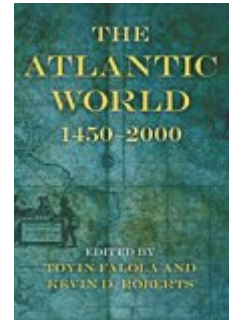


Toyin Falola, Kevin D. Roberts. *The Atlantic World, 1450-2000*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. 383 S. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-253-21943-5.



Reviewed by Thomas Benjamin

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During the past decade an increasing number of monographs, essays and edited books have appeared with the words “Atlantic” and “Atlantic World” in their titles. This relatively new approach to the study of the formation of the modern West is also found in the many dozens of university courses that are offered to students throughout the United States and in many other countries. For all of its popularity, however, the Atlantic World remains a rather nebulous subject and one with its fair share of skeptics and critics. What is or was this ocean centered world? Does it have a beginning or an end in history? Is it an academic fad that will fade away in the few years? Or is it the beginning of a serious rethinking and restructuring of the history the multicultural and multiracial West composed of Western Europe, the Americas, and Africa?

The sixteen essays in Toyin Falola and Kevin D. Roberts’s excellent edited volume reinforce again and again that this world centered on the Atlantic Ocean was a world in motion, that is a vast arena of complex human interactions among so many different peoples and cultures. Although

this book is not the “comprehensive survey of the Atlantic World” promised on the back cover, it is perhaps the most coherent edited volume in Atlantic history. As a volume in Blacks in the Diaspora series of Indiana University Press, the editors Falola and Roberts have created an Africa and African-centered collection of essays.

The three chapters in Part I, “Nations and Migrations” focus on the scattered and largely unconnected cultures and empires of the Atlantic regions and how early trade and migrations shaped a nascent Atlantic World. Part II, “Empires and Slavery,” with five chapters is the beating heart of the book. The authors of these essays consider the significance of race and gender in the formative interactions in all of these new worlds. But it is the emergence of black slavery, the slave trade and the useful concept of the Black Atlantic that takes precedence in this section. And, rightly so. The Black Atlantic in its human, commercial and imperial configurations was the core of the Atlantic World. As the editors write in their Introduction, “slavery was the handmaiden of colonialism in the Atlantic basin. Together, they created

the Atlantic World” (p. X). The three chapters of Part III, “Independence and Abolition” recognize the trans-Atlantic connections between the revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the form and popular movements to abolish the slave trade and slavery. Finally, in an innovative and welcome departure from nearly all conceptions of the Atlantic World, the four chapters of Part IV, “Globalization and Its Discontents” examine several Atlantic issues in the twentieth century.

The editors of this volume are to be commended for organizing such an intelligent and well-integrated history of the Atlantic World. Indiana University Press, likewise, has the respect of Atlantic scholars for publishing so many excellent studies in its Blacks in the Diaspora series.

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