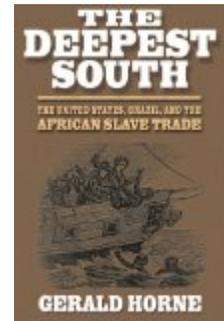


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Gerald Horne. *The Deepest South: The United States, Brazil, and the African Slave Trade*. New York: New York University Press, 2007. 352 S. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-3688-3; \$24.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8147-3689-0.

Reviewed by Stephen D. Behrendt (Department of History, Victoria University of Wellington)  
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## The Antebellum Quest for a Southern Slaving World

Gerald Horne's *The Deepest South* is one of many works on Atlantic slaving published in 2007 to coincide with the two-hundred-year anniversary of the abolition of the British and U.S. slave trades. In contrast to other studies, this effort does not build on the author's Ph.D. dissertation or published articles; in contrast to other authors, Horne is not a specialist on the slave trade. He is a prolific book writer on wide-ranging topics concerning race, politics, and African and African American studies. Among his recent monographs, he has written about U.S. policy in Zimbabwe, 1965-80 (2001), African Americans and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-20 (2005), radical black sailors in the United States and Jamaica (2005), racial politics in the Pacific during the Second World War (2005), and right-wing extremism in the United States (2006).

The content of *The Deepest South* reflects a historian moving into a new field of study: there is little discussion of historiography in the main text, and the reader does not learn whether other historians first mined the rich archival material that Horne examined. We do not read that scholars relate the "deepest south" to the Mississippi Delta, or that sociologist Rupert B. Vance coined that term in *Human Geography of the South* (1932). Horne takes the term further south to Brazil, the center of the slaving world in the 1820s-40s. Lacking a structured historiographical framework, however, makes *The Deepest South* an accessible book for a general audience uninterested in scholarly debates. They will read about how the United States was involved in the antebellum transatlantic slave trade and how many slave-owning southern-

ers in the 1840s and 1850s envisioned a "deeper south" that included Spanish Cuba and a "deepest south" that incorporated Brazil. Alliances between slave-ownership classes would "ensure that slavery in the [western] hemisphere would triumph" (p. 14).

*The Deepest South* contains an introduction, eleven chapters that proceed chronologically, and an epilogue that reflects on the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888 and today's links between the United States and the South American republic. The book's argument is that "U.S. slavery is better understood in hemispheric terms—the Slave South saw in an alliance with Brazil a formidable hedge against a future relationship with the North and, for that matter, a hedge against continuing pressure from London to abolish slavery, a hedge that could mean triumph in a Civil War, if need be" (p. 1). In addition, Horne presents evidence, mostly from primary sources, that after 1807 citizens from the United States continued to play a role in the transatlantic slave trade, whether in outfitting and selling fast sailing Guineamen, working as slavers on the African coast, or shipping enslaved Africans to Cuba, Brazil, or the southern United States.

The author's goal is to write a narrative history that relies on the voices of those Americans, Britons, and Brazilians to tell his story. As Horne notes, Henry Wise, a Virginia governor and later U.S. minister to Brazil, and Matthew Fontaine Maury, a Confederate military commander, Dixie nationalist, and supporter of slave-based

expansion into Amazonia, are two “leading characters in these pages” (p. 1). He discusses their lives and racial thinking extensively in chapters 4 and 6. They are two of the hundred protagonists advancing his narrative. Half of the book’s words are quotes from slave traders, navy officials, abolitionists, or politicians. Indeed, there are few paragraphs that do not contain at least one contemporary comment. In chapters 2 and 3, for example, he quotes from thirty-seven letters written by naval officers on the Brazil Squadron from 1842 to 1853. In chapter 9, “Deport U.S. Negroes to Brazil?” 100 of the 119 endnotes reference primary sources written from 1862 to 1864. One suspects that Horne’s approach is to locate and transcribe primary sources, and then to research secondary sources.

Whereas the narrative structure strengthens readability, the lack of historiographical context weakens the book’s scholarly value. Horne quotes and paraphrases extensively from Maury’s published speeches and writings, including his idea that such frontier lands as found in Amazonia would be a “safety-valve of the Union” (p. 121). This phrase echoes other contemporaries and later historians who viewed the American southwest, Mexico, or Caribbean islands as safety valves.[1] Indeed, Horne’s argument about maintaining a Southern slaving empire builds on ideas published in 1973 by Robert E. May in *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861*, a work absent from Horne’s discussion and referenced only once, buried deep in endnote 13 in chapter 10. Though Don Fehrenbacher devotes two chapters on the United States and the slave trade from 1789 to 1842 in *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government’s Relations to Slavery* (2001), Horne only references his work once. Greater attention to scholarship on the slave trade would tell readers that U.S. nationals were not “a prime motor pushing Africans across the Atlantic from the late 18th century though the late 1840s,” nor did U.S. citizens have an “extensive involvement” in “the African slave trade to Brazil” (p. 53). The contribution of the United States to the transatlantic slave trade post-1807 paled in comparison with that from Luso-Brazilians or the Spanish in Cuba. There were comparatively few U.S. slaving ships or firms based in Africa. As a document, in fact quoted by Horne, states, in 1858 in Luanda, Angola, there were “thirty-nine Portuguese firms and two American firms which do more business than all the others put together” (p. 143). Of the documented slavers sailing under the U.S. flag from 1807 to 1863, more than one-half of the enslaved Africans were disembarked in Cuba. From Cuba, small numbers of slaves then were

landed along the southern coastline between Louisiana and Florida. The Caribbean, not Brazil, was the focus of most U.S. southerners who were looking further south.

A more balanced examination of sources would have been beneficial in placing information contained in *The Deepest South* in historical context. Horne realizes that splits in the slave-owning South existed, as some planters, for example, did not want to renew the transatlantic slave trade, as imports would decrease the value of their slaves. But, the author buries such points under a barrage of quotes from vocal southerners, men that other historians, such as May, would call extremists or “extreme southern expansionists.”[2] Regarding the role of U.S. nationals in the post-1807 transatlantic slave trade, the implication throughout Horne’s text is that any American on the African coast after 1807 worked directly and/or surreptitiously in the transatlantic slave trade. He cites numerous letters archived at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, to support his contention. But, most Americans traded with African merchants for “legitimate” products, such as hides, gum, spices, oils, ivory, or dyewoods. These trades are also documented in the extensive Peabody collections, and many of these letters and journals were published by Norman R. Bennett and George E. Brooks Jr. in *New England Merchants in Africa: A History through Documents, 1802 to 1865* (1965). So, one could argue that U.S. nationals helped to abolish the slave trade by demanding from African merchants commodities other than slaves.

There is also some inattention to reference matter, perhaps caused by hurriedness to deliver the manuscript in time to be published in the 2007 anniversary year. Horne cites “The Journal of an African Slaver, 1789-1792,” a primary source published in 1929 by the American Antiquarian Society that details trades along the Gold and Slave coasts of Africa (modern-day Ghana and Benin). But, it is included incorrectly in endnotes supporting statements about the U.S. slave trade to Brazil in the 1830s (none of the sources listed in this note correctly reference the main text information) and the slave trade from Mozambique to Brazil in the 1820s. In fact, the “Journal of an African Slaver” includes accounts from London/Havre slaving merchant William Collow, who shipped African captives to the British and French West Indies—though it might be true that one of Collow’s agents on the Gold Coast was born in the United States.[3]

Though published in the anniversary year of the abolition of the U.S. slave trade, *The Deepest South* reminds us that from 1808 to the outbreak of the Civil War, Amer-

icans continued to finance, outfit, and man slaving vessels, and that illegal shipments of enslaved Africans continued to arrive. In a broad view, Horne's work is one of an increasing number of articles and monographs that place U.S. history in a larger Atlantic context. It is also one of many studies published in the past forty years that reemphasize the importance of the nineteenth-century slave trade, when 20 percent of all Africans forced into transatlantic slavery arrived in the Americas. The history of the slave trade does not end in 1807, and the institution of slavery would have persisted longer in New World history if slaveholders in the United States, the Caribbean, and Central and South America had had the power to

maintain the institution.

#### Notes

[1]. See, for example, Frederick Merk, "A Safety Valve Thesis and Texan Annexation," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 49 (1962): 413-436.

[2]. Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 75.

[3]. Stephen D. Behrendt, "The Journal of an African Slaver, 1789-1792, and the Gold Coast Slave Trade of William Collow," *History in Africa* 22 (1995): 61-71.

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