

the structural violence and inequalities in trade that permitted the system to grow. This has been a strong feature of this literature and emphasises the limitations of too strong a focus on this thematic; when Sparks writes how one archival quote ‘does suggest how the Fante shifted the blame for the trade onto the Europeans’ (p. 157), the reader is reminded of the way in which the focus on African agency can morph into a moral debate reminiscent of Abolition narratives, of guilt and responsibility, and at times of ‘passing the buck’.

The problem therefore in producing West African history for an Atlantic ‘market’ is that the importance of the discourses and history of West Africa itself tends to be occluded. Thus far, this debate can sometimes reproduce Eurocentric discourses. In the end, therefore, *Where the Negroes are Masters* provokes thought as to how West Africa can and should be incorporated into global and Atlantic histories and about how West African historical discourses can be reproduced among global ones. For this alone, it is worth reading.

TOBY GREEN  
*King’s College London*

## AFRICAN NARRATIVES, HEXAGONAL TRADE

*Transatlantic Africa 1440–1888.*

By Kwasi Konadu.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xxviii + 146. £10.99,  
paperback (ISBN 978-0-19-976487-7).  
doi:10.1017/S0021853715000377

**Key Words:** Global, slave trade, slavery, teaching texts, trade.

Many years ago, not long after I had begun teaching full time, two colleagues, one a specialist in African American History and the other a Latin Americanist, invited me to come speak in a class on the History of Race in the Americas. As the newly hired Africanist, I was asked to speak about African identity during the era of the Atlantic Slave Trade. My cunning strategy for the hour or so I spent in the class was to say something along the lines of: ‘We don’t really know much about it, but we do know that most categories of identity we now use are probably not applicable.’ This made for an interesting discussion, but it also left me hoping that somebody would eventually address this crucial question.

With *Transatlantic Africa*, Kwasi Konadu has taken a major step towards addressing not only the diversity of ways Africans saw themselves during the era of the slave trade, but also the variety of ways in which the trade was understood at different times and places. Part of Oxford’s African World Histories series, this book seeks to provide a world historical grounding for African content and a dose of African content for world history courses in a concise and accessible format. To do so, Konadu utilizes (and more importantly, carefully engages) a number of first-person narratives by enslaved Africans. More specifically, he uses these sources to weigh, test, and critique the existing scholarly examinations and explanations of Atlantic slavery. In the process he also presents what are often stark

cliometric, economic, and political treatments of the subject and infuses them with a degree of humanity that is welcome, indeed.

In so doing, Konadu provides instructors and students with a number of important perspectives on Atlantic slavery. Among these are such points as that Atlantic slavery was not so much an event as a process and that the trade was not so much a triangle as a hexagon, for which I am deeply appreciative. I believe there are few terms as misleading as the ubiquitous notion of the ‘triangular trade’ taught to generation after generation of secondary and college students. Perhaps most importantly Konadu drives home to his audience that while the Atlantic slave trade and slavery did come to an end, their economic, political, and cultural legacies are very much alive in the world today.

Konadu presents these broader points and other critical issues in four carefully constructed, and creatively titled, chapters. In Chapter One, ‘The Anchors: African Understandings of their Societies and “Slavery”’, he provides a nuanced discussion of African notions of sovereignty, freedom, and slavery. Chapter Two, ‘Vessels and Villians: African Understandings of Atlantic Commerce and Commodification’ builds from a discussion of African systems of commerce and exchange to examine how growing Atlantic economic connections generated new economies and identities in parts of Africa. The theme of identity continues and is further complicated in Chapter Three, ‘Black Bodies at Bay and Reversing Sail: African Understandings of Self, Religion, and Returning Home’. In particular, this chapter examines the creation of uniquely Atlantic identities and the role of religion, particularly Christianity, in defining Africans and in African’s creation of new identities in the Americas and Africa. The fourth and final full chapter, ‘The Endless Voyage of Cannibalism and Capitalism: African Understandings of the Impacts of Trans-Atlantic Slaving and Abolitionism’ seeks to offer a counterpoint to scholarly interpretations of the Atlantic slave trade by utilizing African metaphors and idioms, as well as first-person narratives, to privilege African understandings of the era so as to ‘calculate the unquantifiable’. The text then concludes with an epilogue by series editor Trevor Getz, which reinforces the case for the continued influence of the Atlantic slave trade in the lives of those living today – in Africa and beyond.

In conclusion, *Transatlantic Africa* is a welcome, and in many ways, novel addition to the significant literature on slavery in the Atlantic World. Despite its brevity, it brings a host of important questions and perspectives to our understanding of Africa and the World. It deserves a place on both graduate and undergraduate syllabi dealing with African, Atlantic, and World History.

JONATHAN REYNOLDS  
Northern Kentucky University

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF AN ANTISLAVERY ICON

*The Letters and Other Writings of Gustavus Vassa (Olaudah Equiano, the African): Documenting Abolition of the Slave Trade.*

Edited by Karlee Anne Sapoznik.