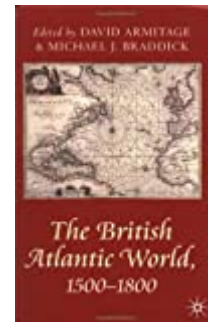




David Armitage, Michael J. Braddick, eds. *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. xx + 324 pp. \$37.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-333-96341-8; \$110.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-333-96340-1.



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Assaying British Atlantic History

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The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800, edited by David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, is a very good book. Broadly conceived and ambitious, this anthology selects key themes and topics from British Atlantic history and traces their development across at least three centuries. It demonstrates the power of an Atlantic perspective and will prove to be an important book for anyone working in Atlantic history, British history, or American colonial history.

The volume has eleven essays, divided into four parts. The first part, "Frameworks," has only a single essay, "Three Concepts of Atlantic History," by Armitage. Armitage boldly observes, "We are all Atlanticists now" (p. 11). Then, he defines three approaches to Atlantic history, which he calls Cis-Atlantic, Trans-Atlantic, and Circum-Atlantic. Circum-Atlantic history is "the history of the people who crossed the Atlantic, who lived on its shores and who participated in the communities it made possible" (p. 16). Trans-Atlantic history is "the history of the Atlantic world told through comparisons" (p. 18). Cis-Atlantic history "studies particular places as unique

locations within an Atlantic world and seeks to define that uniqueness as the result of the interaction between local particularity and a wider web of connections (and comparisons)" (p. 21).

The second part, "Connections," has three essays focusing on networks that created Atlantic communities. "Migration," by Alison Games, skillfully identifies who migrated and why; the author argues that migration not only defined colonial societies but also shaped the evolution of the British Atlantic. "Economy," by Nuala Zahedieh, reviews the navigation laws, several important Atlantic trades, and the changing economic relationships between Britain and its colonies, showing that economy and empire were interwoven. "Religion," by Carla Gardina Pestana, looks at the distribution of religions in British America. She contends that religion provoked radicalism and that religious diversity subdivided the British Atlantic while making religious liberty necessary.

The third part of the volume, "Identities," has four essays that address how people defined themselves and others. Braddick's essay, "Civility and Authority," which

deals with state development, may seem to fit uncomfortably in this section. The essay, however, works wonderfully because it argues that the creation of an elite identity enabled the emergence of a British Atlantic political community. Sarah M. S. Pearsall's essay, "Gender," focuses on questions concerning what power, responsibilities, and rights women possessed, concluding that the ramifications of gender were too complex to support any convenient narrative based on golden ages or separate spheres. Keith Wrightson's essay, "Class," samples social structures and perceptions of social structures in various locales, demonstrating the variant forms of social inequality and the "importance of historical time as a dimension of social structure" (p. 152). Joyce E. Chaplin's essay, "Race," is probably the most ambitious offering in the volume. Three hundred years of developments within the Atlantic world were not sufficient to contain this essay, which boldly ventures into the Greco-Roman and South Asian worlds and argues that "racism in its present form is a specific product of Atlantic history" (p. 154).

The fourth part of the anthology, "Politics," has three essays. "Empire and State," by Elizabeth Mancke, shows how international relations forged empire, how empire encouraged state building, and how state building led to dysfunction within the empire. "Revolution and Counter-Revolution," by Eliga H. Gould, reviews the Atlantic aspects of the three British revolutions, detailing how revolutionary impulses ricocheted around the Atlantic world. One of Gould's many contentions is that "the American Revolution was a product of the growing unity of the British Empire" (p. 210). Finally, "Politics of Slavery," by Christopher L. Brown, emphasizes that slavery had a politics of its own and outlines a political history of slavery in the British Atlantic based on the challenges that British planters faced in their attempt to "establish, profit from, and preserve colonial slavery" (p. 221).

These eleven essays are bracketed by a preface written by Bernard Bailyn and an afterword written by J. H. Elliott. Elliott reviews the volume, gently pointing out missed opportunities and needed developments, while

gazing occasionally at other Atlantic worlds. Elliott also notes that the essays in the book raise a number of broader themes including the "creation, destruction and re-creation of communities" (p. 239), change and continuity, and convergence and divergence. Bailyn reflects on the history of Atlantic history and contends that the migration of scholars is promoting interest in Atlantic history. Bailyn also suggests, however, that historians migrate less often than scientists (and certainly business people as well) and that historians tend to migrate to major research institutions (pp. xviii-xix). Bailyn's comments provoke two fears: first, instead of carrying a torch for an Atlantic perspective, history will lag behind other fields; and second, the idea of Atlantic history will remain shut out of many second-tier and third-tier institutions. Therefore, most students will learn little in their history classrooms about the importance of an Atlantic perspective. This book, however, can help to rectify that failing. Indeed, while this book is probably too general for courses dedicated to Atlantic history, it would work wonderfully in the course on modern British history that remains an academic staple.

Overall, this volume is well executed. The editors and each of the contributors performed their duties very well. Though the authors tread familiar ground, each essay contains obscure but important nuggets and references to overlooked secondary literature. The essays draw upon few primary sources; however, each author uses a remarkable array of secondary sources (nicely reviewed in the bibliographic essays at the back of the volume), and each essay provides a context for bold and fresh perspectives. The scope of the volume results in a loss of detail at times, yet this inevitable shortcoming is easily offset by the authors' commanding and often pithy understandings of the broad sweep of developments. Each reader will find some essays more interesting or more useful than others, and though some readers may complain about the selection of topics, the editors were wise not to swell the volume beyond its present, very manageable size or to cull any of the essays included. Therefore, it is hard to see ways to improve this impressive anthology.

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