYHQ *New-York Historical Society Quarterly*
 NY Manuscripts E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Calendar of Historical Manuscripts in the Office of the Secretary of State, Albany, N.Y.* (Albany, 1865)
 PAH *Perspectives in American History*
 PAPS *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*
 PH *Pennsylvania History*
 PMHB *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*
 PS *Plantation Societies*
 PSQ *Political Science Quarterly*
 RKHS *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*
 Runaway Advertisements Lathan A. Windley, comp., *Runaway Slaves Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790*, 4 vols. (Westport, CN, 1983)
 S&A *Slavery and Abolition*
 SCHM *South Carolina Historical and Geneological Magazine*
 SCHS South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston
 SS *Southern Studies*
 SSH *Social Science History*
 T&C *Technology and Culture*
 THQ *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*

- VaHS Virginia Historical Society, Richmond
 VBHS Virginia Baptist Historical Society, Richmond
 VMHB *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*
 WMQ *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series

NOTES

PROLOGUE: SLAVERY AND FREEDOM

1. *Freedom*, ser. 3, vol. 2:331-338.
2. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (New York, 1964), query xviii.
3. Claude Meillassoux, *Anthropologie de l'esclavage: le ventre de fer et argent* (Paris, 1986), translated as *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold*, trans. Alide Dasnois (Chicago, 1991), 99-100; Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), 5-6; M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York, 1980), 74-75; Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago, 1959).
4. Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves: Sociological Studies in Roman History*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, UK, 1978), 1:99; Moses I. Finley, "Slavery," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1968); Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, 79-80.
5. Anne Grant, *Memoirs of an American Lady* (New York, 1809), 26-29.
6. Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York, 1946), 117.
7. Although they differ in their emphases, two particularly clear statements are
 - Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill, 1972), and Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Baltimore, 1973).
 8. Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), ch. 13.
 9. Russian serf masters mused that the bones of their serfs were black. Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 170.
 10. David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, NY, 1975); Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery* (London, 1988); David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus, eds., *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean* (Bloomington, IN, 1997).
 11. *Freedom*; Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy* (Baton Rouge, 1983); Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore, 1992); Frank McGlynn and Seymour Drescher, eds., *The Meaning of Freedom: Economics, Politics, and Culture after Slavery* (Pittsburgh, 1992); Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill, 2000).
 12. Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, 1998); Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, 1998); Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, 1998); Robert Otwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country, 1740-1790* (Ithaca, 1998); Douglas R. Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey* (Madison, 1999); Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill, 1999); Thomas N. Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718-1819* (Knoxville, 1999); Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana, IL, 1999); Theresa A. Singleton, ed., "I, Too, Am American": *Archeological Studies of African-American Life* (Charlottesville, 1999); David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge, UK, 2000) along with Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert S. Klein, *The Transatlantic Slave*

- Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge, UK, 1999); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, 2000); Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and Servitude in Colonial North America: A Short History* (New York, 2001); Linda M. Heywood, ed., *Central Africa and Cultural Transformation in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge, UK, 2002); Alan Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* (New Haven, 2002).
13. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1956); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1988).
 14. Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge, UK, 1990).
 15. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York, 1983).
 16. Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery*, ed. Ward M. McAfee (Oxford, 2001).

I. CHARTER GENERATIONS

1. "Creole" derives from the Portuguese *crioulo*, meaning a person of African descent born in the New World. It has been extended to native-born free people of many national origins (including both Europeans and Africans) and of diverse social standing. It has also been applied to people of partly European but mixed racial and national origins in various European colonies and to Africans who entered Europe. In the United States, creole has also been specifically applied to people of mixed but usually non-African origins in Louisiana. Staying within the bounds of the broadest definition of creole and the literal definition of African American, I use both terms to refer to black people of native American birth; John A. Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles: Theory and Structure*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, UK, 1988-1989), 1:9. On the complex and often contradictory usage in a single place see Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, 1992), 157-159, and Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., "On that Word 'Creole' Again: A Note," *LH*, 23 (1982), 193-198. This section draws upon "From Cre-

- oles to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America." These notes provide only essential references to this chapter; for the full citations see *WMQ*, 53 (1996), 251-288.
2. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, 2000). From the perspective of the making of African American culture, see John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge, UK, 1998), and the larger Atlantic perspective, see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA, 1993).
 3. A. C. de C. M. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441-1555* (Cambridge, UK, 1982), 11-12, 145, 197, 152, 215, 173; G. R. Crone, ed., *The Voyages of Cadamosto and Other Documents on West Africa in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century* (1937, rpt. New York, 1967), 55, 61; P. E. H. Hair, "The Use of African Languages in Afro-European Contacts in Guinea, 1440-1560," *Sierra Leone Language Review*, 5 (1966), 7-17; George E. Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society, and Trade in West Africa, 1000-1630* (Boulder, CO, 1993), ch. 7; Kwame Yeboa Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600-1720: A Study of the African Reaction to European Trade* (Oxford, 1970), ch. 5, esp. 96-97. For the near-seamless, reciprocal relationship between the Portuguese and the Kongoese courts in the sixteenth century see John K. Thornton, "Early Kongo-Portuguese Relations, 1483-1575: A New Interpretation," *HA*, 8 (1981), 183-204.
 4. For an overview see Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, ch. 2, esp. 59-62. See also Daaku, *Gold Coast*, ch. 2; Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers*, chs. 7-8; Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison, WI, 1975), ch. 3; Ray A. Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore, 1982); John Vogt, *Portuguese Rule on the Gold Coast, 1469-1682* (Athens, GA, 1979). *Lançados* from a contraction of *lançados em terra* (to put on shore); Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa*, 95. As the influence of the Atlantic economy spread to the interior, Atlantic creoles appeared in the hinterland, generally in the centers of trade along the rivers that reached into the African interior.
 5. Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Politics*, ch. 1, esp. 38; Vogt, *Portuguese Rule on the Gold Coast*; Harvey M. Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans in West Africa: Elminans and Dutchmen on the Gold Coast during the Eighteenth Century*, American Philosophical Society, *Transactions*, 79, no. 7 (Philadelphia, 1989).