Michael Meranze, Saree Makdisi, eds.. *Imagining the British Atlantic after the American Revolution.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. 396 pp. $67.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4426-5069-5.

Reviewed by Gregg French

Historians of the early American republic and the British Empire often use the American Revolutionary War (1775–83) to demarcate the birth of the United States as an independent nation and the demise of the First British Empire in North America. Despite the occasional necessity to identify historical signposts such as the American Revolutionary War, these events can often create a false sense of uniformity and absoluteness, overshadowing complex realities. Attempting to grasp how individuals engaged with transatlantic events during the Age of Revolution (1750–1820) can provide academics with a more nuanced conceptualization of the period, as well as increased understanding of the global events that followed. Additionally, it is essential to be cognizant of the fact that, for the vast majority of individuals living during the period, the local superseded both the national and international. However, this did not exclude national and international events from affecting an individual's understanding of their place in the turbulent transatlantic world that developed in the decades following the conclusion of the American Revolutionary War.

In *Imagining the British Atlantic after the American Revolution*, editors Michael Meranze and Saree Makdisi have masterfully brought together nine essays from a diverse range of scholars specializing in history, literature, or art histo-

ry. Within the chapters of the work, each author concludes that an individual's interaction with the instability that dominated the period was fueled by the "rise of democratic nationalism and the subsequent surge of imperial reaction" that inevitability affected those living throughout the region (inside flap of the dust jacket). Additionally, individuals' engagement with, and reactions to, these events was dictated by who and where they were, from where they had previously come, and how they perceived their contact with the past. Rather than arguing that a singular British Atlantic imagination emerged during the time period under discussion, the essays contend that both "multiplicities and antinomies" ruled the day. Furthermore, each chapter also illustrates how examples of fragmented engagement with the surrounding world challenge the narrative that the conclusion of the American Revolutionary War marked a "clean break" with the pre-Revolutionary Era (p. 18).

Building on the contention that the Atlantic basin served as a "connective lifeline" for individuals living on both sides of it between 1750 and 1820, Meranze and Makdisi position their study at the forefront of a historiographical crossroads examining Atlantic history and the Age of Revolution.[1] The introductory chapter provides the reader with a clear understanding that this collec-

tion of essays will not be a traditional, top-down narrative about the British Atlantic. On the contrary, Meranze and Makdisi establish that the subsequent chapters will illustrate how a diverse group of artists, writers, politicians, migrants, administrators, Catholics, Quakers, abolitionists, feminists, penal reformers, sailors, and mutineers engaged with and were affected by the incidents that shaped the Age of Revolution throughout the British Atlantic, leading to significant differences in the perceptions of the period and the events that followed.

Although all nine essays address the connectivity and/or the disjointedness of the British Atlantic during the Age of Revolution, Aris Sarafianos's chapter on the production and reception of Jan van Rymsdyk's works of anatomical art particularly excels at presenting a multitude of transatlantic networks and modes of perception. The reader is given an immediate opportunity to grasp the nuanced relationships that existed in the Atlantic world by engaging with Sarafianos's intra-imperial example. Furthermore, the positive reception that van Rymsdyk's work received in Quaker-dominated Pennsylvania during the colonial period points to the dominant position that realism would hold in the coming century, one of many examples of British and American views diverging in the post-Revolutionary Era.

While Sarafianos's work primarily focuses on the pre-Revolutionary Era in both Britain and the American colonies, Randall McGowen's essay explores the changing nature of penal reform in England following the conflict. McGowen illustrates that responses to the Age of Revolution in Britain were not as conservative as many have previously believed. On the contrary, despite the failure of several reform movements in the 1820s, British prisons were perceived as a "technical problem" (p. 17) that could be resolved with new initiates, while at same time, "preserv[ing] the existing order" (p. 220). By presenting this example, McGowen's work analyzes the weight that the Age of Revolution placed on the British imagination, as well as the nuanced position that prisons held for those who desired reform, and those who preferred stability and control following the turbulent period.

Also included within Meranze and Makdisi's collection of essays are the ways in which Quakers and Catholics dealt with the American Revolutionary War, how people on both sides of the Atlantic struggled with their personal lives amidst the larger national and international conflicts of the period, and how others responded to the failed "revolutionary breakthrough[s]" that appeared decades earlier (p. 15). Taken collectively, the editors of this work have curated an insightful, thought-provoking collection that is sure to inspire a multitude of future academics to reconceptualize the heterogeneity that existed in the Atlantic world during the Age of Revolution.

The work concludes with Edward G. Gray's exploration of Pitcairn, a remote island in the South Pacific inhabited by British criminals and mutineers beginning in the late eighteenth century. Although geographically outside the Atlantic world, Gray connects Pitcairn with the Atlantic through the institution of slavery, which shaped the history of the island. In concluding the collection with this essay, Meranze and Makdisi are alluding to the British Empire's shift in focus from the Atlantic to the Pacific in the nineteenth century. Additionally, the editors are hinting at a belief that, building on the methods and theories presented in this collection of essays, a global analysis of the British Empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would illustrate further "multiplicities and antinomies" affecting the lives of individuals throughout the period and into the future (p. 18).

Note

[1]. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 1.

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