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Review of Ida Altman and David Wheat, eds., *The Spanish Caribbean and the Atlantic World in the Long Sixteenth Century*

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Spanish Caribbean & the Atlantic world in the long sixteenth century, edited by Ida Altman and David Wheat, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2019, 330 pp., US\$40.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-8032-9957-3

The Caribbean may play an important role in Atlantic world history, but Ida Altman and David Wheat argue that its early Spanish history has been neglected. They contend that the Spanish Caribbean was more than simply a stepping stone for colonial ventures on the mainland, a transitional site giving way to the maturation of imperial institutions across Spanish America. Shifting our focus away from English, French and Dutch incursions and activities in the region, *The Spanish Caribbean & the Atlantic World in the Long Sixteenth Century* treats the Spanish Caribbean as “foundational and central rather than preliminary or marginal” (pp. xx–xxi). While many of the 12 essays deal with Cuba, Hispaniola and Puerto Rico, the volume’s contributors wisely take a circum-Caribbean approach. *The Spanish Caribbean* covers a wide range of themes, but I want to concentrate on three that nicely deconstruct commonplace assumptions about the region’s early colonial history.

Accounts of the Caribbean after contact have long been dominated by images of disease, demographic decline and desolation. Without minimizing the disastrous consequences of the Columbian Exchange, *The Spanish Caribbean* rewrites simplistic narratives of Indigenous defeat and disappearance. Cacey Farnsworth analyzes the 1510 rebellion of the cacique Agüeybaná in Puerto Rico to show how Indigenous peoples reacted to and resisted Spanish invasions. Drawing upon the work of “new conquest history”, he demonstrates that many of the patterns associated with conquest in both New Spain and Peru – Spanish misunderstandings of local politics, conflicts between caciques and the centrality of Indigenous allies – were also characteristic of conquests in the Caribbean. Beyond their roles as conquistadors, Indigenous peoples were also healthcare workers in the larger Spanish response to the spread of epidemic disease. Instead of only tallying up the numbers of the deceased, Pablo F. Gómez counts the number of hospitals in the Caribbean and describes “innovative strategies” (p. 212) like containment measures. He emphasizes that medical practitioners were from various ethnic backgrounds, exposing familiar yet false ideas that Indigenous peoples were wiped out in the Caribbean.

Eighteenth-century sugar mills powered by anonymous African slaves is another image of the Caribbean that influences how the region is understood in the present. *The Spanish Caribbean* offers a more complex vision of bondage by emphasizing the varieties of slaveries in the region together with the transatlantic connections to West Africa. Erin Stone focuses on the circum-Caribbean Indian slave trade, an institution that officially lasted between the late 1490s and 1542. Although legally abolished with the New Laws, Stone argues that a pan-American view complicates the common idea that Indigenous slavery was unsuccessful and quickly replaced, given that it lasted for centuries on the frontiers of Spanish America. Marc Eagle looks at the African side of early Caribbean slavery, pointing out that studies of the transatlantic slave trade often only begin in 1580, when the Portuguese obtained a monopoly contract. Moving through the previous five decades, he highlights how non-Portuguese actors engaged in slaving and how slave routes shifted between different ports. One such port was Havana, which David Wheat uses as a case study to understand the social interactions of the Biafada. Drawing upon data from parish records, he shows that the Biafada were primarily

endogamous and maintained many of their former social ties from West Africa's Upper Guinea Coast. Wheat's archival findings are a caution not to see all sub-Saharan slaves as the same because of their shared experiences of oppression.

A third standard image of the early Caribbean is that it was the theater of male Spanish colonists. Broadening our knowledge of island and coastal communities, *The Spanish Caribbean* presents a picture of multiethnic ports shaped by both sexes. Spencer Tyce argues that the idea of a Spanish conquest does not match the reality of colonialism on the ground. Concentrating on German merchant companies, his study of the Welser family in Venezuela highlights the fact that explorers, soldiers, priests and other businessmen hailed from an array of different European nationalities. Brian Hamm looks at the Portuguese, who were perceived as both a threat and as valued members of various circum-Caribbean communities. He suggests, that because of geopolitical concerns, the Portuguese were attacked as Protestants rather than as Jews, as they would be by the Inquisition in the seventeenth century. While men from various European nations appear in the colonial record, women are harder to find. Sifting through wills and correspondence, Shanon Lalor follows how two aristocratic ladies used legal channels to protect their dowries and enhance the patronage networks of their families. Her study is a reminder that Spanish women shaped colonial societies in the Caribbean despite their low numbers.

The Spanish Caribbean is useful on two different levels. It offers highly readable essays for undergraduate students and the imaginary tools for scholars to dig deeper into the archives and existing sources – however limited they might be – to tell new stories. Much more can be said about the Spanish Caribbean in the sixteenth century, and this volume is an inspiration for future research.

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Freedom of speech: talk and slavery in the Anglo-Caribbean world, by Miles Ogborn, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2019, 336 pp., US\$35.00 (paperback), ISBN 9780226657684

Miles Ogborn's *Freedom of Speech: Talk and Slavery in the Anglo-Caribbean World* highlights how speech helped define the history of Jamaica and Barbados from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries. While revolutions and other dramatic events shaped this period, people's lives were more commonly affected by "conspiratorial conversations and judicial inquiries; orders, threats, and promises, heeded or ignored; whisperings among confidants [...] or direct confrontations; and evidence given in court, or withheld in silence" (p. 3). Ogborn argues two main points. First, efforts to police speech along the lines of race, gender and class were central to creating and maintaining patriarchy, slavery and white supremacy in the Anglo-Caribbean. Sustaining social inequity was partially predicated on controlling who could speak, where they spoke, what they said and how their speech was interpreted. Forced silences, exclusions from platforms and imposing meaning on the speech of others were essential tools of oppression. Second, Ogborn shows how these efforts were