H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences


**James Taylor Carson.** *Making an Atlantic World: Circles, Paths, and Stories from the Colonial South.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007. xx + 161 pp. $36.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-57233-479-3.

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**Published on** H-Atlantic (July, 2008)

One question has shaped numerous Atlantic histories: were Old World cultures or New World environments more influential in shaping colonial American societies? In his ambitious book about the colonial South, James Taylor Carson recasts this question by analyzing the environment as a socially constructed space, as opposed to a natural fact, in which Europeans ("the invaders"), Native Americans ("the first people"), and West Africans ("the enslaved people") negotiated cross-cultural relationships and constructed a Creole culture. By utilizing a non-totalizing model of culture and an elliptical method of narration, Carson is able to reconstruct the "often overlapping contours of a multicultural past" (p. xv). Carson provides scholars of the South with a history that evenly accounts for the contributions of all of the founding peoples, and scholars of Atlantic history with a model of how to integrate diverse peoples into a single narrative. In his final analysis, Carson aligns himself with historians who give more weight to the New World adaptations required of Europeans, arguing that to survive in America the invaders had to adopt the first people's subsistence patterns and the "moral landscape that gave meaning to the physical topography" (p. 85).

Carson's reflections on the choices that a historian must make when constructing a multicultural narrative are original and thought provoking. Like many historians who study marginalized peoples, Carson grapples with how to overcome the "incommensurate literatures" and "asymmetries of power" of European, Native American, and African sources to "restore to each of the founding peoples a rough sense of equivalence and possibility" (p. 3). To this end, Carson subjects European history to the same generalities that have limited the richness of Native American and African history. His thirteen-page discussion of Eurasian cosmologies, for instance, tackles the ideologies and practices of peoples from Mesopotamia to Scandinavia over a period of roughly five thousand years. The histories of Native Americans and West Africans are not significantly different in tone from standard treatments, but there is no doubt that Carson's depiction of Eurasian cosmology effectively creates a level playing field between all of the founding peoples

and lays the groundwork for the creation of a Creole culture in America.

In chapter 1, "Founding Peoples," Carson reconstructs the precontact cosmologies of the first people, the enslaved people, and the invaders. He uncovers many similarities between the founding peoples: the shift to agriculture transformed their social structures and, in turn, transformed their landscapes; they transcribed their cosmologies on utilitarian objects; and they instilled some of the same shapes, animals, and environmental phenomena with cosmological import. Carson emphasizes the diffusion of ideas over vast networks, highlighting a system in which cultural learning and transformation were normative for all of the groups. Most significantly, he outlines how each of the founding peoples imagined and constructed their landscapes to facilitate, or guard against, interactions with outsiders. In a historiography that predominately depicts precontact Native Americans as existing in insular communities, Carson takes a large step forward by demonstrating the centrality of trade and long-distance relationships to the first people. On large mounds, they celebrated their relationships with outsiders through hospitality and reciprocity. The spread of Christianity, by contrast, led Europeans to view outsiders as enemies; those who had the power to control nature were civilized and those who were part of nature were savages.

In chapter 2, "Invasions," Carson demonstrates that the cosmologies of the founding peoples shaped their initial encounters in America. Castilian, French, and English explorers, acting under their belief that outsiders were ungodly and uncivilized, felt obliged to take possession of land using crosses, prayers, flags, and violence. Most Native Americans, by contrast, greeted these outsiders with hospitality. Eventually, the invaders' need for food "eroded Classical and Christian boundaries" and drew the invaders and the first people "together into a common space defined by maize" and the need for alliance (p. 61). In Florida, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana, the invaders quickly learned that to survive in the American environment they had to adopt the first people's social rituals of trade, tribute, and gift-exchange, and integrate themselves into local networks of power.

The enslaved people had to forge a different set of relationships in the South. In West Africa, kinship and ancestral relationships infused land with meaning. Enslaved people struggled to form families and communities in the foreign southern landscape. Carson stresses the survival of West African cultural products. Through examining crops, tools, musical instruments, baskets, homes, technologies, and conceptions of time and space, Carson argues that enslaved people were able to "rebuild the past out of the materials of the present" (p. 71). Markets, in particular, became places where the enslaved people rediscovered and forged familial relationships, "drawing the South together in a network of ancestral energy" (p. 74). This does not mean, however, that West African culture remained fully intact or static. Carson outlines how the enslaved people reworked Christianity into their cosmological beliefs and even used it to justify their flights from, and rebellions against, enslavement.

Carson explores the successes and failures of cross-cultural negotiations in chapters 3 and 4. He invokes the first people's use of "path" to connote the quality of relationships. Instead of relegating the intersections of paths to the frontier, Carson argues that the convergence of these paths gave rise to a Creole culture in which all groups utilized and invoked a system of shared beliefs and practices about social relationships. "White and red paths were never solid states but expressions of contingent and evolving relationships," he explains (p. 106). Forts, land disputes, thefts, and slave raids darkened the paths, while the shared experience of Native American and African enslavement, the creation of kinship relationships, gift-exchange, and trade (if conducted fairly)

brightened the paths. The divisions that took shape in the South were primarily the product of the invaders' hopes that by "insisting on difference they could obliterate creeping similarities and propinquities and humanities" (p. 110). While the enslaved people used a common Christian god to assert that they were equal to the invaders, the Native Americans invoked the language of kinship to underline the fact that all of the founding peoples emerged from the same earth. Standing in contrast to a historiography that reads violence as evidence of entrenched racial divisions, Carson provides evidence that Native Americans' ritualized violence against whites mimicked their punishment of Native American enemies, and was thus "a product of the painful merging of worlds" (p. 108). The landscape bore the marks of creolization. The placement of fields and crops highlighted the melding of Native American, European, and West African horticulture. European travelers at the end of the eighteenth century had to scrape the earth for remnants of precontact Native American cultural artifacts and boundaries, speaking to the emergence of a new culture in the South. The landscape also provided a lens into divisions. After rebellions, the invaders tried to rid the terrain of potential hiding spots and bounded the land with severed enemy heads.

In his historical ethnogeographic study of the colonial South, Carson supplements, rather than alters, what historians of the South accept about the dynamics of cross-cultural negotiations, namely, that Europeans had to perform Native American rituals of reciprocity to forge peaceful relationships, and that slaves resurrected African cultural forms to assert their autonomy and sense of community. For this reason, this compact volume could serve as an introductory text to the history of the colonial South. For Atlantic World historians contending with the relationship between culture and experience, Carson's book persuasively argues that even the most entrenched beliefs must be sustained by everyday practices and can be altered by material necessities. Historians who choose to emphasize the environment over natal culture would be remiss to ignore Carson's point that Europeans "stepped into a landscape that had been in the making for millennia" (p. 79). Finally, Carson's decision to highlight the fluidity of culture and the elliptical nature of history, and his insistence that the expansiveness of culture easily allows different groups to locate points of intersection, will provide all contact historians with a welcome example of how to construct a multicultural history.

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**Citation:** Jessica Ross Stern. Review of Carson, James Taylor. *Making an Atlantic World: Circles, Paths, and Stories from the Colonial South.* H-Atlantic, H-Net Reviews. July, 2008.

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