

John Wareing. *Indentured Migration and the Servant Trade from London to America, 1618-1718.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, February 2017. 352 pp. \$100.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-878890-4.

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Published on H-Early-America (November, 2017)

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In his book *Indentured Migration and the Servant Trade from London to America, 1618-1718*, John Wareing takes readers into the murky and often violent world of the servant trade between London and the Americas. Wareing demonstrates the importance of indentured human cargo in both furthering English colonial ambitions in the Americas and providing an outlet for an increasing number of urban poor. Collectively, procurers, merchants, and ship captains brought more than 320,000 servants to the southern continental colonies and West Indies through the mid-eighteenth century (p. 2). Rather than examine the experience of the indentured, however, Wareing addresses the inner workings of the trade itself in order to highlight how it “was a practical and effective method of supplying labor to serve the national ambition for territory, trade, and power in America” (p. 251) during an era when “decades of population growth and inflation” (p. 253) affected market economics and social values. The work brings together statistical data, drawn from merchant accounts and customs sources, legal cases, which trace the government’s response to the growing trade in human cargo, and popular accounts of spiriting, documented by writers like Daniel Defoe, to address the “often abusive practices inflicted upon many indentured servants” in

the name of national progress and personal profit (p. 250).

After a brief opening outlining England’s slow response to the Iberian discoveries in America, Wareing dedicates the second section of the book to methodically situating the growth of the servant trade within a period of mass migration from the English countryside into London. Promises of high wages attracted more than a million people to the city between 1550 and 1750. While skilled artisans could find stable work and a living wage, for the majority of migrants, “competition for positions was intense, turnover was high, and unemployment the fate of many” (p. 57). In an urban center increasingly littered with the vagrant poor, promoters of English colonization, the Hakluyt cousins in particular, argued that these men and women could serve as valuable settlers helping to build “new Englands out of England” and serve as a counter to the colonies of the Catholic powers (p. 66). In his analysis, overseas migration was not a separate event beginning on the docks of port cities, but another stage of the process that began in rural English towns.

In connecting overseas transportation to the larger process of English migration to urban centers, Wareing challenges historian Abbot Smith’s depiction of servants as passive and unwilling victims presented in his 1947 work, *Colonists in*

Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labour in America 1607-1776. As migrants in a larger process, Wareing effectively demonstrates that indentured servants actively sought out employment opportunities in London and, if no employment could be found, many turned toward indenture in the New World. Those transported as servants fit into four distinct categories. Skilled workers most often entered into servitude as “Consigned servants” who freely signed contracts that clearly defined the terms of bondage, demarcated a colonial destination, and identified masters prior to embarkation. “Exchanged servants” entered into the market under less favorable terms as they were recruited and bound in England and resold in the colonies in a second transaction. “Customary servants” were not bound in England but transported to the colonies and bound by the custom of the colony where they were purchased. Finally, upon arrival in the New World, “Redemptioners” were responsible for finding masters to pay their passage debts and if they were unable to find contracts, they were bound as servants and sold at the price of their debt.

While Wareing utilizes the distinction between different forms of servitude to challenge Smith’s conception of servants as passive victims, he is equally keen to dispute the rebuttal made in David Galenson’s *White Servitude in Colonial America: An Economic Analysis* (1981). Galenson examined indenture contracts to argue that servants were savvy bargainers who participated in a free-market economy and actively sold their human capital to the highest bidder. Rather than explaining how servants negotiated terms, Wareing posits that it was merchants who made contracts in order to gain legal protection from both deceitful servants and unscrupulous procurers. “Would-be servants” were neither passive objects nor cunning capitalists. Instead, Wareing notes that many migrants were criminals looking to secure food, board, and payment before absconding from bondage. Secondly, during the seventeenth century merchants ran the risk of purchasing coerced

servants from unlawful procurers, which could lead to prosecution for their role in transporting deceived or stolen servants. Therefore, servant contracts demonstrate the role of merchants protecting their investments rather than exemplifying entrepreneurial servants selling their labor.

While the English population generally accepted the servant trade as a means of populating colonies in the Americas, popular accounts of deceit and violence generated a vigorous debate in Parliament about the ethics of the servant trade. In his third section, Wareing utilizes the stories of St. Katherine’s High Bailiff William Haveland and Wapping merchant John Dykes to illuminate a world where punishments for the crimes of kidnapping and spiriting were only sporadically enforced and criminality an everyday business risk prior to 1718. While urbanization created a growing number of potential servants and national ambition justified the movement of transient people to the Americas, ultimately profits motivated procurers like Haveland and Dykes to employ deceit and violence to illegally spirit men, women, and children to the colonies. These procurers benefited from a system where “the need to maintain law and order was balanced against the need for labor in the profitable staple-exporting colonies” (p. 125). Because servants were often (although not always) from the dregs of society, few cases of kidnapping or deception were prosecuted in the courts. Even if more affluent families could afford redress during the seventeenth century these crimes carried only misdemeanor punishments and many criminals were prosecuted multiple times. Although court records reveal how men like Haveland faced public punishment for the crime of spiriting servants, many involved in the illicit side of the trade continued to profit. The economic importance and utility of spirited labor led to the defeat of more strict punishments for dishonest traders in 1682 and 1686.

Ultimately, eighteenth-century colonial expansion led to even greater movements of indentured

servants from London to the Americas. The need for more colonists prompted Parliament to see the New World as a valve for not only the transient urban population, but also the criminally unwilling. The need for labor, especially in the Continental colonies that had not yet begun importing enslaved African labor on the scale of their West Indian counterparts, justified a new Transportation Act in 1718. The introduction of penal servitude created more attractive terms for masters as the law bound criminals to contracts of seven to fourteen years instead of the common four-year terms for servants twenty and older. Secondly, more stringent penalties for spiriting brought a virtual end to the kidnapping of children. In all, the Transportation Act of 1718 brought more than 50,000 convicts to Maryland and Virginia by 1775 (p. 241).

Although Wareing's primary focus is on economic and legal aspects of the trade, he also strives to analyze the social makeup of the servant population. While the archive is not complete for the century under study, surviving records from Bristol (1654-62) and London (1683-86) indicate that more than three-quarters of servants leaving England were male, more than three-quarters were adults over the age of twenty-one, and almost all of the individuals traveled alone (p. 62). Wareing also demonstrates that although recorded occupations are scarce, historians should be wary of Smith's claim that "the majority of servants were more or less worthless individuals" (quoted, p. 66). Rather, Wareing posits that discourses of class did not develop until the eighteenth century. In the century prior, the majority of servants were drawn from the "common sort" of people, which included all people below the rank of yeomen. Therefore, the servant population was more economically diverse than previous scholars imagined.

Collectively, Wareing's study of the servant trade between London and the Americas through 1718 addresses historiographical debates and

provides new insights about the inner workings of the coercive and vicious market. He utilizes a number of tables and graphs particularly well to chart both statistical data on emigrant numbers and provide visual representation on the places of origin and destination for indentured servants. In addition, the transcription of a number of laws and regulations, alongside copies of indenture contracts compiled in an appendix, allows the reader to interact with his evidence and validate his conclusions. Despite his meticulous detail, this reviewer wonders if Wareing could have done more to address the connection between the servant trade, the growth of slavery, and the construction of race at the end of the seventeenth century. Refuting historians who equate the two forms of bondage, he asserts, "Indentured servitude was not chattel slavery" (p. 97). Yet his focus on the economics of the trade and violence inherent in procuring servants means Wareing only briefly analyzes growing concerns about cohesion between enslaved Africans and indentured Englishmen in America and how these fears impacted the demand and recruitment of servants in London. Nonetheless, Wareing's study wonderfully illuminates the shadowy world of the servant trade, revealing how national ambitions, demand for labor, and moral reaction to exploitation created a complex market in human capital, which servants and procurers alike hoped to manipulate for their own gain.

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Citation: G. Patrick O'Brien. Review of Wareing, John. *Indentured Migration and the Servant Trade from London to America, 1618-1718*. H-Early-America, H-Net Reviews. November, 2017.

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