

*The Princeton Companion to Atlantic History.* Joseph C. Miller, ed.  
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There is no shortage of good work on the history of the early modern Atlantic world. This is hardly surprising since the concept has transformed the study of the Americas and made major inroads into our understanding of Europe and Africa. Leading journals routinely present cutting-edge work relating to economic exchanges, the movement of people and nonhuman biota, and transoceanic political and religious ideas. Much of this work is distilled in the pages of what the distinguished Africanist Joseph C. Miller, the editor of this volume, has called “the first encyclopedic reference work” on the topic (vi). But this volume does more than most reference works. In a series of exceptional preliminary chapters, the editor and three of the four associate editors trace the history of each century from the sixteenth through the nineteenth. These pieces reveal an underlying truth about the Atlantic world: it needs to be understood not geographically, as a place, but instead temporally, as a time that stretched from the Columbian discoveries through the end of the slave trade in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

This argument unfolds in the chronological essays by Miller, Karen Ordahl Kupperman, Vincent Brown, and Laurent Dubois, and then, somewhat unexpectedly, in the topical essays, arranged in *a* to *z* format, that fill the next 444 pages. Many of the entries are the kind one would expect in a book that intends to be a comprehensive reference work, including essays on cartography, the Columbian Exchange, maroons, and the Seven Years’ War. There are ten separate essays that treat aspects of regional economic activity or economic strategies, many others that deal with issues relating to commodities and labor, four that deal with healing practices, and seven on legal systems, ranging from canon law to the law of nations and Roman law in the Americas. There are entries on more obscure topics, such as Mami Wata, the Water Mother worshipped in over twenty African countries according to Henry John Drewal. There are also essays on more conceptual topics that seem less specifically Atlantic. The most remarkable is a long essay on capitalism by the historian Mark Peterson, which redefines an economic ideology taken for granted by modern observers. As he argues, “it is plausible to suggest that capital made the Atlantic world, while the Atlantic world in turn made capitalism” (71).

Certain themes emerge when reading across the volume. There is enormous coverage of slavery, as well as abundant material on the Caribbean. There is much on Christianity, including separate essays on African adaptations of it and African American practices. This is all well and good, though if the length of an essay is a marker of a subject's significance one might wonder why an essay on raiders is longer than that for the one on race, a category of analysis that has attracted substantial attention among scholars of this era. The editors have tried to find geographical balance: for example, including an essay "Technologies, African"; but there is no entry for "Technologies, European" or "Technologies, Native American." Instead, there are separate entries on military technologies and nautical science — each of them dominated by material on Europeans, reinforcing the idea that things in Europe are normative and examples elsewhere need clarification. Dale Tomich's essay "Agricultural Production," which includes European and non-European farming achievements and practices, represents a way forward from this older perspective.

In a volume as rich as this it seems churlish to point out problems, which are primarily those of omission. Still, the book ignores the north Atlantic — virtually nothing on Iceland and no mention of Inuit. The maps at the start of the volume cut off around sixty degrees north latitude. This orientation emphasizes the single overriding message here: the Atlantic world was about slavery, and places where slavery did not take off simply do not fit. As Brown notes, "enslaved Africans made up more than three-quarters of all immigrants to the Americas" (36), a total of 12.5 million forced travelers, with 1.5 million dying before reaching their destination. This migration shaped many of the economies and legal regimes across the basin and posed challenges and opportunities to those advocating religious or political agendas, and hence explains why many entries are here and others are absent.

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