

DAVID ELTIS

from Atlantic History in Global Perspective [1999]

DAVID ELTIS (1950–) is the Woodruff Professor of History at Emory University and has also taught at Harvard, Yale, and Oxford. His publications include *Routes to Slavery: Directions, Ethnicity, and Mortality in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1595–1867* (1997), *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (2000), and *Coerced and Free Migration: Global Perspectives* (2002). He also helped produce the massive *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (1999).

From a global perspective, Atlantic history from the sixteenth century down to the mid-nineteenth century was rather unusual. The movement of human beings, initially perhaps by land out of Africa, and eventually via the Bering land bridge and the Indonesian archipelago to the farthest terra firma, began many millennia ago. Typically, however, whether it was the central Europeans who are thought to have settled in Asia three thousand years ago, or the Chinese who visited Africa in the fifteenth century, movement and settlement were not accompanied by continuing and intensive contact between the source society and the migrant society. In the early modern Atlantic, however, for the first time in human history there appeared an hemispheric “community.” Community in the sense used here, means that everyone living in it had values which if they were not shared around the Atlantic were certainly reshaped in some way by others living in different parts of the Atlantic basins, and, as this suggests, where events in one small geographic area were likely to stimulate a reaction — and not necessarily just economic — thousands of miles away. The end result was, if not a single Atlantic society, a set of societies fundamentally different from what they would have been without participation in the new transatlantic network. . . . Atlantic integration . . . was a paradigm for the integration of the whole world after 1800, a sort of precursor of globalisation at the turn of the twenty-first century.

This phenomenon of integration is all the more striking when we consider the disparate elements drawn into the Atlantic community. Most work on Atlantic history has focussed on the North Atlantic, and to a lesser extent the white North Atlantic. Geography and winds ensured the existence of two largely exclusive Atlantic systems, north and south, which both the Portuguese, through the long domination of the Asiento, and the English, through their contacts with the Rio de la Plata and their efforts to supply slaves to Brazil attempted to merge. The northern system was the larger of the two, but black migrants, who dominated the human movements within both systems, were proportionately more important in the south, which accounted

for over half of all Africans carried to the Americas. As this implies, the role of Africans in the shaping of the Atlantic world still needs more attention. This is more than a conventional plea to give a voice to the non-elite in constructing the past. Africans not only moved across the Atlantic in far greater numbers than Europeans, they also had a major influence over who entered the slave trade, which regions supplied slaves, and through prices, what slaves did when they arrived in the Americas. One further major implication is the still not widely recognised fact that integration ensured that the experiences of Europeans and Africans in the Americas were more similar than first appears, despite the dramatic differences in how the two groups travelled to the Americas and in the subsequent labour regime under which they worked.

It is important at the outset to revise the traditional picture of the Atlantic system arising from a marriage of the vast unexploited resources of the Americas, with the abundant reserves of labour of the Old World. It was not resources that drove the expansion of Europe to the New World, but technology. Most of the land and mineral resources, forestry and fish of the Americas were not windfall gains that immediately increased European well being, but rather small additions at the margin. Thus at the point of contact, New World land had little value. . . . The exploitation of the resources in the Americas became possible only with later development of technology, and in the case of some plantation products such as sugar, the brutal exploitation of one group of human beings (Africans) by another (Europeans) who did not see the exploited as fully human, or at least full citizens.

Nevertheless, Old World technology will only get us so far in understanding the Atlantic World in the aftermath of 1492. From the broadest perspective, interpretations of Atlantic history require the incorporation of geophysical, economic, ideological and cultural elements in the interaction of four continents over as many centuries. There have been many first rate studies of pairings of these continents and elements, but, except at the level of textbooks, little attempt to integrate all. Economic hues have dominated the largest canvases, and even those whose interests have lain elsewhere have acknowledged this primacy. How strange, then, that after five centuries of transatlantic trade, between eighty and ninety-five percent of the international trade of any nation which borders the Atlantic is with its immediate neighbours, not with transatlantic partners. This is as true of Mexico, the United States and Canada (despite their facing on to the Pacific as well as the Atlantic) as it is of Germany, France, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Most of Africa and Latin America, with the notable exception until very recently of Cuba, also fit this pattern. Indeed, most of Africa and the Americas (especially the Caribbean) in the last five centuries has experienced diminishing, not increasing, dependence on transatlantic markets for goods, capital and labour over time. After a massive switch to transatlantic trade in the century or so after transatlantic contact was first established, the normal trend thereafter for most societies was a long secular shift back toward

intra-African or (intra-American) trade, and perhaps above all, a return to a focus on domestic sources of demand for goods and supplies of factors of production. In the sense that most economies around the Atlantic have become more developed over time and the more developed the economy, the more important is its domestic relative to its external markets, globalisation (and Atlantic history) are myths.

To make sense of Atlantic history we still have to break out of the materialist paradigm and focus on the cultural, not the economic, or, to put it another way, to make sense of the economic, scholars should re-examine cultural patterns. Despite (or perhaps because of) the preoccupation of Europeans with seeking to increase production wherever they managed to establish a "plantation" in seventeenth-century terms, five centuries of Atlantic history is more about the merging of cultural values, than of economic integration. In the two centuries after Columbian contact, differences in the ways individuals defined themselves, the values they held and above all how the societies in which they lived were organised were likely far greater than say differentials in living standards, or rates of capital accumulation among the societies around the Atlantic basins in which they lived.

It is not possible in a short essay to more than sketch some parts of the emergence of an Atlantic culture. The basic unit of the expansionist societies of Europe in the early modern period was, or became, the individual; the basic unit of the societies with which they came into contact in the extra-European Atlantic world was some corporate entity comprising groups of individuals. It is not that individuals in sixteenth-century Europe had more rights in relation to society than those in Africa and the pre-contact Americas, though this was probably true. Rather it is that property rights in particular, especially those in human labour, one's own and others, were vested in the individual in Europe rather than the group. Kinship structures in Africa and the Americas were extremely varied, but generally, status and rights in much of Africa and the pre-Columbian Americas derived not from autonomy and independence, but from full membership of a kin-group or some other corporate body. Such a group would make collective decisions and hold, again collectively, at least some of the property rights in persons which in the European Atlantic world would be held by individuals. Europeans might purchase property rights in others (slaves) outright, or they might enter the labour market themselves and temporarily trade some of their own rights in persons in return for wages, but in either case there was an individual owner of the rights in persons and a market transaction.

This leads to one of the major ideological differences between Europe and the rest of the Atlantic in 1500. To be a full citizen in much of the non-European world meant having more social bonds and less autonomy than would a marginal person without kinship ties. Freedom meant a belonging to, not separateness. By contrast, in Europe and the European Americas full citizenship meant freedom from such bonds, full ownership of property rights in oneself, and, before the eighteenth century at least, the ability to avoid hiring out these rights to others in return for wages. If, in the Western World, possessive individualism meant a recognition

that one owns full rights in oneself and that one has the right in a market society to bargain away such rights, it might also mean the accumulation of rights in others in the hands of a few, as indeed happened in the slave societies of the European Atlantic. A market system per se, and the vesting of property rights in persons with an individual instead of the group, were perfectly consistent with both waged and slave systems. It was the concept of rights, including rights to the labour of oneself and others, being vested in the individual, that deserves the title "the peculiar institution" to a much greater degree than did slavery. Indeed, the idea that holding such rights should qualify one for full membership in society was extremely peculiar in relative global terms. Thus the implications for slavery of western concepts of freedom and a focus on individual rights are more ambivalent than appear if examined through a twentieth century lens. Likewise, possessive individualism could mean that individuals have the right to sell themselves to others. Until not very long ago the slave trade and slavery were as western as emerging parliamentary democracy. The really interesting question, touched on below, is why this did not continue, and, more specifically, who Europeans (Africans and Amerindians) deemed eligible for slavery and how this shifted over time. . . .

Once in the Americas, the slaves were incorporated into the most closed system of slavery that the world has known under the direct control of people who valued, or at least said they valued, freedom to an equally unprecedented degree. Yet in the course of three hundred fifty years [of] transatlantic slave trading, huge shifts occurred in the way Africans and Europeans saw themselves and others which fundamentally restructured the Atlantic community and, as shown below, the movement of peoples from the old World to the New.

On the African side, the slave trade encouraged an elementary pan-Africanism. There is a pattern to slave ship revolts and the European use of gromettoes (castle slaves) and guardians in forts and slave vessels which suggests that non-elite Africans began to think of themselves as part of a wider African group. Initially, this group might be say, Igbo, or Yoruba, and soon, in addition, blacks as opposed to whites. As a consequence, by the second half of the eighteenth century, slave ship revolts were more likely to be successful as Africans from different areas on the same vessel co-operated, and Europeans could no longer use African guardians on slave vessels. In effect, slaves came to recognise a common white enemy, and in the process modified their own identities.

This process of reformulating identity, at root a search for common bonds with others on the same side of the slave-free divide, went further and fastest in the Americas, especially in the Caribbean and South America. African nationalities sought out their own kind on seventeenth-century sugar plantations when establishing personal relationships and celebrating the rituals of life, sometimes with the help of slave owners. Even in the very earliest days there were no counterparts to gromettoes or to guardians in the plantation Americas whose sole function was to prevent rebellion among those of different ethnicity from themselves. The rebellions and conspiracies in

Barbados later in the seventeenth century show little sign of internecine strife. The Coromantines (from the Gold Coast), most of whom had been brought over as guardians on slave ships, had a prominent role in the Barbados slave conspiracy of 1675, but they were neither acting alone nor were they thwarted by non-Coromantines. The better known and documented slave conspiracy of 1692 contains no hint of ethnic divisions. In Jamaica, an open land frontier ensured a greater frequency of armed resistance and escape. There is almost a consensus among scholars that slaves from the Gold Coast were over-represented among the rebels, but seventeenth-century documents on Jamaican revolts contain almost no references to the African origins of rebels and none at all to inter-ethnic strife. As Gold Coast slaves were over-represented among the early Barbados and Jamaican slave populations, Coromantines might have a larger place in the records on rebellions for the simple reason that they had a larger place in islands' slave populations. Acceptance of newcomers into maroon communities, however, had much more to do with geopolitical realities and the survival of the community than with the African origins of newly escaped slaves. This emergence of black identity posited here is somewhat earlier than Michael Gomez has argued for in the case of slaves in the old south.

On the European side, there were, by the mid-eighteenth century, two conceptions of the insider/outsider division. In Europe itself, there was a slow move to more inclusive definitions, specifically including non-Europeans. The belief that members of one's own community were not appropriate subjects for enslavement was not confined to early modern Europe. Romans, Greeks, Islamic and indeed all other societies developed similar attitudes. But Europeans began to back this up with substantial resources after 1500. Spanish and Portuguese religious orders began working for the release of captives in the sixteenth century — the first such efforts on a large scale. Further north almost every coastal town in The Netherlands had a "slave fund" for redeeming Dutch sailors from the galleys of the Barbary States by the seventeenth century. European seafaring states signed a series of treaties with North African powers and the Ottoman Turks to safeguard ships and crew from capture and enslavement. Most provided for the issuing of safe-conduct passes to merchant ships. The irony that among the main beneficiaries of such arrangements were Dutch and English slave traders on their way to Africa appears to have escaped historians and then contemporaries, among them the Earl of Inchquin, who was held captive in Algiers before becoming Governor of the slave colony of Jamaica. When the passes proved ineffective and seamen were captured and enslaved, petitions to the British government seeking their release demanded action in the cause of "Christian charity and humanity" — long before abolitionists began to invoke similar principles. . . . The relevant question is at what point did "Christian charity and humanity" come to encompass those of African descent for enough people to make a difference?

The gradual removal of the barriers that kept non-Europeans from insider status in the European worldview was a very slow process, and as the modern world suggests, capable of reverse. It was shaped in part by the actions

of Africans and people of African descent over three centuries of plantation slavery and the slave trade. The interaction between slave rebellions and the strategies of abolitionists in the final years of slavery in the British Caribbean, and co-operation of a different kind in Brazil in the 1880s is now well known. But long before this point the actions of slaves both in the Americas and on board slave vessels kept the issue of slavery before growing numbers of literate Europeans. Judging from the frequency with which they are reported, slave rebellions were a constant source of fascination to readers of early newspapers, a disproportionate share of which were in English on both sides of the Atlantic. English citizens moreover had an extraordinary proclivity to migrate (and return), most of them before 1800 going to plantation regions forming part of the most integrated of all eighteenth-century colonial systems. As early as 1700, "communication and community" across the English Atlantic had attained a depth, richness and reliability of contact unrivalled among European powers, and quite unprecedented in the history of long-distance migration. . . .

What is often forgotten is that the Atlantic slave systems were the only ones in history where those ultimately responsible for the system — consumers of what the slaves produced and ultimate[ly] governors and protectors of the plantations — were not directly a part of the slave societies themselves. A reformulation of identities by Europeans was much more likely under these circumstances. This is not the place to reassess the origins of abolitionism. The intention is to suggest only that the key counterpoint is not slavery and abolition, but rather the enslavement of non-Europeans and abolition, and that abolition was in part a function of shifting identities.

Among those of European descent in the slaveholding Americas, the move to a more inclusive conception — one at least that might include blacks, as opposed to different kinds of whites — came to a complete halt. On the other hand, divisions between Europeans had lessened substantially. Jews received rights in the slaveholding Americas before they received them in Europe. The despised Irish had a meteoric and largely unrecognised rise to respectability before the arrival of the famine refugees recast their image. By the time of the 1727 census they had become the largest slaveholders on the island of Montserrat. They came to hold a disproportionate share of colonial offices in eighteenth-century Jamaica, and probably Cuba, too. Almost every European colony in the Americas with the exception of the Spanish came to contain large elements of populations from parts of Europe other than the respective mother countries. These populations, including Jews, came to have full *de facto* rights. The eighteenth-century proscriptions against Catholics in the English case were largely ignored in the slave colonies. In bald terms, the planters sought allies wherever they could find them. At the same time the experience of slavery made the divide between Europeans (and in some jurisdictions free coloureds), with African slaves close to absolute. Planter classes that did not make these adjustments in how they defined themselves — in St Domingue for example — did not survive.

A second and quite different impact of European and African cultural constructs on the Atlantic World stemmed from gender. It is now clear that early modern migration from Europe was overwhelmingly dominated by males. The coerced counterpart from Africa had much higher proportions of females. These differences point to major differences in constructions of gender in Africa and Europe. Indeed, intriguing contrasts and similarities appear in the roles of women in the two sub-continent. Opportunity for females in English, Dutch, and eventually in North Atlantic society appear much greater in the reproductive than in the economic zone of gender relations. This is particularly the case if a global comparative perspective is adopted. The exceptional nature of early modern western European marriage patterns is now widely accepted. Compared to women in Asia and Africa, western European women married late, had considerable choice over marriage partner, and a large proportion of them never married at all. The nuclear family was much more common in Western Europe than anywhere in Africa, and kinship structures were much stronger in Africa than in Europe. Nevertheless the bulk of labour in both continents at this time was performed within the household, however defined. Women in Africa tilled the fields, produced cloth and had major roles in trade, all of which gave them value as wives. "Polygyny," according to Remi Clignet, "is most tenacious in cultures where economic rights to women can be acquired and have high value." African women were expected to perform a much wider range of occupations than in most other parts of the Old World. For one small community on the western Slave Coast, however, Sandra Greene has shown how the women's economic and reproductive functions varied over time in response to resource availability and an influx of migrants. But even when most restricted by male-dominated patrilineages, the women of Anlo had access to a wider range of skills, and a role in economic decision-making not to be found in most of early modern Western Europe.

In effect Europeans went to Africa to buy labour, which for them meant mainly males. Africans could no more conceive of selling males as Europeans would have conceived of selling females if Africans had sent vessels to Europe for similar purposes. When Africans offered females for sale, the gender pattern of the trade emerged as a compromise familiar to anyone who has participated in market activity. Africans sold more males and Europeans bought more females than they wished. Europeans put African females to work on the plantations, though they would not bend their conceptions of gender to provide African (much less European) women with the necessary training to carry out skilled occupations outside the household. It is striking that the labour source over which Europeans are traditionally supposed to have had the most power was the source that provided them with a smaller proportion of males than they were able to obtain (albeit as indentured servants) from their own societies. It is even more striking that there is no obvious economic explanation for the constructions of gender which underlay such preferences. In effect there were two broad constructions of gender, one African and one European, which clashed in the slave trade.

The above arguments have some interesting implications. One is that Europeans, and more particularly the English, failed to take advantage of three rather large economic opportunities. If they had emulated the sixteenth-century Russian aristocracy, created some ideological distance between the masses and themselves, and enslaved some elements of their own society, lower labour costs would have ensured faster development of the Americas, and higher exports and income levels on both sides of the Atlantic. For those who see European, in particular English, economic power built on overseas colonies, it might be argued that for the underpopulated tropical Americas at least, exploitation of the periphery and the transfer of surplus to the core would have been far more rapid with white slave labour. A second failure to maximise an economic advantage was that Europeans did not make use of European women as gang-labourers, or even, extensively, as field labourers of any kind. They compounded their economic irrationality by ignoring totally the cheaper supplies of skilled labour — coopers, carpenters, blacksmiths et cetera — that could have emerged from the ranks of European and African women. Again, this could have only accelerated the development of the Americas. Third, Europeans gradually widened their perception of what constituted an insider from the late eighteenth century to include transoceanic peoples. This in effect brought a very profitable institution to an end. The first “missed opportunity” created the Atlantic slave trade from Africa; the second increased the costs of skilled labour; the third ended not only the slave trade but slavery in the Americas as well. The broadest implication, however, is not just that economic interpretations of the rise and fall of African slavery in the Americas have shortcomings, but that in the end any narrow economic interpretation of history will not probe into the behaviour of people very deeply. At the very least, it will run the risk of missing the cultural parameters within which economic decisions are made.

In one sense the impact of economics is clear enough. Prior to 1800, coerced and non-coerced migrant streams alike gravitated toward export-producing regions. Peaks in overall arrivals coincided broadly with the peak years of exports. After 1800, as domestic economies in the Americas evolved and intra-American trade became more important, that link disappears. Nevertheless the effect of merging transatlantic values may be seen from the composition and pattern over time of migration and time nations responsible for it. . . . As noted above, possessive individualism was consistent with all labour regimes — a traffic in free labour, which was fairly small in the early period, an indentured servant trade, as well as a slave trade. The west’s magnification of the rights of the individual coupled with settlements located thousands of miles from direct government control and the social pressures of Old World societies meant an increased freedom to exploit. On the non-European side, there appears to have been no ideology, value system or social structure that inhibited the selling of individuals out of a given society despite conceptions of ownership that differed radically from those dominant in Europe. As a consequence, the slave trade was the prevailing migration stream to the Americas for

250 years. Moreover, . . . slaves increased their share of total transatlantic migration steadily from Columbian contact through to the beginning of the nineteenth century. . . .

The two [migration] flows supplied labour for the Americas and together reseeded the two continents in the aftermath of the Amerindian demographic disaster (the latter reaching a peak — or alternatively, the Amerindian population reaching a nadir — in the late seventeenth century). For the first two centuries, the African and European streams went to the same part of the Americas. Except for a moderate specialisation in silver mines, the Spanish used slaves in a variety of occupations usually to be found in Spanish settlements. In Brazil and the British Caribbean, early migration from both Europe and Africa was overwhelmingly to the semi-tropical sugar and tobacco growing areas. It was not until after 1680 that the African and European migrant streams began to diverge into what many scholars take as the standard transatlantic migrant pattern — Europeans to the temperate areas of the Americas and Africans to the tropical, so that the two peoples not only left from different parts of the Old World, they arrived in different parts of the New.

Perhaps the first question to ask is why Europeans brought Africans to the Americas in the first instance — in other words why was there *transatlantic* slave trade from Africa? Sugar was well established in the Old World to the point that São Tomé supplied most sugar consumed in Europe as late as 1550. The sugar complex had emerged from the Mediterranean and headed toward tropical Africa via the Atlantic Islands in the century before this. When it settled in the Gulf of Guinea, it appeared to be pausing before the jump to the mainland. Instead, of course, the jump was the rather larger one to north-eastern Brazil, and despite the best efforts of the Dutch and the English (they actually shipped slave sugar makers east across the Atlantic to Africa to facilitate this process), sugar was never commercially grown on the mainland of West Africa. A major part of the explanation for this was the political and military power of West Africans (Portuguese Angola was never a potential site for plantations) which before the late nineteenth century made it impossible for Europeans to establish the control required for a plantation economy. Europeans wanted mines and plantations. Africans did not want to give up the sovereignty that this would have entailed, and they certainly had no interest in working voluntarily on such operations. Europeans failed completely to gain control or even access to the production of African gold. A Dutch observer reported the Africans in the vicinity of Elmina stating “the forts don’t protect us — we protect the forts.” Aided by the epidemiological factor (though there was certainly no shortage of English, Dutch and Portuguese prepared to go to the coast) Africans were able to resist European incursions. African resistance resulted in Europeans taking slaves away in ships as a second best alternative to working slaves on African plantations or mines. The slave trade was a function of African strength, not weakness. Moreover, as Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson and myself have argued elsewhere, the distribution of the slave trade on the African coast was determined by

an apparently regionally determined pattern of resistance on the part of Africans themselves.

But once the wall of African resistance helped force the plantation complex across the Atlantic, it seems self-evident that the transatlantic demand for labour from the Old World was economic. What do non-economic values have to do with shaping this pattern? . . . The explanation for the racial exclusivity of labour regimes and the transatlantic flows that supplied the labour itself must have been that Europeans were prepared to enslave Africans or use black slaves that other Africans had deprived of their freedom, but were not prepared to subject other Europeans, even despised minorities such as Jews, Huguenots and Irish, to the same fate.

Second, why was the nation most closely associated with the development of the possessive individualism and deeply involved in discourse on individual liberty and the rights of Englishmen, also the leading slave trader? Between 1660 and 1807, covering the period when the slave trade was at its peak, and when the traffic was still legal for British citizens, the English carried fifty percent more slaves than the Portuguese and almost half of all the slaves taken to the Americas. British migration to the Americas has received much attention, but the British actually carried three Africans to the New World for every European down to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Portuguese domination of the trade was limited to the period before the English Caribbean converted to sugar production, and after the British withdrew from the transatlantic slave trade then sent out their cruisers to suppress it. . . . English domination of the supply of coerced labour and, together with France, domination of the coerced labour sector in the Americas, occurred partly, as already noted, because western concepts of freedom incorporated the freedom to exploit, especially in lands remote from the metropolitan centres of European expansion. This paradox was carried to the extreme in the British case where metropolitan control of the colonies was weakest, and domestic developments most conducive to both large-scale migration to the Americas and a preoccupation with the substance and ideology of possessive individualism. On the eastern side of the Atlantic, the latter underpinned the emergence of a nascent market in free labour, whereas in the Americas, it supported slavery. A market system *per se*, and the vesting of property rights in persons with an individual instead of the group, were perfectly consistent with both waged and slave systems. It was the northwestern Europeans in particular who were likely to impose slavery whenever they found themselves in transoceanic lands. The worst features of the gang labour system which was at the heart of the economic efficiency of slavery probably emerged first under the English. Yet over the preceding three centuries, it was the English in particular who had developed concepts of the modern liberal state (and notions of personal freedom) that have become central parts of the western cultural domination of the late twentieth-century world.

Third, . . . the extraordinary and rapid disappearance of the slave trade, both relative to non-coerced migration, and in absolute terms, . . . is very hard to explain using conventional notions of profit and loss and economic

self-interest. In 1860, it was possible to buy a prime male slave for \$30 in the River Congo and sell the same individual for over \$1,000 in Cuba when the cost of ferrying a steerage passenger (always assigned more space than a slave, anyway) across the Atlantic had fallen to less than \$20. Scholars who argue that the plantation sector was in decline and therefore slavery died because it was no longer profitable have generally not examined profits in the slave trade very closely. The slave trade was a bulwark of labour supply for planters, outside the US at least, and it continued to be profitable throughout the nineteenth century until, in fact, it was prevented from continuing. The slave trade was suppressed; it did not die a natural economic death. Nor, except possibly in the US, did it die because slave purchasers acquiesced in, much less actively sought, its termination. If it had not been suppressed, there was nothing in the pre-1820 patterns of migration . . . to suggest that the dominance of Africa in transatlantic migration streams would not have continued, or at least not have eroded completely. With slave prices at historic highs in the US, Brazil and Cuba alike in the mid nineteenth century, and steamship technology evolving rapidly, it is hard to believe that the transatlantic slave trade would not have far surpassed its late eighteenth-century peaks before 1900 and perhaps beyond.

Fourth, the gender composition of transatlantic migration is . . . now well known. Before the nineteenth century, European migrants were overwhelmingly male, perhaps four out of five prior to the family based migration of later years. In the African slave trade, gender ratios were almost balanced in the mid seventeenth century, and while there was a steady trend toward more males over the next two centuries, the male ratio never climbed much above seventy percent. Before 1800, probably six out of seven females crossing the Atlantic were African, not European. These ratios, as with the social constructs that shaped them, were not very obviously rooted in the economic self-interest of either Africans or Europeans.

In summary, Atlantic history has the potential for generating broad new insights but to make the most of its potential we have first, to look beyond the economic phenomena that have tended to preoccupy historians, and second, give fuller recognition to the fact that it was created by non-Europeans as well as Europeans. On the first of these, let me appear to double back on the message of many of the preceding pages by concluding with an economic historian's favourite ploy and ask the question what that World would have been like if economic rationality had dominated human behaviour to the point of shaping cultural attitudes and indeed all else besides. White slaves would have been cheaper than their black counterparts in most of the Americas, and as a result sugar production would have been greater than it was and prices of plantation produce lower. The Americas would have developed more rapidly than they did. The one exception to this would have been in South America, where there could have been little difference in the cost of bringing slaves from Europe on the one hand and from Africa on the other — assuming of course that whites were subject to the full rigours of a slave-ship transportation regime. The slave trade from Europe — still drawing on convicts, rebels, and prisoners of war — as

in Africa — would not have ended when it did. Among the many implications for the twentieth century is that any civil rights movements would have been class-, rather than race-based, though it is not at all clear where a reform movement of any kind would have originated. With large numbers of white slaves as well as black stretching back over several centuries, relations between blacks and whites in the twentieth century would presumably have borne no relationship to the historical reality. Perhaps we can say that giving primacy to culture over economics would have made class an even more dominant analytical category for twentieth-century historians and social scientists, though within a Weberian rather than Marxist framework. The point of such speculation, of course, is simply to highlight shaping influences over human actions, European as well as non-European, in the early modern Atlantic world that have received insufficient attention. If economic rationality had had the importance that many scholars think, then the world would have been a very different place. For historians that should in itself be much less interesting than getting the priorities right for an analysis of the early Modern Atlantic World. The expansion of the Old World into the New resulted in violence, exploitation and unprecedented economic growth (though not as much as there might have been), but it was the merging and transference of values and cultures that made this happen, not the resources of the New World, or the transfer of capital and labour from the Old.