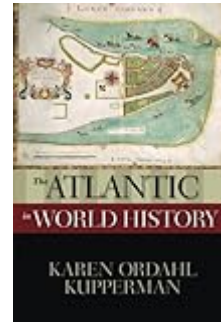




**Karen Ordahl Kupperman.** *The Atlantic in World History.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 155 S. ISBN 978-0-19-516074-1; ISBN 978-0-19-533809-6.



**Reviewed by** Thomas Adam

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## **K. Ordahl Kupperman: The Atlantic in World History**

Karen Ordahl Kupperman's book on the place of the Atlantic in world history provides a very traditional and fact-oriented narrative of the traditional and embattled concept of Atlantic history from the time of Columbus to the end of the Seven Years War. In five brief chapters, Kupperman explores first contacts between European, African, and American people, migrations across the Atlantic, the trade with commodities, the impact of diseases, and warfare. The chapter on first contacts adds much new information to the traditional Columbus-centered story by incorporating new archaeological findings in Newfoundland and Maine as well as a rather detailed literary analysis of Nordic sagas. In her chapter on migration, Kupperman skillfully discusses the practice of indentured servitude which played an essential yet often forgotten role in transatlantic migration from Europe to North America. Servitude was a normal phase of life (p. 59) for many Europeans in the early modern period. It seemed, therefore, quite acceptable for those who wanted to leave Europe behind to employ this practice to pay for their transatlantic voyage. Indentured servitude largely provided the funding for populating North America with European people during the seventeenth and eighteenth

century.

The most fascinating section of Kupperman's book can be found in her chapter on commodities in which she discusses the significant changes in Europe caused by the import of products such as fish, fur, silver, dyes, and chocolate. "American fish," as Kupperman argues, "tied western Europe together" (p. 73). Caught by Protestant Northern Europeans in North American waters, it was sold to Catholic Southern Europeans who preferred fish over meat for religious motives. Southern Europeans paid for the American fish with typical Southern products such as olive oil. This exchange of products seems to have integrated distant regions and people into a vibrant transatlantic economy. While travel across the Atlantic was certainly dangerous and time-consuming, this ocean began, to paraphrase Daniel T. Rodgers *Daniel T. Rodgers, Atlantic Crossings. Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, Cambridge 1998, p. 1, to serve as a connective lifeline rather than a geographic barrier already from the sixteenth century onwards. Unfortunately, Kupperman limited her discussion of the integrative forces within the transatlantic world to com-

modities and (all too briefly) to diseases. The mixing of people through European migration to North and South America as well as the creation of local, regional, and much later national cultures in the Americas through the integration of native and European traditions is not given any space in this volume. And while the Spanish and Portuguese in South America receive as much attention as the French and English in North America more recent literature on German-speaking people â to name just one of the many language groups that were involved in the peopling of the Americas â who moved across the Atlantic has been completely ignored. Each group of settlers came, as Kathleen Conzen reminded us a long time ago Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Phantom Landscapes of Colonization. Germans in the Making of a Pluralist America*, in: Frank Trommler / Elliott Shore (eds.), *The German-American Encounter. Conflict and Cooperation between Two Cultures, 1800-2000*, New York 2001, pp. 7-21, p. 11. , to the Americas with distinct colonizing visions. While English-speaking settlers focused on conflict with native populations, German-speaking settlers â to take just one example â sought out ways to gain ownership of land by negotiations and by building friendly relations with native populations based upon respect and mutual trust. Philip Otterness, *Becoming German. The 1709 Palatine Migration to New York*, Ithaca 2004, pp. 113-154; Colin G. Calloway, *Historical Encounters across Five Centuries*, in: Colin G. Calloway / Gerd Gemünden / Susanne Zantop (eds.), *Germans and Indians. Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*, London 2002, pp. 47-63.

The book under review provides an excellent example of all the shortcomings of the traditional approach of Atlantic history. It limits itself to the early modern period and, thus, is nothing more than imperial history in disguise. Philip D. Morgan / Jack P. Green, Introduction. *The Present State of Atlantic History*, in: Jack P. Green / Philip D. Morgan (eds.), *Atlantic History. A Critical Appraisal*, Oxford 2009, pp. 5-7. While Kupperman recognizes that nineteenth and twentieth century national histories over-determined our picture of the earlier Atlantic world, she does nothing to remedy these misconceptions. In fact, she even uses national identifiers for labeling people of the pre-national era. Her decision to end her account with the Seven Years War reflects older notions still propounded by some but not all Atlantic historians that Atlantic history came to an end in the second half of the eighteenth century with the Seven Years War and the American Revolution. Nation states, so the outdated argument goes, prevented the continuance of transatlantic connections and exchanges outside the purview of

nation states. But Kupperman even presents the traditional argument of Atlantic history that people on both sides of the Atlantic grew increasingly apart and did no longer care for the events on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean without even mentioning that this interpretation has attracted much criticism. The author seems to be set to solidify an increasingly outdated scholarly interpretation that has been under siege for the last twenty years. Even Atlantic historians such as Donna Gabaccia have argued in favor of expanding the time frame of Atlantic history into the nineteenth century. The Harvard Seminar on Atlantic history has long moved its time frame up to 1825. And many researchers have chosen to âconsider Atlantic âworldsâ that persist until 1815, 1830, or even 1888.â Donna Gabaccia, *A Long Atlantic In A Wider World*, in: *Atlantic Studies* 1 (2004) 1, pp. 1-27, here p. 7. But even such âlate endingsâ are too early endings for the story of the Atlantic world. The increasing popularity of nationalism and the creation of nation states following the American and French revolutions have not limited the connections between people and cultures within the Atlantic world. In fact, improvements in transportation (steam ships) brought both sides of the Atlantic closer together and provided for an intensified exchange of people, products, and ideas. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings* (note 1); Thomas Adam, *Buying Respectability. Philanthropy and Urban Society in Transnational Perspective, 1840s to 1930s*, Bloomington 2009. We also need to remember that nation states had little power over people and ideas moving across national borders before 1900. Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation. United States History in Global Perspective since 1789*, Houndmills pp. 127-129.

And while Kupperman makes a serious and laudable effort at integrating Africa into the Atlantic world that goes beyond the aspects of the slave trade, South and Central America seem to fall off the cliff with each page past. In the last section of the book, one has the impression, that only the United States takes center stage while other American societies and cultures are not even mentioned. And even events such as the American Revolution are presented in isolation since Kupperman suggests that the intellectual roots of the revolution rests exclusively with the experience as settlers in the New World, thus, completely ignoring the influence of the Enlightenment which after all was a European (East and West) and North American intellectual movement. The concept of American Exceptionalism seems to lurk behind the pages of this section.

The book under review suffers from a complete and

utter lack of historiographical discussion. Within the text, there are only references to secondary sources for the purpose of establishing facts and to primary sources for enlivening the text. The "Further Reading" section at the end of the book provides an all too short list of secondary literature. Kupperman failed to present any contrasting interpretations and scholarly debates. Recent discussions about the traditional definition of Atlantic history as well as books written in the tradition of transatlantic history are completely ignored. And even in the more traditional field of migration essential new studies such as Philip Otterness *Becoming German* and Dirk Hoerder's *Cultures in Contact* are missing. Otterness, *Becoming German* (note 3); Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact. World Migrations in the Second Millennium*, Durham 2002. As such the book is of little use to readers who want to familiarize themselves with the newest trends in transatlantic and world history.

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