

The Many Faces of Slavery: non-traditional slave experiences in the Atlantic World

21-22 May, 2015

University of Montpellier, France

By the 18th century, racial slavery had matured into a fully-fledged, firmly established, profitable form of labour in the Atlantic World. In slave societies, the development of the plantation unit led both to the geographical concentration of the slave population and to a growing homogenization of the activities bondsmen performed. However, throughout the Atlantic World, the existence of phenomena such as urban slavery, slave self-hiring, quasi-free or nominal slaves, domestic slave concubines, slave vendors, slave sailors, slave preachers, slave overseers, and many other types of “societies with slaves,” broadens our traditional conception of slavery by complicating the slave experience. This conference does not aim to challenge the significance of the plantation system, but, by using it as a paradigm, seeks to assess the extent and nature of non-traditional forms of slavery in the context of the historical evolution of labour in the Atlantic World.

In order to do so, this conference seeks to ask the following questions:

Were certain locations, historical periods and economic conditions more favourable to the diversification of the slave experience? How does the variety of slave experience inform the essence of slavery itself? What strategies did slaves employ to negotiate or manoeuvre themselves into different relationships with their masters or with their societies? Did the privileges that certain slaves benefit from, such as geographic or social mobility, undermine the slave system by subverting the established social and racial order? At what point did slave autonomy develop from an act of the assertion of agency and become an act of rebellion? Could it be argued that the development of non-traditional forms of slavery was the result of deliberate political choices?

The themes this conference endeavours to explore include, but are not limited to:

- Urban slavery
- Hiring out of slaves and slave self-hire
- Industrial slavery
- Slave hierarchies within plantation culture
- Subsistence slavery
- Manumission by self-purchase or by a relative
- Nominal or quasi-free slaves
- Slaves owned by non-traditional owners (women, free blacks, indigenous people, institutions)
- Socialising across legal or racial lines (i.e. between slaves and free people of colour or whites)
- Spaces of negotiation
- Slave geographic and social mobility
- Slaves in the westward migration
- Runaway slaves and Maroon communities

Please send proposals of no more than 300 words in English (for papers or panels) and a brief CV mentioning your institutional affiliation to manyfacesofslavery@gmail.com by January 31st, 2014. Notification of acceptance will be sent by February 20th 2015. We welcome papers that cover any region of the Atlantic World as well as proposals for round table discussions.

Conference Organisers: Lawrence Aje (University of Montpellier), Catherine Armstrong (Loughborough University), and Lydia Plath (Canterbury Christ Church University).
