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Multiethnic Slavery and the African Diaspora in Macau:  
The Search for the Geographic Limits of Vast Early America

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The geographic limits of early American history are continuously being debated. Recently, this has culminated in the popular adoption of the expression “vast early America,” which looks beyond the previously dominant Atlantic paradigm to embrace hemispheric perspectives while underlining the need to delve more into continental Africa, the Mediterranean, Eurasia, and the Pacific and Indian Ocean worlds. But what are the limits of this widening historical panorama in the case of the history of slavery? A hitherto-unstudied set of mid-eighteenth-century baptismal records from the Portuguese enclave of Macau, which noted the birth, ethnicity, and parentage of dozens of African and other enslaved people, offers evidence that the transatlantic slave trade was part of a larger trade in people of African descent (and others) that was geographically uneven and regionally segmented but global in extent, reaching as far as China. Placing this unique new dataset within the context of other contemporary Portuguese- and Chinese-language sources reveals that the presence of “Black slaves” (黑奴, *heinu*) in this port city was shaped by many of the same imperial and missionary projects as in the Atlantic, as well as racialized in ways highly reminiscent of the Western Hemisphere by both European and Chinese observers. The increasingly racialized slave trade of vast early America was thus horrifyingly “vast.”