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Editors' Introduction

We are midway through another year in which the COVID-19 pandemic has created losses for all, if unevenly. Disaggregating the toll, we see in stark terms a history of racial injustice and inequality. At the same time, in former metropoles and in the United States, organizations have mobilized around the demand that Black Lives Matter to advocate for the repair of historic harms and against present-day violence that is based in the past. Calling for a redistribution of resources, renewed forms of mutual aid, and the removal of statues of slave traders and racist historical figures, social movements and individuals are questioning official histories and reckoning with a racist past. Both the effects of the pandemic and these social justice movements remind us of how our present world is shaped by the history of the transatlantic slave trade. It is fitting that this issue of *The Journal of African History* publishes research that contributes to the scholarly exploration of such questions.

The present issue contains the forum 'Population Change and Demography in African History', comprised of four pieces, as well as two research articles on the history of Asante in different periods. In her introduction to the forum, **Sarah Walters** lays out the stakes of African demographic history by tracing key debates, sharing research insights from her use of parish registers to analyze fertility increases in mid-twentieth-century Tanganyika, and setting an agenda for what she terms 'moral demography'. Walters builds on the scholarship on moral economy, employing her research in Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa, to argue that demographic history is most powerful and relevant when combined with qualitative material and a reflexive methodology to navigate the silences and gaps in sources.

Demographic history has been a key part of the scholarship on the transatlantic slave trade and a cornerstone of the Slave Voyages database. Sources on population and demographic methods are the tools researchers use to estimate the size of the slave trades and to gauge their impact on society, economy, politics, and culture in the regions most deeply affected. Historians argue over the benefits, limitations, and meanings of quantitative sources and the need to bring qualitative materials to counter and contextualize them, all while centering the humanity of historical actors.

John Thornton has been an active participant in these debates. In his forum contribution, Thornton revisits his 1977 article on demography in the Kongo Kingdom, published in these pages, in light of recent work by Igor Matonda Sakala that challenged his population estimates as being too low. Thornton originally argued that Kongo's demographic characteristics were much like those of Western Europe, and that its population was smaller than estimated by other scholars, though focused in concentrated areas. In this issue, he notes that the conglomerations of population around São Salvador (Mbanza Kongo) and Mbanza Soyo likely indicated political centralization and the presence of enslaved persons captured in wartime. Thornton's piece is a fine example of how conversations over time in scholarly publications enrich historiography; his most recent book features in the review section of this issue.

In the third article for the forum, **Jelmer Vos** and **Paulo Teodoro de Matos** engage the 'transformation of slavery' thesis in Angola's coffee-producing region. They use imperial Portugal's population surveys to refine the main claims of the thesis: an increase in slaveholding during the last phase of the Atlantic trade, the predominance of women among those enslaved, and the increase in the use of enslaved labor in the cash crop revolution that developed with the abolition of the slave trade. Using the Counting Colonial Populations database, a new collection of primary sources on the demography of the Portuguese Empire, Vos and de Matos use nineteenth-century data (instead of backward projections) to argue that the population dynamics in these districts do not

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clearly align with the conclusions made earlier by scholars like Paul Lovejoy for this region and elsewhere on the continent.

The final forum contribution by **Gerardo Serra** and **Morten Jerven** brings demographic analysis back to the twentieth century and to the census in independent African states. Revisiting controversies around Nigeria's 1963 census that played out in the Nigerian press, they draw our attention to what historians can learn from visual and textual representations of population counting. Serra and Jerven explore the relationship between census taking and the political imagination, offering new ways to consider how demography matters to states, political groups, and societies.

State and society relations are central concerns for **Manuel Manu-Osafo**, who returns to precolonial Asante's social and political history to reconsider the Asante defeat in 1896 at the hands of the British military. Manu-Osafu locates the defeat not in the failings or strengths of individual actors but in the breakdown of the social contract that kept Asante men, in particular, serving in the military, thereby allowing the kingdom to maintain its independence. Giving similar attention to nuanced social processes in late colonial Asante under a reconstituted *asantehene* and colonial customary court system, **Sara Berry**'s article analyzes an inheritance dispute from 1951. Here on the verge of independence from colonial rule, the case offers a window onto a social world in which what it meant to belong or to be kin was not a straightforward social fact or element of identity. Berry reads belonging as a social process, opening up a world where the long-term processes of slavery, pawnage, and kinship overlap.

As indicated above, this issue's featured review is of **John Thornton**'s *A History of West Central Africa to 1850*. In his expansive and engaging review, **David Gordon** considers the uses and limits of archives for accessing early African history. Fourteen more reviews follow, covering subjects ranging from environmental history (**Martin S. Shanguyhia** on **Jacob S. T. Dlamini** and **Matthew V. Bender** on **Gufu Oba**) to transnational and global approaches to African history (**Christopher Lee** on **Henning Melber**'s analysis of Dag Hammarskjöld, the United Nations, and decolonization; and **Andrea Queeley** on **Paul Ryer's** study of Africa and Africans in the Cuban imagination). Gender emerges as a central theme linking **Ogechukwu E. Williams**'s review of **Nwando Achebe** and **Claire Roberston**'s co-edited collection on African women with **Judith A. Byfield**'s analysis of **Ndubueze L. Mbah**'s study of changing masculinities in the Bight of Biafra and beyond. Perhaps more than anything else, this issue's batch of reviews demonstrates the range of methodologies and sources that scholars employ to study the African past — from oral narratives, in **Meredith Shepard**'s review of **Donald E. Miller**'s oral history of the Rwanda genocide, to technical and scientific data in **Abena Dove Osseo-Asare**'s history of Ghanaian nuclear science, reviewed by **Nana Osei-Opare**.

Starting with volume 62 of *The Journal of African History*, we inaugurated a new digital media venture, *The Journal of African History Podcast*. We will use the podcast to highlight work in each issue through a brief author interview. For our first issue of 2021, we spoke with **Aïssatou Mbodj-Pouye**, who shared a recorded radio call sign from Radio Rurale de Kayes in Mali. The podcast allowed us to hear and think about a source not easily captured in text but that we think deepens the reading of the article. For the present issue, we chat with Sarah Walters about the forum on demography. We look forward to feedback on the podcast, which is available on *The Journal of African History* website, as well as through Apple and Google's podcast streaming apps.

THE EDITORS

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