

Mediterranean, compelling peace treaties and forcibly redeeming captives, and the Restoration saw a greater concern for captives. Even as British naval power grew and peace was secured with Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, captives continued to be taken, in part because British ships continuously abused the terms of the treaties. Increasingly, captivity became a transatlantic affair, with North Americans ‘who ransomed their kin from Indian and French captivity’ also ransoming ‘travelers and would-be colonists from North Africa’ (p. 134).

Matar’s final chapter expands on the role of captivity as a *casus belli* for Britain, invoked to justify what Fernand Braudel called the ‘Northern Invasion’ (a term Matar borrows for his chapter title) of the Mediterranean. In this, he follows Gillian Weiss’s parallel argument for France in *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, that the pretext of liberating captives enabled attacks on Mediterranean ports and the broader project of European dominance. As British military and commercial ambitions grew, captivity became the excuse for conquering North African ports and eliminating them as commercial rivals. While Matar’s account of how the literary sphere relates to this context feels intermittent and overly simplistic, he succeeds admirably in his larger goal of historicizing captivity as precisely as possible given the limited records, and showing its military and political utility to Europe. Perhaps unsurprisingly, captivity turns out to be about money, trade, and dominance, rather than about religious enmity.

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THE AGE OF CHILD ENSLAVEMENT

Amistad’s Orphans: An Atlantic Story of Children, Slavery, and Smuggling.

By Benjamin N. Lawrance.

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I confess that I grossly underestimated this fine and important work of historical deduction and analysis. After a surfeit of literature on the *Amistad* case, I expected a similar work focusing on the children aboard that vessel. However, *Amistad’s Orphans* is far more than that. It is a *cri de cœur*. By questioning how child slavery ‘has emerged as a central issue of twenty-first century humanitarianism’ (p. 268), Benjamin N. Lawrance was led back to his historical training. The result is a book that not only casts light on enslavement today but also recasts our understanding far beyond the *Amistad* affair.

Amistad’s Orphans informs knowledge of illegal transatlantic slave trading more generally, demanding nothing less than a renaming of the nineteenth century’s titular epoch. Instead of the ‘Age of Abolition’, Lawrance’s work shows how the era after 1808 should more accurately be called ‘an age of child enslavement’ (p. 7), when abolitionism, missions, colonization, and ‘the mischievously named “legitimate commerce”’ (p. 33) spread rather

than checked enslavement for Africa's young. Renamed in this way, today's problems are re-presented with their true long historical roots; they are not simply a rescinding of the abolitionist cause but also its outcome.

This is not to suggest that the book is not a very important work for historians uninterested in the present day dimension. *Amistad's Orphans* can be read purely as a work of historical scholarship. It challenges what Lawrance calls the 'myths' about the *Amistad* case: not just that it happened in the 'Age of Abolition' (or indeed that such a thing existed at all), but that most of those involved were Mendi; that those aboard the vessel had arrived together in the Americas having been 'free-born' in Africa; and, that the Supreme Court liberated all of the mutineers. Some of these things might be true, in some senses, for the adults aboard the vessel, but, Lawrance forcefully argues, they obscure the stories of the children. Confronting many issues – two children pawned by parents, one rescued from one slave ship and then resold, the New Haven jailer listing them as his slaves, returning to slave trading in one case – that do not fit with romantic pictures of the *Amistad* case, Lawrance demands that his readers face a more nuanced picture in the quest for truths.

Lawrance's book illustrates that child slavery was (and perhaps is) not a smaller, less well-formed version of adult slavery, but a different creature. Using the device of 'orphanhood' to explore their specific situations, he seeks to investigate their shifting kinship and the fact that they likely remained perpetual children in the eyes of others even as they survived to adulthood. Their lives were liminal in a way that both provokes and informs: for them freedom meant being put to domestic servitude by their New England jailer, then returning to Sierra Leone where the girls were forcibly circumcised and married off, and the men, remaining uncircumcised, could never marry and have families.

The most provocative parts of the book are discussions of trading companies that specialized in child slaves and the many reasons that merchants turned increasingly to children in the era after 1808. Easier to coerce and hide, more profitable, less likely to rebel, and with less agency, child slaves were a sound business choice for slave dealers, not an afterthought used to fill gaps in the hold. Some slave ships, fitted out with less space between decks, actually 'specialized in children'. Child slaves were emblematic of the clandestine transatlantic trade, the unintended victims of the abolitionist movement in some ways, yet their stories have been subsumed beneath those of adults.

At times *Amistad's Orphans* is, by the very nature of the sources and lack thereof, teasingly hesitant in its conclusions. Yet its overall message is powerful and sweeping. In focusing on abolitionism, historians have unintentionally obscured the changes in slave trading after 1808. In the Christianity-based narrative focusing upon nuclear families, family reunions, Westernized gender constructs, and the glories of freedom, the truths of what happened to the children aboard the *Amistad* have become lost.

Lawrance's book is erudite yet readable. It is not only an important contribution to *Amistad* literature but also essential reading for those studying the illegal slave-trading era more generally. It provides much-needed background for those who seek to understand child enslavement in West Africa today.

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