James Walvin, *A World Transformed: Slavery in the Americas and the Origins of Global Power*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022. 26 + 374 pp. (Cloth US$ 34.95)

What explains the uneven distribution of wealth and power in the modern world? This is the question that James Walvin seeks to answer in his sweeping new history of American slavery. Enslavement, he argues, was “fundamental to the way the West emerged” (xv) because it created an almost insatiable appetite for “commodities which owed their origins to enslaved Africans,” such as sugar, coffee, and cotton. The demand for enslaved labor to produce these commodities, coupled with the creation of the infrastructure to transport and produce those goods, created a “vast machine” (xv) that enriched the west. That same system impoverished the Caribbean, South and Central America by focusing the regions’ economies on environmentally destructive and socially divisive systems of plantation agriculture. “Slavery matters” (331), Walvin concludes, because the poisonous legacies of its history remain with us today in stark economic inequalities and racism. Walvin makes this bold series of claims by adopting an impressively wide vision and synthesizing large volumes of secondary literature. His study commences in the early fifteenth century, with Spain’s pioneering of slavery in the Atlantic islands, and ends in the present, with the Black Lives Matter movement. This volume’s geographic bounds are equally as capacious. Walvin examines Africa, the Caribbean, Brazil, and the United States, but he also looks beyond these zones to demonstrate the importance of enslavement to the economies of Japan, China, and, especially, Europe. This is hence a truly Atlantic wide—and at times global—history of slavery.

*The World Transformed* commences by charting how Atlantic slavery rose and operated. Readers of other histories of Atlantic slavery will find much familiar here, as Walvin covers enslaved people’s capture in Africa, the horrors of the Middle Passage, and the brutality of plantation slavery. Walvin maintains an important focus on people throughout—both the enslaved and their enslavers. We glimpse enslaved people perishing aboard the slave ships, toiling in the fields, suffering violence and sexual abuse, and trying to escape their bondage. Enslaved people’s misery is also effectively contrasted to the greed, violence and luxury of their owners, a device that demonstrates the historic and modern inequalities sparked by Atlantic slavery. Walvin likewise anchors his wide-ranging study by focusing on key commodities that were tied to slavery. Focusing on the movement of sugar, cotton, and coffee effectively illustrates slavery’s important and lasting changes on global consumption habits. But Walvin also cleverly shows the importance of American slavery in driving the growth of Chinese ceramics industry; Europe’s trade in precious metals with the East; and the production of fashionable mahogany furniture. Although it covers well-trodden ground, the first section of this book therefore offers a number of new insights.

The second section, where Walvin turns to the internal functioning of American slavery, is much more original. Walvin first examines the domestic slave trades that operated both within and between American colonies—the so-called intra-American slave trade. He demonstrates the ways that many enslaved people faced continued upheavals and dislocations once they reached the Americas: Africans arriving in the Caribbean were embarked on other vessels and carried on deadly additional voyages to distant markets; and enslaved people born in the United States and Brazil faced the constant threat of sale, separation, and long marches to slavery’s frontiers. Walvin also effectively surveys the importance of management and accounting techniques to Atlantic slavery’s functioning, but without losing sight of the violence that was likewise fundamental to the brutal system. This volume therefore cleverly synthesizes some of the most recent research on the Atlantic slave trades to make important revelations that cut across disciplinary and geographic boundaries.

*A World Transformed* is thus an important new history of Atlantic slavery that should find a wide readership, especially given the growing public interest in slavery’s history. A book of this ambition and scope must, however, include acts of omission. As this volume’s title indicates, there is relatively on Africa, a continent that is arguably as important to Atlantic slavery’s history as the Americas. Even within the Americas, some key places are overlooked, especially Barbados’ key role as a laboratory of Atlantic slavery, and Saint Domingue and Cuba as the *ne plus ultra* of plantation colonies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively. The idea in this book’s title—that slavery explains “the origins of global power”—might also be misleading to readers expecting an exploration of political, diplomatic, and military history (the traditional definition of global power). These issues aside, readers will struggle to find another book that so effectively surveys the long history of Atlantic slavery without losing sight of its millions of enslaved victims.

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