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Vidal, Cécile. *Louisiana: Crossroads of the Atlantic World*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. Pp. 278. ISBN: 9780812245516

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Atlantic history has evolved as scholars have recognized “the difficulty for one person to master several languages and historiographies and to do research in archives disseminated all over the Atlantic world” (3). To avoid these obstacles, the authors in this edited volume utilize what David Armitage refers to as cis-Atlantic history by studying Louisiana’s uniqueness as a result of its interactions with the greater Atlantic world. In her introduction, Cécile Vidal asserts, “One cannot write Louisiana history without adopting an Atlantic perspective or study Atlantic history without including Louisiana” (17). Although the latter may be an overstatement, this collection contributes significantly to the histories of Louisiana, the United States, and the Atlantic world.

This volume encourages scholars to incorporate the histories of Atlantic Louisiana into the narrative of American history. Louisiana, or the Mississippi colony, refers to the original French colonial territory “from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico and from the Alleghenies to the Rocky Mountains” (10). While spanning the seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries to draw attention to “several interconnected phenomena,” the majority of the content treats the eighteenth century (9). Using Louisiana as the perfect example, Sylvia R. Frey argues in her conclusion for the importance of an Atlantic history based on race instead of nations or empires. However, this volume portrays a biracial Atlantic “to the detriment of Native Americans,” as Vidal acknowledges (12). These essays explore a variety of historical topics from law, religion, and race to marriage, slavery, and informal economies. Vidal divides the eight chapters into three sections based on concepts and practices of Atlantic history.

The first section, “Empires,” includes essays by Guillaume Aubert, Alexandre Dubé, and Sylvia L. Hilton, demonstrating the Atlantic character of Louisiana’s administration under the French and Spanish Empires. Using religious and judicial documents, Aubert examines the transatlantic nature of French Louisiana’s 1724 Code Noir. He asserts that historians have placed too much emphasis on the metropolitan origins, while neglecting France’s reliance on “colonial reports synthesizing decades of Caribbean jurisprudence” for Louisiana’s Code Noir (22). Dubé traces the Atlantic careers of administrators from the Ministry of the Navy in French Louisiana in the eighteenth century. *La plume*, as Dubé refers to these bureaucrats, “constructed the navy’s presence in the colony from local resources, contributing to its reach and flexibility,” making “the navy an Atlantic network” and “an organizer of power relationships” (67). Hilton focuses on the policies adopted in Louisiana under the Spanish Regime. She argues that “the most unusual policies” were inspired “by expediency born of necessity, in the face of local peculiarities which made that region especially vulnerable to international pressures” (69).

“Circulations,” the second section, contains chapters by Sophie White and Jean-Pierre le Glaunec. White analyzes the parallel theft cultures in the French Atlantic and judicial records to suggest that enslaved Africans learned their roles in an informal economy based on stolen goods from poor white colonists. She concludes that by assimilating to European culture in Louisiana, Africans found “a degree of agency” and “continuity with their ancestral past” (102). Le Glaunec seeks to move beyond the dichotomy of “Creolization” versus “Africanization” in examining slave culture and communities in Louisiana. He demonstrates that from 1780 to 1812 “Louisiana slavery was a small world” and “a slave society in the process of a massive expansion, not one favoring the recreation of an imagined Africa” (121).

Vidal, Mary Williams, and Emily Clark authored the three essays regarding sex and marriage in Atlantic Louisiana in the final section, “Intimacies.” Vidal examines the influence of the Caribbean islands on practices of *métissage* in Louisiana during the French period while demonstrating the differing attitudes toward it geographically based on local circumstances (127). Similarly, Williams examines laws regulating sex and marriage in Louisiana. However, she demonstrates how Spanish law extended more familial rights to persons in interracial relationships than was experienced under the French. Finally, Clark uses church records from 1759 to 1830 to examine marriage between people of African descent in New Orleans under French, Spanish, and American control. She challenges the notion that New Orleans’ free black community was monolithic.

Vidal’s introduction and Frey’s conclusion make the case that the French Atlantic merits more attention in Atlantic studies and that U.S. historians should consider the unique Atlantic history of Louisiana. This volume’s temporal and topical scope makes it accessible to a broad academic readership, increasing the likelihood that scholars will answer both of these historiographical calls. Overall, this volume’s authors prove Vidal’s assertion that Louisiana’s history is an Atlantic history.