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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Nancy L. Rhoden, ed. *English Atlantics Revisited: Essays Honouring Ian K. Steele.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007. xxviii + 528 pp. $85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-3219-9.

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Published on H-Atlantic (August, 2008)

Revisiting the English Atlantic

The new Festschrift dedicated to historian Ian K. Steele is a volume replete with an impressively diverse set of chapters on the Atlantic world. They are a testament to the varied nature of Steele's writing as well as to the breadth of the field at present. Ian Steele's notable list of publications has done much to craft Atlantic studies. In addition, he has supervised several graduate students who have gone on to make their own contributions, a large number of whom have written chapters for this book, including the editor, Nancy Rhoden.

Rhoden claims that modern Atlantic history is popular because it "offers a powerful framework for historical understanding" and benefits from having influential parents: the imperial school and the new social history (p. xix). As courses in Atlantic history are becoming increasingly commonplace at universities and publishing continues apace, the field is poised to remain a staple for the foreseeable future, or, at the very least, a "confident fashion" within the discipline of history (p. xix).

Rhoden credits Steele's *The English Atlantic, 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (1986) with being "one of a handful of path-breaking books published in the mid-1980s that helped to make transatlantic history fashionable again and from which the current field of Atlantic studies emerged" (p. xiv). As she points out, Canadians seemed much more ready to accept Steele's vision that the Atlantic basin played a remarkable role in shaping English (and later British) colonial history. Our cousins south of the border were not initially so accepting, given the prevailing view of American exceptionalism. That Steele's view has gained widespread acceptance is proof of the fluid nature of historiography and, no doubt, the impact of Steele and like-minded historians upon it.

When he retired in 2003, Steele was honored for his role as mentor and author with a conference at the University of Western Ontario (UWO). This volume arises out of those papers and, not surprisingly, many of the contributors teach or were educated at UWO. The sections within the volume are said to represent, albeit loosely, various subfields in colonial American and British Atlantic studies as well as the chronological phases of Steele's scholarship.

Rhoden's introduction is useful for educated readers, specialist and non-specialist alike. While she obviously adheres to Steele's vision of a fairly cohesive unit that was the British Atlantic, she does not shy away from some of the limitations of this explanatory framework. She notes that "the Atlantic perspective simultaneously collapses real differences between nations and exaggerates unity" (p. xx). Her overview is a thought-provoking analysis that extols the strengths and identifies some of the weaknesses of this approach, especially valuable for those readers who are not experts in Atlantic history.

Following Rhoden's overview of Atlantic history trends, the "Contexts" section focuses more specifically on Steele's contributions. Richard Johnson discusses reconstructing the political economy of empire with special reference to Steele's evolving view of the Atlantic world. John Shy addresses Steele's role as a revisionist military historian who has produced works of originality and "spiky complexity" (p. 27). Admittedly, such works do not always find great favor with undergraduate students, he admits, but his studies are nonetheless influential. Shy also draws some interesting parallels between the work of Steele and Carl von Clausewitz.

The next section explores Atlantic political economy, a theme of Steele's earliest work. Barbara Murison, Stacy Lorenz, and Randy Dunn offer case studies of three political officials who struggled to master the complicated system of imperial administration and politics. In her examination of William Blathwayt, Murison sees imperial concerns through the prism of London, while Lorenz's chapter on Francis Nicholson and Dunn's on William Gooch explore the careers of two colonial governors. One of the overarching themes in this section is the important and

tricky business of patronage. These new studies provide further evidence in support of Lewis Namier's influential theories on this subject.

Part 3 focuses on the maritime Atlantic and offers numerous perspectives on the importance of the "transforming ocean" as a locus of commercial and political struggles (p. 129). Neil Kennedy argues persuasively that Bermuda should be considered a vital link in the early English Atlantic and that it was the first English New World space to live up to its advertised potential. While Michael Dove ably shows the key role of the Hudson's Bay Company in the North Atlantic world, he also maintains that it should be considered a more integral part of the larger English Atlantic world and colonial America. The company's initially tenuous hold over its North American holdings increased over time as it systematically amassed knowledge of the burgeoning British Empire; this was an instrumental task in mastering these new imperial spaces in the face of stiff French competition. Daniel Baugh's very insightful chapter compares the French and British maritime empires in the eighteenth century, stressing the role of their holdings along the Atlantic basin. This fascinating study emphasizes the national efforts made to control geopolitically significant waterways and coasts. On the strength of his essay, one has to conclude that Britain's sheer determination to protect its island and empire overrode its many disadvantages. Sara Morrison's analysis of the uses of the English royal forests for the "wooden walls" of the Restoration Navy is a revealing look at early conservation.

If the third section of the Festschrift is inspired by themes in Steele's seminal work, "The English Atlantic," the fourth section, is rooted in his work on aboriginal peoples and warfare. Frontiers were hotly contested areas that brought cultures, nation-states, and ethnic groups into contact. The impression that emerges from the various studies in this section is that these relationships were much more complex and nuanced than one might assume. Jon Parmenter's study of the negotiations between the Haudenosaunee people (the indigenous term that now takes the place of the French Iroquois) and British officials is particularly illuminating in this regard. Alexander Campbell's chapter on the Royal American Regiment and Michelle Hamilton's contribution on the British Army in the Old Northwest examine fighting men in the late eighteenth century and their hardscrabble existence in the New World.

As a social historian, I will admit to being partial to the studies in the fifth section. These chapters explore social themes in the Atlantic world of the eighteenth century, and they, like the chapters in the other sections, are very disparate. David Norton's look at Samson Occom examines a Mohegan evangelical minister with one foot in native culture and the other in the Great Awakening, with all that that entailed in terms of cultural and religious clashes. Arguably one of the most intriguing chapters is Kenneth Lockeridge's study of the Swedish Hesselius brothers and their coming to terms with the New World. These two studies demonstrate the "pull-haul" between the countervailing impulses of tolerance and assimilation. Given that Steele was reputedly leery of tackling the influence of the American Revolution on the Atlantic world, Rhodens examination of the "patriarchal crisis" in a small sample group of Virginian fathers argues for an Atlantic perspective beyond what Steele may be comfortable with. So too does Margaret Kellow's look at the relationship between the British antislavery movement and the American Revolution. She argues that the War of Independence rocked the Atlantic world, but did benefit the emancipation cause in Britain and its colonies.

Yet although the contributors have ties to Steele and have tackled subjects within the Atlantic framework, their studies are so distinct that there seems to be very little to bind the large volume together. This is a frequent problem in works like this. This may be rather "off-putting" for readers with little background knowledge of the field or Steele's scholarship. As a result, a book such as *The English Atlantic Revisited* is best suited to those with more than a passing familiarity with the field, who can use these largely specialist studies to nuance their existing picture of the Atlantic world.

From my perspective, the strongest chapters are those that not only shed light on particular corners but also draw conclusions about the Atlantic world in general. In this regard, the most edifying contributions are those, like Daniel Baugh's analysis of the rival French and British navies, that tackle overarching themes clearly encompassing the Atlantic basin and beyond. Thus, although the authors may well have been attempting to show the larger significance of their studies, they vary in their level of success. To a great extent they are rescued by John Murrin's concluding section, which anchors the work to Steele's considerable legacy: he does an admirable job pulling some threads of cohesion out of the seventeen diverse essays.

Overall, then, the various chapters in this Festschrift demonstrate the wealth of possibilities in a transnational and cross-cultural approach. While some studies are regrettably narrow in their focus, together they form com-

pelling if fragmented portraits of the peoples and persons populating the complex world that was the British Atlantic. The contributions illustrate the "tumultuous variety of recent scholarship" as well as raising many questions and revealing promising methodologies for future studies in the Atlantic world (p. 491). It does not purport to be the final word on the British Atlantic, but this volume unquestionably reveals how much has been accomplished in the field to date and how much remains unwritten. As such, it is a fitting tribute to a prolific historian.

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Citation: Cheryl Fury. Review of Rhoden, Nancy L., ed., *English Atlantics Revisited: Essays Honouring Ian K. Steele.* H-Atlantic, H-Net Reviews. August, 2008.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14807

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