

*Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500-1830* Edited by Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault.

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The past decade has seen a revolution in how historians view the relationship between the Old and New World during the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. Where once historical research focused on nations, states and empires, we now see a dynamic, shifting, fluid and complex relationship between all of the continents touched by the Atlantic Ocean. The field of ‘Atlantic history’ is a vibrant topic and there remains a wealth of information and ideas to discover. It is in this vein that *Soundings in Atlantic History* aims to fill some of the gaps already apparent in the area of Atlantic studies.

The major focus of *Soundings in Atlantic History*, contrary to much extant research, is on the myriad ways in which the ‘Atlantic peoples’ were connected by reframing and readjusting our perception of the Atlantic: that is to say, instead of seeing the ocean as a divisive force, splitting Americans from Europeans and Africans, the authors seek to establish the Atlantic as a connecting force in the world and as a shared space for a number of peoples. The twelve essays, plus the introduction by Bailyn, cover a great number of issues in Atlantic history from the impact of the Slave Trade on African identity and the creation of an Atlantic economy, to religious networks throughout the ocean and scientific exchange in the Atlantic World. Together, these essays show the various ways in which the Atlantic

shaped the development of Africa, Europe and the Americas and the ways in which societies, cultures and people adapted and responded to the challenges brought by the ocean.

Where this book demonstrates a deserved relevance for scholars is in the massive scope of its enquiry and the unusual perspective that it posits, providing a fresh and innovative approach to the study of this period in history. Readers should find that several of the essays give a new understanding to the nature of the Atlantic community from perspectives perhaps not before considered. The book's approach, however, means that those not already well versed in the discussions surrounding the historiography of the Atlantic World may find its content difficult with which to engage. This is partially negated by Bailyn's excellent and detailed introduction to the topic and to the specific details of each essay. Nevertheless, despite the book being well presented and including several informative and attractive maps and illustrations throughout, it is not entirely suitable for introductory level study.

The essays can be split into a number of thematic subdivisions. The first section of the book deals with the impact of the Slave Trade on the Atlantic World. Behrendt's essay looks at the ways in which the trade of Africans from their homelands to the Americas – and particularly the sugar plantations – was dependant upon and influenced by seasonal and ecological factors. That is to say, he analyses how weather (seasonal and 'predictable' or not) affected the spread of the African people around the Americas and the ways in which those involved in the organisation of the Slave Trade reacted to the varying ecological factors both in the Atlantic Ocean and on the land. Similarly, Heywood and Thornton analyse the Slave Trade, but look at how African identity in Brazil was created and shaped by the experiences of political leadership

established already in the culture of the kingdoms of Kongo and Dahomey. This essay returns to a political analysis of the Slave Trade and seeks to discuss the ways in which transported Africans defined themselves politically, socially and culturally.

Following on from the chapters on the Slave Trade, Hancock – the author of the groundbreaking *Citizens of the World* (1995) – discusses the development and intricate nature of the ‘Atlantic economy’. This somewhat elusive phenomenon difficult to quantify in any meaningful terms due to the vast geography of the area and the competing national interests was first truly discussed by Hancock. Developing on his previous work, Hancock here looks specifically at the Madeira wine trade (from producers, distributors, traders, and transporters to syndicates, consumers and representatives) as a lens through which to analyse Atlantic trading networks. This essay in particular is outstanding, and provides interesting, valuable and coherent discussion on the topic. Similarly, Klooster’s essay looks at the nature of smuggling throughout the Atlantic during this period. Klooster discusses effectively the importance of smuggling to the Atlantic economy and draws on sources from all the major European players involved in the Atlantic economy. This type of discussion provides a refreshing analysis of history, outwith the boundaries of the European governments involved.

Religion also played a huge part in the lives of many of the residents of the Atlantic World, and has not been overlooked in this volume. Martínez-Serna’s essay discusses the extraordinary organisation of the Jesuit order working around the Atlantic. In particular, this essay looks at the ways in which the Jesuit order spanned across the Atlantic, linking Old World to New, but also the ways in which it spread out across the Americas and formed new, innovate connections along the way. Beiler looks at the other side of

the coin: she discusses how dissenters from all over Europe (but primarily from Britain, the Netherlands and the Rhineland) travelled throughout Europe and the Americas to avoid persecution. Specifically, Beiler looks at how varying types of dissenters – from Quakers to Puritans – built networks of communication and co-operation throughout the period. Furthermore, she looks in some detail at the nature of Quaker connections throughout British North America. What these essays provide is an interesting discussion on the ways in which religion helped to foster intra- and inter-continental connections, and helped to create an Atlantic community.

The essays of Cañizares-Esguerra, Safier, and Schiebinger mark another shift in theme by introducing a detailed look at the development of ‘science’ and the Scientific Revolution. Cañizares-Esguerra begins by taking the stance that the Scientific Revolution started in the Iberian Peninsula and, as a result of the pressures placed on the Iberian powers by their vast colonial empires at the start of the colonial period, she argues that the Atlantic World was one based on scientific advancement. What is particularly highlighted here is that the shift of power, from the Spanish to the north-western European powers, is mirrored in the development of scientific advancement. More importantly, however, the Scientific Revolution worked to bind the Atlantic World together: a thirst for knowledge about the world and the environment meant that great expeditions were carried on throughout the Americas in order to further mankind’s progression. Moreover, the challenges met by those involved in exploring and settling the new territories on the other side of the ocean meant that new methods and practices had to be developed. This was most obviously the case with medicine, and here Schiebinger’s study of the attempts to develop effective

medicines to combat tropical disease in the West Indies is particularly current. The connection of scientists throughout the Atlantic World is a particularly enduring and strong one; and these three essays work well together to provide informative discussion on the beginnings and development of Western Hemisphere science.

The next thematic section of the book finds its focus in a collection of essays that discuss the political nature of the Atlantic World. Peterson looks at the distinctive nature of Boston, and the development of cosmopolitanism in this city. His major focus is on the ways in which cosmopolitanism developed in the Americas, and the ways in which the various networks spread across the Atlantic helped to create, influence and mould the Bostonian experience. Peterson's approach is to look at the ways in which both commercialism and religion – particularly Protestantism – affected leading Bostonians.

The focus of Dávila's essay is the shared experiences of colonists in the Americas and the examples set by those that would become United States citizens. The argument in this essay is that Southern American political and constitutional theorists were heavily influenced by both British and United States practice and tradition; and, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Dávila shows that it was the British practice that was deemed more appropriate than the complex United States federal system. The final essay, by Rothschild, focuses on the Atlantic World of David Hume. This essay examines the ways in which Hume viewed the Atlantic, but also the impact of the changing connections and ties of empire at this time, to provide a snapshot of Atlantic history. The essay works to exemplify much of the work discussed by the other authors and provides a solid ground on which to conclude the book.

Overall, the essays provide a thorough, interesting, and vivid account of various under-represented aspects of the Atlantic World by extending current understanding of the ways in which the various peoples spread across the Atlantic continents – in Europe, the Americas, and in Africa – connected through networks of trade, commerce, culture, religion, politics and kinship. Although the variation in focus and subject from essay to essay mean that there is no over-arching theme (save for Atlantic history), this does not detract at all from the benefit of the work. On the contrary, it provides us with a fresh approach to this vibrant subject and is of a very high standard.

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