

## INTRODUCTION



This book proposes to mark the end of American history as we have known it. “*End*” can mean both “purpose” and “termination,” and both of those meanings are necessary to introduce my themes. First I mean to draw attention to the *end* to which national histories, including American history, have been put. Histories are taught in schools and brought into public discourse to forge and sustain national identities, and they present the self-contained nation as the natural carrier of history. I believe this way of writing and teaching history has exhausted itself. We need a history that understands national history as itself being made in and by histories that are both larger and smaller than the nation’s. The nation is not freestanding and self-contained; like other forms of human solidarity, it is connected with and partially shaped by what is beyond it. It is time to stop ignoring this obvious dimension of a national history. Nineteenth-century nationalist ideology became embedded in the development of history as a discipline, but it obscures the actual experience of national societies and produces a narrow parochialism at a time when we need a wider cosmopolitanism.

National histories, like nation-states, are modern developments. The first national history of the United States, David Ramsay’s *History of the American Revolution*, was published in 1789. In fact, Ramsay held off publishing it until the Constitution was ratified.<sup>1</sup> History—and especially history in the schools—contributed mightily to the acceptance of the nation as the dominant form of human solidarity during the next two

centuries. It became the core of civic education in schools and other institutions devoted to making peasants, immigrants, and provincial peoples into national citizens. A common history, which involved both common memories and a tacit agreement to forget certain differences, was intended to provide a basis for a shared national identity.

This conception of the citizen was absolute; it was supposed to trump all other sources of identity. Regional, linguistic, ethnic, class, religious, and other forms of solidarity or connection that were either smaller or larger than the nation were to be radically subordinated to national identity. Moreover, national territory was to be firmly bounded. To sustain the idea of a national citizen or subject, the national space and population were presumed to be homogeneous. In return, the modern nation-state promised to protect its citizens at home and abroad. One artifact that marks both the importance of borders and the promise of protection is the passport—a nineteenth-century innovation.

The leaders of the new nation-states naturalized the nation as the most basic, obvious form of human solidarity, and they were helped by historians. Although this elevation of the nation is still quite new, everyone has become so comfortable with the notion as to refer routinely to events that occurred a thousand years ago within the present borders of France as “medieval French history.” In this age of talk about globalization, multiculturalism, and diasporas, clearly our experience does not match up to such nationalist assumptions. Life is simply more complex. Historians know this as well as everyone else.

It is often said that the persistence of the demonstrably false nineteenth-century ideological framing of history can be explained by the absence of an alternative. My aim in this book is to offer another way of understanding the central events and themes of American history in a context larger than the nation. Unlike notions of American “exceptionalism,” this framing insists that the nation cannot be its own historical context. In fact, it presses context to its ultimate terrestrial limit: the globe itself. Here the major themes and events of American history, including such distinctively American events as the Revolution and the Civil War, are examined in a global context. To go beyond the nation is not necessarily to abandon it but to historicize and clarify its meaning. “To stand outside of the filiation of history and the nation-state,” the historian Joyce Appleby has written, “is not to disparage it but, rather, to

get some purchase on the powerful presuppositions that have shaped our thinking.”<sup>2</sup>

In the past few years some of the most innovative and exciting scholarship in American history has been framed in ways that do not necessarily tie it to the nation-state—work on gender, migrations, diasporas, class, race, ethnicity, and other areas of social history. If this scholarship has not succumbed to the nationalist framing, neither has it altered or displaced it. It has grown up beside the older default narrative that we all carry around in our heads. It has brought forth new knowledge about previously unstudied or insufficiently recognized groups and themes in American history, but it has not changed the dominant narrative structure. The unitary logic of national history seems to have kept at bay new scholarship that could be transformative. Too often this new scholarship is bracketed (literally so in textbooks) rather than integrated. Much is added, but the basic narrative stays the same. That is why textbooks get longer and longer, more and more ungainly, and less and less readable, with the old nineteenth-century narrative buried under the mass. This narrative must be challenged more directly.

About a decade ago I began to think more seriously and quite differently about the way American history has been written, to say nothing about the way I was teaching it. What concerned me was not the then-much-contested question of the politics of history, at least not in the narrow sense of supporting or opposing this or that side in the so-called culture wars.<sup>3</sup> Nor was it about favoring liberal or conservative interpretations, for on the issue that concerned me there was no difference. The problem for me was more fundamental and methodological: it seemed to me that the default narrative I carried around in my head limited my capacity to understand the central themes of American history. What were the true boundaries of America’s national experience? What history did the United States share with other nations? How would the use of a wider context change the core American narrative? I began to rethink two aspects of that core narrative: its unexamined assumption that the nation was the natural container and carrier of history; and its neglect of the truth that space, no less than time, is fundamental to historical explanation, that history plays out over space as well as over time.

American history was taught to me and to you as if it were self-contained. Recent changes in the school history curriculum highlight the

problem rather than solve it. In the interest of better preparing our youth for citizenship in a multicultural nation in a globalized world, most states now require schools to offer world history courses. That appears to be an effective curricular change, but in practice the new curriculum subverts the good intentions that prompted it. Most world history courses do not include American history. Somehow the world is everything but us. America's interconnections and interdependencies beyond its borders are rarely captured in these courses, and the revised curriculum reinforces the very split between America and the world that contemporary citizenship must overcome.

If Americans tend to think of something "international" as being "out there," somehow not connected with them, we historians of the United States bear some responsibility for this misperception. The way we teach history, with our disciplinary commitment to the nation as the self-contained carrier of history, reinforces this parochialism. We assume this nationalism, but we do not argue it. If historians want to educate students and the public as true citizens, they must think more profoundly about the way they frame national histories, which we must keep, but in ways that reveal commonalities and interconnections.

Strangely enough, many scholars who study foreign nations and regions—area studies specialists—have shared and reinforced the binary approach that puts the United States and the rest of the world in two different boxes. American studies and area studies programs developed at the same time in American universities, but until very recently they did not acknowledge that each was an interacting part of the same global history. Thus we have limited our understanding of other parts of the world, and missed the ways other histories have been part of our own. Americans need to be more conscious of being a "part of abroad," as the *New York Journal of Commerce* observed in the auspicious year of 1898.

This book elaborates two nested arguments. The first is that global history commenced when American history began, in the decades before and after 1500. The second follows directly from the first: American history cannot be adequately understood unless it is incorporated into that global context. It then becomes a different kind of history with more explanatory power. It reconnects history with geography. It incorporates causal influences that work across space as well as those that unfold over time. It enriches our understanding of the historical making and remak-

ing of the United States. It is, moreover, the only way to map and appraise the changing position and interdependencies that connect the United States today to the other provinces of the planet.

At the end of the nineteenth century Max Weber famously defined the nation-state as the possessor of a legitimate monopoly of violence. Evidence surely supports this definition, which is necessary but not sufficient. The nation also depends on the population's embrace of a national identity. Nationalism and national identity are founded largely on a sense of shared memories. Making and teaching such shared memories and identities were the work of historians and of national history curricula, generously supported to promote the formation of national identities and national citizens. But we need to recover the historicity of the prior and coexistent forms and scales of human solidarity that compete with, interact with, and even constitute the nation. A national history is a contingent outcome, the work of historical actors, not an ideal form or a fact of nature. It is the outcome of interplay and interrelations among historical social formations, processes, and structures both larger and smaller than the nation. Recently social historians have greatly illuminated those "smaller" histories within the nation; now the larger ones are emerging, too.

Thinking of the global dimensions of a national history, historians must step outside the national box—and return with new and richer explanations for national development. They can better recognize the permeability of the nation at boundaries, the zones of contact and exchange among people, money, knowledges, and things—the raw materials of history that rarely stop at borders. The nation cannot be its own context. No less than the neutron or the cell, it must be studied in a framework larger than itself.

This book examines the United States as one of the many provinces that collectively constitute humanity. The story I tell begins around 1500, when oceanic seafaring for the first time connected all the continents and created a common history of all peoples. The beginning of American history was part of the event that made global history. I end with the twentieth century, when the United States loomed larger in global events than could ever have been imagined at the beginning of the story.

The American nation-building project has been unusually successful. But the history of that success cannot and ought not be used to sustain a claim of historical uniqueness or of categorical difference. Whatever the distinctive position of the United States today, it remains nonetheless only one global province interconnected with and interdependent with every other one. The history of the United States is but one history among histories.

The clamor of debate about multiculturalism and globalization has encouraged talk of the decline of the nation-state and the possibility of a post-national history. But I do not believe the nation is likely to soon disappear. True, nation-states have done terrible damage to the human community, but they are also the only enforcer available to protect human and citizen rights. The nation must remain a central object of historical inquiry so long as we understand history to include both the analysis of power in society and the clarification of ethical responsibility within the human community. My purpose here is not to dismiss national history but to propose a different mode for it, one that better respects the empirical record and better serves us as citizens of the nation and the world.

A considerable scholarly literature has recently been produced that in various ways challenges the old way of teaching national histories. There have even been manifestos that call for alternative approaches, including two for which I am responsible.<sup>4</sup> They were both directed exclusively to my disciplinary peers, academic readers and professional historians, and they both called for something different without actually doing it. This book is addressed to a wider audience, and it actually does what the manifestos propose.

Rather than nibble at the edges of the default narrative, this book examines five major themes in American history and reinterprets them as parts of global history. To do this significantly changes—and in my view enriches—our understanding of those themes. I might have addressed other themes, but the ones I selected are central, and no general history of the United States can omit any of them.

The first chapter explores and redefines the meaning of the “age of discovery.” What precisely is new about the New World? That chapter, which establishes the beginning of global history, sets the stage. The next chapter, taking its cue from a comment made by James Madison at the Constitutional Convention, extends the chronology and geography of the

American Revolution, placing it in the context of the competition among the great eighteenth-century empires and especially the “Great War,” the global conflict between England and France that lasted from 1689 to 1815. Developments outside the territorial United States were decisive in the American victory against Great Britain and in the development of the new nation. Equally important, the revolutionary crisis of British North America was but one of many around the globe, all deriving from the competition among empires and the consequent reform of them.

Next I place the Civil War in the context of the European revolutions of 1848. Lincoln watched and admired the European liberals who were forging a link between nation and freedom and who redefined the meaning of national territory, and they watched him, understanding that the cause of the Union, especially after the Emancipation Proclamation, was central to their larger ambitions for liberal nationalism. These new understandings of nation, freedom, and national territory were played out on every continent, and often violently.

Most Americans hesitate to acknowledge the centrality of empire in their history, let alone to see that the American empire was one among many. But the imperial adventure of 1898 was not, as is often argued, an accidental and unthinking act, and in my fourth chapter I explore the ways in which empire had been on the national agenda for decades. There is a striking continuity in purpose and style from America’s westward expansion to its overseas colonization in 1898. Equally continuous was a policy of extending foreign trade in agricultural and industrial goods and, in the twentieth century, access to raw materials and securing American investments abroad.

My fifth chapter concerns American progressive reform, social liberalism, and the claims of social citizenship in the decades following 1890. With a wide-angle lens, one cannot but recognize that American progressive reform was part of a global response to the extraordinary expansion of industrial capitalism and of large cities at that time. A global menu of reform ideas was available to all. That they were selectively and differently adopted and adapted, nation by nation, shows the importance of national political cultures within the larger, shared global history.

This last point is crucially important. I am not saying there is only one history, or that the American Revolution is like other revolutions of its time. Nor do I say that the Civil War was no different from the eman-

icipation of serfs in the Russian and Habsburg empires or the unification of Germany and Argentina. Nor do I argue that the American empire was indistinguishable from those of England, France, or Germany; or that progressivism in the United States was like progressivism in Japan or Chile. Yet there are family resemblances we have missed, and we have also missed the self-aware communication about common challenges that historical actors on every continent had with one another.

It is not just that all national histories are not the same. More important, the extension of context enables us to see more clearly and deeply exactly what is unique about the national history of the United States. Its major events and themes look different; their causes and consequences get redefined. And then we can better understand the legacy of the past for our present.

The United States has always shared a history with others. To acknowledge that literally makes us more worldly, and it makes our history more accessible to foreign scholars and publics. It makes us more open to interpretations of our history coming from historians and others beyond our borders. It will, I hope, better educate us and our children to the kind of cosmopolitanism that will make us better citizens of both the nation and the world. Surely it will move us closer to the cosmopolitan moral integrity that the anthropologist Clifford Geertz has well expressed for us:

To see ourselves as others see us can be eye-opening. To see others as sharing a nature with ourselves is the merest decency. But it is from the far more difficult achievement of seeing ourselves amongst others, as a local example of the forms of human life locally taken, a case among cases, a world among worlds, that the largeness of mind, without which objectivity is self-congratulation and tolerance a sham, comes.<sup>5</sup>

This kind of history is not entirely novel. It is a recovery of history as it was envisioned by some of my predecessors a century ago. They were among the many intellectuals and men and women of goodwill who sustained a hopeful internationalism and cosmopolitan values, which resulted in the foundation of various international organizations devoted to peace and uplift. There was a great awareness of global connections, and

global thinking was quite pervasive.<sup>6</sup> The 1890s were a decade when transnational developments were as striking as they were to us in the 1990s, and the percentage of foreign investment even greater.

Historians of that era also shared in the presumption that national histories were part of a larger universal history. The intellectual foundations for this understanding of history had been laid by the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel in the early nineteenth century, but American historians mostly absorbed it in diluted form through their emulation of German historical scholarship, most notably that of Leopold von Ranke, who clearly understood that his particular histories were part of an implicit universal history. The first generation of professional historians trained in the United States was more worldly than the post-World War II group who emphasized American "exceptionalism," and this earlier generation was typically trained in European as well as American history. With their passing, American history became more self-enclosed, a development accelerated by the Cold War.<sup>7</sup>

When, in the 1890s, historians presumed that the Atlantic world shared a history, their unifying theme was, unfortunately, racist. They included in the domain of history only those parts of the world that were organized into nation-states, thus leaving out Africa, most of Asia, and what we now call the Middle East. And the transnational history studied and written by Americans then traced the special Anglo-Saxon gift for political life. Herbert Baxter Adams and his students in the famous historical seminar at The Johns Hopkins University studied the development of American democratic institutions from the medieval forests of Germany, through England and English legal institutions, to the rocky but evidently nourishing soil of New England. It was a kind of genetic history, with history tracking the "germ" of democracy.

Frederick Jackson Turner rejected this metatheory of Adams, his mentor. Instead, he famously proposed his still influential frontier hypothesis at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. In powerful and almost poetic language he rejected the Atlantic transit of democracy. Rather, he claimed, American democracy was the product of the frontier experience. "The true point of view in the history of this nation," he declared, "is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West."<sup>8</sup> While he broke the Eurocentric genetic chain, he did not, as many of his followers did, endorse the idea that national histories, American or otherwise, were self-

contained. A point of view is not the same as a method. Two years earlier, in "The Significance of History," which was based on a talk he had given to teachers, Turner elaborated on the importance of historical and geographical contexts larger than the national one. "In history," he observed, "there are only artificial divisions" of time and space. One must take care not to cut off the fullness of either the axis of time or the axis of space. "No country can be understood without taking account of all the past; it is also true that we cannot select a stretch of land and say we will limit our study to this land; for local history can only be understood in the light of the history of the world." "Each [nation] acts on each . . . Ideas, commodities even, refuse the bounds of a nation." He added, "This is true especially in the modern world with its complex commerce and means of intellectual connection."<sup>9</sup>

Turner was not alone in the 1890s. Henry Adams's great *History of the United States During the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison* (1889–91) is a powerful example of a history that moves between local, national, and larger transnational contexts. Adams begins the first volume with regional portraits of the social and intellectual condition of the new nation in 1800, and he concludes the final volume with a similar account of the nation in 1815. But in between, he reveals a nation embedded in a larger Atlantic world, and as a historian he shifts his position from place to place to best reveal and explain actors and acts beyond the borders of the United States that are part of its history. The cosmopolitanism that enabled Adams to write such a history was part of his family history and biography. He was, after all, the great-grandson of John Adams, who with Benjamin Franklin negotiated the Treaty of Paris that ended the war of American independence; the grandson of John Quincy Adams, who negotiated the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the War of 1812; and the son and private secretary of Charles Francis Adams, Lincoln's ambassador to the Court of St. James's. Moreover, he was a distinguished historian of European history. His exquisitely crafted *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (1904) remains a classic for its celebration of the architecture, social organization, and spiritual devotion of medieval European culture, and he would later publish three memoirs of his travels in the South Pacific.

In 1895, W.E.B. DuBois completed his Harvard dissertation, published a year later as *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638–1870*. This work was a forerunner of Atlantic his-

tory and the concept of the "Black Atlantic." All the continents with Atlantic shores were part of DuBois's history of this fundamental, even central aspect of U.S. history, since they were all connected by the slave trade and the institution of slavery. DuBois's recognition of the global developments of the 1890s, like Turner's, no doubt encouraged the global perspective that marked his scholarship and political activities throughout his long career. In an address to the graduating class of Fisk University in 1898, he sketched out the broad connections that were making human history singular:

On our breakfast table lies each morning the toil of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and the isles of the sea; we sow and spin for unseen millions, and countless myriads weave and plant for us; we have made the earth smaller and life broader by annihilating distance, magnifying the human voice and the stars, binding nation to nation, until to-day, for the first time in history there is one standard of human culture as well in New York as in London, in Cape Town as in Paris, in Bombay as in Berlin.<sup>10</sup>

After World War I, this worldly impulse among historians went into decline, though the aspiration was not entirely lost. In fact, in 1933, when most nations, including the United States, were turning more nationalist in the midst of the crisis of the Great Depression, Herbert E. Bolton, a Berkeley historian of Latin America, titled his presidential address to the American Historical Association "The Epic of Greater America" (later published in *The American Historical Review*). He took his colleagues in U.S. history to task for their tendency to study the "thirteen English colonies and the United States in isolation," an approach that, he pointed out, "has obscured many of the larger factors in their development, and helped to raise up a nation of chauvinists." He proposed a much larger framing of history not only to make better citizens, but also "from the standpoint of correct historiography." He insisted—in the spirit of Turner, whose notion of the frontier Bolton had applied to the Spanish frontier in North America—that "each local story will have clearer meaning when studied in the light of the others; and that much of what has been written of each national history is but a thread out of a larger strand."<sup>11</sup>

Much was lost when this perspective atrophied in the interwar and war years and was dismissed after World War II. It is important to recover it for the civic and historiographical reasons Bolton noted, and to renew it with the historical questions of our time. We must also move beyond the Atlantic world or the Western Hemisphere. If we can begin to think about American history as a local instance of a general history, as one history among others, not only will historical knowledge be improved, but the cultural foundations of a needed cosmopolitanism will be enhanced. We do not want to reinforce a narrow and exclusive notion of citizenship. The worldly history promoted by Adams, Turner, DuBois, and Bolton will encourage and sustain a cosmopolitan citizenry, at once proud nationals and humble citizens of the world.

# I

## THE OCEAN WORLD AND THE BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN HISTORY



Until recently the basic narrative of American history began with a chapter on exploration and discovery. That formula has changed—but only slightly. With the belated acknowledgment that earlier migrants, the first American peoples, had already been living in the Western Hemisphere for thousands of years when Christopher Columbus arrived and when the Pilgrims established Plymouth Plantation, the theme of the typical first chapter has been changed to emphasize European “contact” with Americans or, in some versions, the European “invasion of America.” These rephrasings offer a truer interpretation of the encounter but do not change the story much. Either way, the extraordinary events of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are reduced to being a prequel to an American national history. Likewise, to begin with the migration of the first Americans across an Asian-American land bridge, which should change the frame of American history, amounts in practice to no more than a prelude, acknowledged and then dropped. The proto-nationalist and linear narrative persists, shaped and misshaped by its teleological anticipation of the later emergence of the United States. Thus reduced, this early phase of American history loses much of its significance and capacity to explain later developments. And the usual story about “settlement” that follows “discovery,” “contact,” or “invasion” is not only linear but very narrowly channeled.

The event that occurred in 1492, whatever it is called, was about space, oceanic space. Space was redefined, and movement across oceans

made possible entirely new global networks of trade and communication. Recognizing this spatial aspect of American beginnings enlarges our story. The actual "discovery" was greater in significance than the exploration of a landmass unknown to Europeans or even than the beginnings of the United States. The real discovery was of the ocean, which entered history, creating a new world.

The consequences of discovering an oceanic world shaped the history of every continent. On every continent a new world emerged, with consequences for each. The story of North America and of the United States is part of that larger, more important history, not vice versa.

While all the educated classes of the European Renaissance knew the earth was spherical, the world as they understood it did not include the oceans. It was not yet global. For Christendom, indeed for adherents of the Abrahamic religions more generally, the Afro-Eurasian world that was unified by the Mediterranean Sea was an "island world" inhabited by the descendants of Adam and Eve, the human family. God, it was thought, had on the third day commanded the sea to pull back, exposing a portion of the earth's surface for the use of humans.<sup>1</sup> This biblical cosmology was illustrated on the border of one of the most famous surviving maps of the era, that of Fra Mauro of 1459.<sup>2</sup> The great fourteenth-century North African Muslim historian and philosopher Ibn-Khaldun made the same point in words: "The water withdrew from certain parts of [the earth] because God wanted to create living beings on it and settle it with the human species."<sup>3</sup> Beyond the ocean was an unknown, often terrifying space. It was even regarded as a kind of anti-world. Map borders often showed monstrous beings beyond the ocean, and countless medieval accounts and encyclopedias described them. This "other" located beyond the human world was present in the daily iconography of Christianity, routinely carved into the tympana of European cathedrals, where they still attract our notice.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, the greater part of Afro-Eurasia had been unified by the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century, and its extent facilitated expansive trade. This vast empire reinforces the point being made here: this was a land empire, limited by the sea, and when the Mongols attempted an invasion of Japan in 1281, the combination of superior Japanese seamanship and a terrific storm resulted in their disastrous defeat.

The later significance of Columbus—though he did not grasp it—was that his voyages opened an extraordinary global prospect, first for Euro-

peans and in time for us all. After Columbus, as the Mexican historian Edmundo O'Gorman wrote in 1958, it became possible for humans to see for the first time that "the whole surface of the terraqueous globe, both water and land, . . . is a continuous whole."<sup>5</sup> The relation of land and water was revolutionized. The world and the earth (or planet) were made one. Human understanding of the world could now grasp its global dimensions, and in 1540 a Spanish humanist, Juan Maldonado, writing in Latin, offered a fantastic account of a flight to the moon, from which he visualized the entire surface of the earth. A dozen years later Francisco López de Gómara—in his *Historia General de las Indias* (1552)—explained that "the world is only one and not many."<sup>6</sup> This vast expansion of the terrain of humanity enlarged the horizon of human ambition.

The people of all continents, not only Europe, learned over the next century that "the world is an ocean and all its continents are islands."<sup>7</sup> Global awareness and communication, which we may think of as the striking development of our own time, preceded America and made it possible. Within a quarter century of Columbus's final voyage, the world had been encompassed. Centuries later, Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, friend and adviser to Theodore Roosevelt, succinctly described the significance of this: the ocean ceased to be a barrier and became "a wide common, over which men may pass in all directions."<sup>8</sup> Ironically, given this celebration of the human commons, Mahan was architect of the empire that, he believed, should consolidate America's strategic and commercial domination of the ocean.

The territory that later became the United States participated in the oceanic revolution, was one of its consequences, and shared its larger implications. Much of the meaning of American history is therefore entangled with this reinvention of the world, entangled in histories it shares with other peoples. Each, however, experienced this common history in its own particular way. Though for centuries what became the United States was marginal to those histories, in time, especially in our own time, not only is it very much at the center, but it is a powerful engine of global historical change. So the history of the United States is not and cannot be a history in and of itself. Its context until well into the twentieth century was the ocean world. And it cannot be appraised except as a part of this revolution in human existence—a revolution comparable in significance to the invention of agriculture or cities.

Thinking he had reached the Asian shores of the known world,

Columbus did not refer to the “new world,” though he occasionally used the phrase “*otro mundo*,” “another world.”<sup>9</sup> It was the humanist scholar Peter Martyr who—in a letter of 1493—first employed the phrase “*novus orbis*.”<sup>10</sup> More famously, Amerigo Vespucci, another humanist from Florence who was serving as the Medici agent in Lisbon, used the term “*Mundus Novus*” in an account of a voyage that brought him to the Western Hemisphere—initially a letter written upon his return in 1502 to his Medici patron and subsequently published.<sup>11</sup> This earned him recognition on the famous Waldseemüller map of 1507, which showed the hemisphere as a simple, distinct entity. On this map, one finds for the first time the word “America,” the letters stretching roughly from today’s Central America to Brazil, the area where Vespucci is supposed to have first seen the “New World.”

Vespucci is fairly credited with recognizing that this new world had large implications for European cosmology. He grasped that he had seen “things that are not found written either by the ancients or modern writers.”<sup>12</sup> By 1498, Columbus, too, had an inkling of this idea. The letter in which he used the phrase “another world” bears fuller quotation, for it shows Columbus, no less than the humanist, considering the lands he visited as “another world from that in which the Romans and Alexander and the Greeks labored to gain dominion.”<sup>13</sup> But neither of them understood the significance of their discovery, which was not in the land they saw, but rather in the ocean that had made it accessible. They both missed the revolutionary transformation of the ocean from a barrier into a connector of continents, a medium for the global movement of people, money, goods, and ideas. By 1519–22, when Ferdinand Magellan (or his crew, since he did not survive the voyage, and one of his five ships, *Victoria*) circumnavigated the globe, the dimensions of this new ocean world had been fully experienced: the world was global, and it was unified by its oceans.

Rather quickly this new world included a novel form of power. Vasco da Gama’s actions in South Asia might be seen as pointing quite directly to the foundations of a new kind of imperial power. His arrival in Calicut, on the Malabar Coast of southwestern India, in May 1498 shocked no one. He was greeted there by Moorish traders from Tunis, who knew of Christendom and spoke both Castilian and Genoese. By the end of the summer, da Gama had met there a Jewish merchant from Poland who spoke He-

brew, Venetian, Arabic, German, and a little Spanish.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, da Gama had known about Calicut before he embarked; a key entrepôt for the spice trade managed by Muslim merchants, it was his destination.<sup>15</sup> And the merchants he met in Calicut knew about Europe. Da Gama found cities and an active commercial and political life in the Indian Ocean region, unlike Columbus in the “new world.” This notable point was made by the Portuguese king in a somewhat gloating letter to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain in 1499: his explorers, the king wrote, found “large cities, large edifices and rivers, and great populations among whom is carried on all the trade in spices and precious stones, which are forwarded in ships . . . to Mecca, and thence to Cairo, whence they are dispersed around the world. Of these [they] have brought [back] a quantity.”<sup>16</sup>

Da Gama’s arrival was not significant for the discovery of unknown places or cultures; his having sailed around Africa was not unimaginable to traders used to seaborne commercial relations on the east coast of Africa. It was important, as the king’s letter indicated, for commerce. But we must recognize a larger historical significance in da Gama’s presence in the Indian Ocean. His second voyage, a few years later, marked the incorporation of the ocean into the domain of state power. He returned with heavily armed ships, establishing a military regulation of the Indian Ocean. With such militarization, the sea became a place of power as well as of movement. The beginnings of modern “sea power” can be traced to this moment.<sup>17</sup>

For the various societies populating the shores of the Indian Ocean whose ships plied its waters, the ocean had been an edge and a passage. Now it was a field for the exercise of power over the “essential social interactions of trade.”<sup>18</sup> Ever so quickly oceans became a medium for the lineaments of European power, which would in time enable the establishment of a series of European colonial empires in Asia. Sea power, invented by the Portuguese in Asia, became, as Mahan later argued, a dominating form of state power—the product and also the security of empire—well into the twentieth century. And the contests among empires for oceanic trade and naval power were, as we shall see, the context for the American Revolution and the later emergence of the United States as a world power.

It was trade, not militarism, that drew the attention of Adam Smith to the creation of the oceanic world. In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Smith wrote that "the discovery of America, and that of a passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope, are the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind." Smith was sympathetic to the American colonies, which were moving toward revolution as he wrote. He supported their opposition to British imperial fiscal and trade policies, against which his famous book was directed. But he did not ascribe world-historical importance to the American resistance. No Tom Paine he. For him, the big historical event between 1400 and 1800 was the oceanic interconnection of the continents, which opened "a new and inexhaustible market" that, Smith believed, promised to transform the world. "It gave occasion to new divisions of labor and improvement of art, which, in the narrow circle of ancient commerce, could not have taken place."

Smith's was not a simpleminded celebration of what we would today call the globalization of capital and trade. He acknowledged uncertainty about the ultimate effects of the emerging global economy. While it was clear to him that the effect of global trade on Europe was to increase both "enjoyments" and "industry," he worried about the future. He recognized and was critical of the enslavement and exploitation that accompanied the expansion of trade. "To the natives . . . both of the East and West Indies, all the commercial benefits which can have resulted from those events have been sunk and lost in the dreadful misfortunes they have occasioned."<sup>19</sup>

However expansive Smith's appraisal of the oceanic revolution, he captured its implications only in part. The geography of trade shifted from the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean to the "ocean sea," and this displacement was enormously consequential for the peoples of southern Europe, the Levant, Africa, central and South Asia, and the Americas. In 1300 much of Islamic Africa and the Mongol land empire embracing China, the Middle East, and India was flourishing, with greater wealth, power, and art than European Christendom. This contrast dramatically altered with the oceanic revolution. Had Portuguese and Spanish sailors not ventured out onto the ocean and established oceanic trade connections that included both the Americas and Asia, Christendom would have remained marginal in world history, on the periphery of the Afro-Eurasian world.<sup>20</sup>

The oceanic revolution coincided with a vital and creative moment in European thought and culture—the Renaissance, the "New Science," the Protestant Reformation, and Catholic renewal. These revolutionary innovations, too, affected the expansion of Europe. The relation of European values and these cognitive developments to the expansion of Europe's maritime reach and trade are much contested by economic and cultural historians, but the outcome is unmistakable: several emerging nation-states in western Europe were enriched and empowered, while others, Native Americans and Africans, paid a horrific price.<sup>21</sup>

Deadly diseases carried from Europe killed as many as three out of four Americans, perhaps nine out of ten in the Caribbean and Southern Hemisphere—the greatest human demographic disaster in the historical record.<sup>22</sup> In this biological exchange, Europeans contracted syphilis, a global event that makes the additional point that the age of discovery contains a still unwritten but important history of gender relations and sexuality.<sup>23</sup> The European quest for land in the Americas confronted those Native Americans who survived the diseases of initial contact with a multi-century battle for physical, cultural, and political survival. And the European search for labor on that land resulted in the sale of between eleven and twelve million Africans into the gruesome Atlantic slave trade—many of whom perished in transit or soon after. The result was, among other things, a demographic crisis for the peoples of Africa and the Americas.<sup>24</sup>

The era of oceanic exploration was a time of curiosity, of appraising peoples.<sup>25</sup> Cultures were compared, contrasted, and even partially inhabited. Languages were learned. When the Christians of Europe ventured out onto the ocean, they also invented anthropology—the study of the condition of being human.<sup>26</sup> Increasingly formalized knowledge was incorporated into their conceptions of colonization, and it facilitated dispossession, slavery, and even genocide. And mistakes about the cosmological position, character, and intentions of others in the new global world could be immediately consequential: the Aztecs, who were initially uncertain about the religious significance of Cortés and his Spanish soldiers, paid dearly for their hesitation. Perhaps the arriving Europeans miscalculated on Roanoke Island, thus accounting for the still unsolved mystery of the disappearance of the English settlers between 1587 and 1591.

Big questions were asked. Were the beings found beyond the ocean

God's people? Or were they an "other" belonging to the netherworld, the negation of the Christian world? Were they humans or monstrous beings, like those decorating the cathedrals? If they were not the children of Adam and Eve, who were they, and what rights did they have? Were there multiple creations? To discover an *otro mundo*, a world with other peoples, forced people to reconsider what was human. These questions would be revisited well into the nineteenth century, whether one was seeking to mount claims to human rights or to offer defenses of racism, slavery, and colonialism.

### THE ISLAND WORLD

In the centuries before Columbus, the peoples of Afro-Eurasia, oblivious to the Western Hemisphere, thought of themselves as inhabiting the entire world *tout court*. The human world as they knew it was an island surrounded by an ocean. For the Greeks this was the *oikoumene*, or "human house."<sup>27</sup> Beyond this house, according to Dionysius, a Greek geographer writing in the first century of the Common Era, was the "vast abyss of the ocean" that "surrounds earth on every side."<sup>28</sup> "Ocean" is a Greek word meaning the "great outer sea" that encompassed the earth, which the Greeks believed was spherical. The Mediterranean was the "inner sea" at the center of this island world.<sup>29</sup> The word "Mediterranean" derives from Greek and Latin roots that mean "middle Earth/land," while in Arabic, the other great Mediterranean language, the sea was named by a word with a similar meaning, *al-Abyad al-Mutawasit*, "the middle white sea."<sup>30</sup>

The Greeks knew much of this world and had mapped it. It is they who named the Indies, by which they meant "all lands east of the Indus."<sup>31</sup> With their sophisticated understanding of geometry, they estimated what the globe's circumference was with remarkable accuracy. Strabo, the Greek historian and geographer who lived in the age of the Roman emperor Augustus, even understood the concept of sailing west to get to the East. Citing the third-century B.C. geographer Eratosthenes, he observed, "If the Atlantic ocean was not an obstacle we might easily pass by sea from Iberia to India, still keeping the same parallel."<sup>32</sup>

At the time of Jesus considerable trade and communication already connected the whole of Afro-Eurasia. The Roman writer Seneca noted

that "all boundaries have shifted," for the "all-travelled world lets nothing remain in its previous station: the Indian drinks from Araxes' cold water, the Persians drink from the Elbe and the Rhine."<sup>33</sup> Between 200 B.C. and A.D. 400 trade routes linked the Roman Empire and the Han dynasty in China (much later denoted the Silk Road). There was so much early contact that the Western name for China came from the dynasty that preceded the Han, the Xin. Cross-cultural interactions extended from the China Sea to Britain, from the Caucasus to North Africa and South Asia. Culture, goods, and diasporic communities of traders traversed these long distances.<sup>34</sup>

Although the curricular story of "Western civilization" in our schools makes much of the fall of the Roman Empire, in fact from the fifth century A.D. onward the Mediterranean world flourished, whether under the rule of Constantinople or the Omayyad dynasty in Damascus.<sup>35</sup> Vital trade between and among several Muslim kingdoms and dynasties and Christian traders, especially the Venetians, brought prosperity to all participants. Later, when Sultan Mehmet II conquered Constantinople in 1453, the foundations were laid for a vast Ottoman Empire that came to surround much of the Mediterranean, reaching into Europe, Africa, and Asia. Mehmet II envisioned Constantinople as an Islamic successor to Rome, the center of "the empire of the world."<sup>36</sup> Worldwide trade and the cultural exchanges that accompanied it were facilitated by the Muslim dynasties, reaching a high point with the reign of the Ottoman sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1520–66). Through their participation in this trade Europeans recognized both their dependence on the Muslim traders and the wealth that direct trade with Asia promised. Arab science also gave them maps and technologies that would enable their exploration of possible sea routes to the East.

The oceanic revolution was to transform the relations of the Atlantic powers to Mediterranean ones and, indeed, of Christendom to Islam. Over time, oceanic trade marginalized the Mediterranean world and weakened the Islamic empires. No wonder that Ottoman leaders, even though not explorers themselves, had great interest in the Portuguese and Spanish voyages; the first illustrated book published in the Ottoman Empire, in Istanbul, was Mehmet Efendi's *Book of the New World* (1583).<sup>37</sup>

But at the time of Columbus, the Atlantic Ocean was, as Fernand

Braudel remarks in his great history of the Mediterranean, an “annex” to the inland sea. The Mamluks and Ottomans, along with lesser Muslim dynasties, held this world together. Extended trade routes in the Mediterranean formed the core of the world’s “dominant economy.”<sup>38</sup>

The Ottoman Empire nearly circled the Mediterranean but, like the Roman and Byzantine empires before it, was basically a land empire. And while the Red Sea, Indian Ocean, and South China Sea sustained important maritime trade, perhaps surpassing that of the Mediterranean in volume, it was coastal, not oceanic.<sup>39</sup> The great Ottoman trade links were caravan routes that with the help of coastal shipping reached as far as Java in the east, Turkestan and Mongolia to the north, Poland and Hungary to the west, and into today’s Eritrea and sub-Saharan Africa to the south. Ottoman trade with western Europe, a source of wealth for both Europe and the Ottomans, was typically carried west from Istanbul and other Ottoman ports in Venetian or Genoese ships.

Touching nearly all other empires, dynasties, and kingdoms of its time, the Ottoman Empire was at once extensive and paradoxically insular.<sup>40</sup> It not only connected the three divisions of the Afro-Eurasian island world but also constituted a civilization that encompassed the whole. Part of Islam’s historical significance derives from the fact that for Muslims following these trade routes across Eurasia, Islam afforded a common reference point that facilitated trade, travel, and cultural communication while granting autonomy to a vast number and variety of minority cultures and peoples. At a time when Roman Christianity was a distinctly European religion, persecuting heretics and inattentive to eastern and Coptic Christians scattered in a wide arc of the Levant and eastern Europe, Islam embraced a range of peoples and gave local space to diverse religions and cultures.<sup>41</sup>

When the great Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta undertook his extended journeys between 1325 and 1354—estimated at more than seventy thousand miles—his experience was quite different from the Italian Marco Polo’s adventure fifty years earlier, in 1271–95. Marco Polo had gone from a known culture into the unknown; there was no cultural continuity and very little knowledge that connected Venice to the court of the great khan in China. By contrast, Ibn Battuta, who began in Tangier, the place of his birth, remained largely within Dâr al-Islam (“the abode of Islam”), a single cultural universe marked by established lines of communication.

For example, early in his journey, in Alexandria, he met a “pious ascetic” who said: “I see that you are fond of travelling through foreign lands.” Battuta affirmed the point, and the man continued: “You must certainly visit my brother Farid ad-Din in India, and my brother Rukn ad-Din in Sind, and my brother Burhan ad-Din in China, and when you find them give them greetings from me.” Ibn Battuta reported that his “journeys never ceased until I had met these three that he named and conveyed his greetings to them.”<sup>42</sup> Marco Polo’s more isolated European culture did not provide him with the resources necessary for such a conversation and such contacts.<sup>43</sup>

The Ottomans did not want to assimilate or reform the cultures of the minority groups within their empire; they were satisfied with and depended on collecting taxes from them. They also sought non-Muslim male children who could be enslaved and serve the sultan; sometimes these men became powerful officials. On these terms, the Ottomans established a “*pax turcica*” that enabled a caravan trade converging on Istanbul to grow eastward for silk from China and, on more southern routes, pepper and spices from Southeast Asia; to the west it connected with Europe, mostly through Italian intermediaries who carried trade along the Atlantic coast and as far north as the Baltic Sea, and from Africa to the south came gold and slaves.<sup>44</sup>

The scope and energy of Islamic mercantile and artistic activity far exceeded anything in western Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Indeed, the centers of wealth and artistic activity in Europe owed their vitality to commercial and cultural relations with the Ottoman Empire. The system worked, but that the Muslim traders were profiting richly from the trade was painfully evident to the Europeans. Moreover, the line between legitimate business practices and piracy was difficult to draw in both the Muslim and the Christian worlds.<sup>45</sup> So the merchants of Europe resented their dependency; they felt captured by these trading patterns even as they profited from trade with the Ottomans and, to a lesser extent, with the Safavid, Mughal, and Songhai empires and from the China trade that passed through Ottoman hands.

Thus it was not their superior wealth or technology or civilization that accounts for the Europeans’ expansion across the oceans. I am prepared to argue the opposite: [that a sense of weakness, marginality, and inferiority impelled them toward invention and boldness on the high seas]

This interpretation of the discovery of the ocean world takes the beginnings of European settlement in North America away from a simple progressivist narrative of Western civilization triumphant and culminating with the United States. It can fairly be argued—and has been—that Europe's emergence was the consequence of its interaction with the societies of Africa, Asia, and America *after* 1492.<sup>46</sup>

Europeans felt besieged by the richer, expansive Islamic world. The well-known moment when the Spanish expelled the Muslims from Spain in 1492 has encouraged an easy assumption that the Islamic world then was both unitary and weakening, but that was not at all the case. Islam contained many societies, and the dynamic Ottoman and Mughal empires were reaching the height of their power. Even as Muslims lost the Iberian Peninsula, other Muslims were gaining a foothold in central Europe, establishing Ottoman power in Hungary and Austria. Indeed, Captain John Smith of Jamestown fame had, before his adventure in Virginia, fought with the Hungarians against the Ottomans and as a consequence spent time in an Istanbul jail.

The Ottomans were confident, sure of their power and cultural accomplishments. From the Ottoman perspective large parts of Europe were marginal, just as central Asia or sub-Saharan Africa was to Victorian Englishmen.<sup>47</sup> Genoa and Venice, however, were both well known and respected in the eastern Mediterranean; these cities had acquired great wealth in connecting the Ottoman trade with western Europe. The Genoese presence in Constantinople is still evidenced by the Galata Tower they built there, while the city-state of Venice was the center of Mediterranean commerce in the fifteenth century. Venetians focused on the eastern Mediterranean and the caravan routes available to them there, but the Genoese, being squeezed out (largely because they had joined the failed defense of Constantinople against the onslaught of Mehmet II in 1453), sought new opportunities and alternative routes, turning first to the Maghreb and then out onto the Atlantic. A Genoese map published in 1457 shows a European ship in the Indian Ocean, suggesting their ambition to find another path to the East.<sup>48</sup>

In these ventures they collaborated with the Iberians, especially the Portuguese. The Genoese merchant and maritime community in Lisbon was substantial, including Christopher Columbus in the 1480s, and it helped to fund Portuguese exploration and commercial enterprises.

Genoese also supplied exceptionally skilled sailors, who partially manned the Portuguese ships that sailed the African route to the Indies. And when the Portuguese developed sugar plantations, they did so in collaboration with the Genoese.<sup>49</sup>

This moment on either side of 1500 reveals a remarkable conjuncture in the history of capitalism and of the global economy. When the Italians invested in developing an oceanic economy to gain leverage in their Mediterranean trade relations with eastern markets, they were laying a foundation for the displacement of the earlier economy that had served them and the Ottomans so well. Equally important, by investing in sugar production and deciding to use African slaves, they laid the groundwork for the "plantation complex" that was to transform the global economy again in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>50</sup> The two together enabled North Atlantic economies to achieve dominance with a global reach in the nineteenth century.<sup>51</sup>

The European move onto the ocean had huge geopolitical consequences, shifting power to the North Atlantic. The Mediterranean world, with its connections to overland trade routes, lost its centrality,<sup>52</sup> and the Ottoman Empire progressively lost territory, decade by decade, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some historians have interpreted this as a decline of the Ottoman Empire but might more reasonably see it as a strengthening of its center. In any case, the fracturing of Ottoman authority on the periphery produced a power vacuum that European diplomats of the time called the "Eastern Question."

An Austrian diplomat in 1721 famously characterized the Ottoman Empire as the "sick man of Europe,"<sup>53</sup> but the Ottoman fate was determined not so much by its religion and culture as by its having been a land empire in an age of oceanic commerce and sea power. In fact, the Ottoman dynasty outlasted the Habsburg dynasty's Austro-Hungarian Empire by a few years, the second being dismembered at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, and the first, reduced in size, surviving until the revolution led by Kemal Atatürk brought it to an end with the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. The weakening of each of these largely agrarian, land-based empires is a geopolitical story, not a cultural or religious one, and it began in the seventeenth century, when they were first challenged and eventually displaced by new state formations. The future belonged to nations whose sailors and merchants mastered the ocean and

its commerce.<sup>54</sup> Small trading nations with small home territories often found success in this new world.

### GOING GLOBAL

Beginning in the twelfth century, people around the world, on every continent, began to benefit from a process of global warming. The result was population growth, more extensive empire building, and new levels of cultural vitality.<sup>55</sup> In the fourteenth century the Empire of Mali was at its height, recognized for its wealth and power throughout the Mediterranean world. Across the Atlantic, the Aztec Empire consolidated its power, ruling over a vast region of client states with a capital, Tenochtitlán, that in 1325 had perhaps a quarter-million residents; it was the world's largest city when Cortés arrived early in the sixteenth century.

But the fourteenth century was not kind to Europe or China. These two parts of the island world suffered devastating losses of life from famine and the plague. If the Mongol conquests had established safe trading routes that brought new levels of prosperity, the great caravans following them across central Asia spread the terrible Black Death. More than sixty million Chinese died, and Europe lost one-third of its population.

No one knows exactly how it began. It seems likely, however, that social disruptions following the roaming conquests of the Mongols made many societies susceptible to this devastating contagious disease. It is certain that their trade routes became channels for its worldwide distribution. It was carried from Southeast Asia, where it probably began, to China, and across central Asia to Europe. The plague disrupted regular trade, and the caravan routes became identified as conduits of the Black Death. The spread of the plague was one reason that Europeans began looking in the fifteenth century for alternatives to the land routes to the East. Perhaps the sea would be safer.

In the fifteenth century Europe's new energy was revealed in its commitments to exploration and increases in long-distance trade, and also in artistic, scientific, and technological innovation. Such developments can rarely be explained, but perhaps the innovations were a response to the challenge of Islam as well as to the disruptions of established social prac-

tices and cultural assumptions that the plague had caused. Yet this striking new social energy was evident not only in Europe. There were indications of it from China to Portugal, from the Aztec Empire to the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires in central Asia, to the Songhai Empire in West Africa. While Europe brought its new energy to the ocean, the house of Osman consolidated its massive Ottoman land empire, and the Muscovy Empire began its expansion to the east, reaching the Pacific in 1639.

Looking for the most likely leader of the move onto the ocean in the early fifteenth century, one would not have focused on Europe. The Chinese, not the Portuguese, might have seemed to be the most likely to encompass the globe by sea and establish a global trading empire. The great Chinese fleets then had ships far larger than those of Columbus (four hundred feet long to the mere eighty-five feet of the *Santa María*) that were exploring the coasts of Southeast Asia, South Asia, and East Africa. It has been proposed that Zheng He, a Muslim eunuch who was a powerful Chinese admiral, circumnavigated the globe between 1421 and 1423, almost exactly a century before Ferdinand Magellan's voyage.<sup>56</sup> Whatever the full extent of this early Chinese move onto the ocean and of the client-state trading partners Zheng He established, Chinese policy shifted in 1433: as the result of internal political and fiscal changes, government subsidies for such maritime activities ended, and without government support, which was essential for the very large ships, private traders turned to regional trading in smaller ships.<sup>57</sup>

Even with this reduction of maritime activity, China remained the economic engine of Asia. Its robust economy (and, to a lesser extent, the economies of other Asian empires) prepared the Asian foundation that made the ocean actually work as a field for global commerce.

The Ming dynasty (1368–1644) had witnessed a transition to a "silver economy" by the end of the fifteenth century. The reason for this development was partly government policy (making silver legal for paying taxes in the 1430s), but silver was also needed for China's growing economy and seems to have had significant value as an economic "good" as well as a medium of exchange. As a result, silver came to have a much higher value (compared with gold or any other measure) in China than anywhere else in the world; between 1540 and 1640, its value was 100 percent higher than in Europe. Japan had supplied China with silver, but China,

with about a quarter of the world's population and perhaps 40 percent of its economy, had an enormous demand for it, and the demand was eventually supplied by the silver mines of America, which between 1500 and 1800 produced roughly 85 percent of the world's silver; between 1527 and 1821, as much as half of the output went to China. This animated not only the Chinese economy but global commerce as well. When the Chinese relaxed restrictions on maritime trade in 1567, the Asian demand for silver and the global flow of bullion increased dramatically, perhaps doubling almost instantly.<sup>58</sup> As a result, an apparently inexhaustible market emerged for the seemingly limitless production of the silver mines of Mexico and Peru.

The movement of silver from Acapulco to Manila (founded in 1571 precisely to manage this trade) created a global economy built on Pacific as well as Atlantic sea-lanes.<sup>59</sup> Without silver from the Spanish colonies in South America and the Ming dynasty's policy that gave it trade value in exchange for the sophisticated manufactured goods from China and, to a lesser extent, India, it is unlikely that Europeans could have become such successful global traders.<sup>60</sup> But silver now became the currency of the global trading system and Europeans the well-rewarded intermediaries. Without these Asian developments, the prospects for settlement and development in the Americas would have been less promising; public or private investments there would not have been made. Spain's success in the New World therefore depended not only on its securing control of the mines of Peru and Mexico from the disease-weakened Native Americans but also on the expanding economies of Asia.<sup>61</sup> Ironically, the flow of silver into China caused rapid urbanization and speculation there, and inflation made China ever more dependent on the constant flow of silver, which meant that the Ming dynasty became vulnerable to the inevitable interruptions in the global movement of bullion. The resulting economic and social instability seems to have contributed to its collapse in 1644.<sup>62</sup>

In his history of capitalism in the early-modern period, Fernand Braudel declares that Portugal was "the detonator of an explosion which reverberated round the world." Having conquered the Moors in their part of the Iberian Peninsula in 1253, the Portuguese also consolidated a surprisingly modern state, accomplishing what Braudel calls a "bourgeois revo-

lution" in 1385. If the phrase is anachronistic, the point holds: the newly established monarchy was organized in alliance with Portugal's mercantile class, and the result was a market-friendly state. Lisbon was an outward-looking, cosmopolitan city eager for trading opportunities.<sup>63</sup>

Evidently influenced by Genoa, the Portuguese focused on trying to find a way around the Venetian and Ottoman monopolies over the Mediterranean and land routes to the Indies.<sup>64</sup> This focus was one reason why they declined Columbus's petition for a transatlantic voyage. The other was their better knowledge of geography. Following ancient Greek estimates of the circumference of the earth, they thought correctly that Columbus had underestimated it by 20 percent, an error, the Portuguese rightly understood, that would make it unlikely that his plan would bring him to Asia.

They had grasped early that "if you are strong in ships, the commerce of the Indies is yours," as their advocate for the sea, Prince Henry the Navigator, put it. They were strong in ships, and they captured the seaborne pepper and spice trade for more than a century.<sup>65</sup> Portuguese progress down the west coast of Africa was not dramatic; it was incremental and persistent. Portuguese sailors and merchants were as cautious as they were skilled.<sup>66</sup> In 1415, the Portuguese established an African claim at Ceuta, just south of Gibraltar; their first fortified trading post in West Africa came in 1445 on the coast of present-day Mauritania. They did not stop there. They sailed south, dreaming of the east, and established more such enclaves, called *feitoria* in Portuguese and corrupted into the English "factory."

It is often said that Europeans limited themselves to coastal enclaves in Africa because of the problem of local diseases there. That was surely a factor, but so was the strength of the polities they encountered.<sup>67</sup> It is worth noting that the first Portuguese territorial colonization was at São Tomé and other offshore islands that they found uninhabited. The enclaves the Portuguese established on the mainland took little land and demanded only limited authority because the African polities, with their coastal navies and possession of the home ground, were able to negotiate from a position of strength. Historians are increasingly realizing that Europeans did not dominate on the ground; in this early phase, empire was shaped by accommodation and by the mutual pursuit of economic or other interests.

Before the arrival of the Portuguese in the 1490s, the Indian Ocean had been the center of a vast system of trading cities connected to all known regions of the island world. The city of Malacca, founded in 1380, had as many as fifty thousand inhabitants at the start of the sixteenth century, and a Portuguese visitor declared that as a center of trade it "has no equal in the world."<sup>68</sup> A trans-regional trade system between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, linked by the Red Sea, went back to ancient times, when the Egyptians had built a canal from the Nile to the Red Sea. This trade, encouraged and facilitated by the Ottomans, was known to the Portuguese, but only indirectly.

Portuguese ambitions in India were initially contested by the Muslim rulers there, whose power was equal to that of the Portuguese. But they did not press the issue, since they had more important strategic interests elsewhere, while the Portuguese were determined to establish themselves. It has been speculated that had these Indian Muslims displaced the early Portuguese enclaves, any Christian "factories" in India might have been postponed indefinitely.<sup>69</sup> Instead, they traded with the Europeans. Now the Portuguese had direct access by sea to the Mughal Empire and the trade of the East, and for about a century they monopolized the European market for pepper and spices.<sup>70</sup>

The Portuguese also anticipated the later development of the Atlantic sugar economy. During the Crusades, Christians had discovered the sweetness of sugar, originally a product of Bengal but long manufactured in the Levant. Production of this delicious luxury now moved across the Mediterranean, initially under the auspices of an expansive Islam, which brought its cultivation as far as Spain. Later Italian investors expanded its cultivation, and sugar production was established in Cyprus, Sicily, and the Maghreb. In the fifteenth century the Portuguese collaborated with Italian investors and growers to develop sugar plantations on the Atlantic islands of Madeira and São Tomé, while the Spanish established plantations on the Canary Islands.

Both Arabs and Europeans used African slaves in this work. Agricultural slavery was a novelty, which may have been propelled by the labor shortages produced by the legacy of the Black Death.<sup>71</sup> It is important also to keep in mind, however, that between 1530 and 1780 at least a million white Christian Europeans, mostly from the Balkans and Caucasus, were enslaved by the Muslim Arabs of the Barbary Coast. Most of

these slaves, typically captured in various conflicts, were put to work in cities and towns or on ships as sailors.<sup>72</sup> The difference in the *mode* of unfree labor imposed on Europeans and Africans warrants emphasis. Slavery in Muslim societies was generally not agricultural. Europeans were familiar with a different form of unfree agricultural labor, serfdom, but they did not employ it on sugar plantations in the Americas. Serfdom was a form of village or communal labor, while slavery in the emerging plantation complex was based on individual slaves, though they typically worked in gangs. Gang labor as a form of slavery had not existed in Africa or the eastern Mediterranean or the Muslim world, except in the salt marshes of the Tigris-Euphrates valley.<sup>73</sup>

The new pattern of unfree labor in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic islands was thus a major innovation. It pointed toward the industrial organization of the future, not back to the patterns of slavery known in African villages. Here was the root idea of the plantation system that was later to develop on a large scale in Brazil and later yet on the Caribbean islands.

### PEOPLE FROM THE SEA

The oceanic revolution touched peoples of all continents in many ways—cultural, cosmological, and economic. Every continent experienced the unprecedented arrival of an unexpected people from the sea—and these seafarers came to know other peoples. On every continent, the arrival of the harbingers of a new world elicited a similar phrase: they were always the people from the sea; the Chinese called them "ocean barbarians."<sup>74</sup>

The novelty of the seaborne arrival of the Europeans was greater for Americans than for the various peoples of Afro-Eurasia who already had trading relationships, even if at a distance, with other continents. The shock of the new is evident in the words of an ordinary fisherman from a shore village who was taken in 1519 to the Aztec capital to report to the ruler, Montezuma, who wanted information about the landing of Cortés. He told him, "When I went to the shore of the great sea, there was a mountain range or small mountain floating in the midst of the water, and moving here and there . . . My lord, we have never seen the like of this."<sup>75</sup>

The native peoples of the Western Hemisphere, the first Americans,

had been isolated from the island world. While they had extensive north-south trading networks, they had not ventured out onto the ocean. Given that the Aztecs did not deploy the wheel for mercantile purposes (using it only on children's toys) and the Incas had only llamas as beasts of burden, they might have considered making more extensive use of maritime transport, but they did not, keeping to coastal navigation mostly devoted to fishing, not trade. But with the arrival of the Europeans they were pulled into the ocean world. The new world of America formed by the arrival of the Europeans offered opportunities for new trade and new items of trade, including manufactured iron implements and textiles, to say nothing of weapons. Also, alliances were possible. Very early, for example, the Tlaxcalans on Mexico's Gulf Coast recognized in Cortés an ally who might (and did) enable them to strike back at the Aztecs who had turned them into a client people. As it turned out, the Spanish profited from the alliance more than the Tlaxcalans did, a pattern that would be repeated.

Unlike the Western Hemisphere, Africa had all along been part of the island world, with plenty of trade and intercultural relations with Asia and Europe. All three shared the Mediterranean trade routes, and the Swahili port cities on the east coast of Africa opened out to the Indian Ocean.<sup>76</sup> Da Gama had recognized their importance and lingered there before going on to India. Along various routes, African gold and slaves went to the Middle East, Europe, and Asia, but communication between sub-Saharan Africa and the Mediterranean world was limited; west equatorial Africa was on the distant periphery of the Muslim trading empires.<sup>77</sup> Still, caravans of five thousand and more camels regularly traversed the Sahara, carrying goods as well as Muslims going on the pilgrimage to Mecca. "Ships of the desert" from the Maghreb coast crossed the Sahara to Timbuktu, connecting the Mediterranean with the Niger River, giving access to the network of trade routes in West Africa.<sup>78</sup> But the Atlantic was a barrier for Africans, as it was for Americans and Europeans. The opening of the oceans made a new world for them as for everyone else.<sup>79</sup>

The North African kingdom of Morocco was more involved with the sea than were other parts of Atlantic Africa, and in 1603 King Ahmad al-Mansur suggested to Queen Elizabeth of England that they jointly colonize America. Both monarchs, he pointed out, reviled the Spanish, and they could together expel them from America and "posse" the land and "keep it under our dominion for ever." He presumed that England would not find the "extremetie of heat" in the Spanish Empire in America suit-

able, and suggested that the actual settlement be undertaken by Moroccans rather than the English.<sup>80</sup> It did not happen, of course, yet that such a proposal could be made suggests the previously unimagined possibilities prompted by the oceanic revolution.

When the Portuguese arrived on the Guinea coast in the early fifteenth century, the geography of trade and patterns of cultural contact shifted, as did the material conditions of trade. The experience of personal movement itself changed dramatically; being a passenger on an ocean-going vessel is quite different from being one on a "ship of the desert." Ships can carry far more and larger goods than caravans can, and the number of intermediaries is greatly reduced, likewise the number of taxing jurisdictions. But even this considerable change in the material culture of trading did not immediately suggest the magnitude of the transformation that followed the arrival of the "men from the sea," as West Africans called Europeans.

Yet the shock of difference when European met African was less than we might expect. Portugal and Kongo had similar rates of agricultural productivity and similar living standards; both had dynastic kingdoms organized by kinship and clientage; trade and political relations were well managed. The cosmologies of the Europeans and Africans were profoundly different, however. For example, in the Kongo cosmology white people were believed to live under the ocean, which made it plausible to have white men arrive from the sea. And while Afonso, the Christian king of Kongo in the early sixteenth century, had extensive diplomatic relations with Portugal, France, and the Vatican, they were conducted, as Wyatt MacGaffey has observed, "on the basis of a shared and double misunderstanding." The cosmologies differed, but the frameworks of interpretation were complementary.<sup>81</sup> There were enough seeming parallels in the cultural repertoire of the two peoples that pretending convergence allowed for fruitful miscommunication.

Similar patterns of interaction occurred in North America, where the Nahuatl speakers of Mexica could communicate and trade with Europeans on the basis of false assumptions about each partner's fundamental concepts.<sup>82</sup> The interaction of Europeans and Native Americans in the Great Lakes region operated similarly. A "middle ground" was established where conversants incorrectly but usefully deployed items from the cultural repertoire (as they understood it) of the other.<sup>83</sup>

Africans and Portuguese recognized and embraced new opportunities

to trade a variety of goods. The incremental changes associated with the new oceanic world had cumulative consequences. By the early sixteenth century it was clear that trade was transforming not only the economies but the societies involved, and the changes accelerated. Soon Europeans and Africans were drawn increasingly into a monstrous trade in human bodies. King Afonso of Kongo had early doubts; in a letter to the king of Portugal in 1526 he wrote, "We cannot reckon how great the damage is and so great, Sire, is the corruption and licentiousness that our country is being depopulated."<sup>84</sup>

That was only the beginning. The Portuguese and then the Dutch and British began trading for slaves, and innumerable individual decisions made by Africans and Europeans created a system of exchange that expanded over the next three centuries to dimensions beyond all expectations and even comprehension. This commerce in human beings brought power and wealth to a few African traders; the nobility of Kongo was able to live in a "grand style."<sup>85</sup> More important, the trade brought misery and death for millions of Africans. In Africa itself it weakened social institutions—from family, to clan, to village, to economies and politics. The loss of so many men skewed the gender ratio, promoting polygamy but also increasing the number of dependents for each provider.<sup>86</sup> There was also a multigenerational process by which African craftsmen lost their skills. In 1500 Portugal imported West African cotton textiles; by 1600 the flow had reversed.<sup>87</sup> That a trade as large as that in slaves could be managed in Africa by Africans is a discomfiting but real testament to the effectiveness of African social institutions, but its success—the export of more than eleven million people, plus the children they would have contributed—impoverished the institutional life of West and Central Africa.<sup>88</sup>

There was also a much older slave trade to the east, from East Africa, the Sahara, and the Red Sea regions to various Muslim societies. Conjectures about numbers are less secure, but during the first thousand years of Islamic slavery (650–1600), between four and five million Africans may have been enslaved; estimates for the period 1600–1900 range from four to six million.<sup>89</sup>

Not initially but very soon and then exclusively, Europeans looked to Africa as a source of human bodies. At first the Portuguese took African slaves to supplement the declining supply of white slaves from the Cau-

casus, but gradually the quest for labor evolved into a racial system of slavery. It is worth noting that in 1500 Africans and persons of African descent were a minority of the world's slaves and by 1700 a majority.<sup>90</sup> The numbers are important, but so are the differences in the experience of slavery. Unlike the white or African slaves in the Muslim world, by 1700 (before then for many) Africans in the Atlantic world were treated more as units of labor than as humans, a reduction that not only was morally repulsive but also tragically narrowed the image and meaning of Africa. The legacy of slavery, which necessarily looms so large in our collective historical memory, obscures a fuller history and richer knowledge of Africa and Africans and still clouds our understanding.

Thus it comes to many as a surprise that in the fourteenth century Africa represented wealth. The continent was known for its crafts and famed for its gold, which sustained the powerful empires and court cities of the interior. The Mediterranean world's main source of gold was the Empire of Mali, which extended more than a thousand miles east to west. The mythic story was told and retold of Mansa Musa, the Malian ruler legendary for his wealth. When he traveled to Mecca for the hajj in 1324, the gold he brought with him—and spent—during his time in Cairo flooded Egypt's economy, resulting in a devaluation of gold specie by perhaps as much as 25 percent and producing financial havoc. By reputation he was known and respected in Europe; a Catalan mapmaker in 1375 portrayed him as a European ruler in dress and the accoutrements of power.<sup>91</sup>

Had Europeans explored the African interior in the fourteenth century when the Empire of Mali was at its peak, rather than a century or more later when Mali had overexpanded and then declined, might the image of Africa have been more positive and the history of Europeans and Africans different? Having heard so much about Mansa Musa's wealth, the beauty of his court, and the power of his empire yet finding so little may have disappointed the Europeans and prompted them to exaggerate all that seemed to be missing, encouraging their conclusion that Africans lacked civilization and were incapable of political life.<sup>92</sup>

Whether for this or other reasons, Europeans invented a new name for Africans. No historian has satisfactorily explained why the Portuguese resorted to the word "Negro" (which was incorporated into the English language by the mid-sixteenth century, the *Oxford English Dictionary* citing its first known use in 1555). But the consequence of using this neologism

can be understood all too well. Older names—Africans, or Moors, or, oldest of all, Ethiopia—referred to a place and to a history. But “Negro” dissolved historical identity, and color replaced culture. The new name effectively denied the history and culture of Africa’s people and distinctive polities. It undermined African claims to history, civilization, religion, culture, or, finally, as Cedric Robinson has emphasized, any “humanity that might command consideration.” The ideological utility of this term is transparent: it was developed in concert with the creation of the Atlantic slave system.<sup>95</sup>

The rise of the slave trade produced new coastal cities, shifting energy away from the old internal trade routes and craft centers. At the same time, specie from the New World swamped the gold trade of Mali and the Sudan, which led to further decline.<sup>94</sup> These historically contingent developments facilitated the invention of the “Negro” and the European notion of a homogeneous Africa, an Africa that was no more than a source of slaves in the minds of slavers and, tragically, of many later critics of the slave trade.<sup>95</sup>

The Portuguese in East Africa and Asia did not mainly seek territory, since they were traders who wanted to establish trading posts. The Portuguese negotiated to establish *feitoria*, or fortified enclaves, at Sofala (East Africa), Hormuz (Persian Gulf), Goa (India), and Malacca (Malay).<sup>96</sup> Soon they were profiting immensely from the Indian Ocean trade—enough to consider the Western Hemisphere, which early on might have been theirs for the taking, of only secondary importance. But they did not transform Lisbon into a great European capital of global trade and banking, a failure to exploit the flow of capital associated with its trade that would in time prove costly. Power and wealth gained through trade in the Indian Ocean went to more northern cities, nearer the major markets—first Antwerp and later Amsterdam.<sup>97</sup>

When Amsterdam used its wealth, mercantile skill, and naval power to establish its presence in the Indian Ocean, it displaced the Portuguese. The Dutch East India Company, established in 1602, quickly became one of the world’s largest and wealthiest business enterprises. Amsterdam, capital of a small, federated, and newly independent state, was the last city able to build an empire as Venice and Genoa had done.<sup>98</sup> True, the British Empire was launched and managed from London, but seventeenth-century London’s economy was built on its position at the

heart of a dynamic national economy.<sup>99</sup> The future of European empires would now belong to strong nations.

Portugal’s century was the sixteenth, Amsterdam’s the seventeenth. Causality is implied in this succession: the Dutch pushed the Portuguese aside, but that is only part of the explanation. When the political and economic elites in Japan, Burma, the eastern Ottoman Empire, and Oman withdrew support from the Portuguese, they became more vulnerable to the Dutch challenge.<sup>100</sup> The first Dutch ship reached Japan in 1600, and beginning in 1601 the Dutch began trading directly and regularly with Canton (Guangzhou). Two years later, they landed in Ceylon and in 1605 captured the Portuguese fort in Malacca, making it the first base for the Dutch East India Company. Like that of the Portuguese, their interest was trade, not territory, and they established their trading posts without making territorial claims. They founded Batavia (today’s Jakarta) in 1619, but the Dutch population there remained very small, much smaller than the substantial community of Chinese merchants who were settled there.

One cannot but be struck by how few were the Europeans who established and sustained these first “empires” in the East Indies. And this points to an important truth: these empires were the result less of overwhelming force than of accommodation by local rulers and elites. The colors of empires on maps misleadingly imply a demographic and institutional presence of the European power abroad, suggesting firm and geographically extensive control did not exist. These early European empires were less about force than about negotiation, even if not always between equals.

The Dutch like the Portuguese particularly valued their interests in the East Indies, but the Atlantic beckoned. In 1621 the Dutch *West* India Company was established to compete with the Portuguese in Africa and America—mainly in hopes of gaining a position in the slave trade and in the sugar colonies. The Dutch accomplished both objectives. And such was the global context of the settlement of New Amsterdam on Manhattan Island.

Americans and American histories tend to put the Dutch settlement of New York at the start of a linear development of what would become the American metropolis. But that appropriates for American history what in fact belongs to Dutch history and to the history of oceanic commerce and capitalism. New Amsterdam was part of a global Dutch com-

mercial strategy, and the settlement on Manhattan was on the periphery of the periphery of the empire. Not only were East Indian interests more valuable and more visible from the Dutch point of view; but even in the Americas, Manhattan was minor compared with the far more important and profitable Brazilian sugar colony of Pernambuco, which they had wrested from the Portuguese. If the nineteenth-century American fable has it that the Indians sold Manhattan to the Dutch for the equivalent of twenty-four dollars, it is doubtful that the Dutch valued it at much more. They fought bitterly in global wars to hold on to their Brazilian, African, and Asian possessions but made little effort to maintain control of New Amsterdam when challenged by the English in 1664. In 1665 and again later, after recapturing the city in the Third Anglo-Dutch War, the Dutch returned New Amsterdam to the English, demanding instead Surinam, which they had also captured.

France, a large territorial state, was slower to move out onto the ocean. Before the end of the seventeenth century, however, the French, too, had a global empire, with holdings in South Asia, the Caribbean, and North America. As for the Russians, who had been moving east across Siberia toward America, they mainly wanted animal furs—first sable, until they exhausted it, and then sea otter. They established semi-military settlements where they could create a brutal regime to “harvest” sea otter by means of “forced commerce” with the Aleuts. This had a devastating impact on the Aleut community, whose numbers were reduced from 200,000 in 1750 to about 2,000 in 1800.<sup>101</sup>

Why, one wonders, was the American experience so much more brutal than other long-distance intercultural and market exchanges? And why did European territorial possession become so important there, and so quickly? For several centuries, Christendom had traded with Islam without settlement, save for small “trade diasporas.” Europeans seemed to have no particular interest in exploring the land crossed by their caravans or, in the Indies, the hinterland of their “factories.” (Later, of course, Europe’s policies in Asia and Africa would be quite different.) Yet in America mapping and settlement were achieved within fifty years of Columbus’s voyage.<sup>102</sup> There seem to be two broad reasons, with a few added corollaries.

First, the Americas seemed to be unpopulated or underpopulated. There is a tragic truth to this, for the very first European diseases to arrive

in the Western Hemisphere substantially depopulated it, most dramatically in the Caribbean Islands and southward. This thinness of population seemed to the Europeans to be matched by a thinness of civilization—notably in the Caribbean, where their initial contact was made and lasting impressions formed. To them, this underpopulation and lack of “civilization” legitimated their conquest and taking possession.<sup>103</sup>

The English especially tended to measure both civilization and proprietary claims by the presence or absence of agriculture. If the Indians did not cultivate the land, they had no right to it. While it is true that Native Americans relied heavily on the hunt, many tribes with whom the English came into contact did in fact cultivate the land, but gender blindness among other things seems to have blocked this from English view. Agricultural work was something men did in England, but men in America hunted, and the English did not recognize gardens and fields tended by women as agriculture.

A shortage of labor to extract wealth from the New World—literally, in the case of the mines of Peru and Mexico—seemed to demand some strategy of building population there, whether by voluntary settlement or by force. The latter method, in the form of racial slavery, became the principal solution; between the mid-fifteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries more Africans than Europeans crossed the Atlantic to the Americas. Among women before 1800 the ratio of Africans to Europeans was even higher. Only in New England was the sex ratio among Europeans balanced.<sup>104</sup>

These conditions were in striking contrast to the situation in Asia. India and China not only were manifestly well populated—China already had one-fourth of the world’s population—but showed evidence of old, historical civilizations, even if Europeans thought of them as decayed or, worse, decadent.<sup>105</sup> And it was of practical importance that these countries had well-known and highly valued goods to trade. Urbanization was probably more advanced in China, India, and the Arab trading regions than in Europe.<sup>106</sup> Their substantial coastal cities were filled with merchants prepared for trade. And, finally, while smallpox killed natives in the Western Hemisphere, malaria threatened Europeans in Africa and Asia.

The English had additional reasons for settling in North America. Seventeenth-century England was experiencing an increase in population (a premonition of a later demographic transition, which in the nineteenth

century produced a modern rate of population growth in industrializing England). Without an adequate understanding of either economics or demography, the English were not sure what was happening, but immediately visible evidence seemed to indicate overpopulation and consequent poverty. Later Adam Smith explained that long-distance trade might produce metropolitan prosperity (or, as we would now say, jobs), but the idea of disposing of some of the population elsewhere appealed to various early proponents of colonization and colonists. Moreover, a substantial disaffected religious minority was ready to leave England for a new place where they might worship more freely. These strongly committed Protestants might perform an additional service as a northern bulwark to limit the expansion and influence of Catholic Spain in the New World.

As this last point indicates, religion was a very important part of the colonial adventures of Spain, France, and England. The oceanic revolution laid the foundations of modern capitalism, but the initial impulse and sustaining commitment for the early colonizers was in large part religious. Both Catholics and Protestants understood the Western Hemisphere to be providential—something God had reserved for Christians. And that implied the obligation to pursue Satan and convert unbelievers to the one true faith. This is evident in the clerical discourse of Protestant England, Holland, and Scandinavia, as well as among their imperial competitors the Roman Catholic French, Spanish, and Portuguese.<sup>107</sup>

Beginning with the initiation of the annual departure of Spanish galleons from Acapulco to Manila in the 1570s, the New World of the Americas linked the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. I have emphasized trade connections, but culture, too, encompassed the two realms. A striking expression of this is found in a massive painting that hung over the main door of a seventeenth-century Cuzco church, which showed a Jesuit carrying Christianity to Asia. The Jesuit mission to the Pacific became part of the “lived religion” of Peru, a place we may identify with the Atlantic because of the Spanish influence there, but of course its coast is on the Pacific.<sup>108</sup> Later, an important Russian presence (more substantial in the North Pacific than we usually realize) underlined the Pacific dimensions of the American experience.

In the eighteenth century, Europeans explored the Pacific Ocean,

which covers one-third of the earth's surface, in the interests of science as well as trade. Inspired by Linnaeus, naturalists hoped to map a “global botanical system.” Major expeditions were mounted by Admiral Louis-Antoine de Bougainville for the French, and Alessandro Malaspina led an expedition for Spain in 1789–94. Malaspina, who modeled his expedition on Captain James Cook's three between 1768 and 1779 and knew of Bougainville's expedition, too, collected scientific information and established Guam and the Marianas as focal points for trade, science, and navigation in the South Pacific, much as Cook had earlier done under British auspices at Hawaii.

Geological and botanical knowledge was often linked to the commercial ambitions of the imperial powers, but with Cook's first voyage, sponsored by Sir Joseph Banks of the Royal Society, the natural-history agenda was heightened and made more specific. The expedition included non-English naturalists and went beyond the national exclusivity and rivalry of so much of the earlier mercantilist-inspired exploration. The discoveries made by Cook and others of the small islands of the South Pacific encouraged an awareness of ecological changes. Just as contact with new peoples in the sixteenth century prompted the invention of anthropology, these scientific voyages prompted a critical discussion about climatic and ecological issues. Modern environmentalism was born, it seems, in the eighteenth-century phase of imperial enterprise, as scientists discovered in the self-contained colonial spaces of small islands—almost laboratories—evidence of the social and ecological costs of incorporation into European commercial empires.<sup>109</sup>

Cook's third voyage made Hawaii known to the Atlantic world at about the time of the American Revolution. Tragically, Cook was murdered there, but afterward the island became a magnet, drawing together a wide range of people—some, like missionaries, with a purpose; others, like the sailor Herman Melville, not yet a writer, wanderers. In the nineteenth century it was a key communications center for two great enterprises: Pacific commerce and the scientific understanding of the ocean world. At Honolulu, a cosmopolis in the center of the world's largest body of water, one could find scientists and sailors, merchants and missionaries, whalers and naval officers exchanging information about opportunities for trade, natural-history findings, and ethnographies of the Pacific societies.<sup>110</sup> Early on it was identified as being in the American or-

bit, though: as early as 1805 a British sea captain referred to the island as an American “commercial hive.”<sup>111</sup>

As is so evident today, immigration follows trade routes and capital flows. Transpacific trade invited transpacific migrations. In fact, the first Chinese and Filipinos to settle in what is now the United States shipped out of Manila as crew on a returning galleon and jumped ship in Acapulco, worked for a while in Mexico City, and in the 1760s made their way to the bayous of Louisiana, then a Spanish colony, where they established the oldest continuing Asian-American community in North America. It was incorporated into the United States when Thomas Jefferson purchased Louisiana from the French in 1803.<sup>112</sup>

I hope it is clear at this point just how much a global perspective disrupts and reframes the usual narrative of American history, which conventionally sees American development as a continuous process of westering from the northeastern colonies.<sup>113</sup> In fact the initial settlements in what is now the United States were in Florida (St. Augustine, 1560), Virginia (Jamestown, 1607), and New Mexico (Santa Fe, 1610),<sup>114</sup> and from the beginning the territory that became the United States touched both the Atlantic and the Pacific and was shaped by a multiplicity of historical processes. People and influences arrived in it from all points of the compass and settled in every region.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries no one could envision a single polity being formed in this huge continental space.<sup>115</sup> The early settlements were points on a map of European global quests for wealth and power. There was no path, no way of imagining one, that promised a new society or a new nation in North America. The English arriving on the northeastern coast were not bold imperialists or particularly capable settlers. The New World was, after all, new to them, and they responded to it with considerable uncertainty and fear. The native peoples, more often than not, set the agenda in the first interactions: accepting the arrival of the English, they helped them to survive in the New World they knew so well. English appreciation of their own limitations did not last more than a half century, but that is more than a moment, and it warrants our recall.<sup>116</sup>

The Americas as a whole—the north-south divide was not yet firm—were a singular space marked by multiple sites of contestation and showing on many imperial grids. No one had a sense of being present at the

“origin” of a new country. Space was more important than time. Settlers and imperial authorities were more aware of the points of the compass and of the territory claimed by different religious confessions than of the development over time of their new colonial establishments. History as it was made was marked by lateral glances, with the various actors worried about encroachments from the others. Religious rivalry between Protestant and Catholic powers combined with imperial strategies and commercial considerations to determine the opportunities and tactics at any given moment.

### ATLANTIC CREOLES

Premodern trade in the Afro-Eurasian island world, whether across land routes or on the sea-lanes of the Mediterranean and Baltic seas and the Indian Ocean, was undertaken by family firms and a myriad and sequence of small operators.<sup>117</sup> Only in the seventeenth century did the Dutch, English, and French develop highly capitalized joint-stock companies. Nor was trade regulated by states, as it would be later, under mercantilist principles. At various nodes of the trading networks were cosmopolitan centers where merchants congregated into overlapping trade diasporas.

Not surprisingly, this familiar, infinitely flexible mode of conducting long-distance trade was transferred to the new oceanic trade pioneered by the Portuguese. Not requiring substantial settlement or territorial acquisition, it was quite simple. Diverse traders, each tied to a trade network in his homeland that gave him his market, congregated in coastal cities, where the mix could be quite cosmopolitan; in the port cities of Gujarat and Malacca, for example, one could find Africans, Persians, Armenians, Arabs, Jews, Portuguese, Genoese, Dutch, English, and Hanseatic merchants.

It is unlikely that most of these merchants went abroad intending to become permanent expatriates, but many stayed on, and the longer they did, the more valuable they were to the family enterprise and to their networks back home. Their “local knowledge” and local contacts were crucial to the development of oceanic long-distance trade. A worldwide market is not impersonal and anonymous, not even in the twenty-first century.<sup>118</sup> Europe’s oceanic trade with the East Indies and with Africa

and the Americas was managed by individuals with personal knowledge of and ties with their counterparts on-site and at a distance.

The Portuguese and Dutch oceanic enterprises were, then, not empires of settlement but empires of outposts. Only Spain managed to acquire a giant land empire before the eighteenth century.<sup>119</sup> In 1600 fewer than ten thousand Portuguese were living in the whole Indian Ocean region. Substantially fewer English were in India, probably no more than two thousand in 1700. By the end of the seventeenth century the Dutch had more agents abroad, but their numbers do not compromise the point: trade empires were the work of small diasporic communities dotting the coasts of very large continents. So empire at this stage was thin on the ground and very informal.

Trans-regional commerce depended on bicultural (or multicultural) "brokers" who had the linguistic skills and cultural adaptability to negotiate the social aspects of trade across cultural differences. In recent years, scholars have shown that sailors, many of whom were familiar with and comfortable adapting to many local cultures, became skillful cultural brokers. They were used to living cosmopolitan lives, both in port cities and on shipboard, where sailors from all continents constituted a typical crew. Some historians would go so far as to describe the world of the sailing ship as a multicultural world of republican equality, which is said to be a source of the republican ideologies that were so important in the age of Atlantic revolutions, including the American Revolution.<sup>120</sup>

While not wholly wrong, such claims are certainly extravagant. The contradictions experienced on shipboard were many. Sailors lived in a republican world, true, but it was very complex and marked by a very strict hierarchy, with many different domains of power and expectation. It was far more deeply and intricately multicultural than our current understanding of the term. Discipline could be brutal, yet there were important demonstrations of a communal spirit (as in the equality of access to ship stores). When sailors went ashore, they entered an alternative world where the ship's hierarchical authority was attenuated and the opportunities for subversion of it, including a seemingly boundless sexual freedom, were striking, but not necessarily transformative. Capacities for quickly reading local circumstances and adapting to cultural difference were highly developed and valued. Mistakes were often costly.<sup>121</sup>

Similar capacities could be acquired on land, for the Atlantic economy produced cosmopolitan settlements around the "factories" or trading posts

on many continents. Again, multilingual cultural brokers were vital, and more often than one might expect they were African or Euro-African. Predictably, Africans were especially important in their own lands, but they could be found in considerable numbers in other parts of the Atlantic littoral. While there were a hundred or so Portuguese merchants in the capital of Kongo in 1550, perhaps ten thousand Africans were in Lisbon, mostly slave but perhaps a thousand of them free, all doing a variety of jobs in government offices, hospitals, noble households, farms, and crafts shops. At least that many were in Mexico City at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>122</sup> Just as the ocean offered new opportunities for venturesome western Europeans, so, too, in its initial phase it opened a wider world for Africans. Historians are only now discovering that some Native Americans, too, went out onto the Atlantic. For example, the instance of Paquiquineo, who departed the Chesapeake region in 1561 and returned nine years later, has been reasonably well documented.<sup>123</sup>

Two matters bear emphasis here. First, of course, is the geographical distribution of Africans, but perhaps more important is their diversity of experiences and work. Some were free, but even the enslaved majority of African Creoles at first experienced slavery more as it was in the Islamic societies of the Mediterranean. A great difference between slavery in the Mediterranean, where slave occupations and ways of living were various, and slavery in the Atlantic plantation system was the uniformity of experience in the latter. Compared with the mostly urban experience of slaves under Islam, where females as well as males had places in a complex society, the plantation regime prized male labor and narrowed the existence of all the enslaved; human labor was commodified, routinized, and invariant.<sup>124</sup>

But New World slavery followed more than one pattern. While the Portuguese, the Dutch, and finally the English (especially in the Caribbean) developed plantation slavery with its work gangs, slavery in the Spanish colonies differed. If the Dutch and English mobilization of capital and rationalization of labor pointed toward modern capitalism, the Spanish world, including its slavery, was more baroque. Slaves were found, in the Islamic pattern, in the cities; they were used in the mines, too, however. And, as one might expect with Spain's authoritarian system of administration, slavery was a matter of interest to the Spanish state and Church, more than it was in the Protestant English situation, where master-slave relations were deemed a private matter.<sup>125</sup>

Under Spanish auspices a distinctive, now largely forgotten pattern of

slavery emerged in northern Mexico, including the territories of what today is the southwestern United States. (A similar form of slavery was established in Argentina as well.)<sup>126</sup> This system had its roots in a convergence of Spanish and Native American practices, which shared different but congruent traditions of honor, violence, and captivity. Native Americans had long captured and enslaved enemies, and women and children were often gifted or captured in this context. This kind of enslavement mattered not only for labor—the key issue in the Atlantic plantation system—but also for status, as a symbolic form of honor. The Spanish, who from their familiarity with Muslim slave practices knew a similar form of bondage, adopted the Native American system. Since the Spanish Catholic Church affirmed in 1537 that Indians were rational beings with souls and thus could not be enslaved, Indian slavery in Mexico was partially masked as a rescue from heathen life and a chance to work (quite literally) toward Christian salvation. It was a system in which social relations between master and slave could be close, including even marriage, which meant that different members of a single family might be slave or free; cousins might be masters over other cousins. This slavery not only predated the enslavement of Africans in the mid-Atlantic settlements near the Chesapeake Bay in the seventeenth century but, located as it was far from Mexico's authorities and formal economy and, later, from the U.S. federal government, continued well beyond the Civil War. The U.S. government did not bring it to an end until the late nineteenth century.<sup>127</sup>

But let us return to the Atlantic littoral, which for a century or more sustained a distinctive slavery system. The Atlantic trading economy, before the plantation regime was established, required and rewarded cultural brokers. Many of them were Africans and Euro-Africans, products of marriage and other sexual unions between Portuguese men, who readily crossed racial boundaries in seeking mates, and African women.<sup>128</sup> Both Euro-Africans and Africans became culturally competent in multiple contexts. Africans were used to a multilingual world and thereby special linguistic skills; not only did they learn many European (and other) languages, but largely invented a Creole one of their own. By the sixteenth century Africans, slave and free, and mixed-race sailors in Lisbon and in African cities were speaking a Creole language with a distinctive grammar that was a fusion of Portuguese, Bini, and Kongo. This "Guinea speech" or "black Portuguese" constituted an Atlantic lingua franca.<sup>129</sup>

The historian Ira Berlin has recently brought to light the numerosness and importance of "Atlantic Creoles." These Africans or Afro-Europeans lived cosmopolitan lives in key communication points—in Lisbon and Seville, in Elmina in Africa, and in Bridgetown, Cap François, Cartagena, Havana, Mexico City, and San Salvador in the western Atlantic.<sup>130</sup> This geography is important. By recognizing the spatial dimension of history as well as its chronological one, the usual narrative is disrupted. Before plantation slavery a more complex world existed: slave and free, black and white, with boundaries that were difficult to define. It was a liminal world, which is to say malleable. It offered space for alternative experiences. Skin color in this Atlantic Creole world was important but not wholly determinative, which makes the contingency of race as a historical construction clearer and more important; that the institutionalization of Atlantic slavery took so long becomes a fact of great significance. One recognizes that in this early phase other racial and labor formations were possible. For perhaps as long as a century, slavery on the Atlantic littoral was quite similar to Mediterranean slavery—mostly urban, with many occupations and varied experiences, many chances for upward mobility, and the distinction between white and black, free and slave less marked. The dissolution of this early Atlantic pattern can be observed in seventeenth-century Virginia, but in Brazil some Atlantic Creoles survived into the nineteenth century, mediating between African Islamic communities in Bahia and those in Africa.<sup>131</sup>

Many of the first Americans similarly became cultural brokers, another kind of Atlantic Creole. These American cultural brokers, like Africans, had to be linguistically agile, culturally adaptable, with a head for business and a cosmopolitan understanding of markets and goods. In addition to their cultural and economic functions, these "fitt & proper Persons to goe between" were called on as political negotiators between colonial officials and Native American leaders.<sup>132</sup> Some of them were Europeans who "went native." Others were Native Americans who acquired knowledge of the Europeans. Squanto, Pocahontas, and, much later, Sacajawea, the Shoshone Indian guide and interpreter for the Lewis and Clark expedition, are widely known—however swathed in myth. Many Indian women became translators and, because of their traditional importance in maintaining ties among groups, offered vitally important contacts for European traders. Women often found opportunities at the

interstices of the two cultures, with Christianity sometimes establishing a space for them there. Kateri Tekakwitha, an Iroquois who converted to Christianity (and took her name from Saint Catherine of Siena), like others became a spiritual teacher, finding a voice and a way around the power of the male shamans.<sup>133</sup>

The most famous (or infamous) cultural intermediary in what became Spanish America was Malinali—or Doña Marina to the Spanish. Born a princess in the southern part of Mexico, she was sold by her mother and new stepfather (who, like her actual father, was a cacique, or Indian king) to a Huastec Maya. In 1519, at the age of fourteen, she seized an opportunity that changed her life and helped to transform her world. When one of Hernán Cortés's translators failed to understand a local language, she presented herself as a translator; before long, she was Cortés's concubine and an adviser as well. (One might note that her first child with Cortés, Martín Vallejo, died fighting corsairs in the Mediterranean—which gives us some idea of the mobility within the sixteenth-century ocean world.) Her motives were no doubt complex, but she was briefly the most powerful woman in the Western Hemisphere, and her place in Mexican history is understandably controversial. In the nineteenth century, as Mexican nationalism developed, La Malinche became an epithet for traitor.

If she was an exceptional case, she well illustrated the ambiguous, even ambivalent, position of the *indio ladino*, as a native Andean who in the sixteenth century became competent in Spanish was called. Ladinos were marginal individuals with insecure identities. The first of them were captives, but in time they voluntarily chose the role (or opportunity). These women and men, drawn from a variety of social backgrounds, worked as guides, political and legal interlocutors, translators, or evangelical agents of the Church. Educated in Spanish schools, they often became indigenous historians and chroniclers. The first ladinos were ethnic Andeans, but later mestizos were more nearly bicultural.<sup>134</sup>

In North America, too, one found such cultural brokers of mixed parentage. In areas of French colonization, where there were many more male than female Europeans, French men took Indian mistresses, concubines, and wives. The result of these *mariages du pays* were culturally ambidextrous Franco-Indian children. But English and Dutch men were much less likely to establish unions with African or Indian women. The

English were quite uneasy with racial mixing, and it was less of an issue because the ratio of men to women in their settlements, especially in New England, was more nearly equal. But this led to less intercultural understanding. The rare English couplings with Native American women were not so permanent, because the men usually moved on instead of creating a bicultural family, and the children were unlikely to grow up in a bicultural family: when the father moved on, the matrilineal American tribes incorporated the children.<sup>135</sup>

While Atlantic Creoles often lived in towns, the North American cultural brokers were usually found in small inland settlements or near trading posts.<sup>136</sup> Wherever they were, they faced the challenge of fitting into a new culture without losing their inherited one. And while their liminal world brought freedoms and opportunities for initiative, it could render them suspect and vulnerable.<sup>137</sup> These cultural brokers were vital actors, whether in the vicinity of African "factories," near trading posts and woodland trails in North America, in seaports of Europe, or in various types of settlements in South America and the Chesapeake region.

Some of the cities of the Atlantic littoral were large by the standards of the day. On the west coast of Africa in what is now Ghana, Elmina, founded by the Portuguese in 1482, had a population of between fifteen thousand and twenty thousand persons by 1682, significantly larger than either Boston or New York. The goods managed in the African trade by cultural brokers in such a community ranged from agricultural products and fish to textiles and metalwork. But with the growth of the plantation economy in the seventeenth century—with its seemingly insatiable demand for human bodies to supply labor—commerce and human experiences were reduced. The diversity of activities and experiences that had made complex human identities possible within slavery became rare. The loss of this richness of human experience was one of the least recognized but most violent aspects of the development of the plantation regime in the Atlantic world.

Skills of the Atlantic Creoles were not valued in this new and brutal economy. Indeed, their worldliness produced uneasiness and even fear. Planters on the sugar islands generally wanted slaves directly from Africa—typically young and inexperienced males—who, they thought, would submit to the imposition of the discipline of plantation slavery more easily. For this reason many Atlantic Creoles ended up in marginal

slave societies where the planters could not pay the high prices paid by their counterparts in the Caribbean sugar islands—such as the settlements on the Chesapeake Bay, where there is evidence of free and enslaved Africans of just this sort of background.<sup>138</sup>

The most fully documented and thus well known of these Africans are a couple, Anthony and Mary Johnson. The records of Jamestown, Virginia, indicate that one “Antonio a Negro” was sold in 1621 to the Bennett family, on whose plantation he worked for a dozen years. Soon after Antonio landed, “Mary a Negro Woman” arrived in Virginia. Both had talents and industry that were appreciated, and they were allowed to farm independently. They purchased their freedom and land, and they married. As a free woman, Mary conferred freedom on their children, who were baptized. When freed, Antonio anglicized his name. Over the years, his property included slaves, and he possessed legal rights that allowed him to sue a white planter. The Johnsons passed their estate on to their heirs. Both as a slave and later as a slave owner, Anthony worked with white and black, slave and free, and his and Mary’s social life crossed these lines. By the eighteenth century, this would no longer be possible. But in the seventeenth century slavery was ill defined or not yet formally institutionalized, although there were indicators of racial differentiation that marked women especially. In 1634, for example, African women were “tithed,” making it harder for them to purchase their freedom. As Englishwomen were increasingly protected from work in the fields, African women were deployed as “field laborers.” Most important, by 1662 perpetual bondage for the children of enslaved women was established. (In Barbados, children of enslaved African women may have been held in perpetual bondage as early as 1636.) And that became the foundation of slavery in British North America and, later, the United States.

We shall never know how many Anthony and Mary Johnsons there were. But in the mid-seventeenth century on the eastern shore of Chesapeake Bay, several small communities of free blacks had grown up. In one county about one-third of the black population was free. Many of these Africans may have lived in cosmopolitan port cities, and they might well have realized, better than their white counterparts, how terribly isolated and parochial life in the Chesapeake region was. The very existence of their communities, no matter how small, ran against the logic that justified the emerging racial slavery there. By understanding the world of the

Johnsons, one is compelled to recognize how the meaning of race was socially constructed over time. In the earlier social formations, color was recognized as one of many overlapping and significant social identifiers of Africans; there was also lineage, religion, market success, and regional leadership.

The fluid quality of society in early-seventeenth-century Virginia and Maryland, combined with the still incomplete definition of legal slavery, meant that there was no strict connection between race and slavery. The resulting social space enabled the Atlantic Creoles to develop a world and a way of life—difficult because of discriminatory laws and social practices, but not impossible.<sup>139</sup> In other words, their actual experience in the Atlantic littoral did not predict the future of Atlantic slavery. It was reminiscent of the historical pattern of slavery in the Mediterranean, where slaves were as likely to be whites from the Caucasus as blacks from Africa and where free laborers and laborers under varying degrees of coercion interacted and worked together.<sup>140</sup>

### THE PLANTATION COMPLEX

The development of a plantation economy, beginning in the sixteenth century, transformed Africa, America, Europe, and Asia, too. It displaced the old silk trade and shifted the increasingly dynamic center of the world economy westward to the Atlantic, marking an advance at the expense of Venice, the Ottoman Empire, and Mediterranean and Asian traders who relied on land routes from the Mediterranean eastward.<sup>141</sup>

The Atlantic economy supplied eager European consumers with mildly addictive drug crops like tobacco and coffee, along with sugar, the last two having been introduced to Europeans as luxury items by the Arabs—sugar from Syria and coffee from Yemen. The Atlantic plantation system transformed these three commodities into items of general consumption. By the eighteenth century, the market for them and for other products of the plantation economy seemed endless, as Europe, led by the British and their North American colonies, became more and more consumption-oriented. Investors prospered, and capital for further economic development accumulated in the metropole. The governments found funding and motive to develop sea power. The Americas had lucra-

tive export crops and developed a society based on a system of labor exploitation of Africans, and Africa suffered the transport of eleven million of its people to the New World.<sup>142</sup>

This new economy, or "plantation complex," had its beginnings in the Atlantic islands off the European and African coast, but it was fully realized first in Brazil, where the Portuguese and later the Dutch established sugar plantations.<sup>143</sup> (The Dutch subsequently brought this brutal regime to Southeast Asia.)<sup>144</sup> By the eighteenth century, the British and, to a lesser extent, the French had developed extraordinarily productive and inhumane regimes of plantation slavery in the Caribbean.

Agricultural innovation was not characteristic of seventeenth-century Europe. Yet the plantation system was remarkably novel, anticipating modern industrial practices. A sugar plantation was an integrated economic unit whose profitability depended on new levels of managerial capacity and a very large labor force being kept at work steadily and with unprecedented intensity. It was a "ferocious" mobilization of agricultural labor.<sup>145</sup> And from the beginning, but especially from the eighteenth century onward, its product was sold into a growing consumer society, first in Anglo-America and then throughout the Atlantic world.

Plantation labor and long-distance trade drew firm lines and distinctions where ambiguity had ruled before: between black and white, slave and free, European and Indian. The recognition of internal differences (and identities) among Africans, Europeans, and Native Americans diminished. Or, put differently, a new sequence of contacts and patterns of differentiation played out in the oceanic world and created the modern identities of African, European, and Native American.

It was the development of oceanic trade that made the plantation complex possible. Because sugar has no nutritional value, it is not a subsistence crop, and local demand is limited; it is necessarily an export crop, but with the advent of a global market it became a valuable agricultural commodity. Reduced to juice on the plantation, the sugar product had a very high ratio of value to bulk, making it an ideal cargo.

Until the development of the Atlantic plantations, production of sugar had been modest, with a small luxury market. But beginning with Madeira, the Canaries, and São Tomé and then extending to Brazil and the Caribbean islands, quality and efficiency were improved, and then the market expanded seemingly without limits. Although its production and

trade were centered on the Atlantic, sugar connected all continents, reaching from the Pacific coast of Peru to Bengal.<sup>146</sup> Silver went to Asia to purchase textiles for European markets and to Africa for slaves. Nutritional foodstuffs from North America supplied plantations that could not sustain themselves without these imports. North Americans were also active traders in slaves as part of the triangle that sent molasses north from the sugar islands, rum to Africa, and slaves to the Caribbean. There were different but complementary demands for males and females in the global slave market: young males were sought for the grueling field work on New World plantations; young female slaves were preferred in Africa and in the Mediterranean world as domestic servants and concubines.

The slave system in the southern colonies of British North America developed in a specific historical and geographical context—later than in the Caribbean, and not closely associated with sugar, since the soil and climate would not sustain sugarcane. This development is central to American history, but it was not central to the larger development of the plantation complex.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, its distinctive qualities derive from its peripheral position within the world of Atlantic slavery.

That slavery should become a fundamental feature of the colonies that became the United States was far from being among the initial intentions of those colonies' proponents. They held a different vision, at once religious, militaristic, and utopian. For Sir Walter Raleigh and Richard Hakluyt, the promoters of the first English settlement at Roanoke, Virginia, in 1585, the benefits were two. First, English colonies would challenge or at least limit Catholic Spain's claims in the Western Hemisphere. In weakening and even displacing the benighted Spanish, the English would create an alternative to Spanish cruelty. Also, when Hakluyt petitioned Queen Elizabeth for her support, he spoke of a haven in Virginia for the idle poor of England and for "the naturall people there" who would be treated with "all humanitie, curtesie, and freedome." Far from imagining a future founded on slavery, then, the English colonial projectors promised to bring freedom to America. But by 1587, with the disappearance of the remaining settlers an unsolved historical mystery, the experiment collapsed. Roanoke marked, if it did not quite cause, the failure of a dream, no doubt unrealistic from the start. Yet it took the better part of a century after that before racial, inheritable slavery was formally established in the Chesapeake region. If in the imaginary utopia of

the sixteenth century freedom was the desired alternative to slavery, by the end of the seventeenth the two were linked in what has been called an "American paradox": white freedom founded on the enslavement of blacks.<sup>148</sup>

Sugarcane in the Western Hemisphere was initially grown in Santo Domingo, with shipments to Europe beginning in 1516, but the first great New World center of production was Brazil. By 1526, sugar from Brazil was arriving in Lisbon, and the whole century, dominated by Portugal, belonged to Brazilian sugar. The Dutch West India Company, created in 1621 in part to compete with the Portuguese in Africa (for the slave trade) and America (in sugar production), established trading posts near the headwaters and mouth of the Hudson River, but these were of a far lesser priority. Farther south, the Dutch became the initial source of the plantation techniques, tools, slaves, and credit that helped to establish the plantation system in the Caribbean.<sup>149</sup>

The British, too, envisioned wealth from sugar. They brought cane to Jamestown in 1619, but it would not grow there (later, tobacco became Virginia's principal cash crop), and they had better luck on Barbados in 1627. England was the principal European market for sugar, where it was used to sweeten tea and coffee, Asian drinks that became popular in the British Isles at this time. The British aggressively expanded their sugar empire, establishing or capturing more colonies and importing more slaves than their rivals. Within a century they dominated the Atlantic sugar market.<sup>150</sup> Neither slavery nor sugar production was a novelty, but the seaborne interrelationship of land, labor, and markets on three continents constituted a new, systematic pattern of relentless expansion.<sup>151</sup>

The question of the relation of slavery to capitalism is a vexed one. In a brilliant and eloquent book, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), Eric Williams argued that the deployment of slave labor provided the foundation for the development of industrial capitalism in Britain. His argument stresses capital formation, but the eighteenth century's rapidly expanding consumer market was vital in generating profits. One could also argue that emergent capitalism transformed slavery into the brutal system that characterized the sugar islands. It does seem that slavery and capitalism were mutually constitutive, and it may well have been this combination that enabled western Europe to lead the world into the era of industrial capitalism. Taking a global perspective, the historian Kenneth Pomeranz argues

that the key to European modernization was its investment in slavery: "the fruits of overseas coercion helps explain the difference" between the urban and industrial development of Europe and of China, each of which seemed to have had the same internal resources.<sup>152</sup>

The similarity of sugar plantations to modern industry is also striking. The plantation seems to anticipate modern industrial organization in respect to its high capitalization, strict labor discipline and division of labor, unified control of raw materials and processing, careful scheduling, and the coordination of production and demand. Sidney Mintz describes the Caribbean plantations as a "synthesis of field and factory." To read a contemporary description of a Barbadian plantation, written by a planter in 1700, is to recall images of late-nineteenth-century steel mills:

In short, 'tis to live in a perpetual Noise and Hurry, and the only way to render a person Angry, and Tyrannical, too; since the Climate is so hot, and the labor so constant, that the Servants [slaves] night and day stand in great Boyling Houses, where there are Six or Seven large Coppers or Furnaces kept perpetually Boyling; and from which with heavy ladles and Scummers they skim off the excrementitious parts of the Canes, till it comes to its perfection and cleanness, while others as Stokers, Broil as it were, alive, in managing the Fires; and one part is constantly at the Mill, to supply it with Canes, night and day.<sup>153</sup>

A comparison of sugar plantations and cities should invite our attention as well. Neither is self-sufficient. Both require the importation of food. Neither could sustain their populations and in the early-modern period required a constant flow of in-migrants, whether voluntary (the usual case with cities) or forced (as on the plantations).

Slavery in the Chesapeake region was different, developing as it did after the Caribbean sugar economy had matured. The number of slaves in the territory that became the United States was quite small in the seventeenth century, though the system expanded rapidly with the expansion of substantial tobacco exports. However central to U.S. history, in the context of Atlantic slavery it was a late and atypical arrival.<sup>154</sup>

There was a real and consequential transition in the American South from the seventeenth-century world of the Atlantic littoral to the later

plantation system, but the result did not replicate conditions on the sugar islands. Still, as the seventeenth century turned into the eighteenth, enslaved Africans in the North American colonies “worked harder and died earlier.”<sup>155</sup> Family life weakened, and access to the market such as had been available to the Anthony Johnsons was closed off. Free blacks became anomalous, and neither slave nor free black could claim the protection of the law. The hard edge of slavery—discipline through violence—was prevalent and visible. An undercurrent of “seething animosities,” always liable to break out into violence, characterized social relations between master and slave. Color defined status to a high degree as the words “Negro” and “slave” became synonymous.

Whereas the Chesapeake world of the Atlantic Creoles could have been described as a “society with slaves,” in the eighteenth century the region had become a “slave society” whose very foundation was racial slavery. Under such circumstances, the blending of cultures characteristic of the Atlantic Creoles was neither considered desirable nor actually possible. The plantation became a site “for a reconstruction of African life.” Instead of learning the languages of the planters or joining churches, the circumscribed slaves drew upon their memories to develop an African culture in America, with their own distinctive customs, religious practices, and burial grounds.

The differences between Caribbean slavery and that of the southern United States are most obviously demographic. The proportion of enslaved blacks to free whites was very high in the West Indies, much higher than in the southern United States. The percentage of slaves on the sugar islands went as high as 95 and never below 75. In most parts of the United States, including the South, whites were in the majority, and the scale of mainland plantations was different, too. All Caribbean sugar plantations had at least fifty slaves, and two or three hundred per plantation was not unusual. In the United States, however, as late as 1850, almost half the slaves belonged to planters who owned more than about thirty slaves. Although “gang” labor increased, the gangs were smaller in North America, and, save for Louisiana, there was no “Boyling House.” Diverse crops were cultivated in the American South, and many plantations fed their slaves from their own crops.

Mortality rates differed strikingly. Slavery in the sugar islands was a death sentence. Indeed, many planters found it more economical to work

slaves literally to death and then import new ones.<sup>156</sup> In contrast, the enslaved population of the United States not only maintained itself by natural increase but actually grew. This meant that in the British West Indies the number of blacks freed from slavery at the time of emancipation amounted to only one-third of the total that over the years had been imported, while in the United States eleven times the number originally imported were freed. A different statistic makes the same point: today the United States, which received 6 percent of all the slaves brought from Africa to the Americas, is home to about 30 percent of persons of African descent in the Americas.<sup>157</sup>

These differences produced contrasting legacies of racism, but I want to focus on one that derives directly from these demographic contrasts. It is a perverse paradox that the most disturbing characteristics of Caribbean slavery may have produced a less problematic racial legacy. The high mortality rate in the West Indies helped to sustain the African culture of those who survived, since the constant immigration of Africans to replace those who died meant that a continuous stream of new African arrivals maintained a sense of African culture, providing a sense of continuity and keeping available traditional cultural resources.

More important was the overwhelming majority of blacks over whites in the West Indies. With no more than 5 percent of the population white, it was functionally inevitable that in the post-emancipation society blacks held many occupations and social positions. That meant that being black in the Caribbean was not synonymous with being in a minority, as it was in the United States. While in the United States one legacy of slavery has been that the white majority defines itself in opposition to black people, that is not the case in the Caribbean. As a result, as Mary Waters writes, “American society is a fundamentally racist society,” while the British Caribbean has societies “where there is racism.”<sup>158</sup>

If we extend the spatial context of American history, then, the central narrative is changed not only in its geographical position but in its content, too. Certain marginal elements in the traditional story move to the center while others become less significant. Perhaps most important of all, the frame is large enough to appraise the relative significance of the various themes.

The conventional account of the beginning of American history rightly addresses religion, utopian ideas and ideals, economic opportunity, and escape—whether from religious persecution or poverty—but there is much more to it than that. Other equally important themes—capture, constraint, and exploitation—become clear in the larger narrative. Since many more Africans than Europeans made the Atlantic transit in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is difficult to reduce their story to the margins or even to call it an unfortunate exception to a benign story. By 1820, in fact, five times more Africans than Europeans had come to the Americas. This means that slavery is central to American history, and it also means that the history of the Americas cannot be the story solely of white colonizers and immigrants.<sup>159</sup> That said, one must also acknowledge the point well made by the distinguished Colombian historian and diplomat Germán Arciniegas: although the darkest aspect of the history of America is slavery, it was because of America and in America that humankind initiated a discussion of the problem of slavery.<sup>160</sup>

Nor is U.S. history a linear story of progress or a self-contained history. The beginnings of the United States, as we have seen, are the product—quite contingent and unpredictable—of many histories, several of them global in scope. And these histories converge on the oceanic connection that links the mobility of money, people, and goods to the themes of slavery, racism, and capitalism. These powerful developments were brought together in a protracted global event. U.S. history, and Americans themselves, have ever since been entangled with their transnational histories and legacies.

## 2

### THE “GREAT WAR” AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



The Declaration of Independence promulgated by the thirteen colonies was the first time a people had formally and successfully claimed “independence” from the imperial power that had ruled them.<sup>1</sup> Since 1500, history seemed to work in the other direction, toward the accumulation of new territories or concessions. The ocean world invited global contests for more territory, trade, and power, but the struggles also created the conditions for and accounted for the success of the audacious claim by British Americans to a “separate and equal Station.” And it was this proposition that the revolutionaries “submitted to a candid World” on July 4, 1776.

Carl Becker famously observed in 1909 that the American Revolution was a double contest: about home rule and about who would rule at home.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it was a triple contest. It was part of a global war between European great powers, it was a struggle for American independence, and it was a social conflict within the colonies. Here I shall emphasize the first and largest of these three, for it is too little known and quite important, as no less a contemporary than James Madison recognized. Speaking behind the closed doors of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, Madison observed that throughout history great powers tended to seek the destruction of each other, often to the advantage of weaker nations:

Carthage & Rome tore one another to pieces instead of uniting their forces to devour weaker nations of the Earth. The Houses of