

Research Africa Reviews Vol. 4 No. 2, August 2020

These reviews may be found on the *RA Reviews* website at:

<https://sites.duke.edu/researchafrica/ra-reviews/volume-2-issue-2-aug-2020/>.

Richard Anderson and Henry Lovejoy (eds.), *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807 – 1896*. Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press, 2020. Hardback ISBN 9781580469692.

Reviewed by Assan Sarr, Ohio University.

Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade examines the global campaign to abolish slavery and those Africans who were involved in the judicial process of abolitionism during the period from 1807 and 1896. For the most part, this edited volume is successful in its goal of bridging the historiographical and epistemological divide between historians of Africa and the Americas, and between scholars of the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean worlds. Following the passing of the 1807 Abolition Act in Britain, anti-slavery courts were established including the courts of vice-admiralty and mixed commission courts. Vice-admiralty courts were established in Mauritius, Aden, Zanzibar, the Cape of Good Hope, St. Helena, Tortola and other places. In 1819, the vice-admiralty courts were replaced by the courts of mixed commission following the signing of major bilateral treaties between Britain, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands and Brazil. Mixed commissions were established in Luanda, Freetown, Havana, Rio de Janeiro and elsewhere in the Americas.

The editors of the volume, Richard Anderson and Henry Lovejoy, state that between 1807 and 1819 the British vice-admiralty courts rescued approximately twenty thousand Africans from slave ships, mostly in Sierra Leone and the Caribbean. More than twenty thousand Africans were freed from slave ships by the British Royal Navy operating in the Indian Ocean. These individuals were resettled in ten port cities stretching between Bombay and Cape Town between 1808 and 1896. The mixed commission court in Cuba was forced to resettle liberated Africans to British Caribbean colonies. Liberated Africans were also resettled in Sierra Leone, Gambia, Cuba, the Bahamas, Trinidad, British Honduras, Grenada and Jamaica. Those freed by US Courts were taken to Liberia. Although the exact number of enslaved Africans liberated in the network of global emancipation efforts is not yet known to historians, current records reveal that some two hundred thousand people were freed from slave traders.

In addition to the introduction, the volume is divided geographically and thematically into six sections with nineteen chapters and no conclusion. The first part, containing chapters by Sean Kelley, Suzanne Schwarz, and Daniel B. Domingues da Silva and Katelyn Ziegler, focuses on Britain's efforts in suppressing the slave trade following the passing of the Abolition Act and the Napoleonic Wars. The second part deals with Sierra Leone, which in the nineteenth century emerged as the main base of operations for global abolition efforts to end the slave trade leaving Africa. The chapters in this section are written by Erika Melek Delgado, Allen Howard and Paul Lovejoy. Part Three focuses on the Caribbean with chapters from Inés Roldán de Montaud, Laura Rosane Adderley and Randy Sparks. The fourth section deals with the South Atlantic (Portuguese world) with contributions from Maeve Ryan, José Curto and Nielson Rosa Bezerra. Part five shifts the focus to the Indian Ocean, the Cape, St. Helena and Liberia with chapters from Matthew Hopper, Chris Saunders, Andrew Pearson and Sharla Fett. The final section, with chapters from

Kyle Prochnow, Tim Soriano and Shantel George, focuses on those Liberated Africans settled in the Gambia, the British Honduras and Grenada.

The chapters in this volume were papers presented at a 2017 three-day international conference and digital training workshop held at York University in Toronto. They draw from a varied array of sources from archives located in different places around the world and in multiple languages. In the absence of first-person testimonies from liberated Africans, these historians turned to legal, administrative, missionary and shipping records for details about the experiences of enslaved and liberated Africans. The volume is also notable in its efforts to tap into the digital humanities, particularly two important online databases (*Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* and *Liberated Africans*).

The book adds empirical evidence to what was already known about the exploitation of liberated Africans by Europeans, often disguised as apprenticeship. In Liberia, for instance, there were apprenticeship laws used to incorporate recaptives into Americo-Liberian settler society (331). Many, including young boys and girls, were forced into periods of forced apprenticeship and indentured servitude on plantations, and domestic servants in households of European settlers. Some were made property of the Crown and thus enlisted into the British army. This evidence shows that many of these liberated Africans were not freed by the actions of former big slave-trading powers. Many who were rescued from slave ships ended up elsewhere in slavery or were enlisted into military service (37). Thousands of liberated Africans suffered physical abuse but, as Suzanne Schwarz notes, these Africans did not passively accept the conditions imposed on them (50).

Whereas the bulk of the book relies on European-mediated records to document the experiences of these liberated Africans, some of the contributions are more successful in foregrounding the African perspectives than others. For example, Shantel George is able to provide a unique African perspective on responses to abolitionism and the meaning of freedom relying on both written and oral sources. George's chapter draws on oral sources to demonstrate that in the villages they established, liberated Africans kept alive their cultural traditions. They also maintained a liberated African identity, as well as memories concerning the veneration of the *orisha* (Yoruba deities). These villages (or independent settlements) were established by liberated Africans in order to guarantee their independence and freedom from plantation life (388). Many liberated Africans also fled from their masters thereby becoming fugitives (47).

One of this book's remarkable features is the editors' successful efforts in bringing together – from around the world - regional experts on nineteenth century slavery and putting together this well-researched book; their contributions to the field go beyond the methodological insights it offers. The contributors have in many ways advanced the scholarship by paying attention to the gendered lives of the liberated Africans and their agency as historical actors. The basic narrative of this book is also more than a story of the changing meaning of slavery and freedom in Africa and in the Americas; it deals with the development of new opportunities opened up by the end of the slave trade and the rise of trade in different goods. During this period, as Allen Howard's chapter demonstrates, many liberated Africans became successful commercial agents and traders (120). *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade* is undoubtedly a welcome addition to the scholarship on the African Diaspora and African history.

Research Africa

Copyright © 2020 by Research Africa, (research_africa-editor@duke.edu), all rights reserved. RA allows for copy and redistribution of the material in any medium or format, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the RA website. You may not distribute the modified material.

RA reserves the right to withdraw permission for republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. For any other proposed uses, contact RA's Editor-in-Chief. The opinions represented in the reviews and published on the RA Reviews website are not necessarily those held by RA and its Review editorial team.

ISSN 2575-6990