

Summer Assignment

Instructions:

Read and annotate the below document: the introduction to Andrés Bello's *The Other Slavery*.

Take notes on the reading:

1. Take bullet-style notes of the content of the chapter
2. Write down at least three quotes you think are important and explain what you think each quote means
3. Write 3 questions you have about the reading
4. Respond with a detailed and specific paragraph to this prompt: What ideas about American history does Bello challenge in the introduction to *The Other Slavery*. What do you think he hopes to convince his readers of? Use specific content from the text to support your response.

Upload your notes and response to Canvas before the first day of classes. This assignment will be graded. There will be no extensions on this assignment.

The
OTHER
Slavery

The UNCOVERED STORY
of INDIAN ENSLAVEMENT
in AMERICA

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Introduction

THE VERY WORD “slavery” brings to mind African bodies stuffed in the hold of a ship or white-aproned maids bustling in an antebellum home. Textbooks, memoirs, and movies continuously reinforce the notion that slaves were black Africans imported into the New World. We may be aware that in the long sweep of history, peoples other than Africans have been held in bondage—a practice that continues today as millions of Asians, hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans, and thousands of Europeans can readily attest. But we still seem unable to escape our historical myopia.¹

Consider the debate at the conclusion of the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–1848. The United States had just acquired Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, more than half of Colorado, and parts of Wyoming and Kansas. The question facing the country was whether slavery should be allowed in this vast territorial haul. By slavery, of course, politicians of that era meant *African* slavery. But the adjective was wholly unnecessary, as everyone in the United States knew who the slaves were. Therefore it came as a revelation to many easterners making their way across the continent that there were also Indian slaves, entrapped in a distinct brand of bondage that was even older in the New World, perpetrated by colonial Spain and inherited by Mexico. With the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo at the end of the war, this other slavery became a part of Americans’ existence.²

California may have entered the Union as a “free-soil” state, but American settlers soon discovered that the buying and selling of Indians was a common practice there. As early as 1846, the first American commander of San Francisco acknowledged that “certain persons have been and still are imprisoning and holding to service Indians against their will” and warned the general public that “the Indian population must not be regarded in the light of slaves.” His pleas went unheeded. The first California legislature passed the Indian Act of 1850, which authorized the arrest of “vagrant” Natives who could then be “hired out” to the highest bidder. This act also enabled white persons to go before a justice of the peace to obtain Indian children “for indenture.” According to one scholarly estimate, this act may have affected as many as twenty thousand California Indians, including four thousand children kidnapped from their parents and employed primarily as domestic servants and farm laborers.³

Americans learned about this other slavery one state at a time. In New Mexico, James S. Calhoun, the first Indian agent of the territory, could not hide his amazement at the sophistication of the Indian slave market. “The value of the captives depends upon age, sex, beauty, and usefulness,” wrote Calhoun. “Good looking females, not having passed the ‘sear and yellow leaf,’ are valued from \$50 to \$150 each; males, as they may be useful, one-half less, never more.” Calhoun met many of these slaves and wrote pithy notes about them: “Refugio Picaros, about twelve years of age, taken from a rancho near Santiago, State of Durango, Mexico two years ago by Comanches, who immediately sold him to the Apaches, and with them he lived and roamed . . . until January last [1850], when he was bought by José Francisco Lucero, a New Mexican residing at the Moro.” “Teodora Martel, ten or twelve years of age, was taken from the service of José Alvarado near Saltillo, Mexico by Apaches two years ago, and has remained the greater portion of the time on the west side of the Rio del Norte.”⁴

Americans settling the West did more than become familiar with this other type of bondage. They became part of the system. Mormon settlers arrived in Utah in the 1840s looking for a promised land, only to discover that Indians and Mexicans had already turned the Great Basin into a slaving ground. The area was like a gigantic moonscape of bleached sand, salt flats, and mountain ranges inhabited by small bands no larger than extended families. Early travelers to the West did not hide their contempt for these “digger Indians,” who lacked both horses and weapons. These vulnerable Paiutes, as they were known, had become easy prey for other, mounted Indians. Brigham Young and his followers, after establishing themselves in the area, became the most obvious outlet for these captives. Hesitant at first, the Mormons required some encouragement from slavers, who tortured children with knives or hot irons to call attention to their trade and elicit sympathy from potential buyers or threatened to kill any child who went unpurchased. Brigham Young’s son-in-law Charles Decker witnessed the execution of an Indian girl before he agreed to exchange his gun for another captive. In the end, the Mormons became buyers and even found a way to rationalize their participation in this human market. “Buy up the Lamanite [Indian] children,” Brigham Young counseled his brethren in the town of Parowan, “and educate them and teach them the gospel, so that many generations would not pass ere they should become a white and delightful people.” This was the same logic Spanish conquistadors had used in the sixteenth century to justify the acquisition of Indian slaves.⁵

The beginnings of this other slavery are lost in the mists of time. Native peoples such as the Zapotecs, Mayas, and Aztecs took captives to use as

sacrificial victims; the Iroquois waged campaigns called “mourning wars” on neighboring groups to avenge and replace their dead; and Indians in the Pacific Northwest included male and female slaves as part of the goods sent by the groom to his bride’s family to finalize marriages among the elite. Native Americans had enslaved each other for millennia, but with the arrival of Europeans, practices of captivity originally embedded in specific cultural contexts became commodified, expanded in unexpected ways, and came to resemble the kinds of human trafficking that are recognizable to us today.⁶

The earliest European explorers began this process by taking indigenous slaves. Columbus’s very first business venture in the New World consisted of sending four caravels loaded to capacity with 550 Natives back to Europe, to be auctioned off in the markets of the Mediterranean. Others followed in the Admiral’s lead. The English, French, Dutch, and Portuguese all became important participants in the Indian slave trade. Spain, however, by virtue of the large and densely populated colonies it ruled, became the dominant slaving power. Indeed, Spain was to Indian slavery what Portugal and later England were to African slavery.

Ironically, Spain was the first imperial power to formally discuss and recognize the humanity of Indians. In the early 1500s, the Spanish monarchs prohibited Indian slavery except in special cases, and after 1542 they banned the practice altogether. Unlike African slavery, which remained legal and firmly sustained by racial prejudice and the struggle against Islam, the enslavement of Native Americans was against the law. Yet this categorical prohibition did not stop generations of determined conquistadors and colonists from taking Native slaves on a planetary scale, from the Eastern Seaboard of the United States to the tip of South America, and from the Canary Islands to the Philippines. The fact that this other slavery had to be carried out clandestinely made it even more insidious. It is a tale of good intentions gone badly astray.⁷

When I began researching this book, one number was of particular interest to me: how many Indian slaves had there been in the Americas since the time of Columbus? My initial belief was that Indian slavery had been somewhat marginal. Even if the traffic of Indians had flourished during the early colonial period, it must have gone into deep decline once African slaves and paid workers became available in sufficient numbers. Along with most other historians, I assumed that the real story of exploitation in the New World involved the twelve million Africans carried off across the Atlantic. But as I kept collecting sources on Indian slavery in Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. archives, I began to see things differently. Indian slavery never went away, but rather coexisted with African

slavery from the sixteenth all the way through the late nineteenth century. This realization made me ponder more seriously the question of visibility. Because African slavery was legal, its victims are easy to spot in the historical record. They were taxed on their entry into ports and appear on bills of sale, wills, and other documents. Because these slaves had to cross the Atlantic Ocean, they were scrupulously—one could even say obsessively—counted along the way. The final tally of 12.5 million enslaved Africans matters greatly because it has shaped our perception of African slavery in fundamental ways. Whenever we read about a slave market in Virginia, a slaving raid into the interior of Angola, or a community of runaways in Brazil, we are well aware that all these events were part of a vast system spanning the Atlantic world and involving millions of victims.⁸

Indian slavery is different. Until quite recently, we did not have even a ballpark estimate of the number of Natives held in bondage. Since Indian slavery was largely illegal, its victims toiled, quite literally, in dark corners and behind locked doors, giving us the impression that they were fewer than they actually were. Because Indian slaves did not have to cross an ocean, no ship manifests or port records exist, but only vague references to slaving raids. Yet in spite of the clandestine and invisible nature of Indian slavery and the impossibility of counting Indian slaves accurately, we possess a sizeable and continuous paper trail. Historians working on all regions of the New World have found traces of the traffic of Indian slaves in judicial proceedings, official inquiries, and casual mentions of raids and Indian captives in letters and assorted documents. Considered in isolation, a couple of hundred Indians here and there do not seem to amount to much. But once we contemplate the breathtaking geographic scope of this traffic and consider its full chronological sweep, the numbers are astounding. If we were to add up all the Indian slaves taken in the New World from the time of Columbus to the end of the nineteenth century, the figure would run somewhere between 2.5 and 5 million slaves (appendix 1).⁹

Such large numbers of enslaved Indians not only approximate the African tragedy in sheer scale but also reveal an even more catastrophic result in relative terms. Without question, both Africans and Indians lost incommensurably. Yet broad comparisons between the two slaveries—still incipient and subject to revision—can provide some useful context. At the height of the transatlantic slave trade, West Africa suffered a population decline of about twenty percent, as it went from about twenty-five million in 1700 to roughly twenty million by 1820. During this time, some six million Africans were shipped to the New World, and at least two million died in raids and wars related to the traffic of

slaves. In absolute numbers, this human loss was tremendous. But in relative terms, indigenous peoples of the New World experienced an even more catastrophic decline in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the Caribbean basin, along the Gulf coast, and across large regions of northern Mexico and the American Southwest, Native populations were reduced by seventy, eighty, or even ninety percent through a combination of warfare, famine, epidemics, and slavery. Biology gets much of the blame for this collapse, but as we shall see, it is impossible to disentangle the effects of slavery and epidemics. In fact, a synergistic relationship existed between the two: slaving raids spread germs and caused deaths; deceased slaves needed to be replaced, and thus their deaths spurred additional raids.¹⁰

Beyond the question of numbers, I became intrigued by some of the unique features of Indian enslavement. For instance, in stark contrast to the African slave trade, which consisted primarily of adult males, the majority of Indian slaves were actually women and children. In this way, the two slaveries seem like mirror images. Indian slave prices from such diverse regions as southern Chile, New Mexico, and the Caribbean reveal a premium paid for women and children over adult males. As noted by the New Mexico Indian agent James Calhoun, Indian women could be worth up to fifty or sixty percent more than males. What explains this significant and persistent price premium? Sexual exploitation and women's reproductive capabilities are part of the answer. In this regard, Indian slavery constitutes an obvious antecedent to the sex traffic that occurs today. But there were other reasons too. In nomadic Indian societies, men specialized in activities less useful to European colonists, such as hunting and fishing, than women, whose traditional roles included weaving, food gathering, and child rearing. Some early sources also indicate that women were considered better suited to domestic service, as they were thought to be less threatening in the home environment. And just as masters wanted docile women, they also showed a clear preference for children. Children were more adaptable than grown-ups, learned languages more easily, and in the fullness of time could even identify with their captors. Indeed, one of the most striking features of this form of bondage is that Indian slaves could eventually become part of the dominant society. Unlike those caught up in African slavery, which was a legally defined institution passed down from one generation to the next, Indian slaves could become menials, or servants, and with some luck attain some independence and a higher status even in the course of one life span (see [chapter 2](#)).

Another fascinating feature of the traffic of Natives has to do with the involvement of the Indians themselves. As noted earlier, prior to European contact Native Americans practiced various forms of captivity and enslavement.

With the arrival of Europeans, they naturally began offering captives to the newcomers. At first Indians occupied a subordinate position in the emerging regional networks of enslavement, serving as guides, informants, intermediaries, guards, and sometimes junior partners, generally dependent on the Europeans' markets and slaving networks. Europeans had the upper hand because of their superior war technology—specifically, horses and firearms—which allowed them to prey on Indian societies almost at will. What started as a European-controlled enterprise, however, gradually passed into the hands of Native Americans. As Indians acquired horses and weapons of their own, they became independent providers. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, powerful equestrian societies had taken control of much of the traffic. In the Southwest, the Comanches and Utes became regional suppliers of slaves to other Indians as well as to the Spaniards, Mexicans, and Americans. The Apaches, who had early on been among the greatest victims of enslavement, transformed themselves into successful slavers. In colonial times, Apaches had been hunted down and marched in chains to the silver mines of Chihuahua. But as Spanish authority crumbled in the 1810s and the mining economy fell apart during the Mexican era, the Apaches turned the tables on their erstwhile masters. They raided Mexican communities, took captives, and sold them in the United States.¹¹

So persistent and widespread was Indian slavery that ending it proved nearly impossible. The Spanish crown prohibited Native bondage under all circumstances in 1542, but the traffic continued. More than a century later, in the waning decades of the seventeenth century, the Spanish monarchs launched an empire-wide campaign to free all Indian slaves. But this precocious crusade also fell short of what increasingly appeared to be an unattainable goal. In the early nineteenth century, Mexico proscribed all forms of bondage and extended citizenship to the Indians. Yet Indian slavery persisted. One of the most revealing aspects of this other slavery is that since it had no legal basis, it was never formally abolished like African slavery. After the Civil War, the U.S. Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment prohibiting both “slavery” and “involuntary servitude.” Although the inclusion of the latter term opened the possibility of the liberation of all Indians held in bondage, in the end the U.S. Supreme Court opted for a narrow interpretation of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments that focused on African Americans and generally excluded Indians. It would require the involvement of Congress, President Andrew Johnson, and some of the most dedicated abolitionists and colorful figures of the post-Civil War era to bring some relief to a people who had long been subjected to one of the worst forms of bondage. Even so, the other slavery continued through the end of the nineteenth century and in some remote areas well into the twentieth century.

Disguised as debt peonage, which stretched the limits of accepted labor institutions and even posed as legal work, this other slavery was the direct forerunner of the forms of bondage practiced today.

The more I learned, the more I became convinced that the other slavery had been a defining aspect of North American societies. And yet it has been almost completely erased from our historical memory. At last count, there were more than fifteen thousand books on African slavery, whereas only a couple of dozen specialized monographs were devoted to Indian slavery. To be sure, scholars of Latin America have broached the topic of labor coercion in considerable detail. But such work is often subdivided under various rubrics such as *encomiendas* (grants of Indians given to meritorious Spanish overlords) and *repartimientos* (compulsory labor drafts to which Indians were subjected), which are generally distinguished from outright enslavement. The end result is a failure to grasp the common threads running through all these institutions and gain a better appreciation of their combined scope. The consequences are plainly visible today. Whenever the conversation turns to slavery, people typically imagine black slaves. Hardly ever does anyone think of Indians. It is as if each group fits into a neat historical package: Africans were enslaved, and Indians either died off or were dispossessed and confined to reservations.

Such an oversimplification is troublesome, because Indian slavery actually explains a great deal about the shared history of Mexico and the United States and casts new light on even familiar events. If we want to find answers to such varied questions as why the Pueblo Indians launched a massive rebellion in 1680 and drove the Spaniards out of New Mexico; why the Comanches and Utes became so dominant in large areas of the West; why the Apache chief Geronimo hated Mexicans so much; why article 11 of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo prohibited Americans from purchasing “Mexican captives held by the savage tribes”; why California, Utah, and New Mexico legalized Indian slavery, disguising it as servitude or debt peonage; or why so many Navajos appear in New Mexico’s baptismal records in the aftermath of Colonel Kit Carson’s Navajo campaign of 1863–1864, we have to come to terms with the reality of this other slavery. Anyone who reads about the history of northern Mexico or the American Southwest will invariably run into indigenous rebellions prompted by exploitation, raids on Indian communities, and labor coercion. And yet it remains hard to see the forest for the trees. Lacking a sense of the overarching system of enslavement, it is impossible to put such scattered and localized practices in their proper places, just as it would be extremely difficult to make sense of the kidnappings or intertribal warfare of West Africa without reference to the transatlantic slave trade. With *The Other Slavery*, I hope to provide a broad

but detailed portrait of the system of Native enslavement that loomed over North America for four centuries and is a key missing piece of this continental history.

Before embarking on this exploration, I feel compelled to issue two caveats. First, this book does not offer a running history of Indian slavery in the Western Hemisphere. Such a gargantuan task—the equivalent of writing the history of African slavery in the New World—could not be accomplished in twenty or even fifty volumes. Instead, I focus on some areas that experienced intense slaving. Thus the story begins in the Caribbean, continues through central and northern Mexico, and ends in the American Southwest—with occasional glimpses of the larger context. And even within this restricted geography, I limit myself to examining moments when the evidence is particularly abundant or when the traffic of Indians underwent significant change.

The second caveat concerns the definition of Indian slavery. Who exactly counts as an Indian slave? The honest answer is that no simple definition is possible. Although some scholars of African slavery have attempted to specify the defining qualities of the “peculiar institution,” such an exercise is very difficult to complete when confronted with the extremely variable labor practices to which Native Americans were subjected. Initially, Indian slavery was legal, and therefore the victims of this traffic were clearly labeled as slaves in the documentation. But after the Spanish crown prohibited the enslavement of Indians, owners resorted to a variety of labor arrangements, terms, and subterfuges—such as *encomiendas*, *repartimientos*, convict leasing, and debt peonage—to get around the law. Although these forms of labor are impossible to fit into a simple definition, they generally shared four traits that made them akin to enslavement: forcible removal of the victims from one place to another, inability to leave the workplace, violence or threat of violence to compel them to work, and nominal or no pay. Like a deadly virus, Indian slavery mutated into these strains and became extraordinarily resistant through the centuries.

In this book, therefore, I use the phrase “the other slavery” in the double sense that it targeted Native Americans rather than Africans and that it involved a range of forms of captivity and coercion. Some scholars may object to this broad usage, which glosses over conventional labor distinctions, but my reasons are threefold. First, since masters and officials devised these newfangled terms and practices to retain control of Native Americans when formal enslavement was no longer possible, it makes sense to lump them together in recognition of their ultimate purpose, which was to forcibly extract labor from Natives. Kaleidoscopic labor categories have long prevented us from assessing the labor system as a whole and making fundamental distinctions between voluntary and coerced work. Second, these labor practices may have seemed quite distinct to

officials and masters at the time, and continue to seem so to researchers today, but they were decidedly less so to the victims themselves, who experienced the everyday reality of labor coercion with little or no compensation—whether on account of debt, because they had allegedly committed a crime, or for some other circumstance. The third reason is that a similar multiplicity of coercive arrangements is still prevalent today in what is often called “the new slavery.” There is no single institution or business model in the contemporary trafficking of humans; instead, there are several related practices adapted to different regions of the world and types of trade, such as sex trafficking or child labor. And even though these modern forms of bondage cannot be neatly defined or reduced to fit into a single all-encompassing definition, they are no less real. It was no different with the other slavery.^{[12](#)}