Conclusion

The essays in this volume bring to light four over-arching themes in the study of empire-building in the Atlantic, the part imperial states played in mobilizing a spectrum of unfree labor, and how the unfree labor histories of the Atlantic empires figured in the rise of capitalism. Taken collectively, they illustrate the value of comparative imperial and hemispheric analysis in an Atlantic context. First, the essays have demonstrated that European states took on various institutional forms and frequently partnered with private enterprise to engage in the work of Atlantic empire-building. Second, they have shown how competing capitalist interests involved in the process of imperial expansion often brought states and their colonial governments into conflict over the usage and exploitation of unfree labor. Third, they have discussed how states themselves became primary agents in the recruitment and deployment of various form of unfree labor for both productive and reproductive work. Both forms of unfree labor, as these essays have illustrated, served the political and economic interests of states as well as capitalist interests invested in colonial commerce and production. Finally, although imperial discourses often professed to serve the best interests of the unfree workers that states deployed in Atlantic colonies, capitalist imperatives for profit maximization overwhelmed whatever political will existed to protect workers from various forms of abuse and dehumanizing exploitation. The following paragraphs offer more expansive commentary on each of these four themes.

The multiple institutional types of the Atlantic imperial states included the Catholic monarchies of the Iberian empires, the imperial republics of mid-seventeenth century England and late nineteenth-century France, and the corporate republic of the seventeenth-century United Provinces. However, despite their varied constitutional composition, important commonalities linked the Atlantic histories of these imperial states. For instance, very different states could adopt similar mechanisms to expand their empires, such as joint state/private ventures to explore and exploit new territories and peoples or to pilfer from rivals, as the essays by Brandon and Fatah-Black, Chambouleyron, Suryani, Coltrain, and Jennings show. Foremost among these commonalities, state imperatives of empire-building regarding the deployment of unfree labor consistently conflicted with the interests of colonial governments and colonial subjects. These confrontations are instructive, as they clarify that so-called colonial “peripheries” exerted a powerful counterbalance to the metropolitan “core,” in contrast to much of the literature in imperial scholarship and world systems theory. All the essays show the complexities of local realities in the

colonies—Portuguese warfare with indigenous groups in Maranhão, the threat of buccaneering incursions in St. Augustine, competing commercial priorities between colonial and imperial officials in Barbados, and endemic conflicts among workers, colonial officials, and metropolitan administrators over who could be forced to do what kinds of work in all the Atlantic empires. These conflicts were sharpened by the resistance of the coerced, their political allies in the colonies and the metropole, and the depredations of imperial rivals. The conflicted relationships between imperial and colonial governments also reveal how the economic interests of both parties often diverged, particularly in regard to the use of unfree labor. By highlighting the importance of these conflicts, these essays have helped to bring contradictory patterns of capitalist development from the sixteenth to the twentieth century into clearer historical perspective, unsettling the origins narratives of both stadial Marxist and neo-liberal thought.

While comparative analysis has shed light on important problems in the book, critical connections have also been made across the histories of the Atlantic empires regarding the relationship between capitalist proliferation, empire-building, and state mobilization of unfree labor. One of this volume's most important, connective themes addresses a critical yet neglected feature of labor, imperial, and Atlantic historiographies: how states became vital agents in organizing the supply of unfree labor for private and public exploitation, before and after the abolition of slavery. The methods usually employed by labor historians situate free and unfree labor in private, employer-employee or master-servant/slave relationships. But the contributors in the book have recognized that the history of capitalist unfree labor is intricately connected to programs that Atlantic imperial states devised to promote the profitability, expansion, and security of their territories. They are not the first to recognize these connections, as the state has long been studied in imperial and Atlantic histories for the part it played in constructing the legal regimes sanctioning the transportation and exploitation of African slave labor and the various forms of plantation servitude before and after its abolition. Labor historians have thoroughly surveyed the experiences of these workers and how they figured within the history of the Atlantic colonial development. However, all of the contributors to this book have emphasized that the state itself became an indispensable agent in mobilizing and deploying convicts, indentured servants, slaves, soldiers, and sailors for plantation, infrastructural, and military labor from the sixteenth through twentieth centuries. In response, the contributors have made a methodological departure, exploring the history of capitalism through the state's efforts to innovate, codify, trade in, deploy, command, and benefit from unfree labor. Although the Atlantic empires

structured state power differently in relation to colonization, they understood that maintaining an adequate supply of unfree labor was necessary for military strength and the profitability of commerce and plantation production. Without securing and increasing such military strength and economic profitability through its own exploitation of unfree labor, an imperial state's power diminished, leaving an empire at a competitive disadvantage with its European rivals. In this regard, Jennings provides methodological guidance for future work through her valuable distinction between state recruitment of productive and reproductive labor. Her case study of nineteenth-century Cuba recovers how the Spanish crown and officials in Cuba recruited "productive" labor for private profit in the plantation complex and "reproductive" labor that facilitated both private profit and state power through private and public infrastructural development. Donoghue's attention to military conscription builds on Jennings' method to explain that without making innovative claims on the labor power of its people, the English state would not have mustered the reproductive labor for the military campaigns it waged on land and sea to defeat imperial rivals and conquer colonial territory. That volunteers were in short supply for the military work of empire building made reproductive labor in the army and navy an experience in life-threatening unfreedom, as the majority of English conscripts perished while under arms. Coltrain's work on St. Augustine shows Spanish colonial officials negotiating terms of labor and hierarchies of class and race to preserve a remote but strategic colony. Heath shows officials of the French Third Republic contending with Guadeloupean planters and African-descended workers over plantation labor and definitions of citizenship. Beyond these examples, all of the chapters demonstrate that the imperial states and colonial governments of the Atlantic world turned unfree workers into political assets, continually mobilizing different groups of workers and containing threats to their supply to reinvest in projects that linked imperial prowess to capitalist enterprise.

A number of these essays illustrate how so-called enlightened ideals concerning colonial unfree workers, generated in metropolitan contexts, animated imperial policies and discourses of subject-hood and citizenship. Examples here include Spanish royal justice and protection for slaves and other unfree workers in Cuba and St. Augustine, the English state's belief that those it transported into colonial servitude would experience moral uplift through severe plantation labor discipline, and the full political and cultural citizenship that the French state promised for post-abolition plantation workers in Guadeloupe. The same could hold true in the colonial context, especially in times of external threat, as the chapters on Cuba, St. Augustine, and the Portuguese Amazon attest or imply. Higher ideals also entered the discourse when metropolitan

officials hoped to cement the loyalty of subjects or citizens, as Jennings and Heath's work demonstrates respectively in the case of nineteenth-century Cuba and Guadeloupe. In many of these cases, workers, soldiers, sailors, and convicts struggled to claim justice, sometimes from within imperial institutions, sometimes from without. However, in all of these cases, when states' and colonial entrepreneurs' interests in maximizing productivity and profit coincided, these higher ideals foundered as both groups sought greater integration into first Atlantic, then global markets for labor and colonial goods and defending their territories and trade. To paraphrase Marx, imperial states may have articulated their missions and goals in humanitarian or moral terms, but ultimately the evolution of capitalism within the contentious imperial framework of the Atlantic stripped away from the state the sentimental veil of paternalism and reduced the relationship between sovereign and soldier, ruler and ruled, master and slave or servant, and employer and worker to naked self-interest.

Taken in sum, the contributions in this volume demonstrate that the state did not simply establish the legal framework to force workers to labor in the Atlantic colonies; it also coerced people to do the work of defending and reproducing the empire and it joined colonial officials, merchants, and planters in the process of commodifying people to exploit for economic profit as species of economic capital. Chamboleyron shows the Portuguese crown making war on indigenous groups in the Amazon to garner slaves and secure territory. Brandon and Fatah-Black, Coltrain, Donoghue, and Jennings all detail the tremendous labor demands of the military foundations of the English, Dutch, and Spanish empires. While the Iberian empires began their Atlantic expansion with well-established policies of coercion through enslavement and transportation of convicts, the English and Dutch elaborated comparable policies on the march. Brandon and Fatah-Black show the Dutch adapting practices of the Portuguese during in their occupation of Northeast Brazil. Donoghue and Suryani show the English empire developing the legal foundations for racialized chattel slavery through the transportation and commodification of British and Irish convicts, poor people, and political prisoners. In this case, the state itself initiated the chattel degradation of its own subjects, forcing them into colonial servitude as alienable, capitalist labor commodities. Further research by scholars may reveal that other states engaged in Atlantic empire-building were involved in the same business of commodifying their own subjects in a similar fashion. The contributions to this collection demonstrate the value of examining labor coercion in state and private enterprises in the same frame. For instance, further study of the systematic use of conscription for imperial warfare or the deployment of slave, convict, and political prisoner labor on military infrastructure and public works could

generate questions about how such labor defined the political identities of those forced to do it. More research could also reveal how states' patterns of labor recruitment and employment affected or was influenced by existing practice in the private sector. Such questions will illuminate further how the interrelated processes that gave rise to empires and modern states also shaped the development of capitalism. The essays here offer a glimpse into how historians can conceptualize the imperial state as an agent of labor exploitation and commodification. Although we have focused on the Atlantic empires and the catalytic part they played in the creation of capitalism, the work here provides several frameworks to advance the investigation of the relationships between imperial states, capitalism, and the exploitation of unfree labor that will be of use to historians studying the Atlantic world and beyond.