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The changing fortunes of Atlantic history

Article

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The changing fortunes of Atlantic history

Richard J. Blakemore

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The Atlantic Experience: Peoples, Places, Ideas, Catherine Armstrong and Laura M. Chmielewski (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013; pp. xii + 246. £22.99).

Atlantic Biographies: Individuals and Peoples in the Atlantic World, edited by Jeffrey A. Fortin & Mark Meuwese (Leiden: Brill, 2014; pp. xvi + 356. €134).

Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail, Marcus Rediker (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014; pp. xii + 241. $19).

The Atlantic World, edited by D'Maris Coffman, Adrian Leonard, and William O'Reilly (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015; pp. xxii + 704. £157).

The Global Atlantic 1400 to 1900, Christoph Strobel (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015; pp. x + 186. £25.99).

The Atlantic Connection: A History of the Atlantic World, 1450-1900, Anna Suranyi (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015; pp. xii + 229. £24.99).

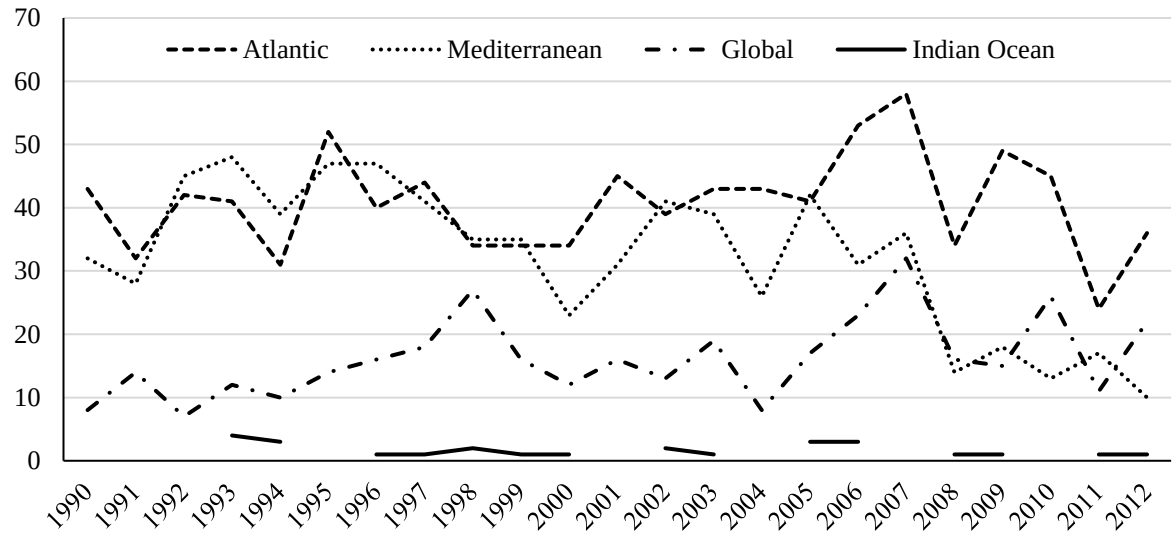
There is little doubt that 'Atlantic history', or the study of the 'Atlantic world', has been one of the most rapidly-growing fields in recent decades.[1] It has two basic premises. Firstly, the connections across this oceanic basin, connections which emerged most visibly during the early modern period, justify using the Atlantic as a meaningful unit of historical analysis. Secondly, taking such an oceanic perspective can challenge traditional national or imperial histories, and reveal hitherto obscured connections and encounters. These ideas have achieved considerable traction. While there is no scholarly society concerned with Atlantic history alone, it has been sponsored by many organisations with wider remits. Numerous university departments around the world offer Atlantic history courses. There is a specialist journal named *Atlantic Studies*, and many publishers now run dedicated Atlantic book series. The amount of research devoted to this topic has risen remarkably, and the number of lectures, conferences, seminars, and published and unpublished studies about the Atlantic world is, it seems, continually growing.

Indeed, figures from the journal database JSTOR provide a crude proxy of this growth: the annual number of articles featuring the term 'Atlantic world' more than doubled, from five or fewer during the 1990s, to between ten and twenty from 2004 onwards (*Atlantic*

[1] For discussions of the origins of Atlantic history, see Bernard Bailyn, 'The idea of Atlantic history', *Itinerario*, 20 (1996), pp. 19-41; Silvia Marzagalli, 'Sur les origines de l'«Atlantic History»', *Dix-huitième Siècle*, 33 (2001), pp. 17-31; Nicholas Canny, 'Atlantic history: what and why?', *European Review*, 9 (2001), pp. 399-411; William O'Reilly, 'Genealogies of Atlantic history', *Atlantic Studies*, 1 (2004), pp. 66-84.

Studies also launched in 2004, although this journal is not included in the JSTOR figures).[2] More significantly, during the 1990s the number of items mentioning the Atlantic was generally matched by those mentioning the Mediterranean – famously the first to receive the 'world' treatment, by Fernand Braudel.[3] Since 2005, however, a clear gap has emerged, while the number of items mentioning the Indian Ocean or the word 'global' has remained consistently lower (see figure 1). This is a blunt measurement, but it conveys clearly how historians' fascination with the Atlantic has gathered pace.

Figure 1: Number of items mentioning search terms on JSTOR, 1990-2012



Sources: Searches for 'Atlantic', 'Mediterranean', 'Indian Ocean', and 'Global', within the subject 'History' on dfr.jstor.org, accessed 9 April 2016.

One distinctive element of Atlantic history has been a tendency towards reflection upon it, a recurrent urge to gaze out across this sea of scholarship, to identify its currents and swells, to survey or define what it could or should be. Back in 2002 there was David Armitage's famous but perhaps prematurely optimistic claim that 'We are all Atlanticists now'.[4] Many subsequent reflections and overviews have tended more towards 'guarded enthusiasm' rather than such outspokenness, but have been no less eager to explore the potential of this oceanic perspective.[5] Beyond such celebration, however, there seems to be

[2] Search for 'Atlantic world' in the subject group 'History' on dfr.jstor.org, accessed 9 April 2016. The delay in uploading items to JSTOR makes the data for more recent years, roughly from 2013 onwards, too small to be reliable.
[3] Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde Méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949).
[4] David Armitage, 'Three concepts of Atlantic history' in David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds, *The British Atlantic world, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 11.
[5] Quoting Philip D. Morgan and Jack P. Greene, 'Introduction: the present state of Atlantic history', in Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, eds, *Atlantic history: a critical appraisal* (Oxford, 2009), p. 21. See also: Alison

little consensus, and indeed one of the most noticeable aspects of this literature is the broad and sometimes bewildering diversity of the field. As Nicholas Canny acutely observed, 'there are as many varieties of Atlantic history as there are Atlanticists'.[6]

The approach as a whole has also had its more determined critics. There have been claims that this very variety, this lack of coherence, undermines the meaningfulness of the Atlantic as a single unit; some, led by Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, maintain that Atlantic history is less novel and challenging to old historiographies than has been suggested, because it continues to invoke national and imperial boundaries and to privilege Europe and North America over Africa and South America.[7] Others have lamented that there is very little 'ocean' in much Atlantic history.[8] Advocates of global history like Peter Coclanis, and even some initially keen and vocal Atlanticists such as Alison Games, argue that it overplays the unity of this one ocean while ignoring connections with other arenas of history.[9] The last complaint seems to have had the most impact: for example, in 2013 *Atlantic Studies* adopted the more expansive subtitle *Global Currents*.[10] These dissenters have therefore encouraged a

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Games, 'Teaching Atlantic history', *Itinerario*, 23 (1999), pp. 162-71; Marcel Dorigny, 'L'Atlantique: un état de la question', *Dix-huitième Siècle*, 33 (2001), pp. 7-16; Horst Pietschmann, ed., *Atlantic history: history of the Atlantic system, 1580-1830* (Göttingen, 2002); Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic history: concept and contour* (Cambridge, MA, 2005); Alison Games, 'Atlantic history: definitions, challenges, and opportunities', *American Historical Review*, 111 (2006), pp. 741-57; Alison Games and Adam Rothman, eds, *Major problems in Atlantic history: documents and essays* (Boston, MA, 2007); Toyin Falola and Kevin D. Roberts, *The Atlantic World, 1450–2000*, (Bloomington, IN, 2008); Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault, eds, *Soundings in Atlantic history: latent structures and intellectual currents, 1500-1830* (Cambridge, MA, 2009); Thomas Benjamin, *The Atlantic world: Europeans, Africans, Indians and their shared history, 1400-1900* (Cambridge, 2009); Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan, eds, *The Oxford handbook of the Atlantic world c. 1450-1850* (Oxford, 2011); John McAleer, 'Atlantic history reviewed', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 14 (2012), pp. 121-128.

[6] Nicholas Canny, 'Atlantic history and global history', in Morgan and Greene, eds, *Atlantic history*, p. 317.

[7] Jason Ward, 'The other Atlantic world', *History Compass*, 1 (2003), pp. 1-6; Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, 'Some caveats about the "Atlantic" paradigm', *History Compass*, 1 (2003), pp. 1-4; Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Erik R. Seeman, eds, *The Atlantic in global history, 1500-2000* (2007), pp. xxiii-xxvii; James Sidbury and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, 'Mapping ethnogenesis in the early modern Atlantic', *William & Mary Quarterly*, 68 (2011), pp. 181-208, and the responses to this essay in the same issue; Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Benjamin Breen, 'Hybrid Atlantics: future directions for the history of the Atlantic world', *History Compass*, 11 (2013), pp. 597-609; see also Edmond J. Smith and Richard J. Blakemore, 'Introduction: Africa in the Atlantic world', *Itinerario*, 39 (2015), pp. 215-20.

[8] David Lambert, Luciana Martins, and Miles Ogborn, 'Currents, visions and voyages: historical geographies of the sea', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 32 (2006), pp. 479-93; W. Jeffrey Bolster, 'Putting the ocean in Atlantic history: maritime communities and marine ecology in the northwest Atlantic', *American Historical Review*, 113 (2008), pp. 19-47.

[9] Peter A. Coclanis, '*Drang nach osten*: Bernard Bailyn, the world-island, and the idea of Atlantic history', *Journal of World History*, 13 (2002), pp. 169-82; Alison Games, 'Atlantic constraints and global opportunities', *History Compass*, 1 (2003), pp. 1-4; Donna Gabaccia, 'A long Atlantic in a wider world', *Atlantic Studies*, 1 (2004), pp. 1-27; Peter A. Coclanis, 'Atlantic world or Atlantic/world?', *William & Mary Quarterly*, 63 (2006), pp. 725-42; Alison Games, 'Beyond the Atlantic: English globetrotters and transoceanic connections', *William & Mary Quarterly*, 63 (2006), pp. 675-92; Philip J. Stern, 'British Asia and the British Atlantic: comparisons and connections', *William & Mary Quarterly*, 63 (2006), pp. 693-712; Peter A. Coclanis, 'Beyond Atlantic history' in Morgan and Greene, eds, *Atlantic history*, pp. 337-56; see also Peter Emmer, 'In search of a system: the Atlantic economy, 1500-1800', in Pietschmann, ed., *Atlantic history*, pp. 169-78.

[10] 'Editorial', *Atlantic Studies*, 10 (2013), pp. 427-30.

more considered and sceptical engagement with the concept of the Atlantic world, but they have not slowed the juggernaut.

The persistent momentum of Atlantic history is evident in the six books reviewed here, which span two categories of work – on the one hand three collections of essays (one by a single author, two presenting chapters by numerous authors) which collate discussions of varying Atlantic topics, and on the other hand three textbooks aimed at presenting Atlantic history to newcomers. By considering these six books together we can get a sense of how this popular field is evolving, of the purposes and methods which unite or divide its practitioners, of where it has improved in response to criticism and where it still falls short. In other words, we can ask whether the central concepts of this approach continue to inspire and provoke historians in creative ways; or whether, like the currents of the Atlantic Ocean itself, we are largely travelling in circles.

I will begin with the three textbooks: *The Atlantic experience*, by Catherine Armstrong and Laura Chmielewski, Christoph Strobel's *The global Atlantic*, and Anna Suranyi's *The Atlantic connection*.[11] Although Armstrong and Chmielewski, writing in 2013, noted that 'the topic is only now making a significant impact in undergraduate and postgraduate courses', the publication of these three books suggests that the development of Atlantic history from primarily a research approach to a teaching topic is well under way, if not already quite advanced.[12] The three volumes share essentially the same purpose, to assist this development: Strobel aims to give 'a concise overview of the complex and diverse history of…the Atlantic region', while Suranyi's book is intended to 'prove useful to both beginning and advanced students who are searching for a more thorough understanding of the connections present throughout Atlantic history'.[13] In seeking to introduce the field by synthesising its key ideas and content, these books give a good indication of how historians currently understand the major contours of the Atlantic world.

Armstrong and Chmielewski, like many previous Atlanticists, are clear on why studying this subject matters: 'Echoes of the Atlantic's historical importance are still with us'.[14] However, they also argue that 'the significance of the Atlantic approach is not that it

[11] Catherine Armstrong and Laura M. Chmielewski, *The Atlantic experience: peoples, places, ideas* (Basingstoke, 2013); Christoph Strobel, *The global Atlantic, 1400-1900* (Abingdon, 2015); Anna Suranyi, *The Atlantic connection: a history of the Atlantic world, 1450-1900* (Abingdon, 2015).
[12] Armstrong and Chmielewski, *Atlantic experience*, p. 1.
[13] Strobel, *Global Atlantic*, p. 1; Suranyi, *Atlantic connection*, p. xii.
[14] Armstrong and Chmielewski, *Atlantic experience*, pp. 225-6.

works as a way of understanding the past, but that, crucially, it would have made sense to people in the past'.[15] The book presents this argument in a series of chapters which cover the staple subjects of the Atlantic world: navigation and exploration, intercultural contacts, slavery and freedom, trade and money, religion, cultural transfer, identity and conflict, and the abolitionist movement. They seek throughout to illustrate the theme of Atlantic interdependence, emphasising that 'the story of the entire Atlantic world cannot be separated from the story of slavery', that 'In most of the Americas and the Caribbean, complete self-sufficiency was virtually impossible to achieve', while on the other hand 'the distance across the Atlantic made it possible for people from many backgrounds to reinvent themselves'.[16] On this large (and often economic) level people of all backgrounds and statuses do appear deeply invested in the Atlantic and subject to its systems, although extracts from primary sources at the end of each chapter offer something of a window into contemporary and individual attitudes.

Christoph Strobel's *The global Atlantic* also works best on the broad levels of commodities and commercial exchanges, as his book sets out to show how 'between 1500 and 1750, a new Atlantic Ocean system emerged that built on and altered…traditional networks and developed into a globally integrated trade system'.[17] Strobel is particularly good at drawing out the 'global tangents' that connected the Atlantic with other regions.[18] He takes an expansive perspective from the very beginning, encompassing the 'tenuous, fluid, and heavily decentralised trade network' built by the Vikings in the twelfth century, Europe's medieval links to Asia through the Middle East, the ways in which European science and agriculture were 'significantly influenced by the Muslim world', and the fact that the Indian Ocean was, until at least the 1400s, 'the most cosmopolitan and valuable trade zone in the world'.[19] These connections persisted even as the Atlantic emerged as a site of new interactions, although Strobel gives far more attention to links with the Indian Ocean than with the Mediterranean, noting that through intermeshed commercial routes and the demand for Asian goods 'the Asian economies…dominated the commerce of the early Global Atlantic'.[20] Considering this, what is not entirely clear in Strobel's book is why it is Atlantic at all. The introduction gives a concise discussion of the scholarly debates around the

[15] Ibid., p. 5.
[16] Ibid., pp. 64, 100, 170.
[17] Strobel, *Global Atlantic*, p. 156.
[18] Ibid., p. 54.
[19] Ibid., pp. 15, 21, 109.
[20] Ibid., p. 138.

boundaries of Atlantic history, echoing Coclanis's criticism that 'much of the literature fails to set the Atlantic World into a world historical context'. However, Strobel rather dodges the question, which Coclanis explicitly raised, about whether and why the Atlantic remains an appropriate unit of analysis.[21]

The Atlantic connection, by Anna Suranyi, gives less attention to global context but is clear on the relevance of this ocean: the Atlantic 'became the most important economic and political hub on the planet', and 'can be identified by connections – between populations; between geographical regions; between biological organisms, including diseases, plants, animals, and humans; and between technologies and ideas'.[22] There is a similarity here to Peregrine Horden's and Nicholas Purcell's work on the Mediterranean, which stresses 'connectivity' as 'the key variable' for investigation.[23] Suranyi's book is organised into five sections both thematic and chronological, examining in turn exploration and early contacts, colonization in the Americas, empires and trade, the Enlightenment and revolutions of the eighteenth century, and the 'paradox of modernity' in the nineteenth century, as the industrial revolution and the development of new political ideologies produced 'tremendous inequality but also tremendous promise'.[24] However, Suranyi's compelling narrative about these Atlantic connections and their profound consequences occasionally leads to a somewhat triumphant tone, especially in the later chapters. The United States is hailed as 'the first modern representative state' and 'the first true democracy', even though Suranyi also acknowledges that 'things changed gradually for many of the lower orders of society', and that the 'conquest of the West [of North America] was a form of colonialism in itself'.[25] The Unites States' government (or any other government in the nineteenth century) was hardly 'representative' of the disenfranchised, including those who were conquered by force, and these statements smack of the kind of national history that early Atlanticists claimed to overturn.

This tone is a little surprising, as all three textbooks seek to deliver a balanced and inclusive description of the Atlantic world, with a particular emphasis on African agency.[26]

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[21] Ibid., p. 6.
[22] Suranyi, *Atlantic connection*, pp. x, i.
[23] Quoting Nicholas Purcell, 'The boundless sea of unlikeness? On defining the Mediterranean', in *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 18 (2003), p. 10; see also Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The corrupting sea – a study of the Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2000).
[24] Suranyi, *Atlantic connection*, p. 202.
[25] Ibid., pp. 140, 142, 146, 193.
[26] Key texts on this topic are John Thorton, *Africa and Africans in the making of the Atlantic world* (Cambridge, 1992); Paul Gilroy, *The black Atlantic: modernity and double consciousness* (Cambridge, MA, 1993); David Northrup, *Africa's discovery of Europe: 1450-1850* (Oxford, 2002); Donald A. Yerxa, ed., *Recent themes in the*

Armstrong and Chmielewski are a little careless in their use of the word 'Natives' to describe the indigenous populations of Africa and America, but they begin with African and American models of empire before considering Europe, and point out, for example, that 'Europeans came to Africa not as conquerors but as customers'; that African slaves 'preserved some elements of Africa' by cultivating certain foodstuffs; and that 'Free and enslaved Africans were not passive receivers of abolition; many played a key part in the abolition movement while others fought to preserve the slave system for their own economic gain'.[27] Strobel points out that most of the terms used by historians – including 'European', 'African', 'Native American' or 'Asian' – are 'Euro-centric classifications', but candidly 'offers no solution to these problems'.[28] He too discusses indigenous American and African societies, in particular the Mound Builders of the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys and the West African empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay, and concludes that 'African elites remained in control of much of the commercial interactions', and that 'West Africa was truly integrated into the Global Atlantic economy'.[29] Suranyi similarly describes African and American political structures before their encounters with Europeans, and while she emphasizes the traumatic dimensions of these encounters, she – like Armstrong and Chmielewski – also discusses the agency of indigenous people, visible in (amongst other things) syncretic Catholicism in South America and the 'African imprint' upon Brazil and the Caribbean.[30]

Yet, despite these efforts, the three books generally conform to a narrative that would look familiar to historians writing a few decades ago, and which is still a largely European story. This narrative begins with early encounters triggered by European exploration, followed by the development of colonial and commercial endeavours by European empires, in particular the transatlantic slave trade and its consequences, before finally turning to the Enlightenment and the 'age of revolution'. It is only when discussing the end of the Atlantic world during the nineteenth century that the shape of this narrative becomes less certain.[31] Armstrong and Chmielewski note that 'The abolition of the slave trade and of slavery itself coincided with the end of imperial control in many areas of the Atlantic world…these

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history of Africa and the Atlantic world: historians in conversation (Columbia, SC, 2008); Douglas B. Chambers, 'The black Atlantic: theory, method, and practice', in Falola and Roberts, eds, *The Atlantic world*, pp. 151-73.

[27] Armstrong and Chmielewski, *Atlantic experience*, pp. 20, 44, 155-6, 197.

[28] Strobel, *Global Atlantic*, pp. 7-8.

[29] Ibid., p. 66, 72.

[30] Suranyi, *Atlantic connection*, p. 123.

[31] On this point see also Gabaccio, 'Long Atlantic'; Games, 'Atlantic history', pp. 747, 751-2; Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan, 'Introduction: the making and unmaking of an Atlantic world', in Canny and Morgan, eds, *Oxford handbook*, pp. 15-17.

developments changed the Atlantic world and even broke it apart'.[32] Strobel sees the industrial revolution altering the 'Global Atlantic' because it created a 'power imbalance' between Europe and North America on the one hand and the rest of the world on the other.[33] To Suranyi, during the nineteenth century 'the concept of the Atlantic as a coherent global zone was breaking down', but this century also witnessed a new surge of colonialism in the Americas by the United States and in Africa and Asia by European empires.[34] These historians therefore argue that the Atlantic world was held together by empires, and crumbled when these empires did; but if Atlantic connections empowered resistance and independence, they also strengthened some empires in their acquisition of further territory both in and outside this ocean. This is the essence of Suranyi's 'paradox of modernity': the Atlantic world, based upon the 'central contradictory reality' of slavery, produced societies which both celebrated freedom and simultaneously subjugated other people around the globe.[35]

As the three textbooks follow the majority trend in focusing upon empires, and upon connections and exchanges across (and in Strobel's case beyond) the ocean, perhaps it is unsurprising that European societies and their descendants, as the major maritime powers, receive more discussion. This focus may also reflect the inclination of much research in the field, since – except for the signal efforts of certain historians, including in the volumes of essays discussed below – European empires and social elites still garner much of the attention. Early Atlanticists described the Atlantic in primarily European terms, albeit making some limited space for other peoples. Nicholas Canny, for example, wrote that 'This concentration on Europeans is justified because the world that emerged was principally of their conception and Europeans remained its managers until the close of the eighteenth century. However, historians are also increasingly conscious that Europeans did not fashion this world alone.'[36] Not everyone has agreed: Alison Games, for example, argued that the Atlantic world should represent 'history without borders…[and] without an imperial perspective…Atlantic history may deal with European dominion, but it should not be Eurocentric'.[37] Despite such exhortations by Games and others, and though they do reflect the increasing consciousness of which Canny spoke, these textbooks show that the primarily European, imperial narrative remains prevalent.

[32] Armstrong and Chmielewski, *Atlantic experience*, p. 214.
[33] Strobel, *Global Atlantic*, p. 156.
[34] Suranyi, *Atlantic connection*, p. 200.
[35] Ibid., p. 201.
[36] Canny, 'Atlantic history: what and why?', p. 408; see also Canny and Morgan, 'Introduction', pp. 2-3.
[37] Games, 'Atlantic history', pp. 749-50.

The three volumes of essays represent different responses to this narrative, different strategies for studying the Atlantic from another point of view. I will first examine the nature of these responses, before discussing the volumes' contents in more detail. Let us begin with Marcus Rediker, who has been writing Atlantic history since before it was even called by that name, and has been one of the most distinctive and controversial voices in the field. From early studies of sailors and pirates, to more recent research on African slaves and their experience of the Middle Passage, as well as in *The many-headed hydra* co-authored with Peter Linebaugh, Rediker has consistently presented a Marxist view of the early modern world, in which a radical Atlantic proletariat struggles, heroically and sometimes successfully, against the growing oppression of capitalism and empire.[38] In his new book, *Outlaws of the Atlantic*, Rediker reflects that 'I have been writing about outlaws my entire career', and aims 'to gather my thoughts and writings on the subject'; there are 'thirty-odd years of scholarship surveyed and synthesized' within these pages.[39] The book 'explores the sea as a setting for human activity and historical change against the backdrop of the Atlantic and global rise of capitalism', thus bringing together the separate strands that have woven around the central theme colouring all of Rediker's work.[40]

While *Outlaws* presents a neat and engaging summary of Rediker's main thesis, it also displays some of those characteristics that have raised scholars' hackles in the past. Perhaps most troubling is the somewhat free-handed approach to his source material. Rediker blithely describes Charles Johnson, nominal author of *A general history of the pyrates*, as 'a man who knew about things maritime'. Yet in the accompanying endnote he states that 'My own view is that the book had multiple authors', suggesting that a more critical reading of this complex text is needed.[41] Similarly, Rediker's evocation of 'motley mobs' during the American Revolution rarely provides clear proof that the people, texts, and ideas he mentions were indeed linked to one another, and this discussion draws upon sources largely written by

[38] Marcus Rediker, *Between the devil and the deep blue sea: merchant seamen, pirates, and the Anglo-American maritime world, 1700-1750* (Cambridge, 1987); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The many-headed hydra: the hidden history of the revolutionary Atlantic* (London, 2000); Marcus Rediker, *Villains of all nations: Atlantic pirates in the golden age* (London, 2004); Marcus Rediker, *The slave ship: a human history* (London, 2007); Marcus Rediker, *The Amistad rebellion: an Atlantic odyssey of slavery and freedom* (London, 2013).
[39] Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic: sailors, pirates, and motley crews in the age of sail* (Boston, MA, 2014), pp. x, 180.
[40] Ibid., p. xi.
[41] Ibid., pp. 9, 185 n. 1.

members of the elite.[42] His endeavours towards producing a history which ignores national and imperial boundaries, therefore, take us less far away from empires and rulers than at first appears, and indeed Rediker himself rarely ventures outside the British Atlantic or uses sources in any language other than English.

A more singular problem with *Outlaws* is that in one sense it represents a missed opportunity to reflect upon Rediker's approach itself. His bold statement that 'The old history will not do any more' is certainly resounding, but just how old is this history?[43] The author notes that maritime, transnational, and global history have all grown in size and scope during the three decades in which he has been writing, but the book offers very little discussion of this historiography or the ways that scholarly practice has changed; nor does it do much to evaluate and update Rediker's own arguments in the light of what other scholars have written.[44] Perhaps there is some authentic value in publishing these pieces in their original form (the book's acknowledgements reveal that all the chapters are based on previous papers or publications), and *Outlaws of the Atlantic* provides an accessible introduction to Rediker's research, but it says too little about the impact of this work on the wider field and *vice versa*.

If history from below is one alternative perspective to an empire-focused narrative, or at least an inversion of it, another that has been gaining ground in both Atlantic and global history is the attempt to combine the broad concerns of these schools with a renewed emphasis on attention to detail through a mixture of biography, prosopography, and microhistory.[45] Scholars looking to mix the 'macro' with the 'micro' have often been motivated by a concern to rediscover the individual, the personal, and the local, even as they locate these within the broad canvas of transoceanic connections. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Benjamin Breen wrote in 2013 that 'a recent turn toward local contingencies and individual narratives offers an escape valve from [the] risks of overgeneralization'.[46] While it

[42] Ibid., pp. 100, 119. On this point see also David Armitage, 'The red Atlantic', *Reviews in American History*, 29 (2001), p. 484.
[43] Rediker, *Outlaws*, p. 177.
[44] Ibid., pp. 1-2.
[45] Miles Ogborn, 'Editorial: Atlantic geographies', *Social and Cultural Geography*, 6 (2005), pp. 379-85; Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster travels: a sixteenth-century Muslim between worlds* (New York, NY, 2006); Lara Putnam, 'To study the fragments/whole: microhistory and the Atlantic world', *Journal of Social History*, 39 (2006), pp. 615-30; Linda Colley, *The ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: a woman in world history* (London, 2007); Miles Ogborn, *Global lives: Britain and the world, 1550-1800* (Cambridge, 2008); Tonio Andrade, 'A Chinese farmer, two African boys, and a warlord: toward a global microhistory', *Journal of World History*, 21 (2010), pp. 573-91; Emma Rothschild, *The inner life of empires: an eighteenth-century history* (Woodstock, 2011); Francesca Trivellato, 'Is there a future for Italian microhistory in the age of global history?', *California Italian Studies*, 2 (2011); John-Paul A. Ghobrial, 'The secret life of Elias of Babylon and the uses of global microhistory', *Past & Present*, 222 (2014), pp. 51-93. See also Peter Burke's addendum to Giovanni Levi, 'On microhistory', in Peter Burke, ed., *New perspectives on historical writing* (Oxford, 2nd edn, 2001), pp. 97-120.
[46] Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen, 'Hybrid Atlantics', p. 604.

does not explicitly take this trend as an inspiration, the volume *Atlantic biographies*, edited by Jeffrey Fortin and Mark Meuwese, is very much in harmony with it: 'the goal of this anthology is to put *people* back into Atlantic history' because, after all, 'they *were* the Atlantic world'.[47] By doing so the editors aim not only to repopulate a sometimes impersonally large vista with the characters of the past, but also to show that 'The subjects of these biographical studies were inherently aware of their communities being connected to a larger Atlantic where ideas, commodities, politics, and culture collided'.[48] In a manner resembling Armstrong and Chmielewski's emphasis upon Atlantic behaviour, Fortin and Meuwese argue that the Atlantic world is not just an analytical construct but was a real part of many early modern lives.

The volume is largely successful in presenting detailed studies of Atlantic people, but it offers no sustained consideration of just how useful this biographical turn is, or of where it might go next; the editors' preface and conclusion are relatively brief, the latter mainly concerned with how this collection responds to 'the theoretical studies that have been recently written about Atlantic history', while the attention given to methodology varies from chapter to chapter.[49] The possible pitfalls of a biographical approach are not really raised at any point in the collection, but two are worth bearing in mind. As alluring to historians as colourful personal detail is, there is always the danger that too narrow a focus can obscure as much as it reveals, and privilege some experiences over others – Meuwese himself points out that there are no biographies of women in the collection.[50] There is also the inevitable bugbear of just how 'representative' these studies are, since a perennial problem with microhistory is that individuals about whom evidence survives are often exceptional, and that their exceptionality is precisely the reason for the survival of evidence about them.[51] While *Atlantic biographies* provides a convincing account of how some people in early modern

[47] Jeffrey A. Fortin, 'Preface', in Jeffrey A. Fortin and Mark Meuwese, eds, *Atlantic biographies: individuals and peoples in the Atlantic world* (Leiden, 2014), pp. ix-xvi, at pp. ix, xvi. Unless stated otherwise, emphasis is as in the original.
[48] Ibid., p. xvi.
[49] Mark Meuwese, 'Conclusion: Atlantic lives and Atlantic history', in Fortin and Meuwese, eds, *Atlantic biographies*, p. 343.
[50] Meuwese, 'Conclusion', p. 350.
[51] Edoardo Grendi, 'Micro-analisi e storia sociale', *Quaderni Storici*, 35 (1977), pp. 506-20; Edward Muir, 'Introduction: observing trifles', in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, eds, *Microhistory and the lost peoples of Europe* (London, 1991), pp. vii-xviii; Carlo Ginzburg, 'Checking the evidence: the judge and the historian', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (1991), pp. 79-92; Carlo Ginzburg, 'Microhistory: two or three things I know about it', trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi, *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1993), pp. 10-35; Levi, 'On microhistory'; Matti Feltonen, 'Clues, margins and monads: the micro-macro link in historical research', 40 (2001), pp. 347-59; Richard D. Brown, 'Microhistory and the post-modern challenge', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 23 (2003), pp. 1-20.

Africa, America, and Europe lived Atlantic lives, there is plenty of evidence that others did not, but the volume does not directly confront this issue.

The third collection, entitled simply *The Atlantic world*, sits more squarely than the other two in the tradition of substantial tomes surveying or summarising the field as a whole, but the editors, D'Maris Coffman, Adrian Leonard, and William O'Reilly, take a rather different approach to the problems inherent in struggling with an overview of the early modern Atlantic. They choose not to present one at all. *The Atlantic world* explicitly 'is not meant to serve as a handbook of Atlantic history'; instead it 'reflects an ecumenical approach to the topic, one that seeks neither to compartmentalize nor to discipline practitioners, but rather to illustrate the methodological diversity of more recent "post-Atlantic" approaches'.[52] They do not dwell upon the meaning or implications of 'post-Atlantic' at any length, though they do explain that what marks this new stage in the life-cycle of the paradigm is 'the methodological pluralism that characterizes the new generation of Atlantic scholarship'.[53] The result is a tour around an extremely wide range of topics, places, and periods, in which geographical, methodological, and theoretical horizons are most definitely widened, although this approach largely sacrifices any attempts at coherence or comparison between the contributions.

'Methodological pluralism' is not necessarily all that new, since questions about the unity of the Atlantic world, either as a historical field or a real thing, have previously been raised by both the field's proponents and its critics. Atlanticists have always followed different paths around the ocean. Nevertheless, what Coffman, Leonard, and O'Reilly describe as a 'post-Atlantic' generation of historians may be the same trend that Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen identified as 'a maturing Atlantic history shift[ing] from debates over the legitimacy of the field itself to fine-grained studies of dynamics on the ground'.[54] This looks like a direct – though not necessarily a deliberate – contrast to the 'Braudelian Atlantic' once imagined by Alison Games, a synthetic and comprehensive treatment of the ocean and its world similar to Braudel's masterpiece on the Mediterranean, although Games also called the Atlantic world a 'chaotic kaleidoscope of movement' and, as noted above, has moved on to criticize the approach for not being global enough.[55]

[52] D'Maris Coffman and Adrian Leonard, 'The Atlantic world: definitions, theory, and boundaries', in D'Maris Coffman, Adrian Leonard, and William O'Reilly, eds, *The Atlantic world* (Abingdon, 2015), p. 3.
[53] Ibid., p. 9.
[54] Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen, 'Hybrid Atlantics', p. 602.
[55] Games, 'Atlantic history', pp. 754, 756.

Perhaps no such Braudelian synthesis was ever truly possible. David Abulafia has pointed out that, while the Atlantic could be considered 'a vast Mediterranean', questions of scale fundamentally differentiate the two, and in any case Mediterranean scholars have themselves moved away from the concept of the region as a 'unity' and towards the idea that it was 'an arena of interaction, of encounters and exchange'.[56] Perhaps it is a good thing – as both the editors of *The Atlantic world* and Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen seem to suggest – if historians stop worrying about 'the legitimacy of the field' and get down to brass tacks. There is much to be said for the 'fine-grained studies of dynamics on the ground' that Cañizares-Esguerra and Breen applaud, and that *The Atlantic world* offers. Yet pursuing history 'in' the Atlantic rather than history 'of' the Atlantic carries some of its own dangers, not least of which is the risk of losing the impulse to search for connections across boundaries or on an Atlantic scale, originally one of the field's driving forces. Moreover, 'methodological pluralism' as the way forwards cannot, by itself, replace the need for a larger narrative of some kind, both in teaching (as the textbooks show) and in making sense of the many fragments that such pluralist research presents to us.

As much as they differ in their methodological underpinnings, these three collections publish essays which resemble one another in certain regards. I want to highlight three ways in which the volumes overlap in their coverage: they examine the Atlantic stories of people, of texts, and of ideas or practices. Focusing on people is, after all, the avowed purpose of *Atlantic biographies*, and this theme is explored in three sections, introducing in turn 'individuals who saw the Atlantic as their conduit to gaining wealth, whether financial, intellectual or religious'; 'the life or lives of enslaved, captive or exploited individuals who refused to accept their particular positions'; and the multidirectional trajectories and interactions through which 'indigenous peoples, Africans, and creoles remade themselves and their environs'.[57] The wealth-seekers are three elite individuals: Pierre Biard, a French Jesuit and priest of Mount Desert Island; Thomas Morton, 'simultaneously a dissenter and criminal in New England, and a lawyer bringing other criminals to justice in Old England'; and Alexander von Humboldt, a Prussian scientist whose expedition through South (and briefly North) America in 1799-1804 contributed to his own thinking and to his network of scientific

[56] David Abulafia, 'Mediterraneans', in W. V. Harris, ed, *Rethinking the Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2005), p. 92; Peter Burke, 'Civilizations and frontiers: anthropology of the early modern Mediterranean', in John A. Marino, ed., *Early modern history and the social sciences: testing the limits of Braudel's Mediterranean* (Kirksville, MO, 2002), p. 136.
[57] Fortin and Meuwese, eds, *Atlantic biographies*, pp. 1, 99, 211.

contacts.[58] Two chapters in part three provide an intriguing comparison, dealing with members of American elites and their relationship with European imperial authority. One discusses the life and work of Mexican jurist Francisco Xavier Gamboa, while the other analyses the careers of Dom Antônio Filipe Camarão and Pieter Poty, two indigenous Potigar leaders who fought on opposing sides of the Dutch-Portuguese conflict in seventeenth-century Brazil.

Other contributions look at those on the receiving end of empires' power. They include three African slaves who followed distinctly different trajectories: Benkos Biohó, who was born in Guinea-Bissau and later became the ruler of a maroon *palenque* community in New Grenada; Occramar Marycoo (after his capture renamed Newport Gardner) who was freed and became 'an evangelical Christian, a musician, and a composer'; and Venture Smith, whose life both in slavery and after his emancipation is recorded in a published narrative which Venture himself dictated.[59] Marycoo/Gardner eventually travelled east from Boston to Liberia, where he died, and his near-contemporary Paul Cuffe, who during his life articulated both indigenous American Mustee and African identities, followed in a similar direction, attempting to establish a community in Sierra Leone. Another, this time involuntary, voyager to West Africa was Patrick Madan, an Irishman who became famous as a criminal in London during the eighteenth century, avoided deportation once, and was ultimately sent to Gorée Island – but was widely rumoured to have escaped again.

This second type of biography, of individuals carving out some agency for themselves despite oppression or other limits, clearly resonates with (and owes something to) Rediker's work. In *Outlaws* he, too, presents individual case studies, in most detail in the chapters on Edward Barlow's 'astonishing journal [which] illuminates what it meant to be a sailor in the late seventeenth century', and on Henry Pitman, whose involvement in the duke of Monmouth's unsuccessful rebellion in 1685 resulted in slavery and escape in the Caribbean.[60] However, neither of these two men were genuine 'outlaws': Pitman was a gentleman surgeon who claimed to be accidentally involved in the rebellion, and was later pardoned, while Barlow is hardly a perfect example of an 'egalitarian, anti-authoritarian' seafarer, since he

[58] Quoting Charlotte Carrington, 'Thomas Morton', in Fortin and Meuwese, eds, *Atlantic biographies*, p. 31.
[59] Quoting Edward E. Andrews, 'The crossings of Occramar Marycoo, or Newport Gardner', in Fortin and Meuwese, eds, *Atlantic biographies*, p. 125.
[60] Quoting Rediker, *Outlaws*, p. 31.

himself wielded coercive authority as a master's mate and complained about 'the lazy, idle temper' and 'grumbling and unwilling mind' of the sailors under his command.[61]

Rediker is on firmer 'outlaw' ground with his studies of certain groups and their experiences, whether it is the 'fragile social world' of Atlantic pirates in the early eighteenth century, the various modes of resistance amongst African captives during transatlantic voyages, or the specific rebellion aboard the *Amistad* in 1839 that led to a lawsuit in which the 'rebels' were vindicated and liberated. Here, too, there are parallels with the three prosopographical chapters in *Atlantic biographies*, which examine slaves who piloted ships in the Caribbean and, through their possession of essential knowledge and skills, carved out a space of greater autonomy for themselves; free African people in the Portuguese colony of Benguela in Angola, who were vulnerable to violent capture by slave-traders but sometimes secured their release through legal action; and French marine veterans forced to return home to France after the surrender of Canada to the British. As Mariana Candido puts it in her chapter on Benguela, these are not so much biographies as collages of the 'fragments of individual lives'.[62] In the *Atlantic world*, too, there are chapters which employ a closer perspective on specific groups to examine Atlantic themes, including two chapters dealing respectively with the current state of Atlantic Jewish history and the experiences of Jews in the British Atlantic, as well as others studying diplomacy and conflict between French and Spanish colonists in Hispaniola, migration from Habsburg Austria to America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and nineteenth-century American seafaring communities.

An important part of these Atlantic lives, not just in allowing historians to reconstruct them but also for the people who lived them, were the stories that these people told or that were told about them, and which circulated both in text and by word of mouth: this is the second correspondence which connects the three volumes. Rediker gives attention to both kinds of circulation, with his first chapter examining the 'sailor's yarn' – the role of maritime workers as storytellers and carriers of information – and his final chapter analysing the newspaper articles, plays, images, and pamphlets that were inspired by the *Amistad* rebellion. Texts are equally evident in *Atlantic biographies*, most notably in Bryan Sinche's chapter about Venture Smith, which seeks 'to read the *Narrative* [*of the life and adventures of Venture*] not just as the story of a remarkable life but as a product in its own right', 'a tool

[61] Ibid., pp. 45; see Edward Barlow, *Barlow's journal of his life at sea in the king's ships, East and West Indiamen & other merchantment from 1659 to 1703*, edited by Basil Lubbock (London, 2 vols, 1934), II, p. 452.
[62] Mariana Candido, 'The transatlantic slave trade and the vulnerability of free blacks in Benguela, Angola, 1780-1830', in Fortin and Meuwese, eds, *Atlantic biographies*, p. 194.

Smith used to negotiate the economic system in which he had been both commodity and businessman'.[63] Mark Meuwese's discussion of the letters which Camarão and Poty wrote to one another across the Dutch-Portuguese battle lines, and the pamphlets which told of Patrick Madan's misadventures considered by Emma Christopher, similarly show how these texts not only described but helped to constitute the Atlantic frameworks of these individual lives. In *The Atlantic world*, D'Maris Coffman's study of the composition and circulation of Jacques Savary's *Le parfait négociant* represents a slightly different tack, offering a biography of the text itself (printed thirty-three times in three languages from its first appearance in 1675 until 1800) and tracing its changing contents and reception.

More distinctive to the volume edited by Coffman, Leonard and O'Reilly are contributions which, often presenting overviews of secondary material, describe the evolution of ideas and practices around the Atlantic Ocean: in this they respond to Jack Greene and Philip Morgan's call for the field's focus on mobile goods and people to expand into 'the exchange of values and the circulation of ideas'.[64] In a breadth that reflects the editors' 'ecumenical approach', this includes science and ideology in the Spanish empire; the ways in which 'violence played a determinative, perhaps even *the* determinative, role in creating Atlantic cultures'; the effects of warfare at sea and ashore; the Atlantic trajectories of both Catholicism and Protestantism; political debates about military power in the British Atlantic; the development and impact of paper money; a comparison of British and Dutch trade, plunder, and settlement; practices of slave resistance; the incentives to speculate in Atlantic enterprises; the impact of the 1772-3 credit crisis in the British Atlantic; the relationship between American consumer tastes and British manufacturing; and a proposal for historians to elucidate 'a distinctly Atlantic Enlightenment'.[65] Some of these are more strictly confined to specific regions: Jonathan Eacott's 'cultural history of commerce in the Atlantic world' does not give much attention to the cultures of African and indigenous American merchants, even though they were crucial brokers in early modern networks of exchange, while N. P. Cole's chapter on the impact of classical literature in the Atlantic is mostly concerned with the thinking behind the United States' constitution.[66] Nevertheless, the cumulative impression

[63] Bryan Sinche, 'Constituting value in *A narrative of the life and adventures of Venture, a native of Africa*', in Fortin and Meuwese, eds, *Atlantic biographies*, p. 125.
[64] Morgan and Greene, 'Introduction', p. 14.
[65] Quoting John Smolenski, 'Violence in the Atlantic world', in Coffman, Leonard, and O'Reilly, eds, *Atlantic world*, p. 245; and William Max Nelson, 'The Atlantic Enlightenment', in Coffman, Leonard, and O'Reilly, eds, *Atlantic world*, p. 650.
[66] On the role of these brokers in West Africa, see Thornton, *Africa and Africans*; George E. Brooks, *Eurafricans in West Africa: commerce, social status, gender and religious observance from the sixteenth to the*

of these broad studies is actually quite similar to the essays in the other two volumes concerned with individuals: they confirm what Armstrong and Chmielewski and Fortin and Meuwese both argue, that certain practices and ideas were Atlantic in origin, evolution, and scope. Armstrong and Chmielewski write that people '*behaved* Atlantically...[they] demonstrated acknowledgement of, or dependence upon, the Atlantic Ocean'.[67] This represents one of the clearest ways in which the work of this wave of Atlanticists differs from previous theoretical positions. Alison Games wrote, in 2006, that 'Historians have had to first invent the region…reflect[ing] trends in historical geography', and three years later Jack Greene and Philip Morgan agreed that the Atlantic world is 'a modern cultural construction'.[68] The 'new generation', as they are called by Coffman, Leonard, and O'Reilly, have no such qualms. They see the Atlantic world as an idea current in its own time, as well as a tool of historical inquiry.

Besides this broad shift, these collections also show that, for some scholars at least, the Atlantic world continues to provide opportunities to unearth new perspectives and unnoticed connections or comparisons. This has always been Rediker's main objective, to show that 'seafaring people were history makers of the first importance' who have been unfairly overlooked.[69] Lacking Rediker's polemical framework and emphasis upon social conflict, the contributions in *Atlantic biographies* and *The Atlantic world* provide more nuanced investigations of the people who might traditionally be considered victims of the Atlantic empires. In *Atlantic biographies* the chapters on Occramar Marycoo/Newport Gardner, Venture Smith, Patrick Madan, Dom Antônio Filipe Camarão and Pieter Poty, Benkos Biohó, Paul Cuffe, enslaved pilots and captive Benguelans show that not only were these individuals often aware of the Atlantic setting of their varied lives, they were able to use that setting to achieve changes in those lives.

Similarly, in *The Atlantic world*, Laura Matthew's chapter asks whether Atlantic questions make sense from the perspective of indigenous South Americans, while Melanie Lemotte's examination of 'colour prejudice' in the French Atlantic offers an alternative to scholarly debates about the suitability of 'race' as a historical category, allowing analysis of

eighteenth century (Oxford, 2003); Philip J. Havik and Toby Green, eds, *Brokers of change: Atlantic commerce and cultures in pre-colonial Western Africa* (Oxford, 2012).

[67] Armstrong and Chmielewski, *Atlantic experience*, p. 5.

[68] Games, 'Atlantic history', pp. 742-3; Morgan and Greene, 'Introduction', p. 8, and see also Joyce E. Chaplin, 'The Atlantic Ocean and its contemporary meanings, 1492-1808' in the same volume.

[69] Rediker, *Outlaws*, p. xi.

the ‘discriminatory treatment of people who have a different skin tone, physical appearance and cultural heritage’ while preserving sensitivity to historical context.[70] Laurent DuBois’s efforts towards ‘an intellectual history of the enslaved’ (republished from a 2006 article) and Denise Spellberg’s ‘thematic, anecdotal introduction to the permutations of Islam’ in the Atlantic turn generally received assumptions about the nature of this world on their head, and point to promising new areas for research.[71] In a rather different direction, two chapters address, in different ways, W. Jeffery Bolster’s plea for study of the ‘living sea’ (although one of these chapters turns its attention to the living land).[72] James Carson and Karim Tiro write about animals in North America and the emergence of a ‘new creole landscape’ after the arrival of Europeans, while David Starkey examines how Atlantic fisheries were not only a major industry but also ‘influenced the movement of people, cargoes, techniques and cultures’.[73]

There are also contributions in *The Atlantic world* which, like Strobel’s book, seek to link this world with others: Gerald Groenewald’s discussion of Southern Africa as a nodal point between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Catherine Styer’s comparison of the two slave systems in which British people were involved, the transatlantic slave trade and their own experiences of enslavement in North Africa; James Brown’s chapter on the relationship between Morocco and the Atlantic world; Paul D’Arcy’s on the Atlantic and the Pacific. By investigating the boundaries of the Atlantic and the various connections to other regions, these chapters review its existence as a ‘world’ and its relevance for historical study. None of these chapters condemn the concept of the Atlantic world entirely, as previous critics have, but rather suggest ways in which these comparisons can enliven both the study of the Atlantic and the other places to which it was linked.

Atlantic history certainly has not lived up to some of the promises of its early supporters. It has not produced a pan-oceanic synthesis, nor has it escaped the basic structure of a narrative in which European empires (and especially their elites) are still the main protagonists. Moreover, Atlanticists very rarely confront the issue that this ocean was not necessarily more

[70] Melanie Lemotte, ‘Colour prejudice in the French Atlantic world’, in Coffman, Leonard, and O’Reilly, eds, *Atlantic world*, p. 152.
[71] Laurent DuBois, ‘An enslaved enlightenment: rethinking the intellectual history of the French Atlantic’, in Coffman, Leonard, and O’Reilly, eds, *Atlantic world*, p. 228; Denise A. Spellberg, ‘Islam and the Atlantic’, in Coffman, Leonard, and O’Reilly, eds, *Atlantic world*, p. 376.
[72] Bolster, ‘Putting the ocean’, p. 21.
[73] James Taylor Carson and Karim M. Tiro, ‘Animals in Atlantic North America to 1800’, in Coffman, Leonard, and O’Reilly, eds, *Atlantic world*, p. 27; David J. Starkey, ‘Fish and fisheries in the Atlantic world’, in Coffman, Leonard, and O’Reilly, eds, *Atlantic world*, p. 56;

influential than local, regional, or global factors in the everyday lives of many inhabitants of Africa, America, and Europe. The oceanic context is a vitally important one; but we must strive to be more sensitive to how it integrates, overlaps, or conflicts with other contexts. Strobel's *Global Atlantic* and some of the essays in *The Atlantic world* make solid steps, but there is much more to be done in this direction.

Nevertheless, the concept of the Atlantic world has driven and still drives a great deal of new and exciting research, and tensions between the constraints and imperatives of an overall narrative and the sometimes contradictory details of specific perspectives are hardly unique to this field, and can themselves prove creative. If David Armitage jumped the gun when he said that we are all Atlanticists, Atlantic history is an idea and a field with which historians are increasingly familiar and comfortable, and it is still making progress. These six books show that Atlantic history has listened to and learned from it critics. As well as beginning to probe the links between this ocean and other regions, some Atlanticists continue to seek out new and previously unheard voices, enriching and diversifying our understanding of this ocean and its significance to human history.

Yet for all that we must not get *too* comfortable. The impression from these books is that Atlantic history continues to grow, and to become more confident, both in its own scholarly existence and in the idea that the 'Atlantic world' was a conscious concern of contemporaries. This confidence must not lead to complacency, or to a total dissipation of purpose. We may indeed have moved in to a 'post-Atlantic' phase in which historians no longer need to expend their efforts on justifying this approach. If, in doing so, we relinquish certain theoretical concerns or objectives – like the need to link up diverse peoples and places, to cross traditional boundaries, to recover unexplored perspectives, to tell new stories – then we might lose the original impetus to question, challenge, and revise, which provided the first motor and much of the appeal of Atlantic history. Atlanticists must strike a fine balance. These volumes give us hope that we can.