D'Maris Coffman, Adrian Leonard & William O'Reilly (eds.)*The Atlantic World*. New York: Routledge, 2015. xxii + 704 pp. (Cloth US\$ 205.00)

This collection joins the growing number of studies on the Atlantic world, and it certainly must be read by everyone attempting to keep up in the field. It is so large and all encompassing that only those strongly committed to the field will read the entire volume; others will profit by reading selectively, according to their interests. Many of its thirty-five essays are innovative and present new research and/or thought advancing our knowledge of this part of the world. The brief introduction by D'Maris Coffman and Adrian Leonard explains their "ecumenical" approach, illustrating the methodological diversity of recent "post-Atlantic" work. They go beyond studies of interactions among Africans, Europeans, and Native Americans to include the Pacific, Baltic, Mediterranean, and southern Africa. They also include recently marginalized subjects in order to counter what they see as the increasing incoherence of Atlantic studies.

The book follows a novel paradigm, with both advantages and disadvantages. Rather than adopting a comprehensive, chronological approach, it offers a number of strong individual contributions in new areas by committed Atlanticists who understand what the field is (and isn't). Essays by John Smolenski, Catherine Styer, Laurent Dubois, Helen Paul, Dror Goldberg, and William Max Nelson are exceptional in this regard. Notable absences are innovative essays on gender or revolution.

The authors put heavy emphasis on the history of commerce and finance, much of it coming from scholars in several fields centered at Cambridge, in part as a scholarly response to the 2008 global financial crisis and a turn away from cultural history. Nine of them (Coffman, Matthew David Mitchell, Paul, Goldberg, Paul Kosmetatos, A.B. Leonard, Edmond Smith, Jonathan Eacott, and Joanna Cohen) argue that this kind of history has been neglected, even though commerce and finance were central to Atlantic world developments. In addition to this major statement on the historiography of the field, there is an undercurrent among these essays suggesting that modern financial apparatuses developing since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were sound and capable of withstanding crises then, and still are. Their view stands in marked contrast to recent work on financial-cultural history by scholars with a more global perspective such as David Graeber, Thomas Piketty, and Nigel Dodd, who see the 2008 crisis as a reflection of long-term historical problems that do not bode well for the future.¹

1 David Graeber, *Debt: The First Five Thousand Years* (2011); Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the 21st Century* (2014); Nigel Dodd, *The Social Life of Money* (2014).

The volume addresses two major issues or problems in current Atlantic history, the first of which is the relationship of Atlantic to global history. It contributes to a movement among some Anglophone historians who criticize Atlantic history as too “limiting.” According to this view, colonial British America and all other parts of the Atlantic region were affected by global influences, and the Atlantic world should either not be studied at all or studied in conjunction with global history. Edmond Smith adeptly highlights this issue in an essay comparing English and Dutch imperial economic perspectives. James A.O.C. Brown’s innovative essay on Morocco and Atlantic history sheds light on the problem, and also shows how it really is not a problem. Although neglected by historians, until 1600 Morocco was central to Atlantic developments involving the expansion of European power, including Portuguese exploration, the Reconquest, the sugar trade, and the slave trade. But it also lay at the intersection of the Saharan, Mediterranean, and Maghribi worlds. Morocco was thus part of a coherent Atlantic world, but that world was not self-contained or unitary at all levels, and it was connected to other worlds. In other words, the Atlantic world must be studied because it sheds light on just about every development within that realm, but many entities within it were connected to other regional and global developments that should also be studied.

The second major issue that this volume addresses is the broader usefulness of Atlantic history. To date Paul Cohen has best illustrated this point for North American indigenous peoples, arguing that their history has much to offer historians of the Atlantic world, but that those historians can do little for Native American history.² In this volume, Laura E. Matthew comes to a similar conclusion regarding indigenous Latin American perspectives. The issue is also relevant for others, including scholars studying Africa, Europe, and gender. What does Atlantic world history matter to anyone besides imperial or colonial historians? The answer here, implied, but not explicitly stated, is that it matters a great deal because Native Americans, Africans, and Europeans of all sorts were increasingly connected to and influenced by Atlantic developments, whether they liked it or not. Thus if you want to better understand what happened to a smaller group or place anywhere in the Atlantic world, you would do well to study it in its larger context.

Taken as a whole, the volume points toward the increasing possibilities of an Atlantic “plus” (not a “post-Atlantic”) approach. Much is to be gained if we study peripheral areas and other regions as context to heighten understanding

2 Paul Cohen, Was There an Amerindian Atlantic? Reflections on the Limits of a Historiographical Concept, *History of European Ideas* 34(4) 2008.

of the Atlantic world. However, if we continue to downgrade Atlantic history and push toward global history without a clear rationale or competence (and there are hints of that in this volume) everyone loses, with Atlantic history becoming less relevant, replaced by an inferior “global history.” Good global history is not an offshoot of Atlantic history, and it is not dependent on the efforts of early American and British imperial historians to develop it. The purpose of Atlantic and global history is not to explain Eurocentric phases of historical development, which implies that the rest of the world has been waiting for Europeans to show them how to become a global community. The most fruitful approach comes from the study of big issues over long periods of time by global historians with wide training who are attuned to explaining truly global trends, rather than studies of how early American or Atlantic history had global components. Fortunately, that is a growing field in current historical studies.

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