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Chapter 7

Sites of Disembarkation and the Public Memory of the Atlantic Slave Trade

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This chapter draws from my two latest books on the problem of the public memory of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade in societies that were involved in these human atrocities.¹ In this essay, I conceive public memory as the way particular social actors and groups engaged with the process of memorializing the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the public space through the development of public discourses, commemoration activities, and permanent markers like monuments, memorials, and museums. My work departs from the premise that in the centuries during which slavery existed and after its abolition, a cultural memory and a collective memory of slavery remained alive among the descendants of slaves, slave owners, and slave merchants. However, it is only after the end of the Second World War when the horrors of the Holocaust were revealed to the world that a growing number of initiatives to memorialize the slave past started emerging in the societies involved in the Atlantic slave trade.

As memory and forgetting are part of the same process, this paper explores how the sites of arrival of enslaved Africans in the Americas have been memorialized as official or non-official slave heritage sites in Brazil and the United States. Of course, in some former Atlantic

slave ports in the Americas the traces of the slave trade were visible everywhere, but many decades after the end of the slave trade, the sites where enslaved Africans disembarked in the Americas were either erased or remained concealed in the public space. For example, in cities like Salvador and Rio de Janeiro, the two largest slave ports in Brazil, the old port areas remained abandoned and impoverished. In many cases, the old sites associated with the Atlantic slave trade were also replaced with new construction. Nevertheless, over the last twenty years, archaeological research has uncovered a growing number of slave cemeteries and sites of disembarkation of Africans in the United States and Brazil. Thus, the historical presence of Africans and their descendants in these areas eventually gained visibility.

This chapter examines the historical and political dynamics that brought these spaces to light and led to their eventual recognition as sites of memory of the Atlantic slave trade. I underscore that their recovery, conservation, and valorization in the public space resulted from a broader transnational movement that produced similar initiatives in other areas of the Atlantic world. This movement, characterized by the rise of the public memory of slavery, was possible through the intervention of various social actors (many of whom identify themselves as descendants of slaves) who fought to have the heritage of their ancestors finally officially acknowledged.²

In Brazil and in the United States, slave markets and slave cemeteries were part of the context of the disembarkation experience. After arriving in areas like Salvador, Rio de Janeiro, Recife, New York or Charleston, enslaved Africans were displayed and sold in public slave markets. Weakened by the horrible journey across the Atlantic Ocean, many of these men and women died in these port areas and were subsequently buried in unmarked graveyards. Although these markets and cemeteries continued to be part of the experience of enslaved men, women, and children, the process of forgetting these disembarkation spaces started during the first half of the nineteenth century, when the slave trade from Africa was outlawed first in the United States (1808) and Brazil (1831).³

In Brazil, the invisibility of former slave markets and ports of arrival of enslaved Africans has led to a phenomenon that I call memory replacement. Through this process, which is similar to the phenomenon of the House of Slaves on Gorée Island in Senegal, the local population appropriates an existing building or site and assigns to it stories

related to the Atlantic slave trade and slavery, even though the site in question was not an actual heritage site.

I argue that such kind of response by various social actors is double-folded. First, it derives from a political necessity to assert the presence of a particular group, whose past associated with the victims of the Atlantic slave trade, was forgotten and erased. Second, memory replacement is also a political response to the absence of public and official initiatives shedding light on the actual sites of the Atlantic slave trade. These gaps have led social actors and groups to create alternate sites of memory, taking in their own hands the process of memorialization this horrible chapter of their past which, for several reasons, has been denied to them by the official heritage institutions.

Where Enslaved People Arrived

Some of the largest slave ports in the Americas were situated in Brazil and the United States, although the volume of the Atlantic slave trade greatly varied in these two countries. According to latest estimates made available in the *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database: Voyages*, between 1601 and 1866, 388,747 enslaved Africans disembarked in mainland North America, whereas between 1501 and 1866, 4,864,374 slaves arrived in Brazilian ports.

Slave ship captains kept journals describing their Atlantic journeys, but they rarely provide precise information about the disembarkation of enslaved Africans in ports of the Americas. However, more details can be found in various kinds of sources produced by enslaved Africans who wrote slave narratives and by European travelers who observed the arrival of slave ships in the Americas. Moreover, some of these European contemporary observers produced visual representations showing the arrival of enslaved Africans in ports of the United States, the Caribbean, and Brazil, in addition to other rendered images of slave markets. Several other written and visual testimonies and narratives confirmed the existence and precise locations of these sites of arrival. But despite these recurring references, most of these sites remained neglected in public memory.

Several Africans described in their slave narratives their disembarkation in the Americas. The arrival of Broteeur Furro (Venture Smith) in Barbados in 1739 was marked by the trauma of realizing that, of 260 captives transported with him in the ship, no more than 200 completed the crossing alive.⁴ Even though his account, written many years

after his arrival in the Americas when he was a young boy, omits any detail about what happened to the men and women who died during the Middle Passage, it is possible to imagine that, as in other slave voyages with high mortality levels, the bodies of enslaved individuals were either thrown overboard or removed from the ship and buried in a common grave not far from the place of disembarkation. In 1754, Gustavus Vassa (Olaudah Equiano) also landed in Barbados. Without mentioning slave mortality during the Middle Passage, he explained that when the merchants came to examine the captives, they were terrified with the fear of being eaten: “We thought by this we should be eaten by these ugly men, as they appeared to us; and, when soon after we were all put down under the deck again, there was much dread and trembling among us and nothing but bitter cries to be heard all the night from these apprehensions.”⁵ According to Vassa, there was so much unrest among the captives “that at last the white people got some old slaves from the land to pacify us.”⁶

Over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European travelers certainly witnessed the arrival of slave ships in slave ports such as Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, and Recife. Yet, their travelogues rarely provide any written and visual descriptions of the disembarkation of enslaved Africans in Brazil. As Daryle Williams observes, Jean-Baptiste Debret narrates in detail his arrival in Rio de Janeiro in March 1816, a view also rendered in a large watercolor depicting the Bay of Guanabara that later gave origin to a lithograph illustrating his *Voyage pittoresque et historique au Brésil*. Still, his text fails in acknowledging the presence of slave ships anchored in the bay.⁷ When describing the Valongo Wharf, the most important site of arrival of enslaved Africans in Rio de Janeiro, Debret quickly explained that “there were the shipyards and once the ships of the French East India Company” but he omitted any reference to the Atlantic slave trade.⁸ However, Debret’s omission does not indicate he was not a witness of the intense slave trade activity in the Bay of Guanabara between 1816 and 1831, the period of his sojourn in Brazil. Indeed, later in his travelogue, he clearly acknowledged the arrival of new Africans in Brazil in the very few years prior to its prohibition. Despite providing inaccurate numbers, he stated that in 1828, Brazil imported 430,601 enslaved Africans, then 23,315, during the six first months of 1829.⁹

Other travelers failed to explicitly mention the movement of slave ships or the disembarkation of enslaved Africans in Brazilian ports. In

1828, Reverend Robert Walsh was appointed chaplain at the British Embassy in Brazil. After spending almost one year in the country, he published a travelogue containing numerous observations about Brazil's slave life. His travel account can be understood as part of the British efforts to abolish the slave trade in the country. On his arrival in Rio de Janeiro, Walsh overlooked the horrors of the slave trade. Instead, he described the picturesque view of the Bay of Guanabara: "Nothing could exceed the beauty of the place in which we lay next morning, when light rendered objects distinct. On our left was a range of fantastic hills, receding behind each other; those in front rising into cones, and terminated by the great Sugar-loaf."¹⁰ Walsh also noticed the presence of numerous ships "of all nations, both of war and commerce; not crowded together, as in our contracted rivers, but spread over the wide expanse of waters, and dotting the surface in all directions."¹¹ Later on, he also described the Bay of Guanabara as a "moving panorama of boats of all kinds, passing from one side of the water to the other. They were generally manned by negroes, whose only covering was a pair of drawers, and an old straw hat."¹² But despite have observed this presence of small vessels with black crews, he was not able to associate these boats, which usually transported the slaves from the slave ship to the shore, with the slave trade activity.

British traveler Maria Graham arrived in Brazil in September 1821. She was among the few European travelers who provided detailed observations about the disembarkation of Africans in Brazil. On 22 November 1821, she described the arrival of Africans in Salvador, Bahia: "This very moment, there is a slave ship discharging her cargo, and the slaves are singing as they go ashore. They have left the ship, and they see they will be on the dry land; and so, at the command of their keeper, they are singing one of their country songs, in a strange land."¹³

In this passage, Graham expressed sympathy for the enslaved, by thinking they were not aware of what was still to come: "Poor wretches! could they foresee the slave-market, and the separations of friends and relations that will take place there, and the march up the country, and the labour of the mines, and the sugar-works, their singing would be a wailing cry."¹⁴

In a passage of his *Voyage dans le Brésil*, Johan Mortiz Rugendas also described the arrival of Africans in Rio de Janeiro. Yet, his account, written with the collaboration of Victor Huber, rather described

the general conditions of the Atlantic slave trade in Brazil. Rugendas mentioned that sometimes the customs forced the slave ships to stay anchored in the harbor or the port.¹⁵ Then “as soon as the merchant obtains the permission to disembark his slaves, they are put on the ground near the customs, and there they are put on the records, after collecting the taxes established for entry.”¹⁶ The arrival of enslaved Africans on Rio de Janeiro’s shores is also pictured in Rugendas’s lithograph *Débarquement* (Disembarkation). The image shows how newly arrived Africans were brought in canoes from the slave ships to the customs house. It also represents in detail the various individuals involved in this process, including the merchants and their black employees, guards, and government officials. Rugendas’s newly arrived Africans are young men and male children. Despite the horrible conditions of the Middle Passage, the naked slaves have strong and muscled bodies, exactly as in his other idealized representations of black individuals.

Mohammah Gardo Baquaqua, the only enslaved African brought to Brazil who wrote a narrative of his life under slavery, described his disembarkation on Brazilian shores. He entered the country in 1845, during the period of the illegal trade. Like thousands of other Africans who arrived in Brazil during this period, he faced particularly difficult conditions. His slave ship landed early in the morning in a clandestine slave port in the then province (now state) of Pernambuco. As Baquaqua explained, “the vessel played about during the day, without coming to anchor. All that day we neither ate or drank anything, and we were given to understand that we were to remain perfectly silent, and not make any out-cry, otherwise our lives were in danger.”¹⁷ To avoid being sighted in public, the merchants disembarked the slaves during the night, as he explained, “when ‘night threw her sable mantle on the earth and sea,’ the anchor dropped, and we were permitted to go on deck to be viewed and handled by our future masters, who had come aboard from the city. We landed a few miles from the city, at a farmer’s house, which was used as a kind of slave market.”¹⁸

Despite the scarcity of narratives written by Africans brought to Brazil, oral tradition collected by historians Hebe Mattos and Ana Lugão Rios shows that the memory of arrival during the Atlantic slave trade and the period of the illegal trade remained present in the communities of descendants of enslaved individuals.¹⁹ Still, these narratives remained restricted to the private sphere among the families of

descendants of enslaved Africans. Today these accounts are not highlighted in the sites that served as ports during the period of the illegal slave trade, all located in remote areas and far from public view.

Although neglected in the public memory, the ports of the illegal slave trade remained present in Brazil's toponymy.²⁰ Among these sites is the *Praia do Chega Negro* (Beach where the Negro Arrives), near the present-day Armação Beach in Salvador, Bahia.²¹ A one-story stone building, which allegedly served as a slave depot for newly arrived African captives, was located on the beach. Until recently, the stone house served as a restaurant and a nightclub, but the old construction was demolished to give place to the construction of a luxurious residential development. Because the stone house is situated in a zone of the beach included in Brazil's National Heritage List, its walls were preserved in the recently built condominium.²² However, as in other slave trade and slavery existing sites in Salvador, there is no plaque indicating any possible use of the old building as a slave depot for newly arrived Africans.

In Pernambuco, one of the most notorious beaches where Africans were illegally disembarked, is Porto de Galinhas (Port of Chickens), a beach situated in the present-day municipality of Ipojuca, south of Recife. Even though the beach was distant from the capital of the province and the repression of the illegal slave trade was inefficient, slave merchants took numerous precautions to prevent local officials to apprehend their slave cargoes.²³ Sometimes, as Brazilian historian Marcus J. M. de Carvalho explains, the disembarkation was performed so quickly that slave merchants would leave behind important evidence of their illegal activity. For example, in 1844, a slave ship was abandoned on the beach, with "37 barrels of water, some pairs of shackles and the corpse of an enslaved African."²⁴ The reputation of illegal slave trade port is also visible in the recent work of popular memory widespread through touristic initiatives. Per one of these accounts popularized on tourist websites, the name of the beach is derived from the coded statement, "There is new chicken in the port," allegedly used by the slave merchants when a slave ship arrived at the beach. Another popular version explaining the name of the beach states that the slave ships carried chickens to hide the slave cargo. Indeed, both versions are unlikely. In fact, the name Porto das Galinhas appears in written documentation as early as the sixteenth century.²⁵

Today Porto de Galinhas is one of the most important tourist des-

tinations in Brazil. Very probably, the attempts by local social actors to explain the relation between the beach's name and the Atlantic slave trade is a response to the national and international initiatives (especially the Slave Route Project led by UNESCO) promoting the public memory of slavery, which became visible in Brazil in the last few years. By associating the name of the beach with the illegal slave trade, these local actors engage in a process of memory replacement that is intended to compensate for the absence of official projects acknowledging the role of Porto de Galinhas in the infamous commerce of human beings, even though in this particular case the beach was an actual slave port.

In 2013, a group of Brazilian historians commissioned by UNESCO produced an inventory of 100 sites of memory associated with the Atlantic slave trade and the history of enslaved Africans in Brazil, which lists Porto de Galinhas.²⁶ Even though this document circulated among scholars and activists, especially through the Internet, it is not clear whether this inventory will lead to the construction of monuments and markers acknowledging the existence of slave trade sites.

As in Brazil, several sites of arrival of enslaved Africans in the United States remain concealed in the public space as well. The US slave trade was prohibited in 1808, about four decades prior to the final banishment of the Brazilian slave trade in 1850. As Laird W. Bergad explains, by 1860, the United States had a population of "31 million people, of whom 3.9 million (13 percent) were enslaved."²⁷ In other words, the country had the largest slave population in the Americas, even though Brazil imported ten times more enslaved Africans than the United States. As the two largest slave societies of the Americas, along with Cuba, these two countries share a common history of slavery. Although scholars have emphasized the differences between the slave systems developed in each country, new studies have underlined their many common elements. In both nations, during the twentieth century, sites of disembarkation of enslaved Africans and the burial grounds were memorialized in similar ways.

Charleston, South Carolina, imported the largest number of enslaved Africans brought to the United States during the period of the Atlantic slave trade. Unlike the ports of Salvador and Rio de Janeiro, which together imported more than 2 million enslaved Africans, Charleston imported about 150,000 slaves from Africa, about 40 percent of the total US slave imports. After the abolition of the Atlan-

tic slave trade to the United States in 1808, the city continued to be an important point of the internal trade.²⁸ Also a tourist destination, Charleston's population, estimated at 122,000, is much smaller than the populations of Rio de Janeiro (about 6 million) and Salvador (approximately 2.6 million). As Blain Roberts and Ethan Kytle argue, in spite of its important role in the Atlantic slave trade to the United States, Charleston "had worked hard since the nineteenth century to avoid candid discussions of its slaveholding past."²⁹ Although since the middle of the nineteenth century, black protests contested existing monuments commemorating proslavery historical actors like the United States politician John C. Calhoun, until the end of the 1980s, the recognition of the slave past in Charleston's public sphere continued to be contested.³⁰ However, during the 1990s, this configuration started to change. On the one hand, the international context following the end of the Cold War and the support provided by institutions like UNESCO favored public discussion about the Atlantic slave trade and slavery. On the other hand, the pressures of African American residents led Charleston to start addressing its slave past in the public sphere. Among the first issues raised was the creation of a monument paying homage to Denmark Vesey, a freedman who led the slave conspiracy of 1822 and who, over the following decades, was depicted in novels, television series, and documentary films.³¹ The various local actors struggled to arrive at an agreement about the creation of a monument honoring a rebel, considered a hero by African Americans and a criminal by many white locals.³²

Regardless of these debates, until the 1990s, the Gadsden's Wharf, site of the arrival of Africans during the Atlantic slave trade, was not highlighted in Charleston's public space. Instead, a number of initiatives were developed on Sullivan's Island, where slaves and crew members were put into quarantine aboard ships or in pesthouses upon their landing in South Carolina.³³ In June 1997, the South Carolina State Senate passed a resolution to create a special marker at Fort Moultrie National Monument.³⁴ In 1999, following a decree of the South Carolina General Assembly, a first official initiative to commemorate the Atlantic slave trade was developed on Sullivan's Island. The project was supported by descendants of slaves and by descendants of slave owners, including Edward Ball, the author of the book *Slaves in the Family*, published in the previous year, which uncovered the history of his slaveholding family and the enslaved men

and women they owned in several South Carolina plantations.³⁵ Consequently, the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, the Charleston Club of South Carolina, and the Avery Research Center erected a huge commemorative inscription stating that the island is “a place where . . . Africans were brought to this country under extreme conditions of human bondage and degradation. Tens of thousands of captives arrived on Sullivan’s Island from the West African shores between 1700 and 1775.” Additionally, the plaque emphasizes that the memorial “also serves as a reminder of a people who—despite injustice and intolerance—past and present, have retained the unique values, strengths and potential that flow from our West African culture which came to this nation through the middle passage.”³⁶ Highlighting the role of the island during the Atlantic slave trade, the marker underscores the resilience of Africans and their descendants and recognizes the contribution of African cultures to the United States.

This acknowledgment was a first step to the development of other initiatives. After having deplored the absence of historical markers in the public space to remember slavery and the Atlantic slave trade in an interview in 1989, Toni Morrison launched a project to create bench memorials in various sites of memory of slavery and African American history around the United States and in other cities of the world that had been involved in the Atlantic slave trade.³⁷ On 26 July 2008, a “bench by the road” was made public on Sullivan’s Island.³⁸ Unlike traditional monuments, the benches placed in various sites in the United States and also in French territories (Paris and Martinique) are memorials leading the passersby to stop and reflect about the significance of the sites of memory chosen as part of the project. Morrison conceived the benches as opened spaces where individuals on a search can sit, and “that search is for anyone, not just black people.”³⁹ Attended by 300 people, in the presence of Toni Morrison and representatives of the National Park Service, the ceremony that unveiled the memorial placed at Fort Moultrie, on Sullivan’s Island, had “African drums, for a service that included the pouring of libations and a daisy wreath cast into the water to remember their ancestors.”⁴⁰ According to Morrison, “It’s never too late to honor the dead.... It’s never too late to applaud the living who do them honor.”⁴¹ The plaque accompanying the monument reproduces an extract of Morrison’s interview of 1989, in which she criticizes the absence of sites of remembrance to mourn the slaves. Moreover, it explains that this first bench pays homage to

the “enslaved Africans who perished during the Middle Passage and those who arrived on Sullivan’s Island, a major port of entry for Africans who entered the U.S. during the transatlantic Slave Trade. Nearly half of all African Americans have ancestors who passed through Sullivan’s Island.”⁴² By consequence, the bench memorial honors not only the enslaved men, women, and children forcibly brought to the Americas but also their descendants who until recently did not have any site to mourn their ancestors, contributing to the development of further projects. For example, on 25 March 2007, a ceremony commemorating the end of the British slave trade to North America was held close to Gadsden’s Wharf.⁴³ Moreover, a project to create a huge International African American Museum in the wharf’s area is in progress.⁴⁴

On 22 March 2009, the exhibition *African Passages* opened in the Fort Moultrie National Monument on Sullivan’s Island.⁴⁵ The exhibit featured artworks and artifacts associated with the Middle Passage and the telling of stories of Africans who passed through the island, including the case of Priscilla, an enslaved girl brought from Sierra Leone to Charleston in 1756 and was purchased by Edward Ball’s family.⁴⁶ Gradually, over a decade, and despite the debates among local citizens who opposed highlighting Charleston’s slave past, the public memory of the city as a site of arrival of enslaved Africans in the United States was established and consolidated. Also in 2010, ground was broken to create a monument to Vesey on Hampton Park in Charleston, which was unveiled in 2014.

Where Enslaved People Were Buried

In 1991, hundreds of bones remains of men, women, and children, either African-born or of African descent, were discovered during an excavation to construct a new federal building at 290 Broadway, in New York City. After protests led by African American activists, the work stopped. A report examining the history of the burial ground as well as the recovered remains and artifacts was assigned to scholars based at Howard University in Washington, DC.⁴⁷ Research concluded that the site was a former burial ground containing the remains of about 15,000 enslaved and free African individuals buried during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Located in a port city that imported about 8,500 enslaved individuals, the New York African Burial Ground, as it

became known in the following years, is the largest of its kind in the United States.

The discovery of the burial ground occurred in a context that favored the promotion of black history in New York City, in as much as in 1990 David Norman Dinkins, the city's first African American mayor, took office. His intervention was crucial to the development of the African Burial Ground. In a statement to the African American newspaper, the *New York Voice*, he affirmed that he felt fortunate that the site was unearthed during his tenure: "by exploring this burial ground, commemorating it, and reintering the remains with the respect and dignity they deserve, we can go a long way toward righting an old wrong."⁴⁸ But the controversies among members of the federal government, politicians, scholars, and activists (identifying themselves as "descendants" of the men and women buried in the site), regarding the future of the site continued in the next years. This context shows how the public memory of slavery is shaped by the disputes of various social groups that attempt to occupy public space.

The unearthing of the burial ground brought to light the importance of slavery in New York City. Henceforth, the debates involved questions on how to make the city's slave past visible and to memorialize African American ancestors in the city's public space. In 1998, the General Service Administration (GSA) launched a design competition for the memorial that would occupy the site, and received 61 proposals. Then, by the end of September 2003, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture organized a series of ceremonies that started at Howard University, where the bone remains were examined, and culminated on 4 October 2003, with the reinterment of 419 bone remains in the New York's financial district (290 Broadway), the same site where they were discovered.

The event, attended by thousands of people, including various African American and international dignitaries, was a privileged stage to address the necessity of publicly recognizing the contribution of Africans and peoples of African descent to the making of the United States. Howard Dodson, then director of Schomburg Center, explained that "basically everything that is including life on earth came from mother Africa and in this country, this western Babylon, we built it on our backs and on our suffering."⁴⁹ Jonathan Blount, one of the founders of *Essence* magazine, used the image of "the bones that rose up through the concrete of time" to illustrate the idea of the past that reemerges in

the present, emphasizing the existing debt toward the African Americans whose ancestors were enslaved in the United States.⁵⁰ During the ceremony, then Mayor Mike Bloomberg made a statement underscoring that the South Street Seaport that is a place “now filled with shops catering to tourists, had once been the site where slaves were auctioned.”⁵¹

Since 2003, every October 4, commemorative ceremonies are held in the African Burial Ground to pay homage to the men, women, and children who were buried in the site. Also in 2003, the United States Congress eventually appropriated funds for the construction of the memorial. But the debates regarding how these Africans and African Americans would be memorialized continued and became highly politicized along racial lines. Central in the debate led by African American activists was whether a memorial would be placed on top of the African Burial Ground. The National Park Service and the General Service Administration organized a series of public forums to discuss the final decision, but activists contested the initiative. Ollie McLean, representing the Committee of Descendants of the African Ancestral Burial Ground, maintained that no structures should be placed on the sacred site. Instead, she suggested to “take land from that parking garage across the street or take land from other surrounding areas.... They could do that for our ancestors, because this has already been paid for by our ancestors.”⁵² Another member of the same committee, Eloise Dix, stated that she wanted the “control of the burial ground out of the hands of people who are not of African descent: ‘I want to get the Europeans out!’ ... They have no rights to it!”⁵³ Another controversial issue was the possible choice of white architects to design the memorial. One activist stated: “I do not believe that Caucasian-Jewish people would be so disrespectful to themselves as to have me design a memorial for them.”⁵⁴ Then the same activist established a relation between slavery and the Holocaust, asking “why should black people accept a white architect’s proposals for a memorial of people who died during the African holocaust?”⁵⁵ These various statements illustrate how the African Burial Ground became a contested site of the memory of slavery. Its unearthing and interpretation were closely associated with race and identity issues that were related not directly to the historical past of the site but to the present total lack of visibility of the city’s slave past in the public arena. Although not all the issues raised by African American activists were addressed, eventually, in June 2004, two

Haitian American architects, Rodney Leon and Nicole Hollant-Denis (AARIS Architects), won the competition to design the memorial.

On 27 February 2006, President George W. Bush officially proclaimed the African Burial Ground a National Monument.⁵⁶ But once again the motivations behind Bush's designation were questioned by African American activists like Ollie McClean, who reminded people that in 2005, during the Hurricane Katrina, the federal government left African Americans abandoned: "I need to know how the government can spend millions to preserve our ancestors' bones, and not care about our ancestors' descendants."⁵⁷

The memorial was eventually dedicated on 5 October 2007.⁵⁸ Built with granite, the memorial is divided into two sections, the Circle of the Diaspora and the Ancestral Chamber. Through a ramp, the visitor is led to the interior of a circular wall on which various Akan symbols are depicted. In the interior of the court, a map of the Atlantic world evoking the Middle Passage is depicted on the ground. The Ancestral Chamber, built with Verde Fontaine green granite from the African continent, was placed next to the ancestral reinternment ground. The chamber, symbolizing the interior of a slave ship, was conceived as a place for contemplation and prayer. As in other monuments, memorials, and heritage sites of the Atlantic slave trade, the idea of return is evoked by a Sankofa symbol carved on the chamber's external wall and dedicated as follows: "For all those who were lost; For all those who were stolen; For all those who were left behind; For all those who were not forgotten." In the various official descriptions of the memorial, the symbol is translated as "learn from the past," but a more accurate translation is "go back to fetch it," referring to a proverb that states, "It is not a taboo to return and fetch it when you forget," evoking the links between spiritual and material world."⁵⁹ The choice of this emblem was not accidental. One of the coffins recovered by the archaeological excavation displayed a heart-shaped pictogram that, according to one expert, was an Akan symbol associated with present-day Akan mortuary practices. Although today this association is contested by some scholars, the Sankofa symbol became the memorial's central element.⁶⁰

In 2010, as part of the development and promotion of the site, a visitor center housing a permanent exhibition was created in the federal building adjacent to the memorial, with the goal of celebrating the African presence in New York City and disseminating the history

of the most important archaeological project ever undertaken in the United States.⁶¹ African American tourists, scholars, and members of the African diaspora are the most frequent visitors to the memorial. During the year, and especially in October, various ceremonies to honor the African ancestors are held in the memorial. But despite its location close to Wall Street in Lower Manhattan at the heart of New York City, the promotion of the African Burial Ground was affected by the events of 11 September 2001. The two towers of the World Trade Center, destroyed by the terrorist attacks that killed thousands of individuals, were located just over half a mile from the burial ground. This tragedy created another mass grave near the site and imprinted the collective memory of New York City's population with a more recent traumatic event. When visitors to the area, whether they are whites or African Americans, ask where the African Burial Ground is, they will often be directed toward Ground Zero, where the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, dedicated on 11 September 2011 is located today. Despite these hindrances, the unearthing of the site brought to light the existence of slavery as a central institution in New York until its abolition in 1827. This chapter of US history, unknown for most part, was absent from the various official narratives presented in textbooks and museum exhibitions, where slavery was usually described as existing only in the US South.⁶² The discovery also led to the development of several other ventures focusing on the existence of slavery in New York City. Among these initiatives was the exhibit *Slavery in New York* held in the New York Historical Society in 2005, which was followed by a series of other exhibitions problematizing slavery in the United States.⁶³

Unlike New York City, whose slave past was a forgotten chapter of US history, slavery was a central element in Rio de Janeiro's daily life until the end of the nineteenth century. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, enslaved Africans who arrived in Rio de Janeiro disembarked in the wharf near the Largo do Paço, present-day Praça XV (Square XV), where several public buildings, including the Customs House and the Royal Palace, were located. From there, the newly arrived Africans were brought into the city to be sold in the dozens of shops located at Rua Direita (Right Street), present-day Rua 1 de Março (March 1). In 1758, it was determined that the slave market would be transferred to the Valongo neighborhood.⁶⁴ By 1774, enslaved Africans who arrived in Rio de Janeiro could also be disem-

barked in Valongo, located in the city's northeastern zone, near the waterfront of present-day intersection of the Avenues Barão de Tefé and Perimetral.⁶⁵ This change, which took several years to be totally effective, was intended to prevent the lines of naked enslaved Africans from entering the city; according to Rio de Janeiro's authorities they brought numerous diseases from Africa.⁶⁶ Between 1758 and 1831, and especially after 1811 when the construction of the quay was completed, about one million Africans came ashore in the Valongo Wharf. But the area of disembarkation of Africans was gradually erased from the urban space after the slave trade was banned in 1831 and during the chaotic process of modernization and urbanization of the early twentieth century.

There were numerous descriptions of Valongo Wharf, but its exact location remained unknown for over a century. In 1843, the wharf underwent major works to receive the Empress Teresa Cristina, who arrived in Brazil that same year to marry the Brazilian emperor Dom Pedro II. The site was then covered with granite blocks and renamed Cais da Imperatriz (Empress Wharf). As historian Jaime Rodrigues notes, the renewal works and the new name were intended to conceal the slave past of the site where so many Africans disembarked, replacing it with a celebratory memory of Brazilian monarchy.⁶⁷ In 1871, the old wharf was the site of the ceremony that inaugurated the Dom Pedro II Dock, the first one to be built in Brazil, designed by the Afro-Brazilian engineer and military André Rebouças and then transformed into the Praça Municipal (Municipal Square), the first of Rio Janeiro's monumental squares. In the early 1900s, Mayor Francisco Pereira Passos led a major urban reform in Rio de Janeiro. On this occasion, a landfill covered the wharf. Finally, the construction of the Avenue Barão de Tefé added another layer to the old structure of the Valongo Wharf. During the twentieth century, the old port zone of Rio de Janeiro, close to the city downtown area, remained nearly abandoned. Not only had the underprivileged black population who were resident in the port zone been totally neglected by the public authorities, but also the buildings and heritage sites located in the area were in an advanced state of decay.⁶⁸

Similarly to what occurred in New York City in 1991, in 1996, an archaeological excavation on a private property at 36 Pedro Ernesto Street (former Cemitério Street) in the Gamboa neighborhood revealed a burial ground containing bone fragments of dozens of en-

slaved African men, women, and children. The site was identified as being the Cemitério dos Pretos Novos (Cemetery of New Blacks), a common grave where recently arrived Africans who died before being sold in the Valongo market were buried. Between 1824 and 1830, after continuous complaints from the residents and because of the official ban of Brazilian slave trade, the cemetery was closed. Scholars estimate that more than 6,000 newly arrived Africans were buried at the site.⁶⁹ But following this important and unprecedented discovery, the cemetery and the port area continued to be neglected for a long period. Unlike the African Burial Ground in New York City, the site was private property and not a federal building, and the Brazilian federal government had no authority on the site, whose preservation was in charge of the City Hall. Although the couple who owned the property where the cemetery was uncovered decided to embrace the cause of protecting the site with the great support of activists of Rio de Janeiro's black movement, they barely received any public or official assistance.

In 2001, the Municipal Secretary of Culture organized a symposium to discuss these new archaeological findings and in 2002 proposed a number of initiatives to highlight the African heritage in the port area. Among the proposals was to establish several markers indicating the significant sites of memory associated with the African presence in the region. By this time, the site of the former cemetery was opened to public visitation, but as the lack of public support persisted, the couple gradually transformed their old home into a nongovernmental organization titled Instituto de Pesquisa e Memória Pretos Novos (New Blacks Institute of Research and Memory). This initiative coincided with the election of President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva and the emergence of numerous official projects promoting Afro-Brazilian history around the country. The space of the institute was expanded with the creation of modest exhibitions and a small library.⁷⁰ Yet this situation drastically changed when in March 2011 drainage works started in the Rio de Janeiro port region, as part of the project Rio de Janeiro: Porto Maravilha (Rio de Janeiro: Wonderful Port), aimed at recuperating the city's old port in view of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games.⁷¹ During the works, the ruins of Valongo Wharf were eventually rediscovered. The excavations also recovered numerous African artifacts, including ceramic pipes, cowries employed in religious practices, and buttons made of animal bones.

Following this second discovery, similarly to what occurred in

New York City, black activists, scholars, and politicians intensively debated the project that would be developed on the wharf. If until recently Rio de Janeiro's authorities never expressed major interest in promoting the slavery heritage of the city's downtown area, there was now an urgent need to find an urban solution to a site associated with the forthcoming Olympic Games. The possibility of nominating the newly discovered site for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List raised the interest of various companies and organizations as well. The initial project of Rio de Janeiro's City Hall was to create a huge memorial with portals that, according to black activists, would divert the attention from the archaeological site. Moreover, because the wharf is located just next to Morro da Providência, the first Brazilian *favela*, most of whose residents are Afro-Brazilians, black organizations were concerned about how an architectural intervention on the wharf would affect the neighboring community. Finally, black activists were successful in preventing the creation of a memorial structure that would compete with the archaeological site by keeping the simple original structure of the wharf.⁷²

Through the municipal decree number 34,803 of 29 November 2011, a pioneer initiative was created, Circuito Histórico e Arqueológico da Celebração da Herança Africana (Historical and Archaeological Trail of African Heritage Celebration). The trail highlights several heritage buildings and sites of memory associated with the Atlantic slave trade and African presence in the port area of Rio de Janeiro. The tour starts at the Valongo Wharf, where plaques and maps indicate and explain the various relevant markers. The trail includes the Pedra do Sal (Salt Stone), a site where Africans and Afro-Brazilians dockers used to get together, which is considered the cradle of the Brazilian samba. The next marker is the Valongo's Garden and the Valongo's Hill (or Conceição's Hill), a place of sociability, where enslaved men and women performed different kinds of activities. Also included in the tour are the Largo do Depósito (Warehouse Square), today Praça dos Estivadores (Dockers' Square), where slave warehouses were located, as well as the Instituto dos Pretos Novos (New Blacks Institute), comprising the archaeological site of the Cemetery of New Blacks. Some of these sites were included in the city of Rio de Janeiro's heritage list since the 1980s and were then identified by small plaques. However, only after the unearthing of the Valongo Wharf and the announcement of discovery in the Brazilian and international media did the City Hall

take clear measures to eventually promote the slave trade heritage sites of the Rio de Janeiro port area.

The public impact of the rediscovery of Valongo Wharf was visible in the reaction by Rio de Janeiro Mayor Eduardo Paes, who compared the site to the Roman ruins and promised that a memorial to exhibit the artifacts found in the site would be created in the Valongo's Garden.⁷³ During a seminar organized by the Palmares Foundation and UNESCO in August 2012, it was proposed to present the nomination of Valongo Wharf to the UNESCO World Heritage List. On this occasion, Elói Araujo, then President of Fundação Cultural Palmares (Palmares Cultural Foundation), a public entity created in 1992 to promote Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage, reacted against those who opposed the proposal of inclusion of the Valongo Wharf in the UNESCO World Heritage List: "are they cynical, and want to forget that there was slave trade? Nobody denies the Holocaust or the dropping of the atomic bomb."⁷⁴ As expected, the discussion about the strategies to preserve the site became politically contentious. Politicians, real state companies, scholars, and black organizations quickly understood its tangible and symbolical importance; both locally and internationally, the wharf embodies the connections between Brazil, Africa, and the African diaspora. With different interests in play, each of these groups attempted to appropriate the site and orient the ways the history of the Atlantic slave trade would be exposed or concealed.

Gradually both the Valongo Wharf and the Cemetery of New Blacks are being incorporated into Rio de Janeiro's urban landscape and becoming part of the country's official national narrative that now recognizes the importance of the Atlantic slave trade and Brazil's crucial role in it. In 2012, the site of the Cemetery of New Blacks was transformed into a memorial. The main exhibition was reshaped, with the inclusion of explanatory panels with text and images reconstituting the history of the site, large photographs of Africans and Afro-Brazilians, and a huge panel wall with the names of enslaved individuals brought to Brazil. Moreover, glass pyramids were set on the memorial's floor, allowing the visitors to see the archaeological findings discovered in the site. As a sacred site, the memorial's unveiling ceremony had the participation of Candomblé priests who paid homage to the African ancestors who died without ever receiving a decent burial ground. The community of Gamboa and different black organizations are slowly appropriating the Valongo area, organizing black heritage

tours, public religious ceremonies, and spectacles of capoeira (an Afro-Brazilian martial art, combining dance and music). Regardless of this appropriation by the local actors, until January 2013, the artifacts uncovered during the archaeological excavation were still housed under precarious conditions in containers left behind in the port area archaeological site. The archaeologists of Museu Nacional were waiting the Rio de Janeiro City Hall to fulfill the promise to build a facility to keep the findings and to hire the professionals to start cleaning, identifying, and classifying the artifacts.⁷⁵ Moreover, the Valongo area remains negligible in relation to most other Rio de Janeiro's tourist sites, and even many locals are not aware of its historical importance. Its visitors are mainly Afro-Brazilians or international tourists with a particular interest in the history of African diaspora. In addition, because no memorial was constructed on the Valongo Wharf—only the ruins were preserved—the visit to the site acquires meaning only if oriented by the few Afro-Brazilian guides associated with local black organizations.

Where Enslaved People Were Sold

After disembarking in the US and Brazilian ports, enslaved Africans were usually put into quarantine. Especially after 1808, when the Portuguese royal court moved to Brazil, upon the arrival of a slave ship in Rio de Janeiro's port, a physician would go on board to examine the captives. Ill enslaved individuals were sent into isolation for at minimum eight days on the Ilha de Bom Jesus (Bom Jesus Island); after 1810, they were transferred to the Lazareto, a facility located behind the Morro da Saúde (Health's Hill).⁷⁶ Once the slaves left the quarantine to be brought to the slave market in Valongo, they were registered, and the duties were paid.⁷⁷

In Salvador, Bahia, the slave market was located in the Lower Town, facing the Bay of All Saints. Amédée François Frézier, a Savoyard military who had traveled to Chile, Peru, and Brazil between 1712 and 1714, described Salvador's slave market: "There are shops full of these poor unfortunates that are exposed all naked, and they bought them like animals and acquire upon them the same power, so that on minor discontent, they can kill them almost with impunity, or at least mistreat them as cruelly as they want."⁷⁸ Surprised by how blacks outnumbered whites in the then the capital of Brazil, Frézier

underscores how the enslaved population was badly treated.

British traveler Thomas Lindley sojourned in Bahia in 1802, during a period when foreign merchants were not allowed to trade in Brazil. In his travelogue, he describes the recently arrived Africans who were displayed in the slave market: “The streets and squares of the city are thronged with groups of human beings, exposed for sale at the doors of the different merchants to whom they belong; five slave ships having arrived within the last three days.”⁷⁹ Lindley states that one could fear that the arrival of so many Africans could provoke the same results that led to then ongoing rebellions in Saint-Domingue, even though according to him, the “negroes are cheerful and content.”⁸⁰ In an entry of her travel journal dated 20 October 1821, Maria Graham also describes the port area of Salvador’s Lower City as being the place where the slave market was located: “passing the arsenal gate, we went along the low street, and found it widen considerably at three quarters of a mile beyond: there are the markets, which seem to be admirably supplied, especially with fish. There also is the slave market, a sight I have not yet learned to see without shame and indignation.”⁸¹

Later on, the wave of rebellions in Bahia between 1807 and 1835, led by West African-born individuals (mostly Hausa and Yoruba), would show that Lindley’s concerns were not unfounded.⁸² During an uprising that took place in Salvador on 1 April 1830, a group of enslaved men attacked three hardware stores and robbed 12 swords and 12 knives. They then took to Julião Street in the Lower Town and attacked the slave depots of Wenceslau Miguel de Almeida. There, they rescued 100 new Africans who were waiting to be sold, most of whom followed the rebels.⁸³ Despite abundant historical evidence and Salvador’s large population of African descent (today estimated at 80 percent), there are no markers on the wharf of the Lower Town indicating where enslaved Africans were disembarked. Today, the wharf includes a modernized port and piers that harbor expensive boats, as well as elegant restaurants and luxurious condominiums with great views of the sea. The lack of spatial markers remembering the sites where Africans arrived in the city, combined with the recent rise of the public memory of slavery, has led to a process that I call memory replacement. According to a legend widespread among local residents and tourists, the basement of the present-day central market, known as Mercado Modelo, was a former slave market. Scholars also reproduce the story, propagated by many workers of the tourism industry and taxi

drivers and disseminated through videos and pictures on the Internet. In his book *Blind Memory*, Marcus Wood erroneously describes Salvador's Mercado Modelo as "the world's biggest slave market" during the eighteenth century.⁸⁴ Actually, starting in 1763, Rio de Janeiro became Brazil's capital, not only surmounting Bahia in numbers of slave imports but also becoming the country's largest slave port. In fact, the present-day building of Mercado Modelo was not the actual central slave market, but rather one that was located in another site close to the current location. In 1969, a fire destroyed the early building. In 1971, the market moved to the present-day three-story building, constructed between 1843 and 1861 to function as the customs house, which had been abandoned and vacant since 1958.⁸⁵ In 1984, following a huge fire, the current building of Mercado Modelo was renovated, and the basement was discovered, rehabilitated, and opened to the public.

Because the basement of Mercado Modelo is located at the sea level and is often flooded, popular accounts state that the site was a slave depot where enslaved men and women were gathered together before being sold. Another version of the legend also maintains that the building was a slave prison, even though there was no prison specifically intended to enslaved individuals. To this day, local residents report that the laments of enslaved persons who were held in the basement can be heard during the night. Although the association between a customs building and a slave depot or market is logical, after 1831 the slave trade to Brazil was outlawed, and even though many thousands of enslaved Africans continued to enter the country until the early 1850s, they could not be disembarked in the Salvador's main port area and gathered in a public building in the Lower Town. The legend, another case of memory replacement, is a good example of how the local Afro-Brazilian population deals with the lack of visible and official markers indicating the existence of sites remembering the Atlantic slave trade in Salvador. A basement in a central market can certainly successfully resemble a dungeon, one of the most popular structures in slave trade sites like Cape Coast Castle in Ghana and the House of Slaves in Gorée Island. But in the case of Salvador, memory replacement is just partially related to the needs of the tourism industry. At Mercado Modelo, tourists can attend spectacles of capoeira, eat typical Afro-Brazilian dishes, and purchase various types of souvenirs, including black dolls of all sizes and kinds. Indeed, the local tourism industry focusses on a stereotypical Bahian black culture, not on slav-

ery and the sufferings caused by the Atlantic slave trade. As a result, the story about the basement of Mercado Modelo is a marginal account in the whole narrative celebrating black culture. In this context, memory replacement becomes an effective way of addressing the lack of official initiatives publicly recognizing the sites where slaves were disembarked and kept before being sold. From this erasure, by relying on existing images and recollections, Afro-Bahians developed a new story. If they cannot reconstruct, they can at least imagine where these sites were located and what the experience of confinement was like for enslaved Africans in these slave depots.

In Recife, the main slave market was located in the Rua dos Judeus (Jews' Street), which later was renamed Rua da Cruz (Cross Street) and today is called Rua Bom Jesus (Bom Jesus Street).⁸⁶ Artist Zacharias Wagener (1614-1668), who sojourned in Brazil from 1634 to 1642 during the Dutch occupation of Pernambuco (1630-1654), rendered the slave market in a watercolor showing dozens of African men, women, and children, almost naked, exposed in various locations along the street. When Maria Graham arrived in Recife 1821, she was disgusted to see for the first time a slave market in one of the main streets of the city's downtown: "[w]e had hardly gone fifty paces into Recife, when we were absolutely sickened by the first sight of a slave-market. It was the first time either the boys or I had been in a slave-country."⁸⁷ Unlike other travelers, Graham emphasizes the difference between imagining slavery through pictures and the actual experience of the "staggering sight of a slave-market." She explains that the owners kept the new slaves closely shut up in the depots: "Yet about fifty young creatures, boys and girls, with all the appearance of disease and famine consequent upon scanty food and long confinement in unwholesome places, were sitting and lying about among the filthiest animals in the streets."⁸⁸ In addition, she also describes in her journal the presence of sick and hungry African men, women, and children in a Recife outdoor slave market. Her observations reflect not only her personal sentiment toward the horrible scenes of slavery but also the abolitionist views that existed among her British compatriots. Graham's text is illustrated with an aquatint titled *Gate and Slave Market at Pernambuco*, based on an oil painting by the British traveler and artist Augustus Earle, who also produced other scenes depicting slavery in Brazil. As in the written description, the image shows distressed enslaved men, women, and young children, almost naked, in the middle of a street. In full

view of street vendors and passersby, merchants and guards force the slaves to move toward the interior. Years later, the Swiss artist Luis Schlappriz also rendered Rua da Cruz, where the old open air slave market was located, showing how, despite the end of the slave trade, enslaved workers still constituted the main workforce in the neighborhood.⁸⁹ Still, despite its crucial role during the period of the Atlantic slave trade, today Rua Bom Jesus (former Rua da Cruz) contains no any marker indicating the previous existence of a slave market.

Other European travelers extensively described, in words and images, the horrible conditions to which enslaved men, women, and children were subjected at Rio de Janeiro's Valongo slave market, while waiting to be sold. British clergyman Robert Walsh also mentions Valongo in his travel account *Notices of Brazil* in 1828 and 1829. He explains that after disembarking, most slaves were sold by gypsies, who served as local intermediaries in the local market. According to Walsh: "Almost every house in this place is a large ware-room, where the slaves are deposited, and customers go to purchase. These ware-rooms stand at each side of the street, and the poor creatures are exposed for sale like any other commodity."⁹⁰ He notes that the warerooms were spacious and could accommodate 300 to 400 slaves of both sexes and various ages: "Round the room are benches on which the elder generally sit, and the middle is occupied by the younger, particularly females who squat on the ground stowed close together, with their hands and chins resting on their knees."⁹¹ Walsh's description perfectly corresponds to the lithograph *Boutique de la Rue Val-Longo* by the French artist Jean-Baptiste Debret, published in his *Voyage pittoresque et historique au Brésil*. The engraving shows a large, neat depot where emaciated enslaved men, women, and children sit on benches or lie on the floor waiting to be sold under the supervision of a gypsy slave merchant. The horrendous scene depicted in the image corresponds to the written description accompanying the lithograph, in which the artist explains that the "auction room, most often silent, is still infected of castor oil escaping from the pores of these wrinkled walking skeletons, whose look, curious, shy, or sad, reminds you the interior of a menagerie."⁹² Still, in spite of the horrible environment, he notes that sometimes the slaves waiting to be sold would sing and dance "turning on themselves and clapping their hands to mark the beat, a kind of dance quite similar to the savages in Brazil."⁹³ This reaction was certainly not the expression of joy but rather the only way to survive

the trauma of the Middle Passage.

A lithograph entitled *Marché aux Nègres* (Negro Market) by the German traveler Rugendas possibly reveals the back courtyard of a slave market, even though it is not possible to identify where this market was located. Gathered in small groups, African men, women, and children are sitting and lying on mats placed on the floor. The scene organization and the idealized, healthy-looking bodies of the characters in the image do not suggest the extent of the grueling conditions to which they were submitted during the Middle Passage. Indeed, the text explains that slaves did not seem unhappy, an idea that contradicts other travelers, probably because they were relieved after overcoming the horrible conditions of the Atlantic crossing: “we rarely listen them complain, even if we see them crouching around the fire, singing loud and monotonous chants accompanied by clapping. The only thing that seems to worry them is some impatience to know what will be eventually their fate.”⁹⁴

In his travel account, Rugendas also observes the unhealthy and inhuman conditions of Africans kept in the various shops of the Valongo slave market. He describes the warerooms as cowsheds. According to him, the market “is a shocking and almost unbearable spectacle: all day these unfortunate, men, women, children, stay sit or lie close to the walls of these huge buildings, and mixed with each other; or, if the weather is good, we see them in the street.”⁹⁵ The artist adds that the slaves looked even more horrible when they have not yet rested from the Middle Passage. Also, he documents how badly they smelled to the point that it was hard to stay in the neighborhood. Despite stating that men and women were naked and just wore a cloth around the hips, he suggests that they were well fed with “cassava flour, beans, and dried meat; and they are not in lack of refreshing fruits.”⁹⁶

Will Memory Suffice?

This chapter explored how the experiences of arrival of enslaved Africans in the New World are memorialized in heritage sites in Brazil and the United States. The sites of disembarkation of enslaved Africans remained concealed in the urban areas of the former slave trade ports of Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, Recife, New York, and Charleston. This context started to change only with the commemorations of the arrival of Columbus in the Americas in 1992, eventually culminating in the

launching of the Slave Route Project by UNESCO in 1994.

The early 1990s was a period of change both in Brazil, with the end of the military dictatorship, and in the United States, with the end of the Cold War. Whereas the two countries opened themselves to global exchanges, black activists could finally occupy the public arena to assert their identities and to address the wrongs of the past. In Salvador, a city whose population has a large majority of individuals of African descent, a rich process of memory replacement took place to fill in the gaps left by the concealment of its slave trade past. To face the invisibility of actual heritage sites where slaves were disembarked, the local population created stories that allow reenacting the painful past of the Atlantic slave trade. However, this phenomenon is less visible in the United States, probably because its established Civil Rights Movement was much stronger and its actions led to the development of official initiatives in Northern and Southern port cities.

Eventually, both in Brazil and the United States, unexpected events have led to the discovery of slave wharfs and slave cemeteries, forcing public authorities to officially acknowledge and create permanent markers to commemorate the slave past of cities like Rio de Janeiro and New York City. Although the preservation and the promotion of these heritage sites face various political and economic obstacles, Brazilian and US black populations are appropriating these spaces and transforming them into sacred spaces and public shrines to mourn and celebrate their African ancestors. Gradually, black social actors, very often supported by scholars who provide their expertise to the study of the newly uncovered wharfs and burial grounds, are forcing the governments of Brazil and the United States to officially recognize the Atlantic slave trade as a central element of an uncomfortable chapter of the histories of the two countries. Despite these new outcomes that ultimately can be understood as symbolic reparations, in both countries as racism and racial inequalities persist, discussion on material reparations are again becoming visible, suggesting perhaps that the memorialization of slavery in the public space is only one step to redress the wrongs associated with the slave past.

Endnotes

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- 2 Both in Brazil and the United States, the term descendant of slave(s) appears in public discourses. In these two countries this category is a given, probably because of the fact that both countries had very large enslaved populations until the middle and the end of the nineteenth century. In France, where this context is different, the term has been examined, among others in the works of Christine Chivallon, *L'esclavage, du souvenir à la mémoire: contribution à une anthropologie de la Caraïbe* (Paris: Karthala, 2012) and Johann Michel, *Devenir descendant d'esclave: enquête sur les régimes mémoriels* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015).
- 3 Yet, it is worth emphasizing that the illegal slave trade continued active in Brazil until 1850, when its prohibition was eventually enforced.
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- 5 Gustavus Vassa [Olaudah Equiano] in Vincent Carretta, ed., *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 60.
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- 9 Ibid., 76.
- 10 Robert Walsh, *Notices of Brazil in 1828 and 1829 vol.1* (London: F. Westley and A. H. Davis, 1830), vol. 1, 128-129.
- 11 Ibid., vol. 1, 130.
- 12 Ibid., vol. 1, 133.
- 13 Maria Graham, *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil and Residence There, During Part of the Years 1821, 1822, and 1823* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1824), 155.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Other European travelers rather underscored the severity of the inspection led by the Brazilian authorities. See Jaime Rodrigues, *De Costa a*

- Costa: Escravos, marinheiros e intermediários do tráfico negreiro de Angola ao Rio de Janeiro (1780–1860)* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2005), 285.
- 16 Johann Moritz Rugendas, *Voyage pittoresque dans le Brésil*. Paris: Engelmann (Paris: Engelmann, 1835), 4^e div., 1^{er} cahier, 4^e livraison, fl. 7.
- 17 Robin Law and Paul E. Lovejoy, *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua: His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa and America* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2003), 155.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 156.
- 19 See the documentary films by the team of the LABHOI (Laboratório de História Oral e Imagem), Universidade Federal Fluminense, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, directed by Hebe Mattos and Martha Abreu: *Jongos, calangos e folias: Música negra, memória e poesia* (2011) and *Passados presentes: Memória negra no sul fluminense* (2011).
- 20 Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *Être esclave au Brésil, XVI^e–XIX^e siècles* (Paris: Harmattan, 1979), 68.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 See “Conjunto arquitetônico e paisagístico incluído nos trechos da avenida Otávio Mangabeira, compreendendo as praias do Chega Negro e Piatã, no Subdistrito de Itapoã,” no. 26, processo 464-T-52, fol. 005/007, 14 July 1959; see Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional, 2009, 14.
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- 26 Hebe Mattos, Martha Abreu, and Milton Guran, “Inventário dos lugares de memória do tráfico atlântico de escravos e da história dos africanos escravizados no Brasil” (Rio de Janeiro: Laboratório de História Oral e Imagem, Universidade Federal Fluminense, 2013), 22.
- 27 Laird W. Bergad, *The Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 29.

- 28 For the estimates see Eltis et al., *The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database: Voyages*, <http://slavevoyages.org>.
- 29 Blain Roberts and Ethan Kytile, "Looking the Thing in the Face: Slavery, Race, and the Commemorative Landscape in Charleston, South Carolina, 1865–2010," *Journal of Southern History* 78:3 (2012), 640.
- 30 Roberts and Kytile," 654.
- 31 Among these works is the novel by Martin Robinson Delany, *Blake; or, The Huts of America, A Novel* (1970), originally published serially in *The Anglo-African Magazine* in 1859, then in *The Weekly Anglo-African* between 1861 and 1862. Also see the television series, *Denmark Vesey's Rebellion* (1982) broadcast on PBS, and the film *Brother Future*, directed by Roy Campanella II, 1991.
- 32 Roberts and Kytile, 677.
- 33 Linda Meggett, "New Monument Honors Slaves," in *The Post and Courier*, 3 July 1999, A1. On the pesthouses of Sullivan's Island, see Peter McCandless, *Slavery, Disease, and Suffering in the Southern Lowcountry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 231.
- 34 John Heilprin, "Island's Painful Past May be Marked for Future," *The Post and Courier*, June 4, 1997, 1.
- 35 See Edward Ball, *Slaves in the Family* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998). On Ball's work see James T. Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787–2005* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 408-409.
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