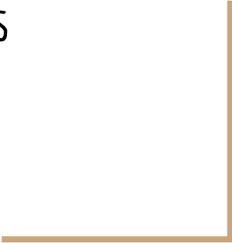


Slavery in Africa

Week Two Lectures



AFRICAN
STUDIES

TRANSFORMATIONS IN SLAVERY

A History of Slavery in Africa

THIRD EDITION

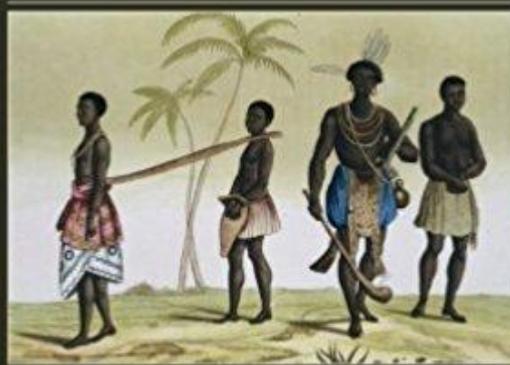
PAUL E. LOVEJOY



CAMBRIDGE

SLAVERY AND SLAVING IN AFRICAN HISTORY

SEAN STILWELL



New Approaches to African History

The RISE AND FALL of the PLANTATION COMPLEX

Second Edition



Essays in Atlantic History

PHILIP D. CURTIN

Defining Slavery

Slavery is diverse, and can look different depending on the locale. Nevertheless, Lovejoy and Stilwell identify several features that make slavery a unique kind of exploitation:

- There is an idea that slaves are property to be bought and sold (chattel).
- Slaves are often "kinless" outsiders who have no access to the heritage and belonging in the society in which they live. They are often removed a considerable distance from where they have connections.
- Coercion can be used at will towards slave populations.
- The labour of slaves is intended to be at the complete disposal of the "master"
- Slaves do not ordinarily own the right to their own sexuality and reproduction.
- Slaves are generally inherited, unless expressly stated otherwise.

Each of these traits is relatively broad, and can lead to various kinds of slavery, as seen in Stilwell, pp. 1-3.

Slaves as Chattel

Theoretically, slaves are the property of the masters, and can be sold at his discretion; he has complete power over them. As slavery has existed in countless different African societies, various specificities clarify this point. For example:

- Under Islamic Law, if a woman is taken as a slave concubine, she cannot be sold if she has given birth to children.
- Sometimes, once "acculturation" had been reached, some very limited form of ethnic affiliation could be bestowed on the slave, making it harder to sell him/her at will.
- Sometimes, if slaves had converted to Islam, it was harder for Muslim slave masters to sell the slave. (we will return to this point).

Slaves as "Kinless" Outsiders

Lovejoy: "Therefore, slavery was fundamentally a means of denying outsiders the rights and privileges of a particular society so that they could be exploited for economic, political, and/or social purposes. Usually outsiders were perceived as ethnically different: The absence of kinship was a particularly common distinction. A person who spoke the same language as his master, without an accent, who shared the same culture, believed in the same religion, and understood the political relationships that determined how power was exercised was far more difficult to control than an outsider" (Lovejoy 2012: 2-3).

Lovejoy: "Certainly the most developed forms of slavery have been those where slaves were removed a considerable distance from their birthplace, thereby emphasizing their alien origins. This uprooting has been as dramatic as the transport of Africans across the Atlantic or the Sahara Desert or as nondramatic as the seizure of people who lived only a hundred kilometers or less from the home of the enslavers" (3).

Slaves as "Kinless" Outsiders (Cont.)

Stilwell (2014: 9) notes that because slaves were usually kinless outsiders, they were quite useful in fulfilling certain roles in society. Even if they were not "loyal" to their master, they were dependent upon him; they had no other access to resources, belonging, or power in this society (because they were removed from their own).

For this reason, soldiers and political aides were often slaves. As Silwell notes (2012: 41), "the use of slaves as soldiers or as officials often proved to be a better option than relying on ambitious kin who had their eyes on the throne." Slaves were also often tax collectors.

As one traveller in West Africa noted in the 1790s, "The value of a slave in the eye of an African purchaser increases in proportion to his distance from his native kingdom" (10).

Coercion, Violence, and Slavery

People are generally reduced from a state of freedom to a state of slavery through violent means, ordinarily warfare, whereby prisoners were enslaved. Warfare, raiding, and kidnapping is the source of most slaves in human history.

Slavery in Africa could also be a form of judicial punishment, penance for a crime committed against someone.

Occasionally (though rarely), slavery was voluntary. In this situation, an individual puts himself under the material protection of a more prominent member of the community in exchange for labour and allegiance.

Physical punishment and beatings were always quite common for slaves, and these beatings could lead to death.

Slave Labour

Slavery is inherently tied to labour! To most masters, slaves were an "instrument of work", and must be compliant to the master at all times.

At the same time, we must remember that slave labour coexisted with other forms of labour. Remember, slavery is just one form of exploitation. (for example, slaves and contract workers worked side by side on Cuban sugar plantations)

Because of coercion, however, slaves could be made to perform any role in the economy.

Slaves and Sexuality/Reproduction

Ordinarily, slaves, especially females, did not have control over their own sexuality. It is not surprising that Eunuchs and young females tended to fetch the highest prices in African slave markets. "These two opposites - castrated males and attractive females - demonstrate most clearly the aspect of slavery that involved the master's power over the slave's sexual and reproductive functions" (Lovejoy 2012: 5). Eunuchs fulfill the "kinless" trait even more.

Slaves, with a few exceptions, were not trusted or allowed to engage in sexual or reproductive relations, and children born to slave marriages and unions were ordinarily the property of the master, not the parent.

- However, Under Islamic Law, children born to slave concubines were technically free.

Slaves are Inherited

With few exceptions, the slave and the slave status were inherited from master to master, generation to generation.

Children born to slaves did not experience "enslavement" i.e. capture, but there was always the threat of violence, and slavery was formed into a kind of identity in these communities.

There were some exceptions to this, however. Under Islamic Law, female slave concubines were ordinarily freed once their master died. This did not usually apply to other kinds of slavery under Islam.

How is Lovejoy approaching the study of Slavery?

“The conceptual framework that emphasizes slavery as a system, and not simply an institution, is intended to demonstrate a fundamental difference between slavery in those places in the diaspora where many of the enslaved were forced to go, including the Americas and the Islamic world north of the Sahara, and slavery in sub-Saharan Africa itself. Enslaved Africans were found in Africa as well as in the Americas and North Africa, **but they were taken to distant lands as slaves; they were not enslaved there.** I argue that the specific features of slavery as a mode of production in Africa harnessed the mechanisms of enslavement with the slave trade and slave use. Elsewhere, enslavement was not an integrated part of the slave system, other than through the biological reproduction of slaves themselves and the purchase of slaves from Africa. There was no such geographical and structural separation between enslavement and the trade and use of slaves. In Africa, the structure of slavery that underpinned the social and economic formations of the largest states and societies was closely tied to enslavement itself.” (xix)

How is Lovejoy approaching the study of Slavery?

Lovejoy is seeking to explore one of the themes of the "plantation complex", namely, that slave populations were rarely self-sustaining, thus necessitating slave raiding and trading.

Lovejoy wants to understand how local conceptions and practices of slavery in Africa were shaped by the presence of the overseas "plantation complex".
How were they transformed?

How is Lovejoy approaching the study of Slavery?

Lovejoy wants us to see that slavery within Africa transformed over the course of the 1500s-1900s. It was not static. In order to illustrate these changes, he wants us to distinguish between three different slave situations:

1. "Slavery as a Marginal Feature of Society" - This refers to, for example, many small-scale kinds of slavery in African societies (pre-plantation complex) and the trade with the Middle East and the Muslim world.
2. "Slavery as an institution" - This refers to the point where slaves became used in production and political organization (such as soldiers and officials). The number of slaves required in these systems was greater. This also opened doors for increased slave raiding to fulfill overseas demand.
3. "Slavery as a mode of production" - This refers to the point when slave production (on plantations) became widespread on the African continent, particularly when the slave trade was abolished.

Slavery as a Type of Dependency...

- In smaller-scale African societies in which slaves existed, slavery often existed as a type of personal dependency, in which slaves were owned and supported by elders seeking to increase the gross number of individuals in their clan/family/lineage.
 - While slaves lacked access to kinship networks, they did add to the numbers of people affiliated with a specific powerful individual.
 - Oftentimes, these slave relationships took the ambiguous form of "pawns" arrangements for debtors. Pawns were not technically slaves, but they performed many of the same functions.
- Similar arrangements were made with slave women. Some were simply assimilated into the family as wives, while some were kept as concubines.
 - The ability to give male dependants property in the form of women was a way for powerful men to increase their power
 - Especially in light of somewhat expensive costs pertaining to marrying a free woman.

Slavery and Islam

- The Islamic States of North Africa and the Sahel were able to obtain slaves prior to the Trans-Atlantic trade by tapping into small-scale slave networks that were already in existence in Africa.
- Furthermore, many slaves were captured in the Holy Wars which spread Islam from the Arabian Peninsula to Africa.
 - According to Islamic law, it is permissible to enslave non-Muslims
- Those who were slaves in Muslim societies saw their condition as more temporary than those in the Americas, or even some sub-Saharan empires.
 - Children of Slaves were not ordinarily born into slavery
 - Conversion and assimilation into Muslim society could remove slave status
 - Slave concubines who bore children to their masters were ordinarily freed upon giving birth

Slavery and Islam (Continued)

- Slaves in the Islamic world between 700-1400 were normally used for domestic purposes (including sexual purposes). Though some were used in agriculture and mining.
 - Despite the importance of slavery, there was not an *economic system* based on slavery in most of these societies. These were "societies with slaves", not "slave societies"
- Islamic merchants and their engagement with sub-Saharan Africa did, however, reveal to future Trans-Atlantic slave-traders that Africa was a potential site of slave labour.

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: Why Africa?

- Between the late 15th century and c.1867, as many as 12.8 million Africans departed the continent for distant shores.
 - And they departed as Slaves.
 - Luanda (2.8 million), Ouidah (1 Million), Benguela (764 thousand), Cabinda (733 thousand)
- "Slavery underwent a transformation from a marginal feature of society to an important institution, but in most places, slavery continued to be interpreted in the context of lineage structures" (Lovejoy, 20).
- "Slavery [eventually] became a central institution and not a peripheral feature. Africa could be integrated into a network of international slavery because indigenous forms of dependency allowed the transfer of people from one social group to another" (Lovejoy, 21).
- Africa became integrated this way because it was an area of slave supply. There is a link between Africa's domestic employment of slaves and its ability to supply them overseas.

Transformations in Slavery

- One must remember that Africans did not ordinarily "enslave their Brothers"; They far more often enslaved their enemies.
- Furthermore, because slave owners and enslavers tended to be the same people, the separation between "enslavement" and "Slave Use" was removed. This enabled slavery to transform in Africa.
- By the late 1700s, many African societies were no longer "Societies with Slaves" and had become "Slave Societies": integrating enslavement, the slave trade, and the production of slaves.
- While in the pasts, slaves as prisoners of war were occasional, eventually, many wars became about slave raiding. This was because there were eventually constant merchants buying slaves for overseas work.