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Unfree Labor and the Atlantic Empires

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**Unfree Labor and the Atlantic Empires
Amsterdam, Summer 2010.**

Essay submissions are requested for a conference and potential publication in an edited volume on unfree labor and the Atlantic Empires. The conference is tentatively scheduled for late May or early June of 2010 at the Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. The volume is under contract with Brill Academic Publishers (Leiden and Boston) in their Atlantic Series under the working title: *Building the Atlantic Empires: Unfree Labor, the State, and the Rise of Global Capitalism, 1500-1945.*



The conference organizers and volume editors are soliciting original essays on unfree labor in global settings influenced by or directly administered by the Atlantic empires of Spain, Portugal, England, France, and Holland (work on other imperial states will be considered). The purpose of the conference and edited volume is to explore the states' roles as critical agents in mobilizing, deploying, and disciplining unfree labor in the pursuit of empire in such venues as the construction of public and defense works, military and naval service, the exploitation of state-owned resources, and the recruitment of coerced laborers for private enterprise.

A second purpose of the conference and edited volume is to examine the intersections of various historiographic fields. Atlantic history, in particular, has reached a moment of introspection and reassessment as scholars probe its range and limits as a conceptual framework. Some have begun to question when, if ever, the Atlantic was a coherent whole, whether its history is old imperial history in a new guise, or whether its practitioners have achieved the integrative vision of Atlantic processes and connections that they claim. Thus, the geographical and chronological sweep of the conference and edited volume is purposely broad in an effort to encourage the interrogation of the many boundaries that have shaped the fields of Atlantic, imperial, colonial, and national histories. The organizers also see the conference as an opportunity to increase interaction and bridge some of the methodological and conceptual divides among scholars of Atlantic empires who focus on economic and labor history and those who focus on cultural studies of empire through such themes as race, ethnicity, gender, representation, and identity. We see both the conference and the edited volume as spaces for dialogue and collaboration that can situate the resort to unfree labor by the Atlantic empires in a global context and move

the studies of labor, empire, and the Atlantic world in new and fruitful directions.

Possible topics might include but are not limited to the following: the historical relationship between early modern and modern empires in their mobilization and deployment of unfree labor; economic, political, social, and cultural rationales for state reliance on unfree labor in specific historical moments i.e. before and after the abolition of slavery; the effects of the enslavement of Africans in the Atlantic world on other forms of coerced labor; the collaboration and/or interpenetration of state and private interests in recruiting and deploying unfree labor; definitions and representations of free and unfree labor in specific settings and over time by states, employers, and workers themselves; the material experiences of coerced workers in state employ; state-building through the use of unfree labor; the role of laws, codes, treaties etc. in shaping states' access to and deployment of unfree labor; critical assessments of the intersections of the fields suggested above.

Prospective participants are invited to send a 500-word abstract and brief cv with their current contact information by May 10, 2009, preferably by email, to the organizers and editors: Dr. John Donoghue, Department of History, Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois, jdonoghue@luc.edu; Dr. Evelyn Powell Jennings, Department of History, St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York, ejennings@stlawu.edu. More detailed information on the conference and edited volume will be forthcoming.