L.H. Roper (ed.), *The Torrid Zone: Caribbean Colonization and Cultural Interaction in the Long Seventeenth Century*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018. vi + 272 pp. (Cloth US\$ 49.99)

As a collection of essays, *The Torrid Zone* is a stellar example of what Atlantic History has the potential to be. The 12 essays weave together a story of multiple overlapping empires and a vast array of people all contesting, negotiating, and struggling to survive in the early Caribbean. The editor, L.H. Roper, intends it to be a history of “the ‘long’ seventeenth-century Caribbean in an organic, transnational, holistic way” (p. 3); the Caribbean, in this book, encompasses not just the islands but surrounding stretches of mainland that were connected to the Caribbean world in North and South America, “from Carolina to Cayenne” (p. 3). In these sophisticated and original essays, we see the impact of distant European politics on the Caribbean; we see people moving across the boundaries of empire and shifting their identities and allegiances. We see the violence, coercion, and destruction of the early Caribbean, but also the extent to which it was a place of possibility and creative cultural hybridization.

The book’s most impressive aspect is its attention to the agency of indigenous peoples and to their role in shaping the early Caribbean, a woefully understudied subject. The first section stands out with three impressive essays devoted to exploring “Indigenous and Other Caribbeans.” Tessa Murphy argues that “characterizations of near-total indigenous extinctions” (p. 18) in the seventeenth-century Caribbean are clearly unfounded, and offers rich evidence to show that “the Kalinago actively shaped and delimited the colonization of the Lesser Antilles” (p. 19). Carolyn Arena challenges conventional thinking by arguing that enslaved indigenous people were “integral to the plantations” (p. 43). And Sarah Barber turns to hybrid European and indigenous identities that developed in the Lesser Antilles by offering a close reading of the sources relating to “Indian Warner,” a man who was said by some contemporaries to be a mixed-race son of Sir Thomas Warner, the leader of the first English settlement in St. Kitts. Barber concludes simply that “‘Indian Warner’ could not have been any blood relation” (p. 57), but in the process she reveals the complicated nature of identity in the early Caribbean.

Overall, this collection is particularly attentive to things that have been long understudied in Caribbean historiography. There are rich essays on English and Dutch settlement efforts in the Guianas, the development of the Danish Caribbean, the nature and significance of Spanish settlement in pre-English Jamaica, the early history of St. Domingue before sugar came to dominate, and the prominent role that Jews played in the English Caribbean. There are certainly some things missing; the book could have benefited from an essay that

more directly addressed the rise of sugar in the region or an essay devoted to Barbados, the most significant English island in the seventeenth-century Caribbean. An essay on environmental history is also strangely absent given that one of the most obviously unifying features of European settlement in the early Caribbean was the wholesale destruction of Caribbean ecosystems. Roper does, however, admit that “the limits of space prevent a wholly comprehensive treatment of the seventeenth-century Caribbean” (p. 13), and so the essays seem to have intentionally and profitably avoided retreading along well-known paths.

Roper’s introductory essay suggests that one of the central questions in the volume is about pan-Caribbean identity or experience. The book, for him, is “a platform for considering questions” such as “What made the Caribbean the Caribbean?” and what made the settlement of this region “distinctive” (p. 3). This question of pan-Caribbean identity and experience is particularly important for writing comprehensive surveys of the region. Yet, no definitive answers arise out of these essays. For all its strengths, *The Torrid Zone* may be offering us proof that an all-encompassing history of such a complex region with multiple peoples, cultures, and languages cannot be fully explored between two covers. The field is so rich and complex and it has splintered into subfields to such an extent that writing the history of the seventeenth-century Caribbean must remain a community endeavor. Paradoxically, with so many authors and so many different windows through which to view the Caribbean in this one slim volume, readers are left largely to themselves to trace the overarching and unifying themes and to answer that central question about pan-Caribbean identity and experience.

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