



The Slave Trade

Hugh Thomas

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No great historical subject is so laden with modern controversy or so obscured by myth and legend as the slave trade. Who were the slavers? How profitable was the business? Why did many African rulers and peoples collaborate? The strength of Hugh Thomas's book is that it begins with the first Portuguese slaving expeditions, before Columbus's voyage to the New World, and ends with the last gasp of the slave trade, long since made illegal elsewhere, in Cuba and Brazil twenty-five years after the American Emancipation Proclamation. His narrative is vividly alive with villains and heroes, and illuminated by eyewitness accounts, many of which are published here for the first time. Hugh Thomas gives the reader the facts about the slave trade - shows us how whole towns, like Bristol and Liverpool in England, Nantes in France, or Newport in Rhode Island, grew and prospered on slavery; how each new discovery and colonization spurred the demand for slave labor. He confronts the thorny subject of Jewish involvement in the slave trade, documents the fact that many of the New England whaling captains became successful slavers on the side, and tells the story of the rising tide of the antislavery movement, first against the trade and then against the institution of slavery itself. He describes the work of men such as Montesquieu in France, Wilberforce in England, and Anthony Benezet in the United States who finally succeeded in turning public opinion against slavery and making it illegal in Europe and the New World.

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