

Matthieu Dussauge (Ed). *La Route de l'esclave. Des itinéraires pour réconcilier histoire et mémoire* [The Slave Route. Itineraries to Reconcile History and Memory]. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016, 425 pp; 39 €.

After a long, long period of neglect, perhaps best characterized as collective forgetting, nations that were involved in the slave trade and had enslaved populations are now exploring their own past and examining what slavery entailed and its significance in the lives of the descendants of the enslaved and the slave-holders today. This has produced an outpouring of scholarly research accompanied by popular interest throughout the Atlantic world in recent decades. Museums, memorial sites, books, historical tourism, television programs, films, and school and university courses that did not exist just a few years ago are all part of this snowballing process that shows no signs of slowing down. The 1998 commemorations in France of the 150th anniversary of the ending of the slave trade, while contested by some as highlighting this 'positive' event rather than the centuries of French involvement in the slave trade and slavery, did nevertheless stimulate the growth of interest in the recovery of memories of enslavement and marking sites of slavery on the landscape in the Caribbean.

La Route de l'esclave [The Slave Route] has 33 chapters that develop the themes just mentioned and more in its 425 pages. The book grew out of a UNESCO project by that name launched in 1994 to better understand and bring to light the story and consequences of 400 years of the slave trade involving West and East Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and North and South America. This volume resulted from a UNESCO sponsored international conference held in Guadeloupe in late 2014 that especially focused on the former French-held islands in the eastern Caribbean but also includes among its 33 chapters material on former Dutch and English colonies in the region, French and British engagement in the slave trade and contemporary efforts to explore these experiences as well as chapters on North and South America. Most of the chapters are in French and many focus on Guadeloupe, but there are a few in English and Spanish as well.

The first six chapters pay particular attention to the long-time absence of collective narratives of enslavement and visible sites of slavery where recounting the narratives would be particularly poignant. Dominique Rogers does an especially good job in setting the agenda for further discussion of the recent large-scale shifts in attention to slavery's past in the Caribbean region (and elsewhere). In the Caribbean as in other places, many descendants of the enslaved found that thinking and speaking about their own ancestors' enslavement too painful (as is in the case with many traumatic experiences) and simply avoided the topic and anything associated with it that would remind them of what had taken place over 400 years. New monuments and memorials have been built throughout the region and have aided the process of historical reconstruction and helped develop cultural education as Karine Sitcarn and Jean Moomou document in their chapters. No longer are monuments only built to honor colonial era whites. Instead, new monuments are part of the project to increase the visibility of the slave past in many places. Some are in the center of cities; others are in the ports where the enslaved arrived; others are in burial grounds that have been excavated and restored; and some are associated with the rural places in which they lived and toiled. Archaeology is an important part of the historical recovery process as well and chapters on two projects in Guadeloupe—one involving slave cemeteries and the other buildings where the enslaved lived.

The recovery of forgotten memories of slavery has taken place in multiple ways. As the volume shows, it has helped flesh out narratives that were in many places very sketchy, and to build new and more complex ones. More recent narratives are often based on careful and detailed archival research examining documents that existed in government archives including maps, judicial records, diaries of administrators, and governmental debates and decisions, as well as in private family records that existed for decades but no one had bothered to read and write about. These became important for doing something as simple as describing the number of enslaved people in

a place, their genders, ages, and the kind of work they performed. In addition, interviews with older people often produced family histories that went back to their enslaved ancestors to supplement genealogical records. The records also help to spell out details about the slave purchases, sales, births and deaths. Slave agency is revealed in accounts of slave uprisings, running away, and protests of various kinds such as work slowdowns, theft of food and other supplies, and breaking tools. The archives also reveal the locations of specific plantations, burial grounds, and other sites of slavery, a number of which archaeologists have recently examined, and some of which have been restored; for example, buildings are now open for the public to visit to learn the kinds of work enslaved laborers did, such as processing raw sugar cane into molasses.

In addition to a rise in now-visible places where the enslaved were sold, worked and died, there are sites in Africa from which they were taken that recount their role in the slave trade. In addition, scholars have also compiled large data bases on slave trading so we have a much clearer idea of where the enslaved were purchased in Africa and where they were sold over time. The most famous of these are Gorée Island in Senegal and Cape Coast Castle in Ghana that served as prisons where captured Africans from the interior were held awaiting their sale to western slave-traders. But there are many others as well where local people and foreign visitors can learn about practices associated with the slave trade.

Recently, museums have become another important vehicle for recounting public history about slavery and the slave trade. They have been built in Nantes, France, Liverpool, England, and on the Washington Mall in the US—all of which have opened in the past decade telling the story of the international slave trade, its end, and the meaning of this story today for both the descendants of the enslaved, and those who profited from the long-time practice directly and indirectly. These are now appearing with monuments and memorials in regions where the enslaved dominated the population locally such as the Caribbean islands. For example, in July 2015, Guadeloupe opened a stunning Museum, named Memorial Acte that carefully documents and explains the dynamics of enslavement in the region (<http://fr.memorial-acte.fr/home-page.html>). Yvon Chotard's chapter on Nantes links the Loire region in which it is located to both Africa and the Caribbean, emphasizing the interconnections throughout the Atlantic world that characterized the slave trade. In a similar vein Phillipe Pichot and Nelly Schmidt write about public sites that now document abolition, while Marcel Dorigny identifies some interesting residues of images of colonization and enslavement still found in Paris today.

The chapters in the book provide rich detail about the wide range of efforts to effectively discuss enslavement and to develop sites appropriate to recount the stories of the lives of the enslaved. The chapters help us continue to better understand the tensions between history and memory that have been widely considered in recent years. The diversity of topics the book raises and the many sites it describes make the volume a rich source of evidence to consider all the creative ways that lost memories can be recovered on an important period of history that still reverberates today. When we look back to see how little we knew about the details of how the enslaved lived and worked a generation or two ago, we have to be especially impressed with the richness of this volume and other works on topics that people were convinced were hardly worthy of investigation not so long ago.

Marc Howard Ross
William Rand Kenan, Jr. Emeritus Professor Political Science
Bryn Mawr College