



**Ana Lucia Araujo.** *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. x + 276 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-350-01060-4.

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Rarely investigated by historians and practically ignored at historic sites, former American slave societies never paid reparations financially or materially to former slaves and their descendants. These demands appear to be a recent twentieth-century phenomenon, perhaps associated with the US civil rights movement; however, that is not the case. Ana Lucia Araujo's book *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade* chronicles the long and neglected history of reparations in a transnational focus that includes mainland British colonies and various Caribbean islands. She charts how demands for reparations paid to former slaves and their descendants started long before emancipation, well into the eighteenth century. Araujo's argument is profoundly original while also multifaceted and clear. She found that each former slave society has a unique cause and effect relationship between demands for reparations and its civil rights movement. For example, Araujo intensely probes the underlying motivations that politicians and activists had in supporting or undermining outcries for reparations throughout the Americas, the Caribbean, and Africa. In societies that had no major civil rights movements (such as Brazil), demands for financial reparations rarely existed. Whereas the civil rights movement of the United States provoked discussions of reparations and ushered in such groups

as the Reparations Committee for the Descendants of American Slaves (RCDAS) and the Republic of New Africa (RNA), supposed racial democracies throughout the Atlantic, such as Brazil, quelled any attempt to demand reparations. Araujo uses archival evidence throughout North and South America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa to provide a comparative assessment and to also understand the complex nature of Atlantic slavery and abolition.

Araujo's work on slavery and the slave trade is robust and intensive. Professor of history at Howard University in Washington, DC, Araujo connects the Americas with the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa in multiple ways. Not only does she use archival materials in each of these regions, but a transnational group of librarians, researchers, historians, and activists also augmented Araujo's research by providing insight in production of *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade*. Also trained as an art historian, Araujo draws comparisons between public memory and artistic representations of slavery while simultaneously creating discussions on the material culture of trauma and commemoration of such critical institutions as Atlantic slavery.

Perhaps most important, Araujo uses clear, precise, and definitive language to carefully lay out her arguments throughout the book. Starting

in the introduction, she defines the overly amalgamated nature of compensation paid to former slave owners and redress paid to former slaves. Financial compensations were purely for the benefit of the former owner. In her own words, “Financial compensation to slave owners are indemnities paid by governments to former slave owners in order to assure that their losses provoked by emancipation were minimal” (p. 6). Such clarity becomes useful in the body of the work, given the comparative approach and differentiating time frames that Araujo covers in less than two-hundred pages of text.

The first two body chapters give a comprehensive and multicultural understanding of African slavery in the New World and the rise of abolitionism throughout the Atlantic World. In chapter 1, Araujo introduces her readers to the overall narrative of African slavery in the Western Hemisphere by giving proper emphasis to the origins of forced bondage: African kingdoms captured their rival neighbors as wartime contraband. These groups typically spoke different languages and also practiced dissimilar religions. Additionally, with properly emphasizing the role of Portuguese exploration in West Africa, the author paints a clear and important message regarding the beginnings of Atlantic slavery. European involvement in colonizing littoral areas further divided African chiefdoms and states in order to fight “each other to gain expansion and control larger numbers of subjects” (p. 15). Beyond this, Araujo also ensures that readers understand the difference between slave societies and societies with slaves that Ira Berlin emphasized in *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (1998): the former are societies built upon sustaining forced bondage as a form of labor, while the latter had a slave presence, but one that did not structure their society. Araujo argues that this distinction had important ramifications for a federal government’s decision

to pay compensation to former slave owners in lieu of reparations to the slaves themselves.

Araujo documents the complex and interconnected Atlantic abolition movements in chapter 2. The exhaustive process to abolish slavery in the Americas began in 1804 with Saint-Domingue (Haiti) becoming “the first and only independent black republic of the Americas” (p. 45). The author gives different abolition movements in North America, Brazil, and Cuba their proper historical context, with increased attention to the “free womb” laws that began some of the first glacial movements toward abolition of slavery. Important to her overall analysis are the different abolition practices in the Americas: immediate versus gradual emancipation had different long-term effects on how former slaves approached the idea of reparation demands. While forced labor was of course maintained by various measures, including convict labor and poor tenant farming, it actually ushered in demands for reparations throughout the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. The most frequent payments, however, occurred in the form of federal compensation to former slave owners.

Chapter 3 contains the heart of Araujo’s argument regarding reparations. Most profound, the author states that the covert methods of racism and segregation in Latin America had the most bearing on whether former slaves identified the need for reparations. With efforts like racial democracy and *mestizaje*, Brazilian, Cuban, and other activists did not feel prompted to call for reparations in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Comparatively, former slaves in the overtly racist and segregated United States faced a troubling period during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era. Elderly former slaves remained impoverished, in addition to facing restrictions on their civil liberties. These conditions served as a battle cry for early reparations activists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ultimately, major efforts in the Atlantic failed largely

due to the racism against and isolation of the black population. This resulted in the federal government never paying reparations to former slaves and their descendants. Nonetheless, these experiences reveal how differently American governments approached demands for financial assistance.

Building on the arguments established in chapter 3, Araujo shifts focus in chapter 4 to the period from World War I to the Cold War. A period of great military and social upheaval, this era showed great hypocrisy to former slaves, given the relative progress made in humanitarian efforts and rapprochements toward wartime catastrophes. Indeed, the Works Progress Administration helped document former slaves' oral histories in the 1920s, but these efforts carried a false outer layer of symbolic reparations. Contemporaneous to this, US officials readily paid out pensions to World War I veterans and their dependents, thus it shows that federal governments were capable of providing financial assistance to others. Additionally, once World War II revealed the horrors of the Nazi regime and the injustices the United States placed on the Japanese during internment, African American activists were encouraged "to request reparations for more than three centuries of slavery" (p. 121). Of course, the US civil rights movement also featured whispers of reparations and repayment to African Americans.

While they did not outwardly campaign for reparations, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. both favored reparations to make amends for slavery and the slave trade. Also, individuals like Jamaican activist and slave descendant Marcus Garvey regularly communicated with others in the Americas and Europe regarding reparations. Araujo emphasizes Garvey's Atlantic role while also highlighting the importance of W. E. B. Du Bois and Callie House. This period of reparation demands had clear transnational and multicultural connections, and Araujo weaves a clear narra-

tive of sometimes disparate people and places that nonetheless were connected by one goal.

Chapter 5 lays out a foundation to show how financial and material reparation demands took on new shapes at the end of the twentieth century. Even though the United States more or less spearheaded calls for reparations at times, this shifted in the 1980s and 1990s. As a period of Caribbean autonomy and independence from their colonizers, the last quarter of the twentieth century saw African nations reinterpret their slave pasts in new and authentic ways. Activists, speakers, and politicians attempted other methods to attain reparations, whether it was through debt forgiveness or symbolic representations of slave historiography. However, Araujo is careful to distinguish between *symbolic* and *material* demands, the latter which have never been satisfied.

Connecting her work to the current state of US race relations, Araujo concludes *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade* with a succinct discussion on the Black Lives Matter movement and considerations toward American universities and their slave pasts. For example, as Georgetown University grapples with its slave past, university officials work in different capacities to rectify its heritage in forced labor. These included preferential admission to applicants descended from slaves sold en masse in 1838, in addition to creating memorials to the slaves who built the university, while also offering a public apology. However, as Araujo argues, many of these efforts in the United States and elsewhere remain insufficient compared to the long-lasting effects of American slavery.

*Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade* is at its core a comparative and transnational work. Araujo's arguments and careful research illustrate the ways in which racial inequality, public memory of slavery and the slave trade, and contemporary debates on race are rooted in the Atlantic narrative of reparation demands. *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade* will also

help countless students understand nationhood and attempts to obtain autonomy throughout the Atlantic. This work is accessible to a wide audience, as it is meticulously researched and maintains a carefully structured argument throughout the entire monograph. The sheer amount of detail covered in this brief book is remarkable, but there still remains much to be done concerning reparations history.

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