

labor mobility, to encourage docility, and to punish intransigent workers (not least those who sought to organize collectively).

A fascinating aspect of this book is its experiment of creating what editor Anamarija Batista in her afterword refers to as a “translation loop” between academics and artists. Three visual artists, Dariia Kuzmych, Monika Lang, and Tim Robinson, were invited to “visualise and conceptualise the lines of argument” (p. 361) developed by the academics who contributed to this book, and, in turn, the academics were encouraged to engage with the artists’ illustrations in their texts. In some instances, such as the chapters by Müge Özbek and Nico Pizzolato, this dialogue contributes significantly to the analysis and does indeed help to visualize and conceptualize the topic. Unfortunately, however, most of the authors only casually refer to the illustrations and otherwise make little use of this opportunity to further reflect on their topic or add to their analysis. It would also have added to the value of this experiment to include some written reflections from the artists themselves. Regardless of these minor criticisms, this attempt to combine artistic renditions of historical analysis and academic texts of the same is a novel and commendable idea that should be further explored.

*Coercion and Wage Labour* is an excellent and timely exploration of work relations in a global context and over a vast time period, a study that encapsulates the changes in the practice of labor history within the last few decades. These changes have transformed the field from linear master narratives of economism to a more nuanced understanding of work and work relations as an integral part of the human experience.

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Randy M. Browne, *The Driver's Story. Labor and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024). 213 pp. ISBN 9781512825862.

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Why did early modern slavery continue for so long despite continuous acts of resistance by enslaved people? In *The Driver's Story. Labor and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*, Browne approaches this classic question within the field of Atlantic slavery from an unconventional perspective. Central in the book are the drivers: enslaved men and



women who were responsible for the management and oversight of the daily life and labors of enslaved people working on plantations throughout the Caribbean and the Americas. Browne points out that drivers appear as conflicting figures in both popular and scholarly understandings of Atlantic slavery, considered either as accomplices to the slave-owning classes or as actors who suffered themselves from this oppressive and violent system, often playing crucial roles in revolts that sought to resist or overturn it (p. 5-7).

According to Browne, the desire to classify slave overseers either as oppressors or as oppressed is emblematic for the dominance of a framework of “domination and resistance” within the historiography of Atlantic slavery. The author’s main intervention is to complicate this approach, arguing instead for the deployment of a framework of “survival” to study plantation slavery and the social lives of the enslaved (p. 6-8). Rather than acting out of resistance and defiance, survival was often the main driver behind enslaved people’s actions – or inactions.

*The Driver’s Story* makes a compelling case for this argument from start to finish. The author’s decision to position the figure of the driver center stage brings the reader to the heart of power relationships that existed in American plantation slavery. Drivers had to relate constantly to the desires of planters, who provided them with their tentative position of social power. At the same time, they depended on the respect and good will of the enslaved community, whom they not only had to manage but often also represented during disputes. This position made the role of the driver a tough balancing act. If carried out well, it could provide privileges in the form of food, clothing, physical mobility, and social status. Browne makes crystal clear, however, that no driver could ever escape the risk of falling out of favor of either planters or enslaved communities, resulting in a life plagued by continuous, often existential dilemmas.

*The Driver’s Story* is an innovative piece of scholarship that engages with classic themes within Atlantic slavery studies through a refreshing lens. The central position of drivers in the world of plantation slavery allows the author to engage with a range of themes, including the business of plantation management (chapters one and two); practices of discipline and punishment (chapter two); the continuation of African cultures in New World identities (chapters three to five); the politics among enslaved communities (chapter four); and resistance and rebellion (chapter five). This assortment of topics makes the book, despite its modest size, an ideal entry point for novice historians seeking to acquaint themselves with the history of plantation slavery.



Admittedly, while the book draws from earlier cases across the Americas, the “World of Atlantic Slavery” mentioned in the book’s title primarily covers the history of slavery as manifested in British colonies around 1800. The wide range of historical case studies presented in *The Driver’s Story* largely stems from a corpus of documents produced in the British Caribbean during the Amelioration period (1808-1834).

The main downside to the Anglo-American perspective that dominates the book is its failure to adequately address the question as to when and why the driver system was instated in the first place. According to Browne, the driver system started after the Barbadian Sugar Revolution that led to the increase of plantation sizes, warranting the installation of gangs of enslaved workers who required continuous oversight. This explanation fails to address, however, the management of enslaved work in earlier plantation systems existing in Portuguese (and Dutch) colonies in Brazil and Atlantic Africa. Nor does it adequately explain why planters decided to select people from the perceived in-group and position them between the white planter’s class and Black enslaved workers, rather than opting for the continuation of a system where European laborers were appointed as overseers. This decision was arguably the most consequential to the driver’s ambiguous place within American plantation slavery. The book might have profited from a deeper engagement with the sociological mechanisms underlying such choices that contributed to refinement of a system of social oppression that became increasingly racialized.

All the same, the documents central to the *The Driver’s Story* provide numerous invaluable insights that will serve scholars interested Atlantic slavery outside of the British empire. This researcher was amazed by the perspectives provided for the clandestine side of plantation life – such as the establishment of African nations alongside ethnic borders – and the role of drivers therein. While the use of the concept of the ‘big man’ as a fixed cultural component of West African societies confuses more than it explains, Browne’s illustration of power relations among enslaved communities, including the role of powerful enslaved foremen, provides fruitful avenues to future research on the political organization among enslaved communities. More broadly, the close examination of the practical workings of the violent system of social oppression illuminates why it was so enticing for enslaved individuals – drivers included – to refrain from rebellion, thereby rendering the decision to resist all the more significant.



All in all, the book lives up to its promise to bring the reader into the heart of plantation life. Browne shows how drivers were perhaps the ultimate tool to maintain the status quo within the American plantation regime, providing intriguing insights into the question of why – if resistance was omnipresent – rebellions and resistance rarely toppled the status quo. Highly stimulating to scholars and ideal for students, *The Driver's Story* deserves to be read by a wide audience in the years to come.

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Yao Chen 陳瑤, *Jianghe Xingdi: Jindai Changjiang Zhongyou de Chuanmin yu Mufanchuan Hangyunye* 江河行地: 近代長江中游的船民與木帆船航運業 (Rivers Flow Eternally across the Land. The Boat Folks and Junk Shipping in the Middle Section of Yangtze River in the Modern Period) (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2023). 389 pp. ISBN 9787100223164.

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Scholars have long recognized that the onset of the Industrial Revolution in England and Western Europe was closely tied to the expansion of inland waterway transportation. Canals played a crucial role in facilitating coal transport, growing in tandem with the broader application of steam engines.<sup>1</sup> In North America, the “Transportation Revolution”, which began in the mid-nineteenth century, significantly reduced transportation costs by leveraging inland waterways.<sup>2</sup> A similar transformation occurred in Rhine River shipping, where continuous adjustments in river governance paved the way for modernization.<sup>3</sup> Within the scope of the global changes above, the transformation of commerce along China's rivers on the eve of modernization, along with its roots in the late imperial period, deserves particular attention. It provides a valuable comparative perspective to Western Europe, given the similar demographic scale and technological level. *Jiang He*

1 G. Crompton, (2004). ‘The tortoise and the economy. Inland waterway navigation in international economic history’, *The Journal of Transport History* 25:2 (2004) 1-22.

2 George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York 1951).

3 Robert Mark Spaulding, ‘Revolutionary France and the Transformation of the Rhine’, *Central European History* 44:2 (2011) 203-226.