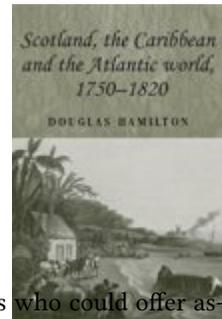


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Douglas J. Hamilton. *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750-1820*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005. vii + 249 pp. \$84.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7190-7182-9.

Reviewed by Mark Quintanilla (Department of History, Hannibal-LaGrange College)
Published on H-Atlantic (March, 2008)



Douglas J. Hamilton's work examines the significance of Scottish contributions to the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Atlantic world. *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750-1820* explores the role of kinship, ethnicity, and mercantile networks in promoting Scottish participation in the British Atlantic. From the northern kingdom, regional centers challenged London's economic ascendancy over the empire. Despite its political subordination, eighteenth-century Scotland leveraged its position in the United Kingdom to advantage. By harnessing British patronage, it utilized the imperial resources, while maintaining a distinctive ethnic identity to pursue this agenda. And while Scottish participation was widespread, Hamilton's focus on the Caribbean allows a careful analysis of Scottish mercantile networks whose influence spread throughout Britain and whose power radiated across the ocean to the Caribbean—the very core of the Atlantic system.

The ability of the Scots to use their ethnic identity to promote their collective interests is a focal point of *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World*. In many ways Hamilton's work is inspired by David Hancock's *Citizens of the World* (1994), but whereas Hancock focuses on London, Hamilton turns his attention to Scotland. Hamilton demonstrates the importance of kinship, community, and social networks in energizing Scottish participation. He also recognizes the complexities of Scottish identity: their collective identity was shaped by a common experience, enabled by the participation of Scottish nobles in Parliament, and their objectives advanced through the resources of the colonial world. Since early modern trade necessitated a personal presence, mercantile families sent representatives to the West Indies who operated trading ventures and agricultural enterprises. In their American settings, these associates enlarged the web of al-

liances by recruiting diverse groups who could offer assistance; these associations were mutually beneficial. Although Scottish identity was renegotiated in the New World, Scots maintained their distinctiveness and coherence, while simultaneously negotiating a British identity that granted them wider acceptance. In turn, these mercantile communities supplied many financial and human resources necessary to build Caribbean enterprises. Such activities allowed the rise of Glasgow as the second city in the British Empire and permitted competition from other Scottish mercantile centers, such as Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Dundee. Scottish networks operated regional trade, built profitable sugar estates, and supplied legal, medical, and managerial professionals to the West Indies.

The heart of Hamilton's study is Scottish participation in the eighteenth-century Caribbean, a region that promised new opportunities after the acquisition of the Ceded Islands in 1763. The Scottish presence in the West Indies was long-standing. As Hamilton observes, Scottish participation in Jamaica, the Leeward Islands, and Barbados had been considerable during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In Jamaica, Scottish interests were considerable. While there have been notable contributions to the study of the Ceded Islands, such as Andrew O'Shaughnessy's *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (2000), Hamilton provides an excellent characterization of some of the social forces shaping the region. Thus, the acquisition of Grenada, Tobago, St. Vincent, and Dominica are of critical importance. Hamilton's concentration on these islands gives important consideration to a region often overlooked. And while other works such as Alan Kassar's *Sojourners in the Sun* (1994) have previously demonstrated the contributions of Scottish merchants, doctors,

and managers, because of its inclusion of the Ceded Islands as well as Jamaica Hamilton's monograph provides a more complex view of Scottish participation in the Caribbean. And while it might be asserted that these islands were of peripheral importance to the empire, in the context of the eighteenth century they were some of the most promising imperial centers; it was not until they were almost destroyed by the slave uprisings of the 1790s and the abolitionist movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that they declined. As Hamilton contends, Scottish investment and expertise was of critical importance to these colonies. And in many of these islands Scottish migrants had a substantial presence.

The creation of a Scottish Atlantic was economically rather than politically motivated. While inclusion in the United Kingdom meant political subordination, it left open participation in the British Empire under the cloak of protection. And while the Scots might be described as marginalized or on the periphery of Britain, they had obtained entry to imperial trade and created social networks to overcome various obstacles. Indeed, the inclusion of Scottish nobles in Parliament strengthened their networks and encouraged them to invest time, energy, and finances in West Indian enterprises. They risked fortunes and lives pursuing these colonial enterprises with the expectation of benefiting the networks to which they belonged. In turn, this necessitated political alliances radiating to London that protected their mutual interests,

but did not necessarily require that they relocate to the metropole. In his analysis Hamilton draws upon Eric Williams's landmark work *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), demonstrating the positive effects of colonial profits. Repatriated wealth was used to purchase and improve Scottish estates and to invest in mercantile centers like London, as well as Liverpool and Bristol. Thus investment was funneled to peripheral regions of the empire—in Hamilton's study mainly to Scotland. In the end, Scottish networks created a large and complex web that protected diverse interests.

By focusing on the Scottish experience in the Caribbean, Hamilton's study could be seen as a case study of what was possible in the eighteenth-century empire. By focusing on Scottish Atlantic activities, he convincingly argues that the empire was British rather than English. And while his study is of Scottish networks and participation in the Atlantic world, he indirectly raises a series of equally important questions: was the Scottish experience unique, or could other groups—such as the Irish—also participate? Was it possible for other groups beyond Scotland—again primarily the Irish—to create mercantile networks, provide indigenous leadership, use the British patronage system, generate investment from regional trading centers, and negotiate a British identity? *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750-1820* will encourage historians to address these and other questions as they seek a better understanding of the complexities of the Atlantic world.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-atlantic>

Citation: Mark Quintanilla. Review of Hamilton, Douglas J., *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750-1820*. H-Atlantic, H-Net Reviews. March, 2008.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14262>

Copyright © 2008 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.