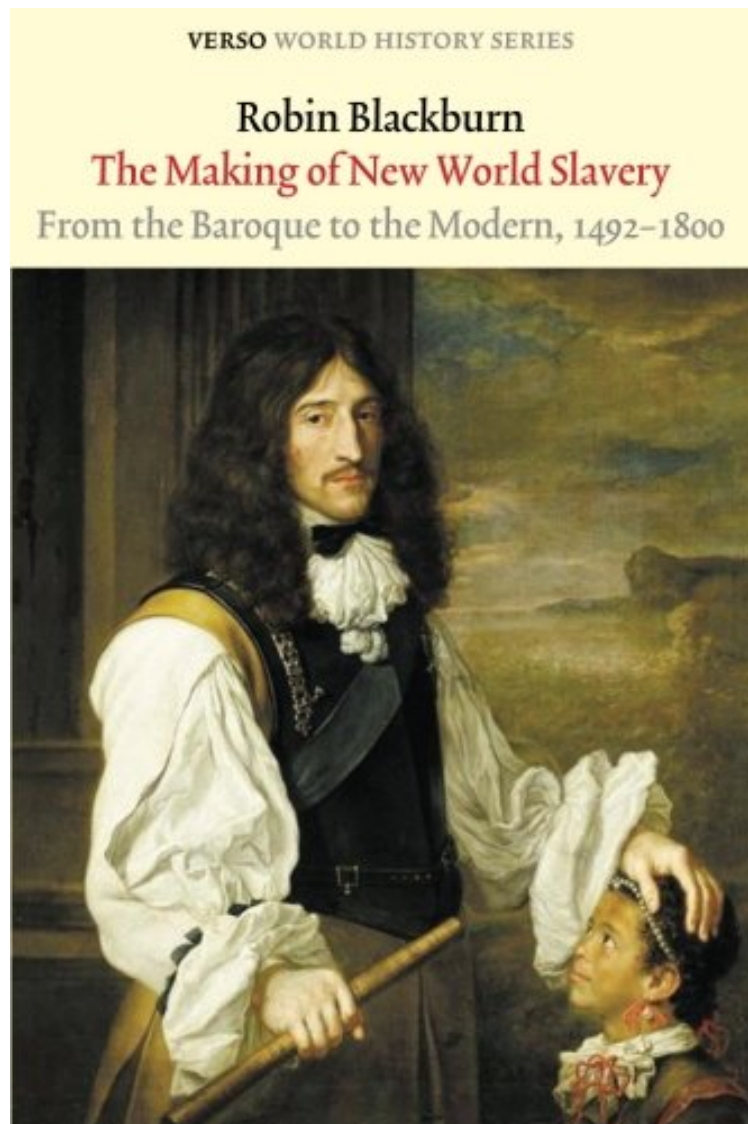


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The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800 (Verso World History Series)

Robin Blackburn

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Robin Blackburn : The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800 (Verso World History Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800 (Verso World History Series):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy wilbert lopez morenoExcellent12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. ExcellentBy R. AlbinThis well written and thoughtful book is an excellent synthesis of the large literature on the development of plantation slavery in the Western Hemisphere and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In the first 2/3s of this book, Blackburn adopts a generally chronological approach starting with the status of slavery in early modern Europe and contemporaneous Africa on the eve of the European discovery of the Americas. This is followed by the development of slavery in the Portugese and Spanish Empires, the key role of the Dutch in the emergence of the trans-Atlantic economy and early plantations, and the maturation of the plantation system in British and French colonies. This largely brings the story up to the beginning of the 18th century. In the concluding third of the book, Blackburn provides a detailed analysis of the plantation-slave system in the 18th century Americas and its multiple economic connections with Europe and Africa. This section concludes with a particularly thoughtful analysis of the possible role of the plantation-slavery complex in the industrialization of the British economy. Blackburn points out that slavery had an ancient pedigree but was a largely minor feature of European society on the eve of the great European expansion. The traditional features of slavery in both Europe and Africa, however, were quite different and in many respects less brutal than the slavery regime that would emerge in the New World. Slavery was transformed by the emerging international economy centered on Europe. Blackburn traces the development of the Portugese and Spanish empires and their colonies beginning with the initial colonizations of Atlantic islands like the Canaries and Portugese commercial activities on the coast of Africa. A series of processes led to significant use of African slaves by the Portugese and Spanish; the horrendous epidemiologic impact of the Columbian exchange in the Americas, with the attendant decline in coerced labor in the Americas and availability of land suitable for cultivation of tropical crops, the prior existence of a form of slave trade in Africa, and European marine technology permitting large scale long distance transport of slaves. The great pioneers of international commerce in the early modern period, the Dutch, played a transient but important role in the transition of use of slaves in plantation economies. Based on successful imperialism, the British and French were the inheritors pioneering Dutch efforts with the development of large scale plantation production of tropical products geared towards increasingly avid European consumers. Blackburn does an excellent job of explaining the major web of trans-Atlantic commerce involving Africa, the Americas, and Europe. Blackburn discusses a number of interesting questions. He shows how aspects of Christian ideology were used to justify slavery and argues well that racism, as we understand the term, was to a large extent the result, as opposed to a major cause, of slavery. His explanations of trans-Atlantic slavery as a relatively modern economic institution are excellent. Large Caribbean plantations, for example, has many features of sophisticated industrial organization. An important point made repeatedly is that the slave trade was a relatively less regulated aspect of European economies. While British and French slavery emerged in the mercantilist framework of imperial states, the slave trade and plantation economy was very much the result of a relatively laissez faire proess. He is very good at showing the important differences between Caribbean slavery, slavery in British North America, and Brazilian slavery, features that would have important long-term consequences. The section on the role of slavery in British industrialization is particularly good. To some extent, this is a critical examination of the debate about Eric Williams' suggestion that slavery capitalized British industrialization. Without going that far, Blackburn shows well that the plantation-slavery complex was a major feature of the emerging British industrial economy and contributed in important ways to demand for manufactures, to increasing consumer demand in Europe, to capital formation, and to provide key inputs of raw materials cheaply. The illustrations are very good and the footnotes are excellent.20 of 20 people found the following review helpful. thorough and objective analysis of slavery in the new worldBy A CustomerThis is a long book, but well worth the time dedicated to reading it, especially if one is interested in understanding the real causes behind the adoption of mass slavery by Christian Nations as a basis for the economic development of the Americas. Mr. Blackburn is writing about an emotionally charged issue but never falls into the trap of emotion and sentiment. Quite the contrary: in the best tradition of historic studies, he seeks to explain and understand; as the author tells us it would have been theoretically possible to build the plantation economies of the new world upon free labour - but how much more convenient for the European colonizers to use an available (African) pool of slave labour right across the ocean. This was reinforced by the fact that not enough whites were willing to emigrate to the Americas in order to work under the harsh conditions predominant in the plantations. Ideology also came to the rescue of the European nations; from the 15th to the 18th centuries the churches - either Catholic or Protestant - chose to legitimize black (as opposed to Indian) slavery with complicated, Bible-based theological arguments. That helped monarchs and colonizers maintain a clear conscience while enslaving millions; and Mr. Blackburn underlines the key distinction between ancient world slavery, as practised for instance by the Romans, and its modern era "Christian" version. While the former was intimately connected to the capture of POWs and was rarely perpetuated throughout the generations (manumission being a widespread practice), the latter - being a system geared for economic exploitation - was generally hostile to manumission and condemned for centuries a race QUA race to the horrors of enslavement (something that never happened in the ancient world). This book should be mandatory reading for European" intellectuals": it would help them put in perspective the achievements of the civilisation they so much admire.

The Making of New World Slavery argues that independent commerce, geared to burgeoning consumer markets, was the driving force behind the rise of plantation slavery. The baroque state sought—successfully—to feed upon this commerce and—with markedly less success—to regulate slavery and racial relations. To illustrate this thesis, Blackburn examines the deployment of slaves in the colonial possessions of the Portuguese, the Spanish, the Dutch, the English and the French. Plantation slavery is shown to have emerged from the impulses of civil society, not from the strategies of individual states. Robin Blackburn argues that the organization of slave plantations placed the West on a destructive path to modernity and that greatly preferable alternatives were both proposed and rejected. Finally, he shows that the surge of Atlantic trade, predicated on the murderous toil of the plantations, made a decisive contribution to both the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the West.