

DAVID ELTIS and JAMES WALVIN, eds. — *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Origins and Effects in Europe, Africa, and the Americas*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1981. Pp. VIII, 314.

The Eltis/Walvin volume suitably takes its place beside similar recent collections, *The Uncommon Market* (eds.: Gemery and Hogendorn), and *Abolition, Religion and Reform* (eds.: Bolton and Drescher). It affords a new perspective of the enormous recent extension of slavery and abolition historiography.

As with most wide-ranging collections it is difficult to do justice to the fifteen individual essays. Some are finely honed attempts to answer specific quantitative questions: Hogendorn and Gemery on the impact of abolition on African-imported monies, Eltis's investigation of the impact of British abolition on the flow of the slave trade, Daget on French suppression, Johansen and Green-Pederson on Danish and Sheridan on British slave demography. Anstey and Walvin deal with religious and popular aspects of abolition in Britain, Reynolds with the rise of post-abolition commerce on the Gold Coast, Emmer with the suppression of the Dutch trade, and Knight with the impact of the slave trade on Afro-American culture. Three are imaginative syntheses, assaying the validity of various explanatory hypotheses: Temperley on the ideology of anti-slavery, Curtin on the impact of abolition in Senegambia, and Austen on abolition and Asian economic structures.

The volume, originating in a conference at Aarhus University, is the outgrowth of slave-trade scholarship on five continents, arranged under four "geographic" rubrics: the European metropolis, Africa, the Atlantic, and the Americas. This subdivision, reflecting a typical slaving voyage, is probably less coincidental than Engerman's thoughtful introduction implies. Most individual pieces reflect specific research interests within the generic subject rather than a prior commitment to illuminate a central problem or paradigm.

If the volume breaks out of the historiographical mould of abolition into a newer global perspective, it also tends to reaffirm some traditional emphases as well. The major impulses in the stages of abolition are seen as Euro- (and indeed Anglo-)centric. All three essays on the "metropolitan" section deal with its English-speaking component. Temperley's stimulating lead-off essay raises a fundamental question of temporal and spatial priority. He deals broadly with the English-speaking non-slave world of the eighteenth century, although his socio-ideological model implies a link to industrial growth in Europe as a whole. Even more forcefully, from an Afro-Asian perspective, Austen lucidly reinforces the ascription of the abolitionist impulse to European and more principally to British initiatives. The essays dealing with the debates over metropolitan abolition, colonial perspectives and oceanic policing (Eltis, Emmer, Johansen, Green-Pederson and Sheridan) implicitly or explicitly reinforce that conclusion by and large. Even Daget's revisionist essay on French enforcement concludes, on a muted note, that French "actions were not entirely negative".

In its close attention to the British/North European metropolises and their colonial dependencies, the volume does not direct attention to major retarding forces ranged against effective abolition of the nineteenth-century slave trade. There is no essay on deterrents to abolition posed by America, Cuba and Brazil. All three essays on the Caribbean area concentrate on demographic investigations. Does this reflect an implicit shift away from the classic central role in abolition hitherto assigned to Caribbean economic development? The latter is only briefly alluded to in the introduction and in the essays on metropolitan abolition. Furthermore, with the exception of a passing reference to the role of the Jamaican uprising of 1831 (Walvin), there is no discussion of slave revolts as catalysts or inhibitors

of abolition. The great St. Domingue rebellion of 1791 is also mentioned only once (Sheridan). In these respects as well the volume seems to highlight the centrality of the British metropolitan impulse.

In contrast with the metropolitan historiography, the African, maritime and Caribbean sections deal primarily with the impact (or non-impact) of abolition. (The African section is labeled the "Impact of Abolition".) Concerning the illegal oceanic trade, Eltis devalues the effect of British abolition in terms of the marginal restraints on the final trade totals by the British navy. His quantitative analysis reaffirms Curtin's conclusion (*The Atlantic Slave Trade*, p. 269) that the British blockade was effective in diverting less than ten percent of the trade. From another perspective, however, Eltis apparently demonstrates that in comparison with his findings elsewhere (*Economic History Review* [1978], pp. 211-49), British naval action was marginally more significant in reducing the trade than would have been the case if the British government, heeding the cynical or pacifist critics of the blockade, had instead restricted all British capital flowing into the traffic after abolition. Moreover, still unchallenged is Curtin's conclusion that British abolition dampened a potential post-Napoleonic record boom resulting from an enormous backlog of demand. If one looks beyond the narrower question of net effect on numbers imported, from a geographical perspective British policy clearly contributed to the dramatic redirection of purchases away from the colonies of north-western Europe to those of southwestern Europe between 1790 and 1820. This consideration would give more emphasis to another of Eltis's implicit conclusions, that the abolition of the slave trade ultimately depended on its effective legal prohibition in areas of demand.

For Africa, abolition appears to be accepted as an exogenous, and not always significant, European intrusion. Curtin finds that Senegambian economy and society moved according to its own African-oriented rhythms. Austen, like Curtin, emphasizes the quasi-autonomy of Africa in relation to British imperial abolition. Austen describes a complex of slave systems developing out of phase with the Euro-Caribbean tempo. Hogendorn and Gemery conclude that abolition was beneficial to West Africa in at least one respect, although Curtin finds its overall impact to be negligible in his area of speciality.

The historiographical debate over the causes of abolition is discussed in Engerman's introduction as well as in the Temperley and Austen essays. Temperley deftly begins with the paradox that abolition occurred despite the economic growth of the slave areas and concludes that it occurred, *inter alia*, because of the ideological consequences of economic growth in the non-slave areas. This leads Engerman to underscore the temporal convergence of industrialization, economic ideology and abolition, and to conclude that the previous historiographical dichotomy between "economics and morality" may now be obsolete. Austen's lucid essay, however, concludes that for yet one more geographic area, nineteenth-century slavery was not economically anachronistic nor was it at all incompatible with dynamic nineteenth-century European capitalism. He retains the perspective that abolitionist ideological commitments of Europeans often conflicted with their political and economic goals, as well as with the impact of their technology. Thus some of the same contradictions that prevailed in the late eighteenth-century Atlantic re-emerged in nineteenth-century Africa. Theoretically, Curtin's essay also emphasizes the heuristic value of positing and testing contrasting economic and non-economic models of motivation and behaviour rather than assuming convergence. Curtin and Austen remind us not to assume a temporal convergence of social forces or ideologies. Above all, a comparison between Temperley's temporal point of departure (why did British abolition begin at the end of the eighteenth

century?) and Austen's chronology (why did slavery expand so long after the end of the eighteenth century?) shows that right down through the close of the Atlantic trade, frontiers of slavery were continually opening up beyond the writ of abolitionism.

For specialists in social history, it also remains unclear why industrializing Britain was so much more abolitionist in the 1780s than, say, industrializing France in the 1840s. Even for the English-speaking world, Engerman, despite his enthusiasm for an industrialization-cum-abolition model, seems to harbour misgivings about the historiographical implications of the Walvin/Anstey descriptions of working-class abolitionists. Might they not, he asks, have better concentrated their efforts on improving their own position in England? Significantly, this question is directed only toward the English *working* class. More attention might be directed toward groups as defined by religion, political culture and history than by occupational status. We do get hints of the importance of disparate cultural traditions. The emphasis on nationalist, religious and popular abolitionism in Temperley, Anstey and Walvin can be contrasted with the initial hostility of Daget's French sailors or the indifference of Austen's Indian merchants. Above all, the global perspective in this volume prevents us from falling into the pitfall of a Whiggish "modernization" theory and of assuming that all factors of social development converged to produce abolition. Austen, most notably, treats abolitionism as an exogenous force in the Afro-Asian area, not embedded in its economic or ideological structures. He expands the paradox with which Temperley begins, demonstrating the functional value of such collections.

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LEE SOLTOW and EDWARD STEVENS. — *The Rise of Literacy and the Common School in the United States: A Socioeconomic Analysis to 1870*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. Pp. 247.

The authors of this volume present an impressive amount of statistical material relating to literacy and illiteracy in the United States from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century. Much of this material is interesting and potentially instructive for those interested in questions of literacy or in more general questions concerning the development and character of common schooling.

Using census data and the assumption that the ability to sign one's name is a reliable indicator of literacy, Soltow and Stevens point to a general increase in levels of literacy in the United States over the period of study. On the average, perhaps sixty percent of adult males were literate in 1790 and perhaps eighty percent by 1870. Soltow and Stevens present a host of tables and graphs illustrating the development of factors (possibly) related to the development of literacy: the growth of printing and of the press, the spread of book ownership among different income groups, rates of school attendance and the distribution of the student population within a common school curriculum, and others. All of this quantitative material is potentially interesting to the student of literacy and common schooling in the nineteenth century.