

Jeffrey A. Fortin and Mark Meuwese, eds. *Atlantic Biographies: Individuals and Peoples in the Atlantic World*. Leiden: Brill, 2014. 356 pp. ISBN: 9789004258976. \$181.00.

This collection contains thirteen essays on individuals who lived as early as the sixteenth century and as late as the nineteenth, residing and often moving among West Africa, North and South America, and Europe. The book favours no single empire or nation, but includes stories from the French, Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and English worlds, plus the early United States. Even listing the different nations and empires in that manner is perhaps inappropriate because, as Jeffrey Fortin writes in the book's preface, one of his goals was to show the interconnectedness and intermingling of people in "an integrated Atlantic world" (x). More critically, Fortin and fellow editor Mark Meuwese hoped that these stories would prove the very import and reality of the Atlantic world, as well as the value of biography in studying these matters. Via biography they try and mostly succeed in their effort to "put *people* back into Atlantic history", to reveal the "human faces" of large and sometimes impersonal processes, meaning migration, trade, war, and especially central to this collection, slavery (ix and 350).

Of the book's different goals and purposes, showing the reality of the Atlantic world is probably the least valuable, not because there was no such thing, and not because these thirteen essays do not in fact prove once again the movement and connections of so many "Atlantic lives" (to borrow a phrase from Timothy Shannon).¹ Rather, it no longer seems necessary in the 2010s to point it out. After so many years of scholarship and so many debates, forums, and monographs in the field, the endless need to explain and justify Atlantic history can start to seem like academic insecurity. Even an enthusiastic convert sometimes wants to say, with Hamlet's mother, "The lady doth protest too much, methinks".

Individual chapters will have value mostly depending on each reader's interests, which weakens the book as a whole. Questions of identity and identity-formation come up a lot, starting in the excellent second chapter on Thomas Morton, the famous colonist and enemy of Puritan leaders in New England. Author Charlotte Carrington shares a revisionist, non-Puritan version of Morton and, in the process, contextualizes and even casts doubt on some of the different legal charges brought against him. Carrington explores and shows the importance of his identities as lawyer, colonist, trader, author, poet, and purveyor of English culture in America. Of the other essays that deal with identity, one is about a Mexican lawyer of Basque descent, one an African American slave-turned-Christian and freedman, and the third a New England merchant with mixed African and Wampanoag heritage. Together their stories remind us why Atlantic history is such a ripe field for identity studies: With so many cultures and races thrown together and so many possible civil loyalties and affiliations at the local, colonial, and imperial levels, knowing and navigating these overlapping, competing categories must have terrified and confused many people. But if these particular stories are any indication, with a little luck and a lot of bravery and creativity, one could exploit the different options to one's personal advantage.

Note

¹Timothy J. Shannon, *Atlantic Lives: A Comparative Approach to Early America* (New York: Pearson, 2003).

The most common topics in *Atlantic Biographies* are race and slavery, claiming six of the thirteen essays. Had the editors found one or two more, they could have maybe jettisoned all other topics and given the book the focus it now lacks. To highlight a personal favourite as an example, Chapter 6, by Kevin Dawson, is about enslaved ship pilots in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Having grown up on local waterways, they knew them better than any foreign ship pilot, and their masters would hire out the slaves' navigational services to ships arriving in southern ports. Slaves would climb aboard and immediately take control, inverting the hierarchies that were then common on land and winning improvements in their lives—even sometimes freedom—from masters who recognized their value. Some pilots eventually became wealthy slave owners themselves, Dawson shows. The essay will be of interest to anyone who studies African American history and maritime history, pairing nicely with the scholarship of R. Jeffrey Bolster and Marcus Rediker, among others.

But the Dawson essay also highlights a problem with this collection: The editors had a hard time saying no. In Dawson's case, attentive readers will have noticed that his contribution is not a biography by anyone's definition of the word, and the same is true of at least one other essay. Other problems include the absence of any biographies on women, the organization into three sections that do not make sense, and three poorly-written, poorly-organized essays with clear typographical errors. On page 176, for example, we get "18th London" instead of "18th-century London" and on page 193 "sources employ" instead of "sources employed."

To be fair, *Atlantic Biographies* has far more good essays than bad, and the individual stories are, as the editors intended, a refreshing, instructive divergence from the broad generalities and major developments with which historians often concern themselves. The main drawback is that few potential readers will find more than one or two essays relevant to their particular research interests, making an interlibrary loan service, a scanner, and a PDF file more tempting than the excessive cover price. The book would have found a wider audience and had a bigger impact with the same biographical approach, but centred around a single theme like slavery or commerce (or just about anything else). The Atlantic basin being as large as it is and Atlantic history covering as many years as it does, merely having lived and worked in the Atlantic world in any capacity at any point in time is not enough to create the cohesion that any good collection needs.

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David Armitage, Alison Bashford, and Sujit Sivasundaram, eds. *Oceanic Histories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 328 pp. ISBN: 9781108434822. Hardcover: £76.99.

In recent years oceanic histories, buoyed by the institutional efflorescence (and decline?) of Atlantic history, have emerged as a discrete and growing subfield within world history. This subfield emphasizes the oceanic mechanisms of globalization and traces global patterns of maritime connections. As the subfield expands, the need for synthesis and reflection grows. *Oceanic Histories*, edited by David Armitage, Alison Bashford, and Sujit Sivasundaram, begins the work of taking stock of where the scholarship on the world's oceans has been and where the field might be going as it comes into its own. Inaugurating the Cambridge Oceanic