SEYMOUR DRESCHER AND
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Introduction

The growth of an Atlantic slave system was one of the most distinctive characteristics of Western development during the three centuries following Columbus's voyages. By the end of the eighteenth century, every European state bordering the Atlantic and many further eastward had attempted to secure a foothold on the African coast or in the Americas. At this peak of dynamic growth and seemingly unbounded potential, a remarkable reversal began. In one society after another, the Atlantic slave trade and the institution of chattel slavery were constricted and destroyed. The process was uneven and contradictory, punctuated by legal closures and revolutionary upheavals in some areas and by unprecedented expansion in others. In the 1780s, some of the northern states of the United States began to abolish or dismantle the slave system. The same decade witnessed the launching of the first mass abolitionist movement against the African slave trade in England and the founding of antislavery societies in the United States and France.

Three generations were required to finally close down the entire transatlantic slave trade. Slave emancipation in the plantation zone of the Americas began in 1791 with a mass slave uprising in St. Domingue and ended with the passage of Brazil's Golden Law almost a century later, in 1888. This extraordinary dismantling of one of the most vigorous elements of the capitalist world economy has been a focus of enormous curiosity for almost two centuries, and scholarly interest in the dynamics of Atlantic slavery and its abolition has never been stronger. During the past decade the centenaries of the abolition process have occasioned frequent commemorative conferences. The year 1988 alone was a triple anniversary: the bicentenary of British popular abolitionism, the sesquicentenary of the termination of the British colonial apprenticeship system, and the centenary of slave emancipation in Brazil. Universities from Brazil to the United States sponsored conferences on the African slave trade and on emancipation and its aftermath in the New World.

A noteworthy aspect of most of these conferences was the increasing

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attention devoted by scholars, not to the process of abolition itself, but to the more prosaic theme of postemancipation development. This development was already noted earlier in the decade. In 1983 an international conference was held at Kingston-upon-Hull, England, to mark the one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the British Slave Emancipation Act of 1833. The keynote speaker drew attention to the extraordinary contrast between the focus of the sesquicentennial commemoration and that of the centennial events in the same city fifty years earlier (Drescher 1985).

In 1933, historians, in a celebratory mood, had focused almost exclusively upon abolition as an epic struggle of metropolitan saints and heroes. The colonial slaves themselves entered the story only at the moment of liberation, as they gathered on the West Indian hilltops at the dawn of emancipation day to receive the first rays of liberty from the east (Great Britain). The slaves entered and exited from the scene at the moment of apotheosis. At the 1983 conference, these British saints and their metropolitan epic had virtually vanished from view. Scholars were less inclined to leave the scene of action at the moment of redemption. The 1983 program focused on abolition and its aftermath, an aftermath extending into the present.

Five years later, the 1988 commemorations in Brazil, the West Indies, and the United States were organized along similar postslavery themes. This volume of essays is the outcome of one of these conferences, held at the University of Pittsburgh in August 1988. The conference attempted to take advantage of the rising scholarly interest to stimulate comparative and long-range reflections on New World postemancipation societies. It was our hope that a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective would stimulate an investigation of both general trends and historical peculiarities in societies united by the tradition of plantation slavery and abolition.

Although the conference papers nominally focused upon the politics and economics of freedom as molded by the dynamics of race, class, and culture, some dominant issues emerged as papers were subjected to formal commentaries and free-ranging discussion. A number of the essays in this volume are elaborations by commentators of remarks that seemed to crystalize important underlying questions of perspective generated by the original papers. These questions address the nature and impact of slave emancipation over both the short and long term. How revolutionary was the abolition of slavery? Did the transformation of

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legal status conceal deeper continuities in the plantation societies of the Americas? Did emancipation differentially enlarge or constrain opportunities for the major social groups in each society and for the plantation zone as a whole? Did a common peculiar economic, political, and racial configuration of the plantation slave zones tend to lead them to a peculiar postemancipation pattern of development? Were there dramatic differences in short- and long-term development? Were there alternative and even radically different possible opportunities for economic or political development, aborted by structures of internal political power and external colonial constraints?

I

The economic historians whose essays open this volume differ about the degree to which fundamental change occurred with emancipation, and about whether one or another kind of revolutionary action might have altered the long-term socioeconomic development of societies after slavery came to an end. All seem to agree, however, that despite or even because of the legal transformation, there were very considerable constraints placed upon long-term economic development and material standards of living in postslavery societies compared to Europe or the northern United States. Pieter Emmer's opening essay begins with a note of profound skepticism about postemancipation development, which reverberates through the collection. His perspective is grounded in recent historiographical analyses of slavery and abolition that emphasize that the relative productivity, economic rationality, viability, and international competitiveness of plantation slavery were as clear during the century of abolition as they had been in the centuries preceding it. By contrast, Emmer notes, postemancipation economies were often less competitive than they had been under slavery or under systems that temporarily retained slavery and the slave trade. Postslavery plantation societies faced stagnating output, declining attractiveness to European capital, and a diminished role in the expansion of western capitalism. Some areas slowly sank into insignificance relative to their preemancipation positions.

Insofar as freedom enabled former slaves to place new limits and higher costs on the mode of production, it also constrained their own potential economic betterment. From the perspective of European governments, the plantation economies were transformed from areas of profitable investment to impoverished burdens on the metropolis. These

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economies converged more toward the "third world" tropical economies than the developed world of Euro-America, with correspondingly low standards of living. In terms of peasant aspirations (peasantization), the more radical the economic and political revolution that accompanied the legal revolution (e.g., in Haiti), the more bleak was the long-term economic outcome.

In contrast, and in world historical perspective, the long-term outcome of slave emancipation for Europe was minimal. The end of colonial slavery did not significantly retard economic growth or rising living standards for the European metropolitan population as a whole. In the plantation Americas, the effect was more profound and enduring. Planters were more concerned with the new economic requirements of the production of staples, Emmer concludes, than with racial preferences or political goals. For the planter, freedom meant a new set of constraints, which forced him to experiment with new forms of contractual relations and new sources of labor.

Emmer's chapter also implicitly argues against the possibility of a radically different economic outcome, given the political and ideological framework of Europe and the West in general during the nineteenth century. The dominant metropolitan zone (industrializing Europe and the northern United States) were unwilling to consider more than the most cautious welfare initiatives for their own metropolitan poor and working classes. It is hardly likely that any industrial society would have long expended more resources on its staple periphery than on its own masses at home. That the plantation zones were of declining economic interest to Europe was a further motive for disinterest in overseas welfare systems for colonial populations. In the long run, even the free peasant proprietors of the circum-Caribbean and their descendants were dependent upon the success of the plantation sector. Paradoxically, expansion of the plantation system would have produced higher economic growth and a higher long-term standard of living, notwithstanding that this may have been the inverse of the aspirations of the freed. Hence, Emmer's insistence that the meaning of freedom be viewed in constant relation to the price of freedom.

In the next essay, Stanley Engerman continues the discussion of the economic implications of emancipation for the meaning of freedom. Beginning with one premise very similar to Emmer's, he stresses the need to understand the outcome of emancipation in terms of the dynamism and competitiveness of slavery before and during the age of abolition.

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Engerman emphasizes that the changes created by the emancipation of the labor force were not those desired by the planters and placed considerable inhibitions on planters' behavior after slavery. By providing a total or partial escape from some of the harshest and most disliked features of a gang labor system that had engulfed all ages and both sexes of the plantations, emancipation made manifest many conflicts in the values and aspirations of ex-masters and ex-slaves. It did not provide for the new free-labor harmony envisioned by metropolitan abolitionists.

The general outcome of these new conflicts was usually economic decline or stagnation, sometimes brief, sometimes permanent. There were major shifts to new labor forces or to new organizations of staple production involving less intensive or less supervised labor. Engerman stresses systematic variation within the trend as much as the general pattern. These variations usually reflected land-labor ratios in local areas at the time of liberation. The land-labor model of the meaning of freedom plays an important role in a number of other essays as well. In general, there was more continuity of labor, and even rising postemancipation output, in the most densely populated Caribbean islands. Brazil also achieved an easy transition by immediate access to a new immigrant labor population. In the United States, the Cotton South came to rely increasingly upon white farmers. In general, due to changes in the world labor market, the later emancipation occurred, the greater were the alternatives to coerced African labor and the easier the retention of staple production for export.

Engerman, like Emmer, discusses the impact of emancipation for the freed and for their descendants. Since his economic model presumes the invaluable good of free choice, he begins with the premise that, by definition, the expansion of the ex-slaves' choices about consumption, leisure, culture, and employers constituted a clear welfare gain. Some short-term welfare gains might later promote long-term constraints on both economic growth and the standard of living, even if the expansion of choice was in itself an irrevocable gain. In terms of the meaning of freedom, this secular perspective implies increasing difficulties for plantation production in the face of ex-slave priorities and limitations on the long-term growth of welfare for both slaves and masters. As for the possibility of alternative outcomes, Engerman, like Emmer, offers a comparison with later nineteenth-century Euro-America to show that certain developments, such as those limiting material welfare and subjection to the world market, were not the fate of ex-slaves alone. In secular

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terms, the Caribbean plantation zones converged with tropical Afro-Asia in economic underdevelopment. But, Engerman cautions, the longer the period after slavery allowed for comparison, the more difficult it becomes for scholars to sort out the competing causal weights of colonial rule, racism, cultural choices, and family patterns.

Jay Mandle pursues the central issue of economic constriction in a narrower geographic range and by a more precisely defined measure. While Emmer and Engerman draw attention to constraints of the world market upon plantation societies as a whole, Mandle affirms that the planters of the U.S. South in particular were remarkably successful in accomplishing the transition to freedom while maintaining both their economic and political positions. A similar premise is the point of departure for a number of other contributors to this collection. For Mandle, the major weapon in the hands of the southern planters was racial division and antipathy. From this came what Mandle calls the economic entrapment of emancipated Afro-Americans. This is illustrated by their lack of mobility out of the southern agricultural sector for two generations after the Civil War.

If Mandle's evaluation of the impact of emancipation for the southern ex-slave is no less pessimistic than Emmer's, his causal nexus is quite different. Mandle posits not the international market, demography, or the priorities of the ex-slaves, but political and racial repression by the ruling class. Mandle does not pursue his subject comparatively, but one might, for example, compare his equation regarding lack of geographical mobility and deterioration with Emmer's passing observation about the detrimental effects of long-distance mobility on Caribbean family cohesion. Engerman's closing observations on the relative rates of economic success for the descendants of southern slaves compared with those of other areas in the Americas also points to another potential comparison: the relative weight of other variables in assessing the impact of racism in the meaning of freedom.

Gavin Wright, like Mandle, concentrates his analysis primarily on the postbellum South, with a brief excursus toward the end of his essay into comparative perspectives. For Wright, the peculiarities of the South were more significant in accounting for the outcome of southern emancipation than was the common institutional background of plantation slavery in the Americas. A peculiar population mix (predominantly free and white) and the political supremacy of the northern-dominated Union indicates for Wright considerable economic and political constraints upon the power of the planter class. Wright gives far more weight than Mandle

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to the dictates of the international market on the cotton planters. The long-term decline in the price of cotton and the impossibility of either forcing a return to gang labor or of establishing a full wage labor system resulted in the emergence of a sharecropping system. That mode of organization was a rational economic outcome, given the constraints of law and political regime on planters and ex-slaves alike.

Wright's general analysis of the postemancipation outcome, while stressing the unique aspects of southern development, is consistent with Emmer's conclusion that the postslavery organization of production was dictated to a great extent by the international market system and the new, if limited, bargaining power of labor, both beyond the control of any planter group. Wright, however, is more emphatic about the significance of race, not in determining the new forms of production, but in the development of political rule in the South after Reconstruction. Racial attitudes allowed for a differential degradation of the Afro-American political and welfare position by the end of the century, independent of the heritage of slavery and liberation. The result was an ex-slave population closer to its Caribbean counterparts than to the white population of its own region.

It was racism, not general economic constraints, that allowed white southerners to anticipate the convergence of their race, rather than of their region, with northern and western European patterns, while simultaneously explaining the backwardness of their section of the country in terms of an inherent flaw in the most downtrodden segment of its population. Race became the cause and the rationale for southern difference. Wright finds a comparison with South Africa to be a heuristically appropriate analogy of this process. One might also consider whether the racial explanation of deterioration was not also widely used by Europeans to explain the failures of colonial emancipation. Brazil offered a parallel example of a partial shift to white labor for staple production following emancipation, a labor import policy exclusively favoring Europeans, the progressive marginalization of the ex-slave labor force, and racial explanations for lags vis-à-vis Europe. Racial differentiation in the distribution of political power generally remained characteristic of most of the Caribbean into the twentieth century.

The theme of constraints which emerges powerfully in these first four essays by economic historians, is inevitably expressed in relation to access to land and economic mobility. Mandle follows a long tradition in making the absence of land redistribution in the South a key to its postbellum history. Wright is somewhat more cautious about mak-

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ing "forty acres and a mule" the pivot of postbellum economic history and the potential mechanism of convergence with the Euro-American metropolis.

The chapters by Mandle and Wright both emphasize racial constraints as determinant of the differential fates of whites and blacks in post-emancipation plantation societies. That is also the salient concern of the chapters by O. Nigel Bolland, Jean Besson, and Michel-Rolph Trouillot. As with Mandle on the South, Bolland's essay on the British Caribbean takes the successful continuity of the old ruling class as its point of departure. Emancipation in the British West Indies came without the far-reaching social revolution that occurred in Haiti. Bolland examines the role of the state in maintaining that dominant position through a variety of policies: subsidized immigration, control of the justice and criminal systems, fiscal and tax allocations, and proprietary encumbrances upon the reconstituted peasantry after emancipation and apprenticeship. These were at least partial solutions to planter concerns with the land-labor ratio and peasant resistance to the regimen of plantation labor (the backward-bending labor supply curve).

This process reproduced the class continuities of hegemony and subordination of masters and slaves in the new regime. Like its predecessor, the postslavery British Caribbean was essentially a bipolar society with status, power, color, and culture reinforcing each other to maintain the old antagonistic dualism in a struggle over land, labor, and cultural autonomy. Like Engerman, Bolland takes note of the variations in the slaves' struggles to impose their own meanings of freedom on the process of emancipation, especially in outlying colonial areas such as the Bahamas and Belize. Everywhere, however, freedom meant the reproduction of the class struggle within the nexus of a new legal status for the freed.

Where Emmer, Engerman, and to a lesser extent, Wright place the shape of freedom within the frame of reference of the world market, Bolland concentrates on the meaning of freedom as the outcome of a ubiquitous class struggle, with cultural as well as political dimensions. On one side were ranged the planters and their metropolitan allies. Their ideological allegiance was to the "bourgeois" notion of freedom, stressing competitive individualism, efficient production in response to world market requirements, and a capitalist ethic. On the other side, the freed retained a solidaristic communal ethic akin to the moral economy of traditional peasantries elsewhere.

The development of what Emmer's essay refers to as *peasantization*

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is the main concern of Jean Besson's chapter on freedom and community in the British West Indies after emancipation. For Besson (as for most of the contributors), continuity (in this case, of community formation) is central to understanding the meaning of freedom. For Besson's subjects, freedom meant new possibilities for long-nurtured aspirations to independence. They sought to take maximum advantage of the land-labor ratio at the time of emancipation to obtain outright possession of the means of subsistence or to gain increased choice and bargaining power within the organization of plantation labor. Major insights into the peasant interpretation of liberation may be found in one very novel postemancipation peasant formation. New "free villages" proliferated beyond the boundaries of the plantations. Like Bolland, Besson envisions the meaning of freedom to lie within a secular conflict between groups and values, extending into alternative patterns of kinship, customs, and land tenure. For Besson, as for Bolland, the aspirations of the freed were determined more by class conflict and ruling class action than by economic growth or the impersonal world market. In terms of possible alternative outcomes, a more radical displacement of the ruling elite, or at least a more radical reallocation of the landholding class than actually occurred (analogous to the hoped-for effects of forty acres and a mule after the U.S. Civil War), would have fundamentally expanded freedom and altered its meaning for the ex-slaves. The possibilities of a radically divergent development seem clearer for Besson than for Emmer and Engerman.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot's chapter is, at least implicitly, a two-case comparative test of one aspect of the "revolutionary alternative" hypothesis. Trouillot examines the political development of the free people of color following slave emancipation in British-ruled Dominica and in French-ruled St. Domingue/Haiti. Because of the ruling class displacement, the shift to peasantization, and the achievement of autonomy from direct metropolitan control, the case of Haitian emancipation is usually deemed the most revolutionary in the history of slavery. Indeed, by such measures and by many others, the St. Domingue/Haiti revolution of 1791–1804 was the most violent upheaval in the age of the French Revolution.

By contrast, Dominican emancipation, half a century later, was but one of nineteen simultaneous emancipations in the British slave colonies legally transformed by imperial power. It was part of the largest, the most peaceful, and the most tightly controlled slave emancipation in the circum-Caribbean during the first half of the nineteenth century.

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The displacement of the white planter class in Dominica was also gradual and nonrevolutionary.

Trouillot's two cases are examples of the decline of plantation agriculture and the expansion of peasantization after slavery. The fact that these outcomes were so similar in dramatically different political circumstances poses an interesting heuristic problem for those who place great emphasis on the significance of radical revolutionary transformation in the evolution of postemancipation societies.

Trouillot's point of departure is the continuity of color-class stratification so central to the essays of Mandle and Bolland. Trouillot, however, gives the story a different twist by following the fate of the intermediate free colored class in Caribbean societies after emancipation. In Trouillot's essay, the state in Haiti and Dominica was not merely a well-controlled mechanism for insuring the continuity of either planter rule or the plantation system. It became, in itself, a principle source of income, status, power, and security for a new ruling class in the postplantation economy. In a compromise with peasantization, this new elite reconstituted itself within the state.

In this respect the similarities of outcomes are far more interesting than the mode of emancipation, the degree of political independence, or the continuity of the plantation system in a racially bipolar milieu. For the free colored class, the relation between the meaning and the price of freedom seems to have been, in Trouillot's terms, largely a matter of political opportunity and affordable economic inconvenience. One might look for similar politico-economic compromises elsewhere, even where the plantation system remained viable and where the white planter class retained more wealth and power. The presence of third groups—Asians and free coloreds in the Caribbean, Europeans in Brazil, and indigenous white farmers in the United States—may have represented analagous crucial ingredients in the meaning of freedom to former masters and former slaves, alike.

Trouillot's essay poses heuristic problems for those who hypothesize that more radical political revolutions, in areas that did not experience them, would have had dramatically different socioeconomic outcomes. Does the example of the Haitian revolution imply that postemancipation peasant societies would have achieved long-term outcomes of class structure, cultural values, or economic systems much different and more desirable than those achieved in areas where the old master class was peacefully displaced?

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II

There is almost universal agreement among the contributors to this volume that sharp differences in values between masters and slaves were characteristic of plantation society and that these differences persisted and sometimes sharpened after emancipation. Even those who are most emphatic about the persistence of severe economic and political constrictions on the freed population indicate that the realms of family, religion, and community seemed to offer greater room for autonomy and self-expression after emancipation.

Diane Austin-Broos follows the long-term impact of legal emancipation on the reconceptualization of the moral order in Jamaica. In relation to the other essays, she makes three important points. First, in the Jamaican case, the bipolar model of Afro-Caribbean or black culture versus European or white culture seems inadequate to describe the meaning of freedom in religious terms. Regarding religion, the continuity model must be dramatically revised. Jamaican religion after emancipation was not the continuation of a struggle for separate African survival in a European-dominated Christianity. Austin-Broos rejects the concept of Christianity as a white hegemonic religion against which African survivals and revivals asserted themselves as the representative religion of the ex-slave community. In religion, as in law, emancipation was a watershed. The appropriation of Christianity by the newly freed was accelerated; the missionary influence reached its apogee.

However, consistent with an extensive European historiographical tradition, Austin-Broos emphasizes the lower-class appropriation of fundamentally oppositional and radical messages within the Judeo-Christian tradition itself. Although the missionaries formulated one modern variant (English nonconformist) of an oppositional message to the planter elite, the subsequent story of Jamaican religion involves fundamental deviations from, and rejections of, the moral order of early Victorian religious dissent. Austin-Broos traces a succession of mass religious movements attuned to the changing environment of Jamaica's working classes and responsive to gender as well as to class consciousness. Jamaica was obviously fertile sociological soil for the reinvention of God. The moral order was contested not only at the major boundary lines of color but within the ex-slave communities themselves. The resulting picture is one of fragmentation, volatility, and local variation. In religious terms, Austin-Broos concludes, slave emancipation did

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not bring freedom to all Jamaicans, but it permitted a wider and more subtle struggle.

What did freedom mean when, in Austin-Broos's terms, the struggle first began in earnest on the morrow of emancipation? Sidney Mintz, like her, focuses on emancipation as a turning point, asking readers to liberate themselves from structural and long-term frames of reference. He asks us to consider a hypothetical outcome based on the ex-slave's meaning of freedom and avoiding the constraints of hindsight. Mintz is cognizant of and does not dissent from the prevailing view that the history of plantation societies after slavery makes for sober reading, with its picture of continuing constraints. If anything, Mintz emphasizes that contemporaries underestimated the harshness of postemancipation labor systems. But he feels that a focus on such constraints makes it more difficult to contemplate alternative histories or to grasp the aspirations of the slaves at the moment of liberation.

Mintz speculatively proposes what he regards as a countercontext to the developmental model that prevails not only among our initial essayists but among more radical scholars working within the powerful assumptions of Marxian or progressive models of development. Mintz proposes to evoke, as a point of departure, the world of possibilities grounded in slave aspirations at the dawn of liberation. As the traditional diplomatic historian George Kennan puts it: "History is not what happened. History is what it felt like to be there when it happened," a far different issue (Marshall 1970).

This is, perhaps, not unlike the image projected by the historians of the centennial of British emancipation discussed at the beginning of this introduction. Mintz's proposal, however, offers two crucial differences from the centennialists. It is not the hopes of the metropolitan abolitionists, nor those of the British colonial office, but the hopes of the slaves that interest Mintz. Unlike Kennan's diplomats, whose daily hopes and fears have been recorded in an unbroken flow through the in- and out-trays of ministerial archives, Mintz's historical actors are not accessible to us, he emphasizes, through a ceaseless paper trail. We have no interviews of ex-slaves recorded on the day of liberation.

Mintz's thought experiment requires something more than recapturing sentiments and perceptions. He asks us to imagine a wholly different history, based on the presumption that the newly freed had been, not just allowed, but "helped to become what *they* aspired to." This intentionally counterfactual suggestion fruitfully stimulates the compara-

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tive perspective. It again raises issues that Emmer and others have addressed concerning the situation of other groups at the moment of liberation and afterward. To fully imagine Mintz's counterfactual history, one has to reimagine not only the position of the planter classes and colonial offices, but that of the metropolitan masses—working class, lower middle class, and the elite.

What would have been necessary for all classes to reach agreement that the newly freed West Indians should not only be allowed, but "helped to become what *they* aspired to"? Among the potential British "helpers" we would have to consider the agricultural poor, urban workers and shopkeepers, and women of all classes for whom the bill for helping the freed might have seemed even less bearable in the "hungry forties" than the twenty million pounds expended as compensation to slaveholders in the 1830s. The request for aid would probably have fared even more poorly in the France of 1848. A Republican National Assembly, ready to risk the bloodiest working class uprising in the century by closing down the national workshops of Paris in June 1848, would certainly have hesitated to offer abroad what they were refusing at home.

In other words, this bold thought experiment requires that the aspirations of the rest of the West be incorporated into the hypothesis. It forces us to recall, with Emmer and Engerman, that in the mid-nineteenth century many European workers lacked the right to vote, had few opportunities for education, and enjoyed limited religious tolerance. Sometimes they faced material standards of living at least as bad as those of the newly emancipated and lived in a political and ideological world in which the very idea of a welfare state was still well beyond the horizon.[1] To achieve the aspirations of the emancipated would have considerably increased the price of freedom for European societies and altered the meaning of freedom in the metropolis as well. At what point would averting "westernization" for nonwestern folk have retarded westernization for western folk? Mintz might well reply that speculation about the aspirations of the ex-slave remains as imperative as speculation about everyone else's.

Mintz's haunting question underlines a persistent tension between two frames of reference in this collection, despite a broad range of empirical agreement. Interpretations of the meaning of freedom will be affected by fundamental views of the driving forces of history and basic notions of human interaction. One conceptual framework implies that economic development is fundamental to a world of expanding choices, which

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is one meaning of freedom. In the nineteenth century it was constraints on development, including ex-slave actions, that helped to determine the price of freedom in the plantation Americas. The second conceptual framework found in this collection, while it theoretically recognizes the dependency of material and cultural well-being on some economically determined outer limit, begins with the persistently unequal distributions of wealth, power, and values in postemancipation societies.

In acknowledging that emancipation held out abolitionist promises and unleashed ex-slave aspirations that were not fulfilled in the two centuries after 1788, we come face to face with what Raymond Smith refers to as the stubborn cultural residue of racism. For Smith, the fundamental distortion that altered the meaning of freedom from the moment of freedom was that gap between the egalitarian ideology of emancipation and the continuity and persistence of a hierarchical order in the plantation societies. As indicated in the chapters by Wright, Bolland, and Mandle, the tension was handled and mediated through racially defined antagonisms. To this extent, emancipation was illusory, and Smith's opening citation from Carlyle is not inconsistent with Emmer's skeptical opening French proverb on the nature of change in general. However, for Smith, as for Mandle, Bolland, and Besson, the source of the deception rested less in the inexorable pressures of the international market for staples than in the old hierarchies of power and culture, which reemerged after emancipation. To maintain that specific hierarchical system in the face of the subversive emancipatory ideology, the dominant elite had recourse to the residue of racism that characterized all of the plantation Americas.

Smith does not illustrate his point through case studies or comparative analysis but concentrates on a theoretical analysis of the relation of class domination to the concept of race. Since *race* is a social construct, elaborated over time, the emergence and function of socioracial ideologies is of major theoretical interest. Its articulation from above—from the dominant cultural group—is as noteworthy as the creation of varied religious ideologies of liberation from below. One could hardly identify a more potent cultural barrier to the fulfillment of slave hopes than this persistent ideological fact.

Peter Kolchin's concluding essay on the interpretation of the postbellum era in the South addresses the general historiographic sense of disappointment in all plantation societies after slavery. He concludes that this sense of tragedy is a subtle but persistent inheritance of the original actors in the drama of Reconstruction and its aftermath. Alter-

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natively, Kolchin proposes a retroactive lowering of expectations about the outcome of emancipation on the basis of a comparative sense of shattered illusions, so characteristic of other massive social transformations. In one sense, Kolchin's strategy for ferreting out the meaning of freedom elaborates one of Engerman's and Mintz's insistent points. Any attempt to evaluate the results of emancipation confronts us with the single primary fact that every liberation was final and created the possibility of a new pattern of development. Historians who confront the problem of evaluation in analogous events, such as the Great French Revolution, generally conclude that the upheaval produced, at a minimum, a new legal and institutional relationship that was the prerequisite of eventual modernization.

Emmer proposes that emancipation in plantation societies represents a type of revolution that did little to further subsequent modernization—in the western sense. Kolchin argues that U.S. emancipation was unique among those in the plantation Americas in having occurred in the context of a larger democratizing trend within the society. The immediate extension of universal adult male suffrage to the ex-slaves represented a singular extension of the meaning of freedom. Although the St. Domingue revolution also occurred within the larger setting of the Great French Revolution, there was certainly no integration of the ex-slave population into a liberal democratic France. On the contrary, the Haitian armies that achieved final separation from France broke with a Bonapartist dictatorship that had rejected institutionalized democracy for its own citizens as well.

Further comparative analysis might include later emancipations within Kolchin's concept of emancipations in a democratizing context. One might consider, for example, the relation of British slave emancipation to the enormous expansion of popular mobilization in Britain and the West Indies between 1828 and 1833 and to the passage of the Great Reform Act in 1832. The ending of France's second slave system in 1848 is even closer to Kolchin's model. In 1848 French ex-slaves became the first in the plantation Americas to vote, under a system of universal male suffrage, for representatives to the National Assembly of the French Republic. They were also the first group of Afro-Americans to lose that right with the overthrow of that republic by a second Bonaparte in 1851. Thus, French ex-slaves went through a full cycle of democratization and political constraint well before the beginning of a similar experiment in the postbellum South. Since the old French colonies, like the states of the South, have remained part of a larger nonplantation so-

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ciety, the American experience might usefully be compared with other regions in which the descendants of slaves have remained a minority.

III

The contributors to this volume are roughly divided between economic or social historians and social anthropologists, which provides for a salutory mix of perspectives and emphases. Nonetheless, the differing viewpoints suggest a need to deal creatively with the theoretical and methodological tensions in an attempt to provide an explanatory bridge between local and global histories.

In the most ambitious attempt by an anthropologist to bring enthnography and history together on this bridge, Eric Wolf sums up the new global era that was the century of emancipation in this manner:

> Capitalist accumulation thus continues to engender new working classes in widely dispersed areas of the world. It recruits these working classes from a wide variety of social and cultural backgrounds, and inserts them into variable political and economic hierarchies. The new working classes change these hierarchies by their presence, and are themselves changed by the forces to which they are exposed. On one level, the diffusion of the capitalist mode creates everywhere a wider unity through the constant reconstitution of its characteristic capital–labor relationship. On another level, it also creates diversity, accentuating social opposition and segmentation even as it unifies. Within an ever more integrated world, we witness the growth of ever more diverse proletarian diasporas. (1982:383)

The participants understood that the comparative study of the economic, political, and social consequences of emancipation remains in its infancy. As was true for slavery studies, a comparative view of the postemancipation era can broaden our perspectives and introduce new questions and concepts. Certainly the value of a conference of this nature is measured in large part by the stimulation provided for both basic research and theory.

Wolf's statement raises two questions, which constantly bedevil the comparative approach in history: (1) Of what sense is one history equally the history of other cases? and (2) Is that history the only one that can be written of these cases? The chapters in this volume are to be read with these issues in mind as they lead us to additional considerations of comparison.

The slave system was a social system that could not be overturned overnight, however profitable or unprofitable it may have been. With the coming of emancipation, slavery could no longer be regarded as an

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economic alternative. Freedom for black slaves had implications for the whole social order of the traditional plantation regime. The state was in a position to insist on some measure of contractual conditions in production and to formalize the institutional framework under which freedom became a legal reality. The state, whether national or colonial, attempted to promote the general conditions required for a labor market economy.

Trouillot neatly captures the paradox of this moment in his comparison of Haiti and Dominica. The mulatto ascendency in Dominica was no less a colonial elite than its white equivalents, elsewhere, and was no less determined to dominate black labor. But its political success was inimical to imperial values and to the Crown colony administration. Although several contributors question the ability or even the willingness of the state to positively intervene in behalf of the welfare of the ex-slaves, this needs to be read against the class dynamics of the Haitian revolution and the experience of the European class struggles.

Yet the political language of class and race in nineteenth-century Britain, France, the U.S. north, and the Brazilian south were not identical. Nor were the political languages static. They have their own distinct morphologies.

"We fell under the leadership of those who would compromise with truth in the past in order to make peace in the present and guide policy in the future" (DuBois 1935:727). "Truth, we are told, will prevail, and freedom we know is truth" (Sewell 1862:323). The truths spoken by DuBois and Sewell about the American South and the West Indies may suggest a tragic reading of the role of the state as the guarantor of promised freedom, but they still require close examinations of the institutions during the transformation and of the many voices and truths used to express and repress these institutions.

What were the tactics, adaptations, and modes of resistance used by the ex-slaves and bound laborers in response to the varying conditions and promises of freedom? The planters saw everything that was once theirs about to be taken from them—manpower, money, power, prosperity, and history. By combining franchise restrictions, legislative fraud, collusion, and the fear of the masses, the planter class strove to keep the newly freed subservient. Where the plantation survived, the state's fear of revolt and the plantocracy's confusion and labor disorganization were codified in new canons of law and order. For the black peasant and indentured plantation worker, any degree of collusion between

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the state and the landed oligarchy presented a more or less formidable hurdle.

Under what conditions could the nonelite mount strategies and mobilize to defend and expand their rights as they contended with both official and extralegal forms of social control? What were the opportunities, the successes, and failures in attempts to maintain client-master relations through credit, confidence, and loyalty? The weighing of these factors might provide further comparative instances of the way in which freedom struggles have defined freedom.

How are the largely rural populations of the plantation zone to be conceptualized? The answer to this question may be framed by stressing the following factors: (1) the degree of the involvement of the local economy in the international market, (2) the strength of the state and of its political components in imposing labor and land controls, and (3) the nature of the alternatives open to the freed as landless laborers, petty commodity producers, and ancillary producers for the market as subsistence cultivators. Freedom fundamentally changed the relationships among people, labor, and land. The variations in land-labor relationships in the plantation zone of the New World led to the development of numerous characterizations of the rural inhabitants. They have been variously labeled as fictive, marginal, and reconstituted peasants, or neither full peasants nor proletarians. Previous typologies tied to local experiences of emancipation often have not been adequately integrated into the dynamics of the global political economy of the era.

Fruitful classification and comparison involve consideration of labor use and family budget strategies, information availability, and sensitivity to the continuous tension between aversion to drudgery and social goals. Primary communities of peasants and proletarians had to accommodate or create new types of budgetary constraints on the wage nexus and on a more socialized economy. New modes of interfamily and intrafamily cooperation were necessary. There were new opportunities for patronage and clientism, for kinship loyalties and factional hostilities.

It is at this point that microhistorical and critical anthropology enters the analysis. As Austin-Broos, Besson, Smith, and Mintz show, in this enterprise culture becomes neither anonymous nor consensual. The cultural concepts of person, class, ethnicity, or gender do not exist in a vacuum. As several of the contributors indicate, culture is expressed through recognizing its political moment.

All of these issues are inseparable from the persistence of racism. Comparative history and anthropology have much to suggest about the

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ambiguous and pervasive role of racism in the modern world. Its meaning in different social settings remains elusive. To what extent does race constitute a single ideological construct? Why do definitions of blacks and other culturally determined color shadings differ so markedly in postemancipation societies? How are the concepts of race and class to be weighted, and what are the changing components?

The global processes set in motion by emancipation remain living traditions and daily practices. We need to understand the traditions and practices that peoples once constructed if we are to recount precisely how they made or failed to make their own history.

IV

The collection as a whole testifies to far more general agreement upon the trends, continuities, and connections between economic, political, and cultural outcomes than one might imagine from the debates over the evaluation and interpretation of the meaning of freedom. Much of the divergence arises from predispositions to assign greater or lesser weight to contradictory aspects of very complex interactions and outcomes. Other, perhaps related, differences arise out of general theories of social change and the ideas, institutions, or material forces inherited by postemancipation societies.

Some fundamental substantive points of agreement seem to be characteristic of the collection as a whole. Emancipation was a profound legal transformation and a successful step toward the elimination of chattel slavery throughout the world. Adjustments to the world market, attempts to constrain political power or economic mobility, and the struggle for cultural redefinition all had to be conducted within the context of that irreversible fact.

Second, the outcome of emancipation in the perspective of the twenty-first century evokes a sense of disappointment tinged with resignation or bitterness. Only by a retrospective revolution of falling expectations, or by returning to the zero hour of freedom, can one avoid confronting the comparative dreariness of the history of the plantation Americas in the century or so after their slave emancipations. With few exceptions, the conditions of the ex-slaves converged more toward the relatively impoverished levels of the Afro-Asian tropics than those of the old North Atlantic world or of the new Pacific Rim. Between these two simple but disparate facts lie all of the complexities, variations, constraints, and aspirations that find voice or echo in this volume.

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NOTE

1. On the standards of living of British manual laborers and West Indian slaves at the time of slave emancipation, see Ward (1988:261–63, 286–88).

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