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Atlantic History: A Critical Reappraisal (review)

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Despite its reduced scope, Adelman's study adds new insights to the ongoing discussion on questions related to sovereignty and revolution. Though the inclusion of Brazil in the present study is laudable, less experienced students may encounter difficulties if they accept the title of this book and then attempt to apply Adelman's conclusions to all of the Iberian Atlantic.

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Atlantic History: A Critical Reappraisal. Edited by Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan.
 New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. x, 371. Notes. Index. \$21.95 paper.

This essay collection—comprehensive, illuminating, engaging and challenging—is an impressive addition to Atlantic and comparative history. In the introduction, Philip D. Morgan and Jack P. Greene note both the significantly varied operational definitions of Atlantic history and the many critiques of the approach. The authors respond to these well-considered positions with balanced confidence in Atlantic history's capacity to evolve through multivalent approaches and offer the contributions to this volume as evidence. Joyce Chaplin follows with an overview of the multiple historical meanings of the Atlantic Ocean, asserting that the ocean's history itself must be integrated into the field's research agenda. The rest of the book is organized along three themes: "New Atlantic Worlds," "Old Worlds and the Atlantic," and "Competing and Complementary Perspectives."

The "New Atlantic Worlds" chapters are written by respected scholars on the Spanish American colonial system (Kenneth Andrien), the Portuguese Empire (A. J. R. Russell-Wood), and the British, French, and Dutch Atlantic systems (Trevor Burnard, Laurent DuBois, and Benjamin Schmidt, respectively). These synthetic presentations emphasize the trade imperatives and the geopolitical designs that derived from commercial interests, as trade and politics were, if not synonymous, certainly equally important foundations for expansion, settlement and competition among European powers. Such activities opened opportunities for entrepreneurship and exploitation within the newly expanded geographies of empire. By design, these contributions offer ready opportunities for comparative perspectives and new means of organizing the complex histories of the component regions.

The section entitled "Old Worlds and the Atlantic" begins with Amy Turner Bushnell's presentation of European contact from the perspectives of indigenous populations, offering a critique of familiar Atlantic history as that of the old seaborne empires without Asia and East Africa. She points instead to an alternative version of this history, in which the indigenous populations and their internal complexities contribute to our understanding of contact and its consequences. Philip D. Morgan follows with an overview of Africa and the Atlantic from the mid-fifteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, which reminds us that while the Atlantic served as a significant causeway for an African Diaspora, more important and numerous were the multiple internal diasporas within Africa obtaining from intra-African slavery, along with the dispersal that resulted from the slave trade across the Indian

Ocean routes. By placing Africa in a much broader context, Morgan helps us to contextualize and appreciate the continent's historical role and scope in the Atlantic web. In the last essay in this section, Carla Rahn Phillips briefly synthesizes the geopolitical and economic connections that tied Europe and the Americas in commonly sensed threads across distant regions and peoples. In sum, she replaces traditional views regarding European expansion with relationships of Atlantic mutualities.

The contributions found in the book's last section concentrate on alternatives to the generally practiced and envisioned Atlantic perspectives. Chapters by Peter H. Wood, Jack P. Greene, Nicholas Canny and Peter A. Coclanis present the possibilities for diverse perspectives afforded by segmenting the world differently. Wood, for example, suggests a continental perspective and sees the benefits of focusing the historian's lens on the North American continent in the early modern period, noting opportunities to engage with the Pacific migratory and commercial currents leading south to Mexico and north to the Russian trade exchanges. Jack P. Greene encourages pre-United States historians to join in a dialogue with the rest of the Western Hemisphere and become Atlanticists of complementary connections and broader comparisons, particularly in the colonial age. Greene clearly considers these endeavors to be privileges, calling the post-Columbian transformation of the American hemisphere "one of the grandest and darkest subjects in the unfolding history of the human race" (p. 312). Nicholas Canny presents Atlantic history as both different from, and essential to, global history in its own right. He notes the debates over the temporal limits of the concept, but in the end lands on the side of Atlantic history's great capacity to inform understanding of broad spaces and time periods. For his part, Peter A. Coclanis celebrates the evolution of Atlantic history and its attainment as an approach worthy of "official establishment" credentials, but bemoans, perhaps all the more so for the achieved centrality, its limiting lenses. The Atlantic's connections with Europe and Africa indicate the vitality of a non-Western environment that had been well shaped even before the early modern era, and yet, despite such an observable East-West nexus, the global perspective remains largely absent among Atlantic historians. Coclanis would like to see a more inclusive Atlantic concept, capable of integrating the technological and trade advances based on commercial exchanges that had earlier taken place between Asia and Europe.

In sum, this volume will be required reading for Atlantic history seminars and for comparative history courses. In addition, it serves as a model of a thoughtful and inclusive collection of essays.

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