Defining Slavery

On January 20, 2005, Adam Rothman asked H-Slavery subscribers to consider the validity of Orlando Patterson's analysis of slavery, *Slavery and Social Death (1982)*, and its implications for the analysis of contemporary slavery. Citing Patterson, Rothman asked:

"Surveying many different slave societies across world history, Patterson defined slavery as the "permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons." He argued that however important the ownership of human beings was to slavery in its early modern Euro-American context, it has not been an essential characteristic of slavery in general. Slavery existed in many places and societies that lacked 'western' concepts of exclusive property rights and where slaves cannot really be said to have been commodities. My question for H-Slavery: Is Patterson right on this point, and if so, what are the implications of his analysis for contemporary slavery?"

Many responded to Rothman's query, leading to a rich discussion about defining slavery. We have harvested the entire thread of that discussion from the archives and present it now for the first time, chronologically in the table below. Participants' names are listed below the links to their respective responses in the archive. Special thanks to former H-Slavery Editor (and current Advisory Board member), Steven Mintz, who moderated and guided the original discussion.

Defining Slavery: Chronological Archive, 20 January - 13 March 2005

20 Jan 2005 - Adam Rothman

21 Jan 2005 (4 replies) - Marcy Tanter, Harold Forsythe, John Philips, Anthony Lee

5 Feb 2005 - John Philips

7 Feb 2005 - Trish Roberts-Miller

7 Feb 2005 - June Roberts

9 Feb 2005 (2 replies) - John Philips, David Paterson

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9 Feb 2005 (2 replies) - Paul Finkelman, Trish Roberts-Miller

10 Feb 2005 (4 replies) - Matthew Mason, Clayton Cramer, A. D. Powell, Anonymous

10 Feb 2005 (2 replies) - David Davis, Nathan Herrod

11 Feb 2005 - Anthony Lee

17 Feb 2005 - June Roberts

17 Feb 2005 - Anthony Lee

18 Feb 2005 - James Oakes

18 Feb 2005 (3 replies) - Kevin Bales, Gwendolyn Hall, Anthony Lee

21 Feb 2005 - Ben Austin

22 Feb 2005 - James Oakes

23 Feb 2005 (6 replies) - Sally McKee, Gwendolyn Hall, Clayton Cramer, Ben Austin, Tim Haslett, Anonymous

24 Feb 2005 (2 replies) - John Weiss, Elise Ward

28 Feb 2005 (3 replies) - Chris Monaco, Paul Finkelman, Elise Ward

28 Feb 2005 - Seymour Drescher

1 Mar 2005 (2 replies) - James Oakes, Trish Roberts-Miller

2 Mar 2005 - Sally McKee

3 Mar 2005 (2 replies) - Susan Iwanisziew, Anonymous

6 Mar 2005 - David Paterson

6 Mar 2005 - Manisha Sinha

7 Mar 2005 - A. D. Powell

8 Mar 2005 - James Oakes

9 Mar 2005 - Jonathon Glickstein
May this archive inspire renewed discourse about how slavery is defined in the 21st century.