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The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery

Robin Blackburn

THERE are many features of medieval Europe that, it has been claimed, anticipate the colonial slavery of the New World. The powers that successfully colonized the Americas had their roots in medieval kingdoms, each of which displayed a propensity for intolerance and persecution, territorial expansion, colonial settlement, arrogant impositions on subject peoples, and theological justification of slavery, racial exclusion, and sordid enterprise. More generally, late medieval Europeans were prone to stigmatize the infidel and the pagan and to entertain fanciful notions of “wild” or “monstrous” peoples. Arab techniques of sugar production were adopted in the Levant, Sicily, and Andalusia, with servile laborers cultivating and processing cane. The practice of slavery, which originated in classical times, persisted in much of Latin Europe. Latin Christendom was a vigorously expansionist force, doubling in land area between the tenth and fourteenth centuries. Robert Bartlett concludes a powerful account of this expansion by observing: “The mental habits and institutions of European racism and colonialism were born out of the medieval world, the conquerors of Mexico knew the problem of the *mudejars*; the planters of Virginia had already been planters in Ireland.”¹ In the same vein, Charles Verlinden has dubbed the medieval and early modern sugar estates of the Levant the laboratories of the New World slave plantations and asserted, in a formula cited by David Brion Davis, that “the slave economy of the modern period is purely and simply the continuation of that of the medieval colonies.”²

Mr. Blackburn is an editor of *New Left Review*. A version of this article was presented at Constructing Race: Differentiating Peoples in the Early Modern World, 1400–1700 held by the Institute of Early American History and Culture in April 1996. He is grateful to the organizers and participants for their comments, to the referees for pointing out problems and gaps in the argument, and to Benjamin Braude for sharing references. He alone is responsible for the interpretation offered and for any errors.

¹ Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (Princeton, 1993), 313.

² Verlinden, *The Beginnings of Modern Colonization: Eleven Essays with an Introduction*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Ithaca, 1970); Verlinden is cited as follows: “L’économie esclavagiste des économies modernes est purement et simplement la continuation de celle des colonies médiévales,” in Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, 1966), 42, apparently from Verlinden, “Le Problème de la continuité en histoire coloniale: de la colonisation médiévale à la colonisation moderne,” *Revista de Indias* (Madrid, 1951), 11:219–36. See also Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York, 1984), 54–57. That Verlinden’s judgments have been widely influential stems from his authorship of a massive study of slavery in the Middle Ages, *L’esclavage dans l’Europe médiévale*, 2 vols. (Bruges, 1955; Ghent, 1977).

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Such observations do not identify what was new and distinctive about the racial slavery of the New World. The English seized land in Ireland for their “plantations” and subjected the natives to many harsh impositions, for instance, but they did not, or could not, enslave the Irish. Likewise, the *mudejars* and *moriscos* of Spain were sometimes temporarily enslaved, but their eventual fate was either assimilation or expulsion. The sugar estates of the Levant represent a rather different impulse from either feudal expansion or cultural conquest. They were set up with the help of merchants from Venice or Genoa to supply Europe’s craving for sugar. Their scale of operation was limited by the relative shallowness of demand in late medieval Europe and by the precarious military position of Christian outposts in the Levant. The sugar output of Cyprus or Candia or Sicily was overtaken by the Atlantic islands of the sixteenth century and then entirely eclipsed by the Brazilian and Caribbean estates in the seventeenth century.³ Levantine slaves were ethnically diverse, and evidence for the use of field slaves on Levantine estates is very weak. It was not until the seventeenth century that the plantation as an integrated labor unit was perfected.

Each stage of development was sponsored by new commercial forces—first Italian, then Dutch, then English—that commanded the necessary resources for constructing plantations and ensuring access to broader markets. The Dutch republic played a key role in fostering a dynamic Atlantic trade in slaves and slave products, even as the Dutch polity and social formation set a new standard of tolerance and pluralism in its domestic arrangements, rejecting much of the medieval legacy that might be thought to have paved the way for colonial slavery. Indeed, the Dutch provinces banned the entry of slaves to the metropolis, and the great Dutch painters portrayed Africans as individuals, not stereotypes.

The rise of medieval Christendom coincided with a secular decline of slavery in most parts of the continent. By the time of the takeoff of the New World slave plantations, slavery was extinct in England, the Netherlands, and France, the powers most associated with this takeoff. Slavery had declined throughout late medieval Europe despite those elements in medieval expansionism that did indeed contribute to the later practice of colonial slavery, as the authors I have quoted rightly maintain. Slavery in the New World was not based on an Old World prototype. Its bonds were woven from a variety of materials—ethnic identities, legal codifications, technical resources, economic impulses, and so forth—and these comprised something noticeably new, whose stark racial character makes the study of the philosophy and practice of enslavement a useful vantage point from which to track the growth of racial identifications.

The Eclipse of Slavery in Medieval Europe

In ancient Rome, slavery was concentrated at the center in Italy and Sicily. Although slaves discharged many other roles—including those of administrator, amanuensis, tutor, craftsman, domestic—the bulk of slaves in

³ See, for example, Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1: *The Structure of Everyday Life* (London, 1985), 224–27. While noncommittal about the significance of slavery on the Mediterranean estates, Braudel also links them very directly to the New World plantations.

Latin Italy and Sicily toiled in the fields, often driven in gangs and housed in barracks. The slaves themselves were captured from many outlying regions and comprised a multitude of ethnicities. Their status was that of chattels who could be disposed of at will by an owner, who in theory had the power of life and death over them. According to Roman law, the slave was entirely subject to the master and could be bought and sold like any other chattel. As the Emperor Justinian put it in a late Roman code that had enduring authority: "Slaves are in the power of their masters; for we find that among all nations slaveowners have the power of life and death over their slaves, and whatever a slave earns belongs to his master."⁴ Roman slavery was nourished and held in place by the military exploits of the republic and empire. This was the source of large slave hauls. The impressive network of roads widened the markets available to the slave estates and allowed military help to arrive in case of difficulty. The legion's special discipline and combination of military and economic capacity furnished elements of a model for the slave estate. Slaveowners and Roman citizens as well as slaves were of many nationalities, which lent a cosmopolitan tone to the empire.

Christianity started out by accepting the empire's secular arrangements, including chattel slavery, despite the persecution to which it was subject; its subsequent rise to a special position with the advent of Christian emperors confirmed its basic stance of urging the virtues of obedience on citizen and slave. It was perfectly licit for a Christian master to hold Christian slaves, and the church itself was a large-scale slaveowner. In fact, Christianity positively valorized slavery, urging believers to comport themselves as "slaves of Christ." While masters were urged not to abuse their slaves, slaves were advised to accept their unhappy lot in this world as a spiritual advantage in preparation for the next.⁵

The decline of the vigor of the empire from about the third century was associated with a gradual mutation in the slave system. Imperial authorities co-opted semi-Romanized Germanic armies to defend the social order against internal enemies—such as the Bacaudae slave rebellions of the third and fourth centuries—and incursions from barbarian forces not under their control. The Germanic military reinforcements helped to maintain the subjection of slaves and to prolong the life of the empire at the cost of increasing warlordism and fragmentation. The disruption of commerce in the late Roman world restricted the scope for large, commercialized estates. The Roman state itself had a declining ability to purchase wheat and supplies from such estates, while the rulers of each province were disposed to be more self-reliant. From late Roman times, lords often found it more advantageous to cultivate their estates, not with slave gangs housed in barracks, but by means of the "huttid slave" or *colonus*, who was given the use of a parcel of land and

⁴ Quoted in W. R. Brownlow, *Lectures on Slavery and Serfdom in Europe* (New York, 1969; orig. pub. 1892), xxx. See also W. W. Buckland, *The Roman Law of Slavery: The Condition of the Slave in Private Law from Augustus to Justinian* (New York, 1969; orig. pub. 1908).

⁵ Dmitri Kyrtatas, *The Social Structure of Early Christian Communities* (London, 1987), 29ff. For the imbrication of empire and church see Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1: *A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge, 1986), 301–40.

expected to furnish tribute in kind or in labor. With continuing barbarian incursions, this decentralized pattern of power also proved more secure.⁶

In the earlier phases of the development of serfdom and a feudal order, slavery survived as a juridical form and name while its content was gradually redefined. In Roman law, the bundle of powers claimed by masters could be broken down, allowing slaves to work land by themselves or to ply a trade sharing earnings with their master. With the decline of the effective power of the imperial center in much of western and central Europe, the leverage of the former slave or serf could be boosted by overlapping jurisdictions or the strength of a village community. The settled population of serfs was, or became, ethnically more homogenous than had been the slave population replenished by slave hauls and a long-distance slave trade. The persistence of large settled populations was generally not conducive to the reproduction of slavery, because more stable and cohesive underlying communities were better placed to bargain with their lords. Latin Christianity, by cementing the new social order, also helped to create groups who remained more vulnerable to enslavement than fellow Christians—pagans, Arian heretics, and Jews, for example. Between the eighth and the eleventh centuries or later, there remains scattered evidence of the persistence of outright slavery, including the enslavement of Christian by Christian. Eventually, slavery was transformed in the core areas of Latin Christendom as a feudal order weakened the absolute powers claimed by the slaveholder and generated different forms of oppression and exploitation. Because feudal power was a patchwork, however, slavery remained or even thrived in its crevices and at the periphery.⁷

In the early medieval period, the Vikings conducted a wide-ranging slave trade; subsequently, traffic in slaves was found along Latin Christendom's frontiers with rival forms of Christianity and the Muslim world in the Black Sea, the Adriatic, the Levant, and the Iberian peninsula. Themselves initially pagan, Vikings often found Christian purchasers for their slaves, irrespective of the latter's religion. The Viking mastery of long-distance maritime and riverine transport was a vital ingredient in their ability to produce and sell slaves. They established far-flung colonies, sustained by a captive labor force, in the North Atlantic and set up the Varangian state in Russia, allowing them to supply Byzantium with slaves captured in eastern and northern Europe. The Viking longboat, whose shallow draught allowed it to navigate rivers as well as oceans, was adapted to a trade in small numbers of expensive slaves; it could not carry more than about twenty captives, often fewer, at a time. Within Scandinavia itself, slave labor was pendant to a free peasantry organized in clan communities with a weak development of private property. According to one account, a typical farm at this period might have attached

⁶ E. A. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians: The Decline of the Western Empire* (Madison, 1982), 17–38; G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (Ithaca, 1981), 497–503.

⁷ William D. Phillips, Jr., *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade* (Minneapolis, 1985), 43–65. For the feudal “synthesis” and its variations see also Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London, 1974), 128–72.

to it three slaves, twelve cows, and two horses. Ten or eighteen slaves on one farm would have been the upper limit and probably unusual. The absolute numbers of slaves absorbed by Viking colonies in Iceland and elsewhere were quite modest; in tenth-century Iceland there were probably around two or three thousand slaves, comprising one-third or one-half the population. Slaves were stigmatized by humiliating stereotypes; swarthy English or Irish thralls were regarded as unreliable and lazy and appear with such names as "Lump," "Coarse," "Thickard," "Noisy," and "Torrent-talker." These Scandinavian societies did not reproduce slavery once military setbacks cut off the supply of new slaves. Within a few generations the descendants of slaves, if any, were absorbed in the wider community. In Scandinavia, the eclipse of slavery was followed by a diminution in the independence of free peasant villages and the rise of a local nobility, developments that coincided with completion of a slow process of conversion to Christianity. In the marchlands of Russia and eastern Europe, slavery remained important.⁸

As long as Europe was swept by barbarian invasions or engulfed by more or less irregular warfare and conquest, there was a continual supply of captives, a proportion of whom would be enslaved. Thus, the Visigoths in Spain sought to maintain slave-worked estates and for a time succeeded. St. Isidore of Seville was a ferocious defender of slave subordination, seeing it as a necessary part of the mundane order, a chastisement for sin that was ubiquitous. He also believed that ancestral sin had perverted entire races of humankind: "Just as among individual races there are certain members who are monsters so also among mankind as a whole, certain races are monsters, like the giants, the Cynocephali, the Cyclops and others."⁹ For Isidore, monsters were not against nature, as they had been for some classical writers, but in their very strangeness revealed the divine purpose; thus a physical flaw could well be the sign of a moral flaw. Pierre Bonnassie summarizes Isidore's position as embracing "the divine origin of slavery, the genetic perversity of slaves and the necessity of servitude as a means for the redemption of humanity through penitence—these were all ideas that became commonplace."¹⁰ Isidore prescribed stern discipline and punishments for recalcitrant slaves; his insistence on this point shows that those who were enslaved contested their role. It was unwise for relatively small groups of invaders to attempt to maintain large settled populations in complete slavery with their own traditions of communal self-organization and control over means of production. The swift Muslim advance in the Iberian peninsula in the eighth century must itself have been facilitated by the tensions generated by a social order that relied to such an extent on enslavement.¹¹

⁸ Peter S. Foote and David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement: A Survey of the Society and Culture of Early Medieval Scandinavia* (London, 1970), 65–78; Ruth Mazo Karras, *Slavery and Society in Medieval Scandinavia* (New Haven, 1988), 40–95, 122–63; Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, 173–78.

⁹ John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 116.

¹⁰ Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism in South-Western Europe* (Cambridge, 1991), 27.

¹¹ C. H. Becker, "The Expansion of the Saracens," in *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 2 (New York, 1913), 329–90, esp. 371–73.

Slavery became progressively less important within the Christian kingdoms that held out against the Muslims in the north of Spain until, by the eleventh century, it may have virtually disappeared. I suggest that the struggle with Islam prompted the beginnings of a new doctrine, copied from the Muslim foe, barring enslavement of fellow believers. This doctrine, ascribed to Charlemagne, was adopted very unevenly and slowly and was only one element tending to reduce the incidence of slavery. The pressure of confrontation with Islam was supplemented by the structural possibilities of a new social order. The diminishing significance of slavery was evident throughout Christendom as lords established their dominion over settled communities of serfs—slavery was left as an institution that had a localized or temporary importance in frontier zones or in enclaves. Slaves were sometimes used to strengthen lordly power, but such slaves or their descendants in time became retainers or serfs. The social formula of Latin Christendom reproduced serfdom, not outright slavery; villagers owed tribute in labor or kind or cash to their lord and were forbidden to move without the lord's permission. Such serfs could not be sold separately from the estate. They worked the land in their own way and could look to the village community for a degree of protection from the serflord. Within this system, pockets of slavery persisted for a host of particular reasons. Greater stability and a more coherent structure of lordly power enhanced the social formation's capacity to turn captives into slaves and, at least for a time, keep them that way. The holding of a few slaves could boost the autonomy of decentralized feudal power and wealth. In the towns, rich merchants favored slave servants, who were beholden neither to lords nor to guilds. In the countryside, lords might retain some slaves as permanent laborers on the demesne, the land reserved for their own direct use. The possession of such slaves available for work throughout the year may have boosted the lord's ability to impose himself on the wider peasantry where this was still necessary. But this was not a slave system or mode of production. The lords' main source of agricultural surplus was in the form of produce or labor services or rent. While the possession of slaves for work on the demesne was still common in Carolingian France, Saxon and early Norman England, or early medieval Italy, slavery thereafter waned, and even those still called "*servi*" enjoyed rights of possession and usufruct.¹²

At the time of the Domesday Book (1086), slaves were still reported to comprise as much as one-tenth of England's population, with the figure rising to one-fifth in the West Country. From this point, evidence for true slaves in England declines sharply. William the Conqueror himself declared: "We forbid any one [to] sell a man out of the country."¹³ From the standpoint of the new monarch, the export trade in English slaves might enrich

¹² Pierre Riché, *Daily Life in the World of Charlemagne* (Liverpool, 1978), 102–04; Sally P. J. Harvey, "The Extent and Profitability of Demesne Agriculture in England in the Later Eleventh Century," in T. H. Aston et al., eds., *Social Relations and Ideas: Essays in Honor of R. H. Hilton* (Cambridge, 1983), 45–72, esp. 60–61; Chris Wickham, "The Other Transition: From the Ancient World to Feudalism," *Past and Present*, No. 103 (1984), 32 n. 34.

¹³ Quoted in Brownlow, *Lectures on Slavery and Serfdom in Europe*, 112.

the merchants of Bristol or Dublin but could only impoverish his kingdom. The Norman feudal system also led to an attenuation of the numbers of English slaves. Those employed as servants or as specialist workers were not reproduced across generations in a fully servile condition. In England in the eleventh century, the slave ploughman was being replaced by, or converted into, the small-holding *bovarius*.¹⁴ When lords were absent from their estates, as was increasingly the case in the epoch of the Crusades, it probably made sense to diminish the size of their demesnes, to settle any slaves they possessed on land as serfs, and to concede some improved status to their children.

Whereas residual slaveholding could give the lord some leverage over peasants, other more effective means underpinned the developed feudal social order of the Middle Ages. In the heartland of western Europe, the stabilization of lordly power was based on advances in military and agricultural techniques at a time when wider imperial structures were ineffective. The lords came to control not only superior means of violence, underpinned by castle construction, but also horses, ploughs, grain mills, and trade routes. The mounted warrior allied to the large-scale introduction of the heavy plough and the water mill or windmill permitted a more effective exploitation of the direct producers. The lords in their castles could offer villagers protection—from one another as well as invaders. Feudal warfare was directed at the acquisition of land rather than of captives, though every effort was made to attach the laborers to the land. The castle and banal mill gave support to the power of the lord, enabling him to assert control at a crucial stage of the production process and to claim a sizable surplus. Where the slave latifundist had had to ensure detailed invigilation of the producer, this was no longer the case for the feudal lord, whose bailiffs had the more limited task of ensuring that peasant grain was taken to the lord's mill. This was one reason why, as serfdom was consolidated, field slavery declined and even disappeared. It also explains why the withering away of agricultural slavery coincided with a loss of rights for some free villagers.¹⁵

Bonassie attributes slavery's eclipse in southwest Europe to the growing solidarity of the rural population within a context of technical and economic relations of production incorporating grain mills and horse-drawn ploughs, such that "all the factors tending to [slavery's] disappearance operated simultaneously. Adherence to Christian beliefs, for long formal or hesitant, became general amongst the rural population; this carried the seeds . . . of

¹⁴ Reginald Lennard, *Rural England, 1086–1135: A Study of Social and Agrarian Conditions* (Oxford, 1959), 82, 91, 98, 241, 389; Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (London, 1963), 56–57, 86; Harvey, "Extent and Profitability of Demesne Agriculture," 69–70.

¹⁵ Bonassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism in South-Western Europe*, 104–31. See also T. Bisson, "The 'Feudal Revolution,'" *Past and Present*, No. 142 (1994), 6–42; Georges Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy: Warriors and Peasants from the Seventh to the Twelfth Century*, trans. Howard B. Clarke (Ithaca, 1974), 172–75, 187–97; Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, 182–85; Pierre Dockès, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation* (Chicago, 1982), 183–97; and the contributions by Wickham and others in Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre, eds., *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1995), 221–26, 245–51, 260–71.

the first 'popular religious movements,' and promoted, above all, the spiritual unification of the peasantry in all its component elements. The technical progress which lightened human labour became more widely diffused. The expansion of the agrarian economy, increasingly apparent, necessitated an ever greater mobility on the part of the rural workers, which required enfranchisement. The state structures broke down in the wake of the new invasions, and with them the whole repressive apparatus which depended upon them. There developed everywhere, in consequence, what Giovanni Tabacco has called for Italy 'a spontaneous movement of liberation.'¹⁶ Bonnassie attributes many of the technical advances incorporated in and underpinning the new social mix to peasant smallholders, but this did not prevent banal lords from soon battenning upon them. Christianity did not pose any direct challenge to enslavement, and it was still permissible to hold fellow Christians in bondage, but to the extent that the whole rural population became incorporated within the church it could furnish an ideal medium in which solidarity could develop between the free and the enslaved. If there was a moment of true liberation for the peasantry, it must have been short-lived, because they were soon laboring under a new regime of power and property. Both free and servile had cause to rue the power of the lords and to wish to set some limit upon it by making slaveholding difficult. Feudal social arrangements had no need for outright enslavement to obtain tribute or rent from the direct producers, because the lords controlled more effective instruments of production and violence.

The windmill or water mill potentially raised productivity; if controlled by the lord it also increased his leverage over the peasants. Once in possession of such leverage, a lord might insist on deliveries to his mill even if the cost to the peasant of hauling grain reduced the real productivity advantage of the mill to zero, as Pierre Dockès suggests it often did.¹⁷ The spread of mills and of horse-drawn ploughs did not raise productivity everywhere, but where they occurred, technical advances allowed the resistance of peasant communities to have a ratchet effect. As the direct domination of the serfdoms was pressed back by peasant resistance, the lords discovered that they could live with and even contrive to benefit from the elements of greater freedom claimed by the peasants, such as communal or private possession of land in return for labor services. The substitution of money rents for labor services or tribute in kind could operate in the same way. Through much of western Europe, villagers gradually established rights against their lords. In England there were still many unfree peasants or villeins in the thirteenth century, but though formally subject to the will of the lord, their condition was also regulated by "the custom of the manor." They were de facto owners of goods; they could buy and sell land and make wills. They might owe their lord as much as half the output of the main arable crop, but if other sources of nonarable output are taken into account, the lord received not much more than a quarter of the value of their gross output.¹⁸ Field slaves in Roman Sicily or in the New World

¹⁶ Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism in South-Western Europe*, 55.

¹⁷ Dockès, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation*, 182–83.

¹⁸ S. H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status, and Gender* (Basingstoke, Eng., 1995), 29–33. See also Hilton, *The Decline of Serfdom in Medieval England*,

retained much less of their product and were made to work only by direct physical coercion.

Feudal Expansion and Ideologies of Persecution

Bartlett describes the expansionary formula of European feudalism from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries as comprising both a reinforced aristocracy deploying an enhanced military technology and communities of free peasants offered land in return for rents or services. Newly conquered areas could be secured by introducing colonies of free peasants accompanied by the forced cultural assimilation of the indigenous population. Colonists were often attracted by offers of some years of exemption or rents rather than labor services. The feudal formula of consolidation and expansion also critically embraced the establishment of churches, monasteries, chartered towns, and universities. These institutions were all necessary to the replication of feudal social relations in new settings. The cultural dimensions of conquest were as important as the mounted knights, pikemen, or archers. They helped to maintain the conquerors' identity and to impose a subject identity on the conquered. As Bartlett writes, "Conquest, colonization, Christianization: the techniques of settling in a new land, the ability to maintain cultural identity through legal forms and nurtured attitudes, the institutions and outlook required to confront the strange and the abhorrent, to repress it and to live with it, the law and religion" were indispensable to the formula of expansion, enabling the new communities to become "autonomous replicas not dependencies."¹⁹

Latin liturgy and laws regulated and defined the social order. The *gens latina* and those within the *ecclesia* had access to rights not available to pagans like the Lithuanians or to so-called wild peoples or primitive Slavs. Any people who failed to conform to settled agriculture and to the cultural and religious norms of Latin Christendom were relegated to a rigorously subordinate status, at the limit to slavery. The former willingness to enslave fellow Christians faded. "From the Old Testament came the idea that if master and slave were of the same race and religion, slavery should be barred, but it took centuries for this concept to penetrate the West. Only in the Carolingian age did it appear in the idea of Christian society as one in which no member should be reduced to slavery."²⁰ This new doctrine evidently took a long time to become accepted and effective. It seems likely that its gradual spread reflected western Christendom's need to transform itself to meet the Muslim threat. Islam was from the outset a faith that formally barred its adherents from the enslavement of co-religionists—indeed, Islamic law went further and prohibited the enslavement of Christians and

2d ed. (London, 1983), 9–19, and Werner Rösener, *Peasants in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1985), 224–53.

¹⁹ Bartlett, *Making of Europe*, 309, 313.

²⁰ Verlinden, "Slavery, Slave Trade," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer (New York, 1988), 11:334.

Jews so long as they were living peaceably under Islamic rule and paying tribute. The Islamic doctrine of slavery was a "means of converting outsiders into insiders."²¹ Infidel slaves who converted could not expect manumission, but with time it was likely that the situation of some, generally those given responsible positions, would improve, and that of menials would remain degraded and lowly but not wholly bereft of rights. Those who were not slaves who converted gained an important immunity. Charlemagne, whose grandfather had repulsed a Muslim army at Poitiers and who fought an unsuccessful campaign in Spain, was keenly aware of the military threat posed by the warrior religion. But the challenge of Islam was ideological as well as military; it concerned core beliefs of Christianity, disputing its claims to be monotheistic and to realize the prophecies of the Old Testament. The notion of Christendom itself was born out of this clash and was marked in many ways by it.²² The notion that Christians should reduce one another to slavery came to seem objectionable, though they could still hold or buy those who were already enslaved, even if Christian.

The greater stress on religious mobilization and solidarity displayed by Latin Christendom in its period of resurgence and expansion was accompanied by greater stress on principles of exclusion and correction. The Christian Europe of the eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed, Robert Moore claims, a far more vigilant and ferocious policing of those who did not partake of the dominant religious, ethnic, corporeal and sexual regime. Jews, homosexuals ("sodomites"), lepers, Manichees, and other heretics were each deemed carriers of a perilous contagion that demanded a sterilizing punishment and persecution if they were not to contaminate the social order. Thus the whitened skin and deformity of the leper was an outward sign of mortal sin. The stigmatized groups challenged the spiritual underpinnings and pretensions of the new order; standing behind them was the specter of persons without a lord—among them itinerant preachers, peddlers, mendicants, lepers, and women without a man to answer for them. The followers of Robert of Arbrissel were described in alarm as "men of every condition, women both servile (*pauperes*) and noble, widows and virgins, old and young, whores and spurners of men . . . turning away neither the poor nor the weak, the incestuous nor the depraved, lepers nor the helpless (*impotentes*)."²³ The persecution of every type of deviant perfected a will to ideological subordination that had ominous implications for those who came into the path of European expansion. It helped to forge the identity of Europe. The campaigns against deviance were orchestrated on a continent-wide basis by decisions of the Third and Fourth Lateran Councils in 1179 and 1215. But while the persecutory apparatus was designed to exclude and

²¹ Shaun E. Marmon, "Slavery, Islamic World," *ibid.*, 332. See also Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry* (New York, 1990), 5.

²² Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Princeton, 1987), 6, 8–9. See also Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (London, 1939), and, with specific reference to slavery, Dockès, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation*, 237.

²³ Quoted in Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (Oxford, 1987), 102.

suppress, it also sought to recuperate and include, if that was possible. Robert of Arbrissel was eventually beatified, long after the ideological threat he was thought to present had passed. The institution of slavery was a means of recuperation, placing the deviant under a necessary restraint.

Following the Lateran councils, it was more common for the formal status of Jews to be defined as one of slavery. They were deemed to be chattels of the king, a designation with great advantages for the monarch since it subjected the Jewish community to arbitrary royal tallage. Jews were held collectively responsible for the death of Christ. Although attempts were made to convert Jews, the presence of Jewish communities was thought to furnish a living symbol of the Scriptures, and some held that it would not be until Judgment Day that the Jews would convert en masse. Jews were forbidden to own Christian slaves, though various loopholes allowed this rule to be circumvented. The status of being the monarch's chattel allowed Jews to be in but not of medieval Christendom. It permitted monarchs to tax Jews at will and gave them an interest in protecting them. Jews usually were required to wear special markings and to live in designated areas. Although only a minority of Jews were moneylenders, the Lateran decisions strengthening the Christian prohibition of usury offered them more openings for this activity than ever before.

St. Thomas Aquinas did not favor harsh treatment of Jews, but he wrote the duchess of Brabant that "the guilt of the Jews caused them to be condemned to perpetual slavery."²⁴ Rulers should protect their Jews, and the latter owed everything to their sovereign. Thus, as slavery was being eclipsed in much of Europe, a notion of enslavement still survived as a part of the social imagination. Robert Grosseteste, the influential thirteenth-century bishop of Lincoln, who was esteemed by Wyclif and later Protestant divines as an upholder of the distinctive virtues of the English church, urged a radicalization of the notion of Jewish enslavement aimed at denying Jews all profit from usury—even if the state also suffered thereby. R. W. Southern summarizes a letter written by Grosseteste to the countess of Winchester in 1231 as follows: "God had condemned . . . [Jews to be] wanderers and the slaves of all nations, and this state of affairs would last until the end of history when their redemption would come. Meanwhile, the rulers of the world had the duty to keep them captive—not killing them, but allowing them to live by the sweat of their brow. They were like the descendants of Cain, cursed by God, given over to slavery. . . . Rulers who receive any benefit from the usuries of Jews are drinking the blood of victims whom they ought to protect." Southern adds: "In this summary, I have softened rather than exaggerated the violence of Grosseteste's words."²⁵ Grosseteste's extreme approach reflected a strong impulse to doctrinal purity and drew on popular hostility to moneylenders. Repeated royal tallage of the Jewish community forced up the rates of interest charged by Jewish moneylenders and pawn-

²⁴ Aquinas, paraphrased in R. W. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1986), 248.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 246–47.

brokers and stimulated the desire of debtors to be rid of them. The advice tendered by Grosseteste led to the expulsion of the Jews from various towns. In 1290, England became the first European kingdom to expel the Jews; by that time, overtaxation had so reduced the financial resources of the Jewish community in England that the royal exchequer was no longer receiving significant sums from it.²⁶

The persecuting impulse was bound up with feudal expansion as much as it was a response to internal tensions. The Anglo-Norman and English conquerors of Ireland managed to sustain the idea that the Irish were a species of wild people because of their pastoralism, distinctive kinship practices, and supposed religious irregularities or laxities. The twelfth-century historian Gerald de Barri (Geraldus Cambrensis) observed: "The Irish are a rude people, subsisting on the produce of their cattle only—a people that has not yet departed from the primitive habits of pastoral life. In the common course of things, making progresses from the forest to the field, from the field to the town, and to the social condition of citizens; but this nation, holding agricultural labour in contempt, and little coveting the wealth of towns, as well as being exceedingly averse to civil institutions—lead the same life their fathers did in the woods and open pastures, neither willing to abandon old habits or learn anything new."²⁷ The new habits desired here were essential for constructing a feudal order. In 1155, Henry II of England persuaded Pope Adrian IV to issue the bull *Laudabiliter* encouraging Henry to go to Ireland "to enlarge the boundaries of the church, to reveal the truth of the Christian faith to unlearned and savage peoples, and to root out from the Lord's field the vices that have grown in it."²⁸

In the initial phases of feudal conquest and colonization, there was commonly a rigorous "judicial dualism" such that colonists and those who had accepted assimilation would be tried by different courts according to different laws from those that applied to the newly conquered population. In Ireland, this was known as "exception of Irishry" and meant that the penalty for killing an Irishman would be lighter than for killing an Englishman—in one such case the penalty, a fine of 70 shillings, was payable to the lord of the victim. The Irish could be described as "not being of free blood," though their condition was meant to be that of a degraded serf and not a true slave. Such procedures were defended as rights and privileges by the colonizers and the assimilated and if comprehensively enforced

²⁶ Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages*, 284–302.

²⁷ De Barri, quoted in A. Simms, "Core and Periphery in Medieval Europe: The Irish Experience in a Wider Context," in W. J. Smyth and K. Whelan, eds., *Common Ground: Essays on the Historical Geography of Ireland, Presented to T. Jones Hughes* (Cork, 1988), 24.

²⁸ Adrian IV, quoted in Seymour Phillips, "The Outer World of the European Middle Ages," in Stuart B. Schwartz, ed., *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, 1994), 51. There are some doubts about the authenticity of *Laudabiliter*, but even if it is a contemporary forgery it reveals the mindset of early English imperialism. See John Gillingham, "The Beginnings of English Imperialism," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 4 (1992), 379–91.

served as an incentive to assimilation. The practices of legal dualism could also be temporally relaxed as another method of securing the social and political integration of a still heterogeneous population. At times, blatantly discriminatory practices seemed inconvenient to the royal power as it sought to consolidate or extend its authority. Some colonizers or conquerors wanted to compromise with the conquered. In Ireland, some Anglo-Norman lords adjusted to Irish customs and became targets of later interventions by English monarchs. Sometimes judicial dualism itself constituted a concession to conquered populations who, on certain limited matters, were permitted to be tried according to their own laws and customs. Over time, the consolidation and extension of the social order required a more even treatment of subjects. In Spain, the 1182 Laws of Santa Maria de Cortes declared that "nobles, knights and Jews and Muslims who come to settle shall be liable to the same fines and the same judicial regime as the other settlers." The Darocca municipality of Aragon likewise promised that "Christians, Jews and Muslims shall have one and the same law regarding blows and accusations."²⁹ These were concessions offered to consolidate a new power and could be withdrawn once it was secure. Following widespread anti-Jewish riots in Castile and Aragon in 1381, there was great pressure on Jews to convert to Christianity. In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain, a growing wave of intolerant homogenization afflicted the status not only of Jews or Muslims but also of those who converted to Christianity or were the descendants of converts. Those who openly professed Judaism were eventually expelled in 1492. Ethnically Jewish *conversos* became the target of persecution in the fifteenth century on the usually spurious grounds that they were continuing clandestinely the practice of their former religion. The *converso* success in gaining royal and professional appointments aroused the envy and hostility of Old Christians. In Toledo in 1449, the city council promulgated laws stipulating that *limpieza de sangre* was a precondition for officeholders. The category "tainted blood" undoubtedly had a mainly racial and national content, though bastards of Christian Spanish descent were also barred from holding office. The pressure to establish the principle of *limpieza de sangre* came mainly from plebeian Spaniards who employed it against what they saw as an aristocratic-*converso* alliance. From 1480 the problem of the *conversos* was dealt with by the Holy Office or Inquisition. Out of a *converso* population of around 100,000, some 2,000 were handed to the secular arm to be burned at the stake, others suffered imprisonment and fines, and large numbers fled into exile; the persecution of the remaining descendants of *conversos* abated after the 1520s. The Inquisition still vetted aspirants to preferment but did not organize regular autos de fe. The racial-religious stigmatization of New Christians led to terrible results but not to enslavement. It was designed to exclude them from advantageous employments; so far as the authorities were concerned it permitted special fiscal exactions. Although a very few may have ended up as convicts (or exceptionally as slaves), it would have been

²⁹ Quoted in Bartlett, *Making of Europe*, 132, 206.

unseemly to subject most New Christians, many of whom had the manners of gentlemen (*hidalgos*), to menial employment. Jews and New Christians were eventually either expelled, killed, or absorbed without a trace. *Limpieza de sangre* as a condition for obtaining royal or clerical appointment was also subsequently used to exclude *moriscos* and those of Native American or African descent.³⁰

Slavery in Iberia's Christian Kingdoms

Spain and Portugal, the two powers responsible for the initial European discovery, conquest, and settlement of the Americas, were heirs to kingdoms that were prime exponents of the territorial aggrandizement of western Christendom. Enslavement, though of fluctuating importance, remained part of the institutional repertoire of the Iberian powers. The Roman, Byzantine, and Visigothic practice of slavery influenced the legal precepts of Christian Iberia and so did the centuries of front-line confrontation with Islam. Following that moment, in the eleventh century, when according to Bonnassie slavery was extinct in the Christian kingdoms, it reappeared in the interstices of the Christian kingdoms as they undertook the Reconquest and participated in the revived Levantine trade during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. As the free populations were mobilized for conquest and colonization, they found inspiration in the teachings of Isidore of Seville yet also found it natural to abstain from enslaving fellow Christians.³¹ In the Reconquest itself, slavery played a role as an occasional instrument of Christian power and means of forced acculturation. The monarchs sometimes preferred to accept the submission of Muslim communities, which would then owe them a special tribute. The Christian kingdoms were by no means single-mindedly bent on Reconquest. They pursued quarrels with one another, engaged in pacific exchanges with Muslims, and participated in the growth of Mediterranean trade. These activities were as much responsible for the presence of slaves in Christian Spain as the crusade against Islam,

³⁰ J. H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain: 1469–1716* (Harmondsworth, 1970), 106–10, 220–28, 305–08; Henry Kamen, “The Secret of the Inquisition,” *New York Review of Books* (Feb. 1, 1996), 4–6. When *converso* office-seekers sought to prove honorable descent, they naturally pointed to their Jewish lineage and the special role of the children of Israel. B. Netanyahu argues that “it was only the constant harping of their foes on their racial perversion and inferiority that forced them (the conversos) to come up with the opposite idea—namely that of their original racial excellence, with which they defended not only their own but their ancestors’ honor. Actually, however, the conversos were interested not in superiority but in equal opportunity. Accordingly they had little regard for racial differentiation between social classes as well. They believed that differences between social classes should be based on individual talents, merits and achievements, rather than on lineages,” in his *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth-Century Spain* (New York, 1996), 979–80. While there probably were strikingly “modern” aspects to the outlook of many *conversos*, the terms in which this is couched are anachronistic. According to other accounts, *conversos* took pride in the purity of their own lineage and understood that if their lineage was not accepted as honorable their own condition would be debased. See Israël Shahak, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion: The Weight of Three Thousand Years* (London, 1994), 59–61, and Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington, D. C., 1996), 100–15.

³¹ Bonnassie, *From Slavery to Feudalism in South-Western Europe*, 55, 74, 93, 102.

since the numbers of permanent slaves acquired by purchase may have been as great as those seized in slave-raiding *razzias* carried out in the Muslim areas. Those seized in a *razzia* were usually offered back to their family or community through the practice of *rescate*—the ransoming of prisoners for cash, which seems often to have been more advantageous than slaveholding or slave trading. Only captives who were already slaves were likely to be kept in that condition. Slaves did not constitute the fundamental laboring population in any part of Spain. They were used in domestic and artisanal roles or for particularly unpleasant and hard labor.

The religious justification for holding some Muslim slaves was that slavery would encourage conversion as well as ensure a proper subordination of the infidel. In 1206, Pope Innocent III expressed concern that masters in Spain were becoming alarmed at the prospect of conversion among their slaves: "When a public baptismal ceremony is celebrated in your church, and many Saracens gather for it eagerly seeking baptism, their owners, whether Jews or even Christians, fearing to lose a worldly profit, presume to forbid them."³² The new doctrine did not, as noted, argue that a slave would become free upon conversion or at any definite future date; it did formally increase the slave's rights. In the peninsula, as elsewhere, social and economic developments, albeit unevenly, diminished the significance of slavery and furnished a more favorable context for observance of restraint in slaveholding. Likewise, respect for a Christian monarch would prevent enslavement of his subjects. Even so, it is likely that such factors—considered in more detail below—were still assisted by Latin Christendom's mixed experience of taking the offensive against Islam. The experience of the Crusades and the Reconquest brought home to Latin Christians the need for greater religious solidarity. The Crusader kingdom of Outre Mer came to grief in part because of the harshness of the Crusaders toward local Christians. The Christian kingdoms of Spain gradually evolved a new ethic, influenced by that prevailing among their Muslim neighbors. For one Christian to hold another as a slave seemed less justifiable than may have been the case in other parts of Europe.

The celebrated codification of Alfonso X, el Sábio, in the thirteenth century, *Las Siete Partidas*, can be seen as a transitional document, moving toward a milder slave doctrine than Isidore had allowed. Where the *Siete Partidas* did permit Christians to be slaves, it sought to alleviate the harshness of their condition and protect their ability to lead Christian lives. The code permitted individuals, municipal corporations, and religious bodies to own slaves and envisaged several routes to manumission, providing that the slaves gave good service and displayed religious conformity. Those who were rightly enslaved included those captured in war who were enemies of the faith, children of a slave mother, and those who had voluntarily sold themselves into slavery. Two further categories were added to this basic list, children of priests who were to become slaves of the religious institution to which their father belonged and bad Christians who sold war materiel to the

³² Quoted in Richard Fletcher, *Moorish Spain* (New York, 1992), 140.

Moors. Masters were forbidden to treat slaves cruelly, to starve them, or to interfere sexually with their wives or daughters; a master breaching these rules could be brought before a court (by whom is not stated), and if the offence were proved, the slaves would be sold to another master. A virgin who was raped by her master or hired out as a prostitute would be manumitted by the court. No infidel could hold a Christian slave, and any slaveholder indicted as a counterfeiter would lose his slaves. Slaves who were Christians could marry one another, with their master's permission, which could not be denied without proof that his interests were damaged thereby. Masters could let their slaves ply a trade, turning over a part of their earnings and eventually buy their freedom. Race was not mentioned. Notwithstanding the attempts to restrain masters, it was still baldly stated that slavery was "the basest and most wretched condition into which anyone could fall because man, who is the most free and noble of all God's creatures, becomes thereby in the power of another, who can do with him what he wishes as with any property, whether living or dead." A slave's duty to his master had precedence over his duty to his wife. Slaves' ability to invoke the protection of the *Siete Partidas* was very limited on a rural estate, slightly greater in towns, if the slave had free relations or protectors. The stipulations of the *Siete Partidas* are described clearly as laws, yet many of them were little more than exhortations—for example, the *Siete Partidas* lay down that kings should take great care of their people's welfare, be faithful to their wives, and rigorously abstain from bad language.³³

The *Siete Partidas* were the product of a society where slavery was mainly domestic and temporary in character and where slaves were usually drawn from some religious outgroup. Yet they did uphold the lawfulness of slavery, concede wide powers to the master, and permit enslavement under some conditions of fellow Christians. In areas conquered from Muslims, those who continued to resist militarily were indeed liable to enslavement. Secular leaders usually negotiated terms of capitulation so that the incorporation of the Muslim *ta'ifas*, or small kingdoms, involved promises of good treatment to the mass of Moorish subjects. While most became a subject caste or left for Muslim areas, few remained as slaves for long. The Muslim cultivators in the countryside were often *exaricos* or sharecroppers: sometimes they owed tribute to a new lord, their rights contracted, and they were subjected to forcible conversion. The essential formula of feudal colonization was to combine the repopulation of conquered land—that is, its settlement by free Christians offered land on attractive terms—with the forced assimilation of subject peoples, who could only retain some access to land or employment by conversion. Cultural discrimination and coercion aimed to prevent the Christian immigrants going native and to promote eventual assimilation.

³³ Gregorio López, ed., *Las Siete Partidas del Rey Don Alfonso el Sábido: Cotejados con Varios Códices Antiguos*, 4 vols. (Paris, [1850?]), esp. Partida Cuarta, Título II, Ley 11; Título V, Ley 1; Título XXI (on slavery), and Título XXII (on liberty). The king's duties are set out in the Segunda Partida.

The trading empire of the Catalans and Aragonese in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries brought them into contact with the Levantine commerce in slaves and sugar. There were reported to be 2,800 slaves in the countryside in Majorca in 1328; by 1400 the slave population of Catalonia was estimated at 4,375. The Christian kingdoms exported some slaves to Granada and imported cotton, sugar, indigo, and wood in return. In Granada as in Muslim Spain, slaves were administrators and soldiers as well as servants and craftsmen. The first African slaves in Spain were probably sold by North African merchants to the Muslim *ta'ifas*. In the course of the Reconquest, the Christian forces seized some Africans. An elite corps of 3,000 African slave soldiers put up a stiff resistance to forces personally commanded by King Ferdinand at the siege of Malaga in 1487; following rendition of the city, a hundred of these were sent as a gift to the pope. Other Africans and last-ditch defenders were distributed as slaves to those who had conducted the siege or were sold to defray expenses. The surrounding Muslim towns and villages swore allegiance as *mudejars*, Muslim subjects of the Catholic monarchs, in the hope of conserving their property and status. For the time being, this was accepted. The Capitulations at Granada in 1492 stipulated that captive slaves in Moorish hands who managed to escape to the territory covered by the Christian rulers would be free; specifically excluded from this clause were Canary Islanders and black slaves from "the (Atlantic) islands." Following resistance or rebellion, those alleged to be involved would be killed or could be enslaved, and the remaining Muslims were pressured either to leave or to convert to Christianity. The aim of the Catholic monarchs was to disperse the Muslims, not to conserve them as an enslaved and hostile mass.³⁴

From the 1440s, Portuguese voyages down the coast of Africa led to the arrival of a stream of African captives, sold as slaves on the peninsula. By 1500, about a tenth of the population of Lisbon and Seville was African slaves. These were owned in ones, twos, and threes, generally working as servants, craftworkers, or menials. They occupied the social roles that for some time had been filled elsewhere in Europe by the so-called *esclavos* or *escravos*. Thus by the sixteenth century, Castile's slave population was swelled by African and Berber captives purchased from the Portuguese; as with those from North Africa, they mainly became urban servants. A study of slave inventories in Malaga in the 1570s reveals a wide ethnoreligious gamut, including *berberisco negro cristiano*, *berberisco moro*, *negro de la nacion de moros*, *berberisco mulatta*, *negro de nacion portuguesa*, *cristiana de casta de moros*, *negro de guinea*, and *negro de la India de Portugal*. Of a total of 493 slaves, 185 were described as Moros and 78 as Christians; one was described as a Jew and one a Turk.³⁵

³⁴ J. N. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms, 1250–1516*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1976, 1978), 1:86–89, 160, 2:24–27, 83–87; Jacques Heers, *Eslavos y servientes en las sociedades mediterraneas durante la Edad Media* (Valencia, 1989); L. P. Harvey, *Islamic Spain, 1250–1500* (Chicago and London, 1990), 294–301, 317–18.

³⁵ Bernard Vincent, *Minorias y marginados en la Espana del Siglo XVI* (Granada, 1987), 239–60, esp. 243–44.

In sixteenth-century Spain, there was still a large population of Christian *moriscos*, most of them peasants in Valencia and Granada and subject to harsh exploitation despite their supposed conversion. The *morisco* New Christians rose in revolt on a number of occasions and were eventually expelled in 1608–1612. This final episode in the eradication of religious and racial difference affirmed Spain's national identity and was accompanied by a new spirit of civic egalitarianism, with a softening of the fierce social distinctions that had characterized feudal Iberia. Slavery allowed for subordinate or correctional inclusion, not the total exclusion or suppression that was the eventual fate of the Jews and Moors. Those Moors who were enslaved were generally not expelled, since they were regarded as part of the household of their owners. The expulsion of the *moriscos* was undertaken at a time when the royal authorities wished to compensate for the humiliation involved in agreeing to a truce with the Dutch rebels. The expelled *moriscos* themselves were not welcome in North Africa, and many were killed.³⁶

The expulsion of the *moriscos*, following that of the *conversos* and Jews, highlighted in a striking and terrible fashion ethnocultural assumptions that appear to have been indissolubly wedded to the religious faith of the epoch. The proceedings against both *conversos* and *moriscos* were accompanied by repeated and obsessive attempts on the part of the religious and secular authorities to prove that those accused were guilty of heresy and deception. It need not be doubted that pressured or forcible conversions were often insincere. On the other hand, before about 1480, it does seem that many *conversos* or their children genuinely practiced as Christians; this was also the case for at least some *moriscos*, or their children, in the early decades of the sixteenth century. But once the course was set for persecution and expulsion, the approach of the authorities was not to build on and encourage signs of conversion but rather to seize on any and every real or supposed proof of heresy and apostasy. If a *converso* or *morisco* refused to eat pork, this was regarded as *prima facie* evidence that they were not real Christians. Failure to speak Castilian was taken as a sign of religious deviance or treachery. If a *converso* or *morisco* woman wore colored clothes, this was suspect. Family get-togethers coinciding with Jewish or Muslim festivals, and even regular washing, were also regarded with deep suspicion. To satisfy their religious or secular critics, the *conversos* and *moriscos* were required, in effect, to adopt the culture as well as the religion of the Christian Spaniards—and sometimes even that was not enough.³⁷

The expulsion of the *moriscos* seems to exemplify the sort of racial exclusion that produced slavery in the Americas. Why, then, were the *moriscos* not enslaved and sent to the New World? At the very time of the expulsions, Spanish Americans were buying tens of thousands of captive Africans. One reason was that *moriscos* were considered a security threat; the expulsion itself was partly motivated by the argument that “the Moorish nation of

³⁶ Elliott, *Imperial Spain*, 305–08.

³⁷ See the documents contained in Rodrigo de Zayas, *Les Morisques et le Racisme d'État* (Paris, 1992).

Valencia" was a potential ally of Muslim or Protestant invaders. *Moriscos* had long been excluded from the New World on the ground that they might assist enemies of the crown. This was not a decisive consideration, however, since African slaves not only often rebelled but also collaborated with the English. It does seem that the possibility of enslaving the *moriscos* and selling them, if necessary, to Muslim purchasers was also unacceptable to the Spanish royal authorities on the grounds that it would have been dishonorable. Muslims would have purchased *moriscos* only if thoroughly convinced that they were infidels; on the whole, Muslims did regard *moriscos* as renegades, but the Spanish authorities were the last who could afford to acknowledge this.

Slavery and the Slavs

The term "slave" in all western European languages refers simply to Slavs, who were seen as congenitally heretic or pagan. Between the tenth and the sixteenth centuries, the Slav lands furnished the Vikings and Italian traders with their main source of slaves, primarily from the eastern Adriatic and the Black Sea. Eventually, the eastern Adriatic became Europe's main "slave coast." Daniel Evans explains this in terms of a "crisis slavery," namely, that "brutal means whereby a region, torn by violence and reduced to misery, converts surplus population into a resource."³⁸ The feuding peoples of the Caucasus or Bosnia, where Latin Catholics were pitted against Bogomil heretics or followers of Greek liturgy, furnished a steady supply of supposedly heretical captives. On one occasion, a Hungarian girl was able to bring a case against enslavement in an Italian court on the grounds that she was a Latin Christian; the court ruled that she was not a full slave but owed her purchaser the price he had paid to "ransom" her from her captors and must serve him until the obligation had been fully discharged.³⁹ This convenient formula, which primarily applied to Latin Christians who lacked a protector, was sometimes also used to "redeem" many held captive by the Moors in the peninsula and reduce them to a new servitude.

If slavery had largely disappeared from western and northern Europe, the same could not be said of Muscovy, where slaves comprised as much as a tenth of the population in the late Middle Ages and early modern period. In Russia, slaves were not often used for large-scale agricultural work but rather engaged as menial domestic servants or, in a few cases, as stewards, treasurers, or bailiffs. Some soldiers were technically slaves.⁴⁰ The precarious conditions prevailing in the steppes could make the slave condition attractive with individuals selling themselves, or being sold by their parents, into slavery. The most remarkable feature of Russian slavery is that slaveowners and enslaved were of the same ethnicity—though it appears that the sense of a common ethnicity was weak, with aristocrats cultivating the myth that they

³⁸ Evans, "Slave Coast of Europe," *Slavery and Abolition*, 6 (1985), 41–58, quotation on 42.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁰ Richard Hellie, *Slavery in Russia, 1450–1720* (Chicago, 1982).

were really Italian, French, or German. A weak ethnic identity combined with a strong religious identity led individuals to define themselves as *pravoslavnye* or Orthodox, rather than as Russian, a description that would anyway have been inaccurate for many.⁴¹ The Orthodox church supported slavery, owned slaves, and upheld Justinian's slave code. The prevalence of slavery in Russia shows that, by itself, adherence to Christianity did not prevent the enslavement of fellow Christians.

The Eclipse of Serfdom and Rise of Agrarian Capitalism

The last remnants of slavery in England did not survive the impact of the Black Death, the Peasants' revolt, and the Wars of the Roses. These events also set the scene for a weakening of other forms of servitude, combined with a strengthening of the role of the market and the effective claims of the state.

Robert Brenner has pointed out that the severe depopulation in the wake of the Black Death had quite different results in eastern and western Europe, depending of the outcome of peasant resistance and revolt in the two areas.⁴² East of the Elbe, peasant resistance was completely crushed and the so-called second serfdom imposed. In many parts of Europe west of the Elbe, landlords, facing the same labor shortage as those in the east, attempted to impose a return to the harsher forms of servitude but failed. Although peasant revolts were put down, these should be seen as only the most visible and dramatic expressions of peasant aspirations that also found outlet in myriad local tests of strength and in the varying ability of serfs to escape the control of their lord. The extent and forms of peasant success in checking the serfdom offensive differed in France and England. In France, the peasants not only won their freedom, but significant numbers also acquired control of land. In England, peasants were able to assert their freedom, but the lords retained control of the greater part of the land. The English serfdoms became landlords, engaging tenant farmers to work their estates with the aid of free wage labor. This new social formula led to a market in consumption goods and in means of production. Competition between producers encouraged them to look for improved methods of cultivation, either economizing on labor, which was now an identifiable cost, or raising yields. The result was the emergence of a precocious agrarian capitalism that, by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, raised rent rolls and widened the internal market. There were increasingly unimportant residues of villenage, which was never suppressed as a legal form. Looking back on this waning of villenage and slavery in 1565, Sir Thomas Smith wrote: "Neither of the one sort nor of the other have we any number in England. And of the first I never knewe any in the realme in my time; of the seconde

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 392.

⁴² Robert Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development," *Past and Present*, No. 70 (1976). See also T. H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin, *The Brenner Debate* (Cambridge, 1985).

so fewe there be, that it is almost not worth the speaking. But our lawe doth acknowledge them in both these sortes, . . . I thinke in both France and England the chaunge of religion to a more gentle, humane and more equall sort . . . caused this olde kinde of servile servitude and slaverie to be brought into that moderation . . . and litle by litle extinguished it finding more civill and gentle meanes and more equall to have that doone which in time of gentility [heathenness, i.e., pagan antiquity] servitude or bondage did."⁴³ This formulation implied that the eclipse of slavery by more moderate religious precepts was sustained by new and more effective social arrangements for inducing laborers to work. In Ireland, where moderate means of coercing the Irish were not discovered, gentleness and equality were replaced by rapacity and pitiless repression, though not outright slavery.

As a former counselor to Protector Somerset, Smith was in a good position to assess the significance of "slavery" in Tudor Britain. During his brief period of power, Somerset sought to address the problems of poverty, unemployment, and vagrancy in what may be seen as the first attempt to deal with social questions aggravated by the rise of capitalism. Somerset's measures have sometimes been applauded, because they appeared to acknowledge that private charity was not enough and that the state itself had responsibilities for the poor. As part of this novel concept of social legislation, Somerset also introduced the penalty of "slavery" into his Vagrancy Act of 1547. Vagrants who rejected offers of gainful employment would be sentenced to some years of slavery, during which time they would be forced to work, deprived of freedom of movement, and obliged to wear distinctive dress. This measure proved impossible to implement, being opposed not only by those at whom it was directed but also by laborers who did not wish to be undercut by convict labor and magistrates who thought it provocative. There were few takers for the proposed slave laborers. After two years the act was abandoned.⁴⁴

It is possible that the Vagrancy Act had been inspired in part by Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), where slaves were used for several unpleasant and morally dubious tasks such as the slaughter of animals. More refers in his preface to the deplorable condition of England and the need to combat poverty, idleness, and discontent. It is as if the very growth of social freedom itself prompted those in authority to thoughts of a corrective discipline. More's supposed informant remarks: "By the way, the slaves that I've occasionally referred to are not, as you might imagine, non-combatant prisoners-of-war, slaves by birth, or purchases from foreign slave markets. They're either Utopian convicts or, much more often, condemned criminals from other countries, who are acquired in large numbers, sometimes for a small payment, but usually for nothing. Both types of slave are kept hard at work in chain-gangs, though Utopians are treated worse than foreigners. The idea is that it's all the more deplorable if a person who has had the advantage of a

⁴³ Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, ed. Mary Dewar (Cambridge, 1982), 135–36.

⁴⁴ See C.S.L. Davies, "Slavery and Protector Somerset: The Vagrancy Act of 1547," *Economic History Review*, 2d Ser., 19 (1966), 533–49. See Davies, *Peace, Print, and Protestantism, 1450–1558* (London, 1977), 261, 266–87, for the context.

first-rate education and a thoroughly moral upbringing still insists on becoming a criminal—so the punishment should be all the more severe. Another type of slave is the working-class foreigner who, rather than live in wretched poverty at home, volunteers for slavery in Utopia. Such people are treated with respect, and with almost as much kindness as Utopian citizens, except that they're made to work harder, because they're used to it."⁴⁵ The offenses carrying the penalty of servitude included adultery, failure to perform labor, and unauthorized travel. In the preliminary discussion of non-Utopian societies, a species of slavery is also prescribed as the punishment for theft; such slaves are to wear the same color clothing and to be available for hire from the public authorities. The severity of the servitude recommended in *Utopia* was tempered by its comparison to the death penalty of Tudor legislation and because it was not necessarily permanent in character—good behavior could lead to emancipation. "The normal penalty for any major crime is slavery. They say it's just as unpleasant for the criminals as capital punishment, and more useful to society. . . . But the prospects of those who accept the situation aren't absolutely hopeless. If, after being tamed by years of hardship, they show signs of feeling really sorry, not merely for themselves, but for what they've done, their sentence is either reduced or cancelled altogether, sometimes at the discretion of the Mayor and sometimes by a general plebiscite."⁴⁶

More's utilitarian conception of servitude is complemented by the justification for the colonial expansion of the Utopians. "If the whole island becomes overpopulated, they tell off a certain number of people from each town to go and start a colony at the nearest point on the mainland where there's a large area that hasn't been cultivated by the local inhabitants. Such colonies are governed by the Utopians, but the natives are allowed to join in if they want to. When this happens, natives and colonists soon combine to form a single community with a single way of life, to the great advantage of both parties—for, under Utopian management, land that used to be thought incapable of producing anything for one lot of people produces plenty for two. If the natives won't do what they're told, they're expelled from the area marked out for annexation. If they try to resist the Utopians declare war—for they consider war perfectly justifiable, when one country denies another its natural right to derive nourishment from any soil which the original owners are not using themselves, but are merely holding on to as a worthless piece of property."⁴⁷ The supposed basis for English colonization in the Americas was thus clearly anticipated. To some extent, More's Utopia reflected tendencies he had observed in the precocious colonialism of Tudor

⁴⁵ Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Paul Turner (London, 1961), 101–02. See also 51–53, 70, 81, 84, 95, 101–02. In the 16th century, More's *servitus* was often translated as "bondman" rather than slave, but it was explained that "all vile service, all slavery and drudgery, is done by bondmen"; More's *Utopia*, ed. John Warrington (New York, 1970), 73.

⁴⁶ More, *Utopia*, trans. Turner, 104–05.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 79–80. The discussion on p. 93 makes it clear that utilitarian principles, a public-spirited conception of "pleasure," reign in Utopia.

Britain. More's ideas themselves may also have helped to shape the colonizing project; the first English translation of his Latin text appeared in 1551 and went through many editions. More challenges some features of Tudor social relations and endorses others, displaying an experimental approach to social arrangements in which servitude or colonialism was perfectly justifiable if either promoted the more intensive use of natural and human resources.

Both More and Protector Somerset envisaged slavery as a correctional device wielded by the state rather than as a resource commanded by the subject, and in this their conception contrasted with the plantation slavery that appeared in the Atlantic islands and New World. The withering away of slavery in western Europe reflected political as well as socioeconomic developments. Medieval towns had long been wont to boast that serfs or slaves could not breathe their "free air"; simply to live for a year in a town such as Toulouse, after 1226, conferred freedom. Rodney Hilton writes: "When the Commune of Bologna emancipated the serfs of its *contado* in 1256, the book called the *Paradisus*, in which the names of masters and serfs were entered, had a preamble that serfdom was due to the fall of man, freedom being man's natural condition, and Bologna the home of freedom."⁴⁸ City states and nascent kingdoms found that such declarations attracted the support of the common people—the latter, free themselves, preferred to live in a polity with other free people and not with masters and slaves. Sovereigns could easily find irksome the absolute power over his chattel claimed by the slaveholder; there was the suspicion that the slave magnate would make a poor subject.

The Renaissance did little to weaken ideas supportive of the legitimacy of slavery. The rediscovery of classical authorities did nothing to undermine belief in the lawfulness of slavery. Indeed, by diffusing a greater awareness of the cultural achievement of antiquity and contributing to a sense that late medieval Christendom was its legitimate heir, the Renaissance nourished a sense of cultural superiority that dovetailed with the classical Aristotelian doctrine that barbarians were natural slaves.⁴⁹ Newly conquered peoples of any sort could be seen as requiring the civilizing influence of colonial subjection and, at the limit, enslavement. Religious adherence and religious imagery usually had the last word in justifications for enslavement, which is why the pagans of Lithuania, the Bogomil heretics of Bosnia, captives from the Caucasus, the Muslims of Andalusia, and the Jews had all been seen as potential slaves in Christian Europe of the later medieval period. When the Spanish and the Portuguese attempted to conquer and colonize the Canary Islands in the fifteenth century in order, they claimed, to promote Christianity, they sought papal blessing for the enterprise. King Duarte I of Portugal observed that the inhabitants needed governance: "The nearly wild men who inhabit the forests are not united by a common religion, nor are they bound by the chains of law, they are lacking normal social intercourse,

⁴⁸ Hilton, *Decline of Serfdom in Medieval England*, 2d ed., 28.

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *The Politics*, ed. Trevor J. Saunders, trans. T. A. Sinclair (Harmondsworth, 1981), 79.

living in the country like animals.”⁵⁰ The papacy was inclined to accept that colonial expansion could be justified by reference to a civilizing and Christianizing mission. Spanish and Portuguese requests for papal recognition of their claims were usually forthcoming; eventually, at the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, the pope divided the zone of discovery between the two Catholic powers. Occasionally the papacy protested that a license to colonize and convert differed from a right to enslave. The colonizers of the Canaries were prone to claim that native conversions were a sham and that only the rigorous tutelage of slavery could bring home to them the value of a settled life, hard work, Christian marriage, fidelity, and the renunciation of superstition. But where there were any clerics who took their mission seriously, they soon discovered that enslavement itself compromised the work of conversion. There were a series of revolts by the natives, but eventually the cycle of colonization was completed. The remnants of the indigenous peoples comprised about a quarter of the population; the enslavement of natives of the islands was replaced, for a while, by the introduction of Africans.⁵¹

The sixteenth century witnessed the consolidation of a process of state formation in England, Spain, France, and the Netherlands that appealed to concepts of nationhood and the liberty of the subject. Monarchs had not infrequently competed with municipalities and parlements to present themselves as champions of their subjects' true rights. The Valois and Bourbons in France, the British Tudors, the Spanish Habsburgs, and the House of Orange in the Low Countries sought in different ways to associate themselves with national values and declare themselves champions of true liberty. In conjunction with the withering away of servitude and in a context of sharp international rivalry, appeals to national sentiment naturally chimed in with celebration of a notion of civil liberty that, while still distant from the concepts of modern liberalism, thought that the national soil should not be sullied with slavery. The new type of state, whether absolutist or bourgeois, found slaveholder claims in Europe to be derogatory to its own power. Jean Bodin, advocate of absolute sovereignty, attacked slaveholding in *Les Six Livres de la République* in the 1570s, arguing that it had been rejected by public opinion; he also urged that it would be folly to admit once again so provocative and troublesome an institution. The decision of an English court in 1567 to prevent the entry of a Russian slave, the declaration of the parlement of Guyenne in 1571 that France, “the mother of liberty,” could not tolerate slavery, and the decision of Middleberg in the Netherlands to free a boatload of Africans in 1596 all reflected versions of this new “free air” doctrine.⁵² A form of domestic slavery remained in Spain, but the expulsion of

⁵⁰ Duarte I, quoted in Peter Hulme, “Tales of Distinction: European Ethnography and the Caribbean,” in Schwartz, ed., *Implicit Understandings*, 187.

⁵¹ Eduardo Aznar Vallejo, “The Conquests of the Canary Islands,” in Schwartz, ed., *Implicit Understandings*, 134–56.

⁵² Jean Bodin, *Les Six Livres de la République*, 4th ed. (Paris, 1579), 45–66. Davis points out that Bodin was present in Toulouse when the 1571 case inspired the declaration of the Guyenne parlement and the Latin edition of *Six Livres* was more uncompromisingly antislavery

the *moriscos* removed from the population the bulk of those who were especially oppressed and degraded; regulations were introduced around the same time making the import of African slaves to the metropolis difficult. Even in England, France, and the Netherlands the outlawing of the slave condition was an ad hoc affair, unsupported by clear general legislation, and it had no force outside the metropolis, where nationals of those states soon vied to participate in the Atlantic slave trade. Nevertheless, it is significant that, beyond a scattering of servants in Spain and Portugal, very few true slaves remained in western Europe by the end of the sixteenth century.

Bodin was unusual among philosophers in condemning slavery. Richard Tuck has drawn attention to the paradox that the theories of natural rights that emerged in the late medieval period and enjoyed widespread influence down to the end of the seventeenth century acknowledged the validity of slavery. Aquinas had given a certain impulse to rights theory when he launched his critique of the practice of apostolic poverty by the Franciscan order. He held that "possessions and slavery were not the products of nature, but were made by human reason for the advantage of human life."⁵³ The Franciscan claim not to be holding property was shown to be at odds with their recourse to personal consumption. Jean Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris, developed these points in a direction that led to acceptance of the view that a person was capable of bartering away his natural liberty and in certain circumstances might be presumed to have done so. The Gersonian approach was developed and radicalized in the sixteenth century with results that had a direct bearing on the Atlantic slave trade. As Tuck observes, "For a Gersonian, liberty was property and could therefore be exchanged in the same way and under the same terms as any other property. . . . Once again (and this is a recurrent, perhaps *the* recurrent theme in the history of rights theories) a theory of rights permitted practices which an antisubjectivist theory prohibited. This theoretical difficulty was important given the murky character of the events in their own countries which led to the Africans being enslaved. The white men generally found them already traded as slaves at the coast, and had merely to be confident that a fairly wide variety of slaveries was in principle permissible in order to be able to trade them themselves with a clear conscience." In Tuck's view the influence of this type of rights theory is clearly present in the writings of Hugo Grotius, John Selden, and Thomas Hobbes, explaining why they all "openly endorsed such institutions as slavery."⁵⁴

The Reformation did not lead to any theological questioning of the validity of slavery. Luther and Calvin both emphasized the necessity of respecting secular subordination and private property. Luther even urged

than the French edition, in *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 111, 112n. The Guyenne declaration is cited in Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*, 1:851; for the action of the Middleberg authorities see Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Anti-Slavery* (London, 1987), 14, 172.

⁵³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, quoted in Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: Their Origin and Development* (Cambridge, 1979), 19.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 49, 3.

Christian slaves in Turkish hands not to seek to steal themselves away from their masters.⁵⁵ A few Catholics worried about the legitimacy of buying slaves on the African coast, and some Protestants had problems with the idea of slaves within their own religious community. At the Synod of Dordt in 1618, a controversy over whether baptized slaves, especially baptized children born to slaves in Christian households, should eventually be manumitted, was not resolved.⁵⁶ The tendency of the Reformed churches to extend recognition to those within the community of believers was largely neutralized by justifications for enslavement found in the Bible; the availability of vernacular editions gave wide currency to many fanciful notions to be found in this text as well as giving license to interpreters of every sort.

The Curse of Noah

Africans were very rarely held as slaves either in the ancient world or in medieval Europe. Nevertheless, by the early modern epoch biblical reading and interpretation had diffused a myth that linked slavery to black Africans. The Europeans who first sailed to Africa or settled in the Americas came from lands where Latin Christianity furnished what Michel de Certeau has called "the totalising framework of reference."⁵⁷ Even the less devout traders and colonists were likely to be comforted if they found biblical sanction for slave trading and slaveholding, especially in those parts of Europe where such activities were now abominated by a new public opinion.

The Bible condoned enslavement and furnished a variety of hints as to the type of peoples who could be subjected to it. According to Holy Scripture, all humans were descended from one or another of the Sons of Noah. There were three of these sons—Shem, Japheth, and Ham—and Ham's son Canaan had been condemned by Noah to enslavement. Thus we read in Genesis: "And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: and he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren."⁵⁸

Ham had committed an offence against his father's patriarchal dignity; according to patriarchal logic, Ham was punished by the degradation of his son. The curse of slavery is somehow associated with the beginnings of hus-

⁵⁵ Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 124, 128; Herbert Marcuse, "A Study on Authority," in Marcuse, *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, trans. Joris de Bres (London, 1972), 56–78.

⁵⁶ See Robert C.-H. Shell, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652–1838* (Hanover, N. H., and London, 1994), 334–35.

⁵⁷ Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York, 1988), 227.

⁵⁸ Genesis 9:20–26.

bandry and with drunkenness induced by wine. The medieval and early modern Christian believed that the passage explained the inherited taint of enslavement. This sense of the passage was reinforced by another from Leviticus in which it is said that the people of Israel should practice two different sorts of enslavement, according to the origin of the slave, with the more severe sort strictly reserved for those who are not themselves children of Israel: "For they are my servants, which I have brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen. Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear thy God. Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possessions. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever; but over your brethren the children of Israel ye shall not rule one over another with rigour."⁵⁹

The Old Testament was not unusual in prescribing different regimes of servitude for insiders and outsiders. As Moses Finley observes, in the ancient world and in most societies, slavery was a fate reserved for vulnerable aliens.⁶⁰ But most slave systems have had difficulty perpetuating slavery down through successive generations; usually the children or grandchildren of slaves, if any, would begin to achieve a partial elevation of their condition. The conjunction of Noah's curse and the prescriptions of Leviticus may have helped convert slavery into a hereditary condition. Genesis identifies Canaan's issue with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose offenses also recommended them for captivity—though the precise sexual offence committed by the Sodomites was not specified. The genealogies contained in the Bible maintain that the Sons of Ham helped to people North Africa and the land of Cush, as Ethiopia was called by biblical writers. But did all Sons of Ham necessarily share in the curse placed on Canaan? This was open to dispute.

Between the fourth and the twelfth centuries, a number of Middle Eastern Christians, Jewish rabbis, and Muslims elaborated on the biblical account of Noah's curse as an explanation of the blackness and enslavement of Nubians, Ethiopians, and other African peoples.⁶¹ During these centuries,

⁵⁹ Leviticus 25:42–46. I have quoted the King James Bible because this was the one most used by 17th- and 18th-century Englishmen; use of "servant" or "bondman" instead of "slave" for *avaday*, *eved*, and *amay* suggests a certain uneasiness. For an interpretation of this passage and parallels in the legal codes of Solon and Hammurabi see Bernard S. Jackson, "Biblical Laws of Slavery: A Comparative Approach," in Leonie Archer, ed., *Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour* (London, 1988), 86–101.

⁶⁰ M. I. Finley, "Slavery," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 14 (New York, 1968), 307–13.

⁶¹ David Aaron points out that the biblical passages themselves set up the association among blackness, the Sons of Ham, and servitude. He argues that later elaborations, whether by Christian, Jewish, or Muslim authors, only embroidered a biblical core: "there is enough of a textual handle in Genesis itself to make the Talmud irrelevant to the justification of black servitude. That is to say, Christians who claimed the Old Testament as their own, were not in need

it became common for black African slaves to be acquired in the Middle East, mainly for menial employment. Among the early Christian fathers, Origen adopted and spread a version of this notion, somewhat softened by contrasting the virtue of many blacks with the inward blackness (sinfulness) of so many whites. St. Augustine argued that just as Christians were spiritual descendants of Abraham so sinners and heretics were descendants of Ham. "The condition of slavery is justly imposed on the sinner. That is why we do not hear of a slave anywhere in the Scriptures until Noah, the just man, punished his son's sin with this word."⁶² Augustine saw the Donatists, with their social message and Mauritanian and Numidian base, as the most dangerous heretics facing the church, worthy of the harshest penalties; these heretics, "hot with sin," were figuratively and literally Sons of Ham. However, he also believed all men and women to be so tainted by original sin that all deserved the punishment of slavery.

The Christians of the late empire and Dark Ages continued to hold mainly white slaves, but they also began to entertain the notion, unknown to the earlier classical world, that there was an affinity between blackness and slavery, blackness and sin, blackness and the Devil.⁶³ These ideas were implicitly or explicitly metaphorical. They were somewhat qualified by other biblical images of black Africans that associated them with positive religious roles; in portrayals of the three kings paying homage to the infant Jesus, one was usually an African, and other holy or noble persons were black or Ethiopian, such as the Queen of Sheba and Moses' wife, Zipporah.

African slaves arrived in North Africa and the Middle East in a steady trickle from about the seventh century; some Muslim commentators linked the status of these blacks to Noah's curse.⁶⁴ Later, early modern European voyagers had the supposed link between the Curse of Ham and black skin

of midrashic parables on the descendants of Noah to find a theological justification for slavery," in Aaron, "Early Rabbinic Exegesis on Noah's Son Ham and the so-called 'Hamitic Myth,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 63 (1995), 752. Ham's descendants peopled North Africa and the Horn of Africa, though some were also to be found in Arabia; likewise, one of Ham's sons was black (Cush), and another was cursed in such a way as to suggest that the penalty was to be paid by a descent group not an individual, just as the Curse of Eve was to be paid by all women. By contrast, no descendant of Shem or Japhet is described in the Bible as black or living in the area we call Africa or deserving of servitude. Only in areas where, and at times when, black slaves were found were these connections drawn together into a myth justifying black slavery.

⁶² Augustine, *The City of God*, intro. John O'Meara, trans. Henry Bettenson (London, 1984), 874 (bk. 19, ch. 15). See bk. 16, pp. 648–53, for a metaphorical account of Noah's curse and the Sons of Ham. Augustine's views are helpfully discussed in Gervase Corcoran, *Saint Augustine on Slavery* (Rome, 1985).

⁶³ Frank M. Snowden, Jr., *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 99–108; Jean Devisse, *From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery": From the Demonic Threat to the Incarnation of Sainthood*, vol. 2, pt. 1, of Ladislav Bugner, ed., *The Image of the Black in Western Art* [(New York), 1979], esp. 55–80.

⁶⁴ See the essays by Akbar Ahmed, Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias, M. Hiskett, Bernard Barbour, and Michelle Jacobs, in John Ralph Willis, ed., *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 1 (London, 1985), and the entry in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. Lewis et al. (London, 1986), 3:104–05.

pointed out to them by Muslim informants. The story also persisted in the Judaic and Christian traditions in association with the account in Genesis of the origins of all the different peoples of mankind. The Latin church, heir to Roman cosmopolitanism and concerned to keep control of biblical interpretation, did not encourage attempts to lend greater weight to genealogy than to religion. But while biblical genealogies could be manipulated in many different ways, Genesis itself indicated that only Ham had progeny who were black and that, according to its strange notion that peoples composed a single descent group, his sons peopled Ethiopia, Libya, and Egypt. In the medieval period, some *mappamundi*, following such indications, designated North Africa and the Horn of Africa as lands peopled by Ham's descendants. Isidore of Seville drew up an influential map with these designations, and maps drawn up in England and France also followed this convention. These maps were configured in the so-called T-O format, enclosed by a circular sea perimeter with Jerusalem at the center and the letter T formed by a stylized Mediterranean as the stem crossed by the Nile and the Don. Mapmakers subordinated geographical features to a moral mapping of mankind.⁶⁵

Isidore and many later writers were inclined to draw on classical authorities such as Pliny and their own speculative fancy in further defining the characteristics of the world's peoples. Isidore himself, following Polybius, attributed differences in skin color to climate, not sin, but he also believed that very hot climates weakened moral fiber and encouraged the view that Ethiopia was inhabited by perverse races. The Ebbsdorf *mappamundi* of 1240 and the Hereford *mappamundi* of 1290 depicted the monstrous races as mainly inhabiting the hot south, though a few were to be found in the cold northeast, where the unclean peoples of Gog and Magog are placed by the Ebbsdorf map.⁶⁶ The term "Africa" was attributed to Greek origins, and it was often held that the excessive heat of the Sahel and sub-Saharan regions had a deleterious effect on all organisms. While there was agreement that many strange beasts were to be found in the equinoctial zone, there was disagreement concerning the effect of heat on humans. Vincent of Beauvais was convinced that extreme heat produced premature aging, and others alleged that Ethiopians (from the Greek for burnt skin) were ugly and lazy; Albert the Great argued that heat stimulated the mental faculties, which explained why Africans were philosophical and inventive. As scholastic thought became more rigorous, the underlying postulate that black Africans were sons of Ham became more, not less, pronounced, because it represented a modest extrapolation from what could be found in the Bible, the Babylonian Talmud, and the writings of some early fathers. Roger Bacon's *Opus Majus* abstained from the wilder anthropological speculations concerning the "torrid" zone. Following his mentor Robert Grosseteste, he believed it likely that there was a temperate area at the equator, since the hours of sunlight were fewer, but also upheld the view that Ethiopians were the Sons of Ham.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ See John B. Friedman, "Cultural Conflicts in Medieval World Maps," in Schwartz, ed., *Implicit Understandings*, 64–96, and Friedman, *Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 100–03.

⁶⁶ Friedman, *Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 45–46.

⁶⁷ The views of Vincent of Beauvais, Albert le Grand, and Roger Bacon are discussed and

The Curse of Noah was sometimes employed to justify servitude in Europe itself, in an attempt to lend religious color to aristocratic beliefs in the right of Normans to rule Anglo-Saxons and Celts, or of Franks to rule Gauls, or of Goths to rule Celts—beliefs that survived down to the racial fantasies of Joseph de Gobineau. Biblical genealogies, which were both complex and vague, could be adapted for this purpose. Thus S. H. Rigby points out: “The estate of laborers was denounced by the early fourteenth century *Cursor Mundi* as the descendants of Ham.”⁶⁸ John Block Friedman and Davis cite similar contemporary attempts to justify serfdom with reference to Noah’s curse: a thirteenth-century Cambridge bestiary and Andrew Horn’s *Mirror of Justices*.⁶⁹ Some of the uncouth or menacing habits imputed to wild and monstrous peoples—such as ugliness and the waving of sticks and clubs—were reminiscent also of representations of Saracens, devils, and rebellious peasants (a word with the same Latin root as pagan).⁷⁰ The evocation of threat itself justified the idea of restraint. Subsequent stereotypes recycled the social and gender prejudices of early modern Europe, portraying black slaves as dangerous if not under control, as childlike, irrational, prone to resentment, and the like. The slave was someone entirely in the household of the master, as was the *feme couverte*, with the difference that the slave’s sexual honor was not afforded even selective protection. The “scold’s bridle” reappeared in the plantations as a device for restraining impudent slaves, as did stocks and instruments of medieval torture.⁷¹

While drawing on a hinterland of such notions, the Curse of Noah had the advantage that it could be sustained by reference to biblical scholarship and could serve as a meeting point between popular prejudice and respectable learning. David Brion Davis has declared: “I am convinced that the ‘Hamitic myth’ played a relatively minor role in justifying black slavery until the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. . . . Before then, for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, it was sufficient that blacks were Gentiles, pagans, or infidels, and the Noachian curse served as an occasional, if forceful, obiter dictum.”⁷² Yet for those who believed in the literal truth of the Noah story, as did nearly everyone in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, its accounts of the different branches of mankind and of the justifi-

documented in François de Medeiros, *L’Occident et l’Afrique (XIIIe-XVe siècle)* (Paris, 1985), 122–56, 273–86.

⁶⁸ Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages*, 312.

⁶⁹ The views advocated by Horn in *The Mirror of Justices* are cited by Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Western Civilization*, 97; the Cambridge bestiary is in Friedman, *Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 236 n. 60.

⁷⁰ Friedman, *Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, 34–35.

⁷¹ Olaudah Equiano mentions an “iron mask” in *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (New York, 1995), 62–63.

⁷² Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, 337 n. 144. This judgment may refer only to those versions of Noah’s curse based on embellishments in the Talmud or other Judaic commentaries, which makes sense because knowledge of these was rare as well as flawed. Davis outlines the influence of Noah’s curse on pp. 21–22, 42–43, and 86–87. His criticism is directed at William McKee Evans, “From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea: The Strange Odyssey of the Sons of Ham,” *American Historical Review*, 85 (1980), 14–43.

cations for enslavement were not, surely, of minor importance. The difficulty of accounting for the peoples of the New World did not prevent Hugo Grotius and Isaac Newton from believing that all were descendants of Noah's sons. In his work on common errors, Sir Thomas Browne wrote: "There is another opinion concerning the complexion of negroes that is not only embraced by many of the more Vulgar Writers but likewise by that ingenious Traveller Mr [George] Sandys . . . and these would have the Blackness of Negroes an effect of Noah's curse ratify'd by God, upon Cham."⁷³

Those who first wrote about a trade in slaves on the African coast—for example, the Portuguese chronicler Gomes Eannes de Azurara, the collections edited by Richard Hakluyt and Samuel Purchas, or the Protestant divines at Leiden in the mid-seventeenth century—made reference to one or another version of the Curse of Noah as somehow explaining and excusing the enslavement of Africans. Protestant reliance on the story seems to have been greater than that of Catholic writers. The notion that Noah's curse justified enslaving black Africans was probably more widely diffused in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than ever before—it was entertained even by clerics who denounced the inhumane treatment of African slaves, such as the Spaniard Alonso de Sandoval, who ministered to the slave arrivals at Cartagena, and the Portuguese Antonio Vieira, who preached against the abuse of slaves in Brazil. Morgan Godwyn, author of *The Negro's and Indians Advocate* (1680), expressed skepticism but nevertheless took the story of the curse as a serious problem for those who would like to see "Christian treatment" of the slaves.⁷⁴ Ivan Hannaford, not surprisingly, allots great significance to such references, while insisting that modern racism is distinct from notions of a prophet's curse on a particular lineage.⁷⁵

⁷³ Browne, *Pseudoxia Epidemica* (1646), ed. Robin Robbins, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1981), 159.

⁷⁴ Azurara, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea* (London, 1895), 54–55, though the reference is garbled; George Best, "A true discourse of the three Voyages of discoverie . . ." (1578), in Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (London, 1598–1600), 3:47–96, esp. 52; Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade or a Discovery of the River Gambia, and the Golden Trade of the Ethiopians* (London, 1623), 65–66; Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimage*, 3d ed., vol. 1 (London, 1617), 821; David Brading, *The First Americans: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (Cambridge, 1991), 278–79, 319; Giuliano Glozzzi, *Adamo e il Nuovo Mondo* (Firenze, 1977), 444–513; Ronald Sanders, *Lost Tribes and Promised Lands: The Origins of American Racism* (Boston, 1978), 62, 223–24; M. Chrétien, "Les Deux Visages de Cham," in Pierre Giral and Emile Temin, eds., *L'Idée de Race dans la Pensée Politique Contemporaine* (Paris, 1977), 174–75; Leon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*, trans. Edward Howard (New York, 1971), 142–43; Sandoval, *Un Tratado sobre la esclavitud* (Madrid, 1987) (a translation of *De Instauranda Aethiopia Salute* (Madrid, 1647), 74–75; Vieira, *Obras completas do Padre Antonio Vieira, Sermoes*, vol. 12 (Porto, 1909), 301–34; Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate* . . . (London, 1680), 19; Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York, 1995), 67 (see also viii, 6, 50, 164, 165 for other references to Noah's curse).

⁷⁵ See Hannaford, *Race*, esp. 89–91, 94–95, 112, 127, 129, 137, 143, 145, 148, 164, 170–71, 188–89, 210, 272, 269. Hannaford does reveal the deep influence of the Hamitic myth on early modern thought; his approach is, for the present discussion, too intellectualist and probably overstates the significance of Judaic exegesis from Josephus to Maimonides and the Cabala.

Richard Jobson, who disdained the slave trade, nevertheless seems to have been influenced by the legend of Noah's curse. He was sent to West Africa by the Guinea Company in the 1620s to report on commercial possibilities. He wrote of the West Africans that "these people sprang from the race of Canaan, the sonne of Ham, who discovered his father Noah's secrets." This did not lead Jobson to favor slave trading himself; when offered slaves to buy by a local chief, "I made answer, We were a people, who did not deale in any such commodities, neither did wee buy or sell one another, or any that had our own shape." But he did perceive a resemblance between the Irish and the Fulbies; "Their manner of lives had great resemblance in following of their cattle, and as they were out of heart in one ground, to move whole Townes together." After this, it is not so surprising to learn: "amongst themselves a prophecy remains, that they shall be subdued, and remain subject to a white people: and what know we, but that determinate time of God is at hand, and that it shall be His Almighty's pleasure, to make our nation his instrument."⁷⁶

The Noahide doctrine was only one strand in Latin Christendom's approach to slavery and the origins of nations. But for the European discoveries of the fifteenth century, it might have remained of little importance. Those potentially vulnerable to enslavement also included Jews, stubborn infidels of any race or religion, the descendants of Cain (sometimes carelessly conflated with the sons of Canaan), those suspected of cannibalism, and the various categories mentioned in the *Siete Partidas*. Once Africans were encountered they were often condemned under several rubrics, since they did not conform to the norms of Christianity and their dark skin was linked to the way that the Devil was invariably represented. The biblical sanction given to the enslavement of descent groups and the indications that Africans were Sons of Ham made it difficult flatly to oppose the Atlantic trade and New World slavery on religious grounds; in this period an opposition lacking strong religious support could not prevail. Further, the reworked Noahide doctrine directly contributed to the highly specific and, as it turned out, functional linking of slavery and skin color. This link was already available, as it were latent, at the time of the rise of the sugar plantations of the Atlantic islands and the New World, which is why it is so easily, even if falsely, projected onto the fifteenth-century Mediterranean. The function it served can be seen in early modern Europe, where many attempts were made

Although Judaic texts, especially if a little obscure, inspired a certain awe, their influence pales besides that of the Bible itself. Hannaford regards George Best's version of Noah's curse, in which Ham is cursed with the "infection" of blackness because he copulated on the Ark, as enormously influential. It was certainly reprinted in the compilations of Hakluyt and Purchas that would have been consulted by many of those involved in the early stages of colonial planting. But Best's story was itself contested by Purchas and its influence cannot remotely be compared to that of Genesis and Leviticus. Hannaford mentions that the pages of the edition of Purchas he consulted in the library of Exeter Cathedral in 1970 were still uncut, in *Race*, 166–67, 170–71, 410 n. 23.

⁷⁶ Jobson, *Golden Trade*, intro. Walter Rodney (London, 1968), 46, 70, 65–66, 93.

to impose distinctive markings or dress on those in receipt of poor relief or those deemed wayward, thus facilitating the recruitment of the whole population to the tasks of invigilation and control.⁷⁷

Mediterranean Slavery and the Advent of Sugar

The expansion and prosperity of medieval Europe helped to generate some marginal slavery in the Mediterranean world, though slaves nowhere constituted the fundamental labor force. The type of slavery found in the eastern Mediterranean from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries was mainly artisanal and domestic. Some specialist slaves may have been used in the development of sugar plantations in the Levant in the wake of the Crusades, but most "honey cane" was probably grown by serfs. The Crusaders were always on the lookout for sources of wealth to sustain their enterprise or to make their own fortunes. They had no scruples about either purchasing or using slaves on their estates, but they probably found it more advantageous to use the labor of conquered serfs for the cultivation of sugar cane; organizing gangs of Muslim slaves would have been a dangerous undertaking.⁷⁸ With the sponsorship of Venice and Genoa, this trade was taken over by Cyprus and Sicily when the Crusaders were evicted from Syria and Jordan.⁷⁹ As Christians reconquered the Iberian peninsula, they founded further sugar works. Sometimes they also acquired the services of sugar specialists, especially where the latter had been slaves. In such cases their cooperation would best be ensured by some amelioration of their enslaved condition.

The processing of the cane required exceptionally skilled, intense, continuous labor. The Levantine peasantry could grow sugar cane but may have resisted or been unsuited to the labor of the sugar works. The owners of the sugar factories could have obtained the cane from peasant cultivators but needed a core of workers trained in the secrets of sugar processing. Peasant farmers offering labor services may have performed some tasks but could not supply this skilled core. Scraps of evidence indicate that recourse was made to slave labor, including the labor of Syrian or "Saracen" captives who occasionally were purchased from the Levantine pirates. But sugar commanded very high prices, and the extraction of sugar from cane was in any case highly skilled; the artisans engaged in it, whether free or servile, would have ranked with silversmiths or weavers of fine textiles. The most probable division of labor would have been a core group of salaried specialists plus a few general laborers or slaves, with the growing and transport of the sugar cane carried out by an enserfed peasantry. William Phillips's study of late medieval and early modern slavery concludes that the labor force in the Mediterranean sugar industry, whether Christian or Muslim, included very few slaves:

⁷⁷ See Robert Jutte, *Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1994), 158–62.

⁷⁸ Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe* (New York, 1965), 101–30.

⁷⁹ *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, rev. and ed. C. T. Onions et al., 3d ed. (Oxford, 1968), 1912; John Julius Norwich, *A History of Venice* (London, 1982), 236, 270–71, 364; Francis Carter, *Dubrovnik (Ragusa): A Classic City-State* (London, 1972), 239–42; Verlinden, *Beginnings of Modern Colonization*.

"Although here and there some slaves may have been used, they were unusual. The close identification of sugar cane and slave labor came later."⁸⁰ This conclusion is echoed by Marie Louise von Wartburg, after thorough archaeological and documentary research. She finds only one unequivocal reference to the employment of a slave, a Muslim said to be working as a sugar maker in 1426. She concludes: "It is without doubt that, in certain cases, slaves were employed in Cyprus to produce sugar. The sources are nevertheless much too sparse to sustain the hypothesis that slaves constituted the bulk of the work force. The social structure of Cyprus in the Middle Ages rather suggests that recourse was made to the large number of serfs (*paroikoi*) present in the island."⁸¹

Slavery and Africans

While there were thousands of Africans in Portugal and Spain around 1500, they were rare elsewhere in Europe. The overwhelming majority of Africans in Iberia were slaves, though some would have been trusted and responsible servants. There were a few freedmen or free children of partly African parentage. Occasionally, African nobles were brought to Lisbon as part of the monarch's diplomatic, commercial, and religious projects. Portugal's sudden prosperity in the aftermath of the discoveries allowed it to set a fashion for Renaissance courts, and the presence of a few African retainers was thought to lend distinction. African musical skills were particularly esteemed. Thus, a small group of Africans was attached to the court of King James IV of Scotland, including a drummer (*taubonar*) and a choreographer who devised a dance for twelve performers. In 1507, the king took the part of a black knight championing the cause of a black lady, played by an African woman, in a court spectacle. These Africans received various payments, and at least one of them, a "more las," was christened. Quite possibly they were not slaves. Henry VII of England also had a black musician at his court.⁸² In northern Europe, the link between Africans and slavery was, as yet, purely notional. In the Mediterranean and North Africa, matters were different.

By 1500, African slaves were to be found in several of the provinces of the Ottoman empire and in the North African kingdoms. However, the development of a full-scale plantation slavery had been checked. The spread of Islam in Africa and the extension of trade routes in East Africa and across the Sahara had opened up a new source of slaves. While the Prophet himself had prominent black aides and asserted that his message could be received by all conditions of men, Muslims were permitted to own, buy, and sell

⁸⁰ Phillips, *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade*, 97.

⁸¹ Wartburg, "Production de sucre de canne à Chypre," in Michel Balard and Alain Ducellier, *Coloniser au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1995), 126–31. The account of the sugar factories in Cyprus given by Noel Deerr in *The History of Sugar*, 2 vols. (London, 1949–1950), 1:84, cites a document referring to "all the" paying laborers at the Episcopi estate.

⁸² Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984), 2–4.

slaves—with the important proviso that they were infidels or had been when first enslaved. Subsequently, an association between blackness and menial slavery developed in the Muslim and Arab world: the word *‘abd* or black became synonymous with slave. Already in the seventh century, black Africans were regarded as desirable slaves in Arabia and its dependencies; a treaty or capitulation entered into by the Christian kingdom of the Nubians as early as 652 A. D. stipulated that the latter would supply 300 slaves annually to the caliphate. Though subject to reinterpretation, this *baqt* was observed for some six centuries.⁸³ Slaves were also acquired from East Africa in the eighth and ninth centuries to work in the salt marshes and on sugar, cotton, and indigo estates in lower Iraq. This precocious slave system was shaken by the great slave revolts led by Mahommed Ali (869–883 A. D.).⁸⁴ This sustained revolt helped to precipitate a crisis of the Abbasid caliphate and discouraged subsequent attempts to resort to large-scale gang slavery. Alexandre Popovic writes that henceforth “the normal and preferred labor system in Islamic sugar production was the compulsory labor of indigenous peasants—a sort of *corvée*.”⁸⁵

African slaves continued to be selected, on a prudently smaller scale, for employment in North Africa and Syria. In the eighth century, Ibadi Berber traders of North Africa also secured trans-Saharan supplies of black slaves. From the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, it has been estimated that an average of some 5,000 slaves a year were dispatched across the Sahara from West Africa, destined to become gold or copper miners in West Sudan, sugar workers in Egypt, or domestic servants throughout the Arab world. In the Maghreb, African slaves sometimes became soldiers, while in the Middle East this was uncommon. Yet it would be wrong to portray Islamic civilization as committed to a doctrine of racial slavery. Islamic societies were prepared to enslave anyone, of any color or race, as long as they were initially infidel. The extensive use of enslavement to recruit soldiers had no western European counterpart. True, France and Spain used galley slaves in their naval forces, but they never enjoyed positions of command. The religious and racial code of the Ottoman empire, the major Islamic formation of the time, was far more tolerant and pluralist than that of Europe’s new absolutist regimes. Nevertheless, black Africans were especially at risk, even if believers, with the Curse of Noah sometimes being evoked as justification.⁸⁶

The spread of Islam in and beyond the African Sahel and savannah furnished more secure conditions for a steady trickle of black slaves. Arab

⁸³ François Renault, *La Traité des Noirs au Proche-Orient Médiéval, VIIe-XIVe siècles* (Paris, 1989). See also Lewis, “The African Diaspora and the Civilization of Islam,” in Martin L. Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg, eds., *The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 37–56, and Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*.

⁸⁴ See *The Revolt of the Zanj*, vol. 36 of *The History of al-Tabari*, ed. and trans. David Waines (Albany, 1992), and Alexandre Popovic, *La révolte des esclaves en Iraq au III-IX siècle* (Paris, 1976).

⁸⁵ Popovic, *La révolte des esclaves*, 195.

⁸⁶ E. Savage, “Berbers and Blacks: Ibadite Slave Traffic in Eighth-Century North Africa,” *Journal of African History*, 33 (1992), 351–68.

traders had little difficulty finding slaves for sale in West Africa. Portuguese traders in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century West Africa began by tapping into established trade routes at the mouths of the larger rivers. Slavery was probably at least as widespread in West Africa at this time as it had been in Domesday England or in medieval and early modern Muscovy. Metal working appears to have developed in West Africa between the third century B. C. and the third century A. D. The more intensive forms of agricultural cultivation this made possible would have increased the numbers of potential slaves with agricultural skills; European traders were well aware that hunter-gatherer peoples made poor field slaves and were, additionally, more prone to run away and make out in the wild. West Africa shared with other regions where slave trading was common—the Caucasus, the Balkans, the Russian steppe of medieval times, and pre-Norman England—a relatively high degree of political fragmentation. Internecine warfare produced captives and destroyed forms of regional solidarity that inhibited slave exports. European traders on the African coast generally treated the authorities with whom they dealt with respect. Indeed, they usually cultivated a special relationship with one or another of the rulers of the African coastal states. The bulk of the captives they purchased had been subjects of some other ruler, often unknown to the traders; the latter supposed that the captive's former sovereign was incapable of or uninterested in extending the sort of protection that, say, even an Anatolian peasant could expect from the Sublime Porte. John Thornton has urged that the West African states of the early modern period were by no means wholly at a disadvantage in their dealings with European traders.⁸⁷ The forts established by the Europeans simply offered a measure of protection to the warehouses and provision grounds of the trading posts. These sites only flourished when on good terms with the local rulers. On the other hand, the Europeans did enjoy an effective monopoly of sea transport, and this must have given them more leverage than Thornton allows. The willingness of European traders to buy large numbers of captives stimulated slave raiding in the interior and encouraged African chiefs to distort judicial sanctions that led to enslavement. The traders usually found it advantageous to allow their suppliers to obtain slaves in whatever way they found best.

Thornton advances as a further general reason for the prevalence of slavery in West Africa the view that the social relations of the region were marked by the objective of controlling labor rather than the landholding that was becoming typical of much of Europe.⁸⁸ Slaves in West Africa were the major form of wealth; as potential soldiers they were a factor of power; and female slaves could bear children as well as till the field. Land, by contrast, was relatively plentiful and could be worked and secured by those with enough slaves at their command. Thornton stresses the potential for diversity among the several hundred states and kingdoms in West and Central

⁸⁷ Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (Cambridge, 1992), xii–xxxvii, 43–71.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 72–97. For varieties of slavery in West Africa see Claude Meillassoux, ed., *L'esclavage en Afrique précoloniale* (Paris, 1975).

Africa, so there was evidently much scope for variations on this theme, and no doubt beyond it. The ability of the European traders to afford the prices charged for slaves was also a circumstance permitting the rise of the trade; it reflected the productivity advantage of the mining and agriculture of the Americas compared with those of West Africa.⁸⁹ Traditional African slavery was something quite distinct from the plantation slavery that was constructed in the New World, though it was itself transformed by the pressures of the Atlantic slave trade, especially once the plantation boom got underway. The diversity of the slave condition in Africa was replaced in the New World by an overwhelming concentration of slaves on field work and cash crop production. Although slaves in Africa were often of alien origin, they were not destined to become part of an inflexible racial hierarchy such that they and their descendants through many generations would remain outsiders and slaves, as did happen in the New World.

Conclusion

I have argued that slavery underwent a secular, though not uninterrupted or uniform, decline in western Europe between the eighth and the fifteenth centuries. Neither high feudalism nor early agrarian capitalism required or reproduced slavery, though both proved compatible with pockets of slaveholding. The clash with Islam eventually encouraged Christians to follow the Muslim lead in barring the enslavement of fellow believers while retaining it for those who were or had been nonbelievers. The expansion of Latin Christendom was accompanied by a battery of persecutions that sought to impose ever greater religious and ethnocultural homogeneity. The decline of serfdom in western Europe did little or nothing to weaken the vitality of doctrines supportive of enslavement. Neither the Renaissance nor the Reformation undermined the legitimacy of slavery. Nevertheless, a marked popular prejudice against slavery, even the slavery of others, encouraged rulers to pose as the champions of their subjects' civil liberty. Piecemeal limitations on the proper scope of slavery were accompanied by continuing, even increased, willingness to enslave religious and racial outsiders, as in the credence extended to the myth of Noah's curse. The vaunted universalism of Christianity and Islam was shadowed by notions that linked race to status.

These developments took on more ominous significance with the growth of an increasingly independent realm of commercial consumption. The demand for sugar and spices reflected the growing purchasing power of those who were drawing larger rents from the countryside and of an urban milieu headed by master manufacturers and merchants. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the spread of capitalist social relations in the towns and countryside of northwest Europe began to create elements of mass demand. The plantation revolution of the seventeenth century was intimately linked to this development. Sugar remained by far the most valuable single crop,

⁸⁹ Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge, 1990), 27–37.

but tobacco, cotton, and dyestuffs were important too. The growing popular demand for these products encouraged merchants to establish plantations to supply them. And so vigorous was the demand that planters thought they could best meet it by acquiring slaves from Africa. The successive feats of colonization undertaken by the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, English, and French each contributed something to developing and refining the practice of New World colonization and plantation development. To a greater or lesser extent, each reflected the uneven transition from feudal business and agriculture to free commerce and capitalism. By themselves, the techniques of colonial expansion and racial stigmatization need not have led to the rise of plantation slavery, but in conjunction with the beginnings of capitalist transformation they did. The new plantation colonies—Brazil, Barbados, St. Kitts, Martinique, Virginia, Saint Domingue—developed a slavery quite unlike what had existed in any part of the Old World. Unlike Roman slavery, it afflicted only those of black African origin or descent.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Developments I trace in *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern* (London, 1997).