

Book Reviews

Pre-1800

TREVOR BURNARD and JOHN GARRIGUS. *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica*. Early Modern Americas. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Pp. 350. \$45.00 (cloth).
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A tension runs through *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica*, a collaboration between two eminent scholars, Trevor Burnard and John Garrigus. On the one hand, it is a synthetic general exploration of the history of the two sugar colonies of Saint-Domingue and Jamaica “at their absolute peak” of power and wealth, “between 1740 and 1788” (1). But on the other hand, Burnard and Garrigus claim in the introduction that the volume is driven by two central arguments. One central advertised thesis is “that the Caribbean sugar plantation of the eighteenth century was an industrial, or at least proto-industrial, operation” (3). The other is that while there were certainly differences between the two islands, “more unites Jamaica and Saint-Domingue than separates them. This is less a comparative history, therefore, than a twin portrait of societies moving along parallel pathways” (8). The book struck this reviewer as largely, if unevenly, vindicating these propositions. But more striking is the fact that large portions of it seem to lose track of these arguments, going off in pursuit of a more diffuse synthetic narrative of events in the mid-eighteenth century.

Burnard and Garrigus do draw on an impressive range of sources and subdisciplines to offer a multidimensional portrait of these two colonies. In addition to their own primary-source research, they make excellent use of a wealth of largely, but not entirely, recent secondary sources. This literature comes from the relevant political, military, economic, cultural, social, and even art history. This all adds to the value of the book as an overall exploration, but it renders large stretches diffuse rather than coherently thesis-driven. Notably, close attention to developments during the Seven Years’ War, stretching across chapters 4–6, is valuable in itself but of uncertain relevance to either overall argument of the book. In fact, only on both sides of the gap between chapters 3 and 9, comprising about half the book, is the

argument manifestly driving the content. In no way are chapters 4–8 devoid of value, but they do seem to render the promise of a thesis-driven book misleading.

The argument for Jamaica's and Saint-Domingue's modernity, of a piece with a growing trend in slavery scholarship, is a strong one here. Burnard and Garrigus demonstrate in multiple ways that "these two eighteenth-century colonies ... were at the forefront of social, economic, and political development in the eighteenth-century Atlantic World" (19). In this account, slaves suffered brutality not usually for brutality's sake, but because their masters were constantly searching out ways of extracting more productivity from their labor. This rendered the plantation machine "a place of dramatic vitality" as well as of real "horror" (49). Burnard and Garrigus show that both Jamaica and Saint-Domingue were more urbanized in terms of population than others of their nations' colonies, and explore the modern implications of that fact in an intriguing chapter. In addition, they use care in advancing a persuasive case that while "Jamaican and Saint-Domingue colonists" in no way "invented racism," in the aftermath of the Seven Years' War they did take "an important step" towards rigid modern racial categorizations (18).

The emphasis on similarity rather than differences between the two colonies seems less supported by the evidence that Burnard and Garrigus provide in the book. The differences demonstrated throughout include those between the islands' commercial connections to their home countries, military experiences and home governments' military strategies during the Seven Years' War, responses to slave resistance during that war, free colored populations' relative wealth and status, political power within and loyalty to their home governments, and degree of reliance on technology to improve productivity. Burnard and Garrigus consistently resolve these surface differences into the macro similarity of the two islands being on the same developmental trajectory in the eighteenth century. Nodding to that pile of contrasts—"to be sure," they sum, "there were differences underlying these similarities" (261)—is a fair mode of argumentation on their part. But it does leave the book open to quibbles about whether they or the similarities represent the central story.

None of these quibbles or tensions ultimately undermine the considerable positive qualities of this book. All told, it is a wide-ranging portrait of two plantation societies at their height. Both the breadth of its narrative and the multiple micro-insights offered along the way are a testament to the skills of these two accomplished scholars.

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MAEVE BRIGID CALLAN. *The Templars, the Witch, and the Wild Irish: Vengeance and Heresy in Medieval Ireland*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015. Pp. 280. \$45.00 (cloth).
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Richard Ledrede, bishop of the diocese of Ossory in the English colony of Ireland, is the overarching antihero of *The Templars, the Witch, and the Wild Irish: Vengeance and Heresy in Medieval Ireland*, Maeve Callan's exploration of heresy in Ireland during the first half of the fourteenth century. Ledrede's obsessive pursuit of his enemies with charges of excommunication and heresy, as well as with actual violence, dominates the records of his long episcopate. While using violence or even excommunication was not unusual among medieval ecclesiastics in Ireland, Ledrede's choice of heresy as a weapon is more unusual. Heresy and witchcraft trials were uncommon in medieval Ireland, and indeed the only ones that occurred were in the first half of the fourteenth century. The obvious question is why—given that Ireland, while geographically isolated, was well connected through trade, politics, and ecclesiastical networks with the rest of Christian Europe. Callan sets out to answer this overarching question.