Joseph Miller, ed.

The Princeton Companion to Atlantic History. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015. Pp. xxxv + 532. Hb, \$65.

The Princeton Companion to Atlantic History is the “first comprehensive reference guide” for the history of the Atlantic World (vi). While there have been some general textbooks, this is the first encyclopedic work aimed at undergraduates, graduate students, and scholars interested or already practicing in the field. Yet, its general editor, Joseph C. Miller, who is T. Cary Johnson, Jr. Professor Emeritus at the University of Virginia, wants the *Companion* to be much more than a mere reference work, and hopes the book “will help carry Atlantic History beyond its formative stages towards intellectual maturity” (viii). With this lofty goal in mind, this massive—in terms of length, comprehensiveness, and ambition—tome ultimately serves three purposes. First, the book is a go-to reference for students and scholars. Second, it integrates the myriad and disparate strains of Atlantic History into a comprehensive whole. Finally, it attempts to move the scholarly conversation forward by employing its organizational strategy to challenge long-standing paradigms in the field.

The book is organized into two parts. Part One is a series of five essays, including a prologue—examining Europe, Africa, and the Americas before 1492—and four chronological essays, each covering a century between 1500 and 1900. Miller authored both the prologue and the essay on the sixteenth century, setting the tone for what follows. He emphasizes the commonalities between all three regions, including tensions between military and commercial elites, and the centrality of slavery to the entire Atlantic enterprise. The essays on the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, written by Karen Kupperman, Vincent Brown, and Laurent Dubois respectively, likewise discuss the rise, maturation, transformation, and globalization of the major processes outlined in the first two chapters. These include governmental centralization, commercialization, militarization, and slavery. Especially interesting are Dubois's observations on how historical processes, having originated in the Atlantic World, became increasingly global in the nineteenth century, and Vincent Brown's ability to weave all the major events of the eighteenth century—slavery, imperial war, revolution, and the rise of capitalism—into one coherent, interdependent ten-page narrative.

Most impressive, however, is that all the essays eschew the geographic determinism often implicit in Atlantic historiography. One of the most common critiques of Atlantic History is that it is updated imperial history. This criticism especially resonates with works that use national boundaries to

delineate their version of the Atlantic World, such as books and articles about the “British Atlantic.” Atlantic History is inherently transnational and aims to break down those very borders constructed by such nationalist impulses. By integrating Africa, Europe, and the Americas into a systematic whole, all of the essays challenge these trends and help us understand the Atlantic in a more complete—and seemingly more genuine—way.

Part Two contains more than 125 entries covering various topics in Atlantic History, organized alphabetically. The contributors are a veritable who’s who of the field, and include scholars from across the globe and many different disciplines. Entries range from the stunningly brilliant, like Mark Peterson’s “Capitalism,” to the utterly fascinating such as Eva Botella-Ordinas’s “Livestock.” They also cover a range of themes including economics, slavery, law, indigenous peoples, and religion. Other entries examine methodological questions and theories in Atlantic History, such as race, class, gender, world systems theory, and modernity—although labor as a category of analysis is conspicuously absent. All of the entries provide a refreshingly broad perspective, examining themes across imperial and national boundaries. Overall, however, they tend to focus on economics, which is understandable given that the Atlantic was first and foremost an economic system. Readers of this journal will be particularly interested in the entries “Christianity,” “Christianity, Adaptations in Africa of,” “Christianity, African American,” “Christianity, Native American Appropriation of,” “Law, Canon,” “Missionary Orders and Communities,” and “Prophetic Movements.” All of these essays explore the Catholic dimensions of the Atlantic World, while the article on missionaries has an extensive section on the Jesuits.

While this work brings together an impressive array of scholars and wide-ranging entries, there are a couple of concerns. First, the organizational strategy can sometimes be a bit opaque. If interested in slavery, for example, the reader will encounter articles about slaving, slave revolts, maroons, free blacks, and Native American captivity, but only one about slavery entitled “Slavery, US.” Why does the United States receive an entire entry on slavery, but places like Brazil and Jamaica—both of which received more slaves from Africa than what became the United States—do not? Certainly you can find information on Brazilian and Caribbean slavery in other entries, such as those on economic strategies. What is confusing, however, is why the only entry entitled “Slavery” is about the US when, as the editor admits, it is central to understanding the Atlantic World. Second, the work lacks a central, cohesive bibliography. In Part One, only Vincent Brown’s essay includes a bibliography; the others do not provide any citations. Each entry in Part Two also has its own bibliography, but there is considerable overlap. Sidney Mintz’s classic *Sweetness*

and Power (New York: Penguin, 1985), for example, appears in multiple bibliographies taking up space that could have been used for more specialized works. If the purpose of this book is to be the starting point for exploring Atlantic History, then the lack of a comprehensive bibliography makes that more difficult. Having a better organizational strategy and more systematized bibliography would have made this book friendlier to non-specialists and students looking to research or teach the Atlantic World.

Overall, the *Companion's* attempts to integrate and redefine Atlantic History are largely successful, but it falls a bit flat as a general reference work. While non-specialists may find this work hard to navigate, it should occupy a space on the shelf of every historian who studies Atlantic History. By boldly challenging many paradigms in the field and attempting to aggregate often disparate themes in the Atlantic World, the *Companion* provides important, methodologically relevant essays and entries that, in the hands of a specialist, are useful for the classroom and provide valuable context for researchers.

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