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Finalists for the 2008 Frederick Douglass Book Prize

Press Release, July 22, 2008
Gilder Lehrman Center for the
Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition

New Haven, Conn. -- Yale University's Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, sponsored by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, has announced the finalists for the Tenth Annual Frederick Douglass Book Prize, one of the most coveted awards for the study of the African-American experience.

The finalists are: Anthony E. Kaye for *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (University of North Carolina Press); Kristin Mann for *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900* (Indiana University Press); Chandra Manning for *What this Cruel War was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (Alfred A. Knopf Publishers); and Stephanie E. Smallwood for *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Harvard University Press).

The \$25,000 annual award for the year's best non-fiction book on slavery, resistance, and/or abolition is the most generous history prize in its field. The prize winner will be announced following the Douglass Prize Review Committee meeting in September, and the award will be presented at a dinner at the Yale Club of New York on February 19, 2009.

This year's finalists were selected from a field of seventy five entries by a jury of scholars that included Anthony Bogues (Brown University), Christopher Clark (University of Connecticut), and Rebecca J. Scott (University of Michigan).

The Frederick Douglass Prize was established in 1999 to stimulate scholarship in the field by honoring outstanding accomplishments. Previous winners are Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan in 1999; David Eltis, 2000; David Blight, 2001; Robert Harms and John Stauffer, 2002; James F. Brooks and Seymour Drescher, 2003; Jean Fagan Yellin, 2004; Laurent Dubois, 2005; Rebecca J. Scott, 2006, and Christopher Leslie Brown, 2007.

The award is named for Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), the one-time slave who escaped bondage to emerge as one of the great American abolitionists, reformers, writers, and orators of the nineteenth century.

Anthony E. Kaye's book *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* offers a new approach to familiar questions about the character of slave society and community. Adopting from slaves' and ex-slaves' own accounts the concept of the "neighborhood" as a key to the organization of their lives, Kaye traces the influences of geographical propinquity and distance on the North American slave experience. Drawing particularly on evidence contained in federal pension records as yet little used by historians, *Joining Places* demonstrates how "neighborhood" shaped slaves' work and socialization, their creation of

marriage and family ties, and the resistance they offered to slaveholders and the slave regime.

The fruit of deep immersion in archival and oral sources, Kristin Mann's *Slavery and the Birth of an African City* is an impressive study of the ways slavery was entwined with the early growth of one of Africa's most important cities. Lagos, though a relative latecomer to the Atlantic slave trade, was sufficiently involved in it that its merchants continued an illegal international traffic in slaves after 1807, so courting British attention and determination to suppress this. This book makes West African history relevant and accessible to scholars in other fields, and will be read by all interested in the history of slavery and the Atlantic world.

In case we imagined that there was nothing more to say about that old question, "what had slavery to do with the American Civil War?" Chandra Manning shows that we were wrong. Her lively, readable book *What this Cruel War was Over* makes a striking argument that slavery was very much to do with the war, and that this was so throughout the conflict. Her subjects are the ordinary soldiers who fought; her sources include their letters and diaries, and their writings in regimental newspapers, many of which Manning discovered and uses for the first time. By tracing attitudes towards slavery among those who actually fought, *What this Cruel War was Over* provides a model study of "history from below," and ought finally to lay the ghost of the view that the Civil War was not about slavery.

Saltwater Slavery is a remarkable account of the transatlantic slave trade that will lead scholars to rethink their understanding of the "middle passage," Africa's diaspora, and the relationships between Africa and the New World. Stephanie Smallwood uses records of the English Royal African Company's trade with the Gold Coast to provide insights into the lives of the men and women the company bought, transported, and offered for sale in the Americas. Tracing the steps that led from captivity in Africa to final sale in the New World, Smallwood gets behind the generalities that often characterize studies of the slave trade. Deploying slaves' own metaphor of "saltwater slavery" to illuminate the meanings of the Atlantic slave system, Stephanie Smallwood opens up new avenues for historians and anthropologists to explore. This is a subtle, powerful study of the deep horrors of slavery and the slave trade.

The Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance and Abolition, a part of The Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale University, maintains two websites, www.gilderlehrman.org and the quarterly online journal www.historynow.org.