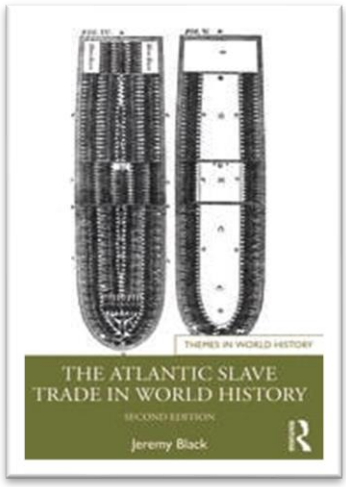


Jeremy Black.- *The Atlantic Slave Trade in World History*. 2nd edition, (New York and London: Routledge, 2024), 204 p.

From the harrowing narratives of Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) to the powerful cinematic portrayals in Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* (2013) and Nate Parker's *The Birth of a Nation* (2016), literature and film have played a crucial role in exposing the horrors of slavery. These works bring to life the brutal realities of bondage, including forced labor, sexual violence, family separation, and dehumanization, while giving voice to the resilience and agency of the enslaved. They serve not only as personal testimonies of suffering and survival but also as acts of resistance against historical amnesia. While these narratives foreground the emotional and psychological toll of slavery, Jeremy Black's *The Atlantic Slave Trade in World History* (2024) offers a broader historical lens. His book moves beyond individual experience to examine the transatlantic slave trade as a global system deeply embedded in the making of the modern world. By tracing its economic, political, and ideological foundations, Black provides a critical account of how slavery was not a peripheral institution, but a central force in shaping global history and its enduring legacies. The book comprises 204 pages and is structured into seven chapters, including a preface, a section of selected further reading, and a comprehensive index.

In the preface, Jeremy Black situates the study of the Atlantic slave trade within a renewed global interest in the legacies of slavery and the urgent calls for justice that have emerged in recent years. He highlights the influence of contemporary movements such as Black Lives Matter in reigniting scholarly and public debates around reparations, historical accountability, and racial inequality. Black acknowledges that the repercussions of slavery are not confined to the past; they endure through systemic disparities and modern forms of exploitation. He draws attention to the persistence of slavery in contemporary practices such as forced marriage, coerced labor, and domestic abuse – especially of women and girls – which, while not identical to historical chattel slavery, share its foundational dynamics of control, violence, and dehumanization. By connecting past and present, Black broadens the scope of historical inquiry to include ongoing injustices, encouraging readers to view the Atlantic slave trade not merely as a closed chapter in world history, but as a legacy that continues to shape our social and moral landscape.

Chapter one serves as an introduction, laying the conceptual foundation for Jeremy Black's examination of slavery as a global and enduring institution shaped by economic, political, and cultural forces. He begins by noting the challenge of defining slavery across time and societies, though key elements such as forced labor, commodification, and the denial of personhood remain consistent. Black links the rise of the Atlantic slave trade to earlier Iberian practices, especially those in Portugal and Spain, which served as models for later transoceanic systems. As European colonial economies expanded, particularly in the Americas, the demand for labor grew. With indigenous populations proving difficult to enslave in sufficient numbers, European powers increasingly turned to Africa. Slavery in the West thus became a brutal system of human commodification, underpinned by violence and rationalized by ideologies of nationhood, religion, and especially race. Black emphasizes the evolving relationship between slavery and racism, arguing that while racism did not cause slavery, it became essential to its justification and longevity. He also examines how constructing ´otherness´ allowed societies to legitimize exploitation. Though focused on the Atlantic context, the chapter situates slavery within a broader global history and acknowledges African involvement, framed within the asymmetry of European power and maritime dominance.

Chapter two, titled "The Beginnings of the Atlantic Slave Trade," examines how political, economic, and technological forces converged to establish the transatlantic system of slavery. Jeremy Black begins with the early maritime ventures of Spain and Portugal in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which opened lasting contact with West Africa and set the stage for European involvement in the slave trade. As plantation economies in the Americas expanded, the need for labor grew. With Indigenous populations diminished by disease and resistance, Europeans turned to African slaves as a more dependable source. Black explains how this demand was met through organized supply networks involving both African intermediaries and European commercial systems. The English entry into the trade in the seventeenth century further expanded its scale, with England emerging as a major player. The chapter also highlights the role of ships and maps in enabling large scale human trafficking. Black closes the chapter by exploring how economic motives and racial ideologies became intertwined, with race used to justify slavery and slavery reinforcing racial hierarchies. He presents the trade not as a sudden development but as the outcome of a gradual process shaped by power, profit, and ideology.

Chapter three, titled "The Slave Trade Expands Greatly," explores the rapid growth of the Atlantic slave trade in the seventeenth century, driven by rising European demand for plantation crops such as sugar, tobacco, and cacao. Black links this demand to the consumer revolution in Europe, which

created new markets for stimulants like sugar and coffee. To meet labor needs in the Americas, the slave trade expanded in scale and reach, involving more regions in West Africa and greater participation by European powers including England, France, and the Netherlands. Special focus is given to England's role in the West Indies, where the shift to sugar monoculture heightened the need for enslaved labor. Black also examines the involvement of African leaders, who engaged in negotiations with European traders and integrated slavery into local systems. The chapter acknowledges the profound human cost of this expansion, marked by violence, displacement, and cultural disruption. It also highlights the emergence of African diasporic communities in the Americas, where enslaved people preserved elements of their cultural and religious heritage. Overall, the chapter explains how this period of intensified trade laid the foundation for entrenched racial slavery and the development of Black Atlantic identities.

Chapter four, titled "The Slave Trade at Its Height," focuses on the eighteenth century, when the transatlantic slave trade became a central part of global commerce. Black examines how European powers, especially Britain, France, Portugal, and Spain, competed for control of slave routes and markets. Enslaved Africans were trafficked across and between empires, as plantation goods like sugar, cotton, and coffee fed European consumer demand. The chapter surveys the main national systems, including the French and British trades, the Portuguese link between Brazil and Angola, and the Spanish American economies. Black also highlights the role of international finance in sustaining the trade through credit and investment. In Africa, he notes both cooperation and resistance among local actors. The chapter addresses the harsh realities of enslaved life and the cultural resilience of African communities in the Americas. It also explores how racial ideologies developed alongside slavery to justify the system. The chapter ends with the American Revolution and its early challenges to slavery's moral and political legitimacy.

Building on these shifts in political thought and growing ethical concerns, chapter five, titled "Abolitionism," explores the gradual, uneven, and politically complex process by which the Atlantic slave trade – and eventually slavery itself – was challenged and dismantled. The chapter begins with early abolitionist efforts in Denmark, followed by more influential campaigns in Britain and France, where moral, religious, economic, and political arguments converged to question the legitimacy of the trade. Black outlines how banning the trade did not immediately eliminate slavery, and many powers continued illicit trading. He discusses Britain's global efforts, including naval interventions and diplomatic pressure on other countries and African states, aimed at ending both the trade and the institution. This chapter also considers America's abolitionist trajectory, and how slavery came to an

end at different times across the British Empire, France, and the United States. Importantly, Black emphasizes that abolition was not solely a moral triumph but was entangled with imperial interests, political shifts, and global power dynamics. The chapter highlights both the persistence of slavery after official bans and the international dimensions of abolitionist activism.

Chapter Six, titled "After Slavery?," explores the enduring consequences of slavery following its formal abolition, focusing on the legacies it left in former colonies, African societies, and the modern world. Black examines the social and economic challenges faced by freed populations and the limited outcomes of resettlement projects for former slaves, such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. He also addresses the impact on African societies that had become economically dependent on the trade. The chapter traces the persistence of forced labor and state-imposed servitude well into the twentieth century, including colonial exploitation and the systematic dehumanization exemplified by the Holocaust. Black concludes that abolition did not erase the structures or ideologies of slavery; instead, its legacies have continued to shape global politics, racial hierarchies, and social inequality.

Building on this discussion, chapter seven serves as a reflective conclusion that synthesizes the historical, political, and moral legacies of the transatlantic slave trade. Black emphasizes how the memory of slavery continues to influence contemporary discourse, particularly in Western societies such as Britain and the United States. He points to the growing global reckoning with slavery's historical injustices, especially in light of recent movements like Black Lives Matter, which have renewed focus on racial inequality and historical responsibility. The chapter highlights symbolic acts of apology and recognition – from institutions such as the Church of England to political leaders – while drawing attention to modern forms of exploitation, including human trafficking and forced labor. Black underscores that slavery is not merely a historical event, but a phenomenon with ongoing repercussions embedded in economic systems, cultural memory, and racial ideologies. He calls for a deeper understanding of how the transatlantic slave trade continues to shape contemporary global relations and identity politics.

Jeremy Black's *The Atlantic Slave Trade in World History* provides a thoughtful and comprehensive examination of one of the most influential and oppressive systems in global history. Instead of confining his analysis to the Atlantic world, Black places the slave trade within a broader global context, analyzing its economic, political, and cultural dimensions across regions and over time. The book's value lies in its clear and chronological structure, guiding readers from the origins of the trade in the fifteenth century, through its expansion in the eighteenth century, to the abolitionist movements and the lasting repercussions of slavery in the modern era. It explores central themes

such as European imperial competition, African participation, labor systems in the Americas, and the development of racial ideologies. Employing a comparative and transnational perspective, and giving due attention to African historical agency, Black avoids reductive binaries and offers a nuanced narrative. He also connects past systems of slavery to modern forms of exploitation and current debates about racial justice. A notable strength of the book is its pedagogical design: each chapter concludes with a list of references, and the volume includes a useful section for further reading and a comprehensive index. Revised to incorporate recent scholarship and contemporary concerns, this second edition serves as an essential resource for understanding the transatlantic slave trade and its ongoing global legacies.

While Jeremy Black's *The Atlantic Slave Trade in World History* presents a broad and comparative overview, it exhibits several limitations. Notably, it lacks engagement with postcolonial and decolonial perspectives, especially in its treatment of resistance. The voices and worldviews of enslaved people are only briefly addressed, with political and economic structures taking precedence over the lived experiences and cultural agency of the oppressed. This emphasis results in a somewhat detached tone, missing the emotional and moral weight of the subject. Furthermore, the book's concise format, while accessible, often compresses complex topics, such as African politics, diasporic identity, and cultural resistance, into overly brief discussions. Though it aims for a global view, the narrative leans toward Eurocentrism, focusing more on European motivations than African perspectives or anticolonial frameworks. References to recent movements like Black Lives Matter are included, but only superficially, limiting their analytical value. While the book succeeds in presenting a structured and informative history, it may fall short for readers seeking a deeper, more critically engaged account of slavery's enduring legacies. Despite these criticisms, Black's book remains a timely and insightful resource for readers seeking to understand not only the mechanisms of the transatlantic slave trade but also its enduring impact on the modern world. It is a valuable reference for researchers and students engaged with slave narratives, the transatlantic slave trade, global and world history, economic history, African diaspora studies, archival studies, memory studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies and decolonial studies.

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