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A Cultural History of the Atlantic World, 1250–1820

A Cultural History of the Atlantic World, 1250–1820, explores the idea that strong linkages exist in the histories of Africa, Europe, North America, and South America. John K. Thornton provides a comprehensive overview of the history of the Atlantic Basin before 1830 by describing political, social, and cultural interactions between the continents' inhabitants. He traces the backgrounds of the populations on these three continental landmasses brought into contact by European navigation. Thornton then examines the political and social implications of the encounters, tracing the origins of a variety of Atlantic societies and showing how new ways of eating, drinking, speaking, and worshipping developed in the newly created Atlantic World. This book uses close readings of original sources to produce new interpretations of its subject.

John K. Thornton is Professor of History and African American Studies at Boston University. He is the author of *Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500–1800* (1999), and *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1992, 1998), and the coauthor, with Linda M. Heywood, of *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585–1660* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

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A Cultural History of the Atlantic World, 1250–1820

JOHN K. THORNTON
Boston University

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To

Jack Fischel, colleague and friend

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Preface

In 1995, Jack Fischel, the chair of the Department of History at Millersville University, asked me if I could develop a new class that would be interdisciplinary and multiregional in scope. Since I had already published a book that more or less met that requirement in *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World* in 1992, I thought that perhaps I could expand the ideas and methods of that book to include not just Africans but all the people of the Atlantic Basin – Africans, Europeans, and the indigenous people of the Americas. Like all such broad-based courses, it floundered at first, and it took me a good three years of teaching it to determine how I should structure the class, what organization it should have, and how such a vast field could be rendered intelligible to undergraduate students at a regional university.

From the very beginning of the course, I was determined that Atlantic history as I was conceiving it would not simply be anchored on the story of European expansion and conquest. Much as I admired the French "big histories" that were my initial guides to doing large-scale history, such as the work of Fernand Braudel, Pierre Chaunu, or Frédéric Mauro, I wanted to include all the actors in the game, and on their own terms. I also decided that I would focus on cultural themes as well as political economy, which I felt had dominated the questions of contact and exchange to the detriment of other elements of human interaction.

More than that, however, I also wanted the class to be regionally comprehensive, to cover the Caribbean and Latin America as well as North America, and not to neglect Africa, my own special interest. I wanted to look at what might be considered fringe areas as well as what are largely conceived as the areas of main activity such as North America, Mexico, and Peru. I hoped to discover patterns of interaction away from the mainstream of historical research that would help us see larger patterns of human interaction, so I wanted to look at Central America as well as the Southern Cone of South America with Chile and Argentina. I wanted to understand the small-scale societies of the North American Midwest or the Mexican Northwest as much as the great empires of the Aztecs and Incas, or the African powerhouses like Mali.

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With these grand intentions I waded into teaching the class. Well over my head for much of the time, I struggled to find material to fulfill my plans. As I gradually got some control of the subject matter, I decided that I would write up my lecture notes, because there was no truly comprehensive textbook that covered many of the themes I was dealing with, and the students were frequently lost or bewildered. So during the Spring term of 1998, I wrote up my notes to form a sort of textbook. As an ephemeral publication (it was printed at the college bookstore and sold "at cost" to the students), I was free to revise and update it at will, and indeed I did so every term I taught the course. Thus, over the course of the next few years, I developed a sort of synergy between student feedback, responses to the course, and my own research interests that drove content in the course and was promptly reflected in revisions to the textbook.

By 2001, I started to add footnotes to the work, at first as much for my own reference as for the students to benefit from. However, the task of footnoting turned out to change the work. I had to be more certain of things I had lectured on; looking up things necessarily forced me to present more detail and to anchor the facts more in their historical context. I was embarrassed that I had initially included information I had culled from encyclopedia articles, or less than reputable sources, and so I had to chase down legitimate scholarly offerings. Bit by bit, the text became less a written form of lecture notes and more and more a formally written text. It also increasingly became a scholarly work on its own as well as a summary of existing scholarship.

In 2003, I moved from Millersville to Boston University, and in the environment of a research university I decided to place greater emphasis on the scholarly aspects of the book, and to build my lectures from the text rather than to build the text from my lectures. The book and its apparatus increasingly became more like the model I had used in *Africa and Africans* and its origins as a text became less obvious.

During the early 2000s, however, other developments helped shape the way the book grew. Gallica, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France's Web site, began offering vast numbers of books for download, and I discovered that books I had once only been able to consult in large libraries were available on my computer in a matter of minutes. That marvel was soon joined by other incredible research resources, including JSTOR, an unbelievable (at the time) database of journal articles (and its companions like Project Muse or Persée). These wonders were capped by Google Books, which opened up an even larger store of older publications.

All of a sudden, I could consult huge numbers of primary sources directly – sources I had only been able to read in summer jaunts to the Library of Congress, overseas in Paris or Lisbon, or perhaps at Harvard University after I moved to Boston. But with downloaded and soon annotated copies on my desktop, I did not need to spend time and resources to go to these repositories. If that were not enough, I was also presented with raw archival material; the Spanish National Archives put hundreds of thousands of pages of original

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unpublished material at my fingertips through PARES, as did the National Archives in Portugal. The Projeto Resgate made countless records of Brazil available to me.

This flood of new material altered my approach to the text. I began to turn increasingly to primary sources to write, and I tried to tackle problems anew. Where once an area that had a historiography that did not fit the aims of my course was simply overlooked, I now found that I could integrate themes directly from the primary sources into my teaching schemes. With the aid of the Internet, I could usually locate primary sources that allowed me to build almost from scratch and that, in turn, allowed me to pursue larger themes in more areas and with greater depth than before.

Throughout the 2000s, my textbook–scholarly research project grew and changed, taking in more regions, engaging more themes, dealing with many topics in greater depth than I could before. At the same time, the relentless demands to make the work accessible to my students forced me to revise constantly, explaining, simplifying, and as always cutting, cutting, cutting, new details wrested from the ever increasing and ever more available store of primary sources I could use.

Finally, I took a sabbatical leave in the spring of 2010 to pull what had become a somewhat unwieldy text together, to ensure that my issues of coverage were met and to fill in areas I knew were still weak. Thanks to the good graces of Henry Louis Gates and Vera Grant, in particular, I was allowed to use a desk in a common use area of the W. E. B. Dubois Institute as my research space. In that environment, enriched by conversations of passing Fellows and workers at the institute, I wrote my final draft. Curiously, thanks to the new electronic environment in which I was working, I often sat at the desk with not one book or piece of paper before me; everything I used or needed was lodged in my computer.

In spite of this long history, this book is in many ways still an incomplete project – in fact, really a first step. I am not embarrassed by this; it is far too large a project to be completed in any meaningful way in one human lifespan, and I only hope that it can point the way for others to work. It was also assembled in a somewhat haphazard way, and readers should note this. I conducted considerable archival research for this project in London, the Netherlands, Brazil, Portugal, Italy, and other locations, including a good deal that was originally performed for other projects. Thus some themes, periods, and areas have been much more thoroughly researched than others. Brazil is one such case, because repeated trips to Brazilian and Portuguese archives gave me a solid base there. Others, such as Mexico and Peru, are not so deeply studied, but thanks to my online research, many older editions of chronicles, collections of documents, and other resources were still available. Such a pattern necessarily creates an unevenness in the treatment of these regions.

I also have relatively less treatment of Europe and most Euro-Americans than to other groups in the Atlantic. This is in some measure a recognition that, on the whole, Europe and Euro-Americans have already been deeply studied

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by many other scholars. The majority of the source material, and usually the best-quality material, pertains far more to them than to others. I therefore have less to contribute, although I have tried to be attentive to not leaving them out. They are a vitally important part of the whole project, and my including them as much as I do is in recognition of that, but also to ensure that the theoretical ideas I develop apply to them also. In many cases, especially as relates to general cultural issues, the matters can be more deeply and thoroughly explored with that group.

Another point I must make is that after about 2001 or so, I did much more research in primary sources than in secondary ones. A large-scale project overwhelms the capacity of a single researcher to cover all the available literature, and in the interests of timeliness I opted to decide at a certain point to say that I had written enough to make a plausible case for the arguments I present, at which point I would stop writing because otherwise, the project may never be completed. But if one imposes a time limit of this sort, it then requires a certain amount of triage, decisions about how much one can read and about what to read first and what to put off. For better or for worse, I opted to read primary sources before or in lieu of the existing secondary sources. In many cases I was moved this way because the more recent literature, especially in book form or written outside the English-language world, was not readily available online, whereas many of the primary sources were.

I was also moved in this case by a sense of security that one gets from reading primary sources. If one is able to read the most important primary sources and to sample, at least, a range of lesser ones, there is an inevitable feeling that one cannot stray too far from what is known or knowable about a region or period. Knowing that one is reading the words of an eyewitness, a contemporary, or the person closest to the events in question is reassuring. This does not mean that reading primary sources without paying heed to the sometimes substantial critical analysis of these sources that secondary literature provides is always a good idea, only that in the process of triage, I felt more comfortable with the primary literature and more willing to sacrifice the secondary.

In this instance I wish to apologize to the many scholars whose work I appear to have ignored. I know the sense of irritation that arises when one reads a bibliography or notes in a scholarly work and finds that one's own work on that very topic is not there. It may also appear as a sort of arrogance that I should be reinventing the wheel in many places. I can only beg forgiveness for this, and plead in my defense my decisions about triage.

Attentive readers of footnotes may also note that I frequently cite older editions of works that are available in more modern form, and this is, in fact, a product of my research strategy – where a nineteenth-century edition of a chronicle was available through Google Books or Gallica, I might prefer that to a more modern edition. In some cases, albeit not in too many, the more recent edition has a better text – employs additional manuscript material, perhaps reads the paleography better. But often the modern editions were simply a means of making a text available to modern readers because the original

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edition had become a bibliographic rarity. Today's Internet-driven world has curiously reversed this situation – old editions are now more readily available than the more recent ones.

Finally, I have a penchant for reading sources in the original languages if I can read them myself, and of course if they are available to me. I have found time and time again that sources, especially the types of sources that underlie a book like this one, can yield the most information when read very carefully and closely, and particularly when the semantic field of each word is considered very carefully. In many languages, there is not a perfect fit between the semantic field of a word in one language and the semantic field in another, and thus even the best translators must choose one out of two or perhaps even more words that fit into that field. Yet sometimes, it is a tiny gain in knowledge to be able to sort out the exact field, and so I prefer to read originals. Unfortunately, it also means that I tend to cite original language texts even when there are fine English translations available. I sometimes use the translation and only revert to the original when it seems necessary, but for citation I prefer the original. I have tried when possible to alert readers to English translations, and in citing this work to seek, whenever possible, to use a method that allows the reference to be retrieved across editions and languages. Thus, for older literature, I have preferred book chapter citations to page number citation, as the strategy of older writers was to have relatively short chapters, and my modern readers would be able to find my reference reasonably quickly.

I must take this opportunity to thank a great number of people who made this work possible. The first thanks go to the approximately 600 students who took my course over the period when I developed this book. Their questions, querulous expressions, student reviews, term paper choices, and answers (both good and bad) on examination questions helped me refine, shape, and conceptualize the course. Several graduate students also helped me by more intense discussion, most notably Sarah Westwood, Eric Cooper, and Andrea Mosterman. A special thanks to Mosterman, whose knowledge of German and Dutch (and Dutch paleography) was often of great help.

I want to give Linda Heywood special thanks for the intellectual role she has played in the development of this book and indeed my whole professional life since we met, corresponded, and married in Lisbon in 1978–79. We discussed Atlantic history first in Cleveland in 1982 as a way to take ourselves beyond being Africanists and reaching a larger audience by including the diaspora within our field. My first book-length venture into Atlantic history, *Africa and Africans* was born in her office at Cleveland State, as she wrestled with new ways of integrating Africa into African-American history. Apart from coauthoring one book and a half-dozen articles with me, Heywood has been a constant source of debate, discussion, argument, and consensus building over the past thirty-some years. Thanks to Jonathan Zatlin for organizing a seminar at Boston University to discuss the book, and especially to Barbara Diefendorf and Brendan McConville for their comments.

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I benefited from the services of some research assistants while at Boston University, notably Lehong Weng and Andrea Mosterman, as well as Marta Roiz of the University of Coimbra, Portugal.

Much of the research that went into this book took place within the confines of Heywood's and my joint book project, started in 2000 and completed in 2007 with the publication of *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles and the Foundation of the Americas*. That work was funded by Howard University, Millersville University, Boston University through travel and research grants, the U.S. Park Service, and especially a three-year grant from the W. E. B. DuBois Institute of Harvard University. The DBI also granted me work space in their building during my final writing stages in 2010.

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Abbreviations

ACL	Academia das Cienças (Lisbon)
AGI	Archivo General de Indias (Seville)
AHN	Archivo Historico Nacional (Madrid)
AHNA	Arquivo Histórico Nacional de Angola (Luanda)
AHU	Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (Lisbon)
AIHGB	Arquivo do Instituto Historico e Geografico Brasileiro (Rio de Janeiro)
ANF	Archives Nationales de France (Paris)
ANTT	Arquivo Nacional de Torre do Tombo (Lisbon)
Inq Lx	Inquisição de Lisboa
APEB	Arquivo Público de Estado da Bahia (Salvador)
APF	Archivio "De Propaganda Fide" (Rome/Vatican)
APM	Arquivo Público Mineiro (Belo Horizonte)
AUC	Arquivo da Universidade de Coimbra (Coimbra)
BIFAN	*Bulletin, Institut Foundamental de l'Afrique Noire*
BL	British Library (London)
Add	Additional Manuscripts
BN	Colombia Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia
BNA	Barbados National Archives (Bridgetown)
BNRJ	Biblioteca Nacional de Rio de Janeiro
BSGL	Biblioteca da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa (Lisbon)
CDI	*Coleccion de Documentos de Indias*
CDHC	*Coleccion de Documentos para la historia de Chile*
DAESP	*Documentos do Arquivo de Estado de São Paulo*

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DTA	Digital Text Archive
GB	Google Books
JR	Reuben Gold Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and allied Documents* (73 vols., Cleveland, OH, 1899–1903)
LC	Library of Congress (Washington, DC)
LRO	Liverpool Record Office (Liverpool)
LW	Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works* (55 vols., St. Louis, MO, and Philadelphia, 1955–1986)
MAB	Moravian Archives, Bethlehem (Bethlehem, PA)
MMA	António Brásio, ed. *Monumenta Missionaria Africana* (1st series, 15 vols., Lisbon, 1952–1988)
MMA^2	2nd series, 7 vols., Lisbon, 1958–1985).
NAN	Nationaal Archief Nederland (The Hague)
OWIC	Oude West Indische Compagnie
NAUK	National Archives of the United Kingdom (Kew)
PARES	Portal de Archivos Españoles
SD	Santo Domingo
TUO	Tuohy Papers

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