
“Native American Slavery in the Seventeenth Century.” Arne Bialuschewski (Ed), *Ethnohistory*, Special Issue. 2017 (64:1).

Published as a special issue in the journal *Ethnohistory*, this collection of five articles on indigenous American slaveries is the outcome of two subsequent annual meetings of the American Society of Ethnohistory (2013, 2014). The editor Arne Bialuschewski introduces the topics individually with short summaries, and presents a short review of the current state of research on the topic. The editor, however, does not clarify the choice of the seventeenth century as the time span covered by the articles other than by saying that it offers a “comparative and contrastive perspective” between the case studies of this early period. Although it may be clear to specialised scholars, who can see the relevance of this little studied chapter of indigenous slaveries, the result of this brief explanation may render the firm focus on the seventeenth century unjustified. He further explains that the absence of Brazilian material is due to a planned second volume dedicated to its indigenous populations. The material gathered here is very heterogeneous, nonetheless. It presents a good case of the diversity of enslaving practices among colonial powers.

The data collated in the articles touch upon Mexico, Guiana, Suriname, the Caribbean region, French North America, and New England. Curiously, in spite of this diversity, the volume deceptively refers to “Native American” slavery (a term usually applied only to the indigenous peoples of the USA), rendering presentation and content somewhat incoherent since only two of the articles directly deal with North American cases (Fisher, and Milne). This oversight notwithstanding, the volume is a much needed addition to a growing body of literature that focuses on the multiplicity of indigenous American experiences that in current historiography are commonly referred to with the term “slavery.” The editorial introduction is clear on this point, and plainly underlines its objective: to contribute to research in this field with new and fresh research, which it does egregiously. The collection puts several forms of indigenous slavery at the centre of the colonisation of the Americas manifesting a mounting desire to understand the phenomenon in its full magnitude, from a hemispheric point of view. Earlier published research had tried to trace the contours of this complex phenomenon, and inevitably, many blind spots were created in the process. The choice of the cases presented in the collection however does more than filling these gaps. As suggested once again by the editor, the collection has the purpose of showing the extent to which indigenous slaveries were central to the colonial economies of the Atlantic world. Yet with this modest assertion the editor seems to minimise the relevance of the volume. The reader can clearly see that the studies cumulatively help us to redraw the economic geographies of seventeenth century Americas. This quasi synoptic outlook offers a much needed continental bird’s eye vantage point that greatly enhances our understanding not only of indigenous slaveries in their distinctive incarnations, but of the role that centres and peripheries took at this moment in time in the interlinked scenarios of captivity and unfree labour experienced by so many Amerindian groups from all parts of the continent. The editor could have probably stretched the collection’s ambition a bit farther by highlighting this important point, for it is only by explicitly addressing the various linkages between the locales presented in the volume that one can truly see the scale and extent of the early colonial slaving networks’ impact. The cases presented here suggest that virtually all the indigenous peoples under colonial rules were unwillingly moved about the continent in unexpected ways: from Yucatan to several Caribbean islands (Bialuschewski), from Surinam to Barbados (Arena),

and across numerous locations across the Spanish empire (Resendez). All the articles indicate that early colonial Americas were criss-crossed by often invisible, undetected, illicit, or downright secret networks that reconfigured alliances and enmities between indigenous and colonial actors. This is a great addition to our current perception of Americas’ histories, one that it is by now abundantly clear, cannot be told without the essential agents described in the detail-rich studies such as the ones proposed in this special issue. The issue opens with an overview of the situation in the Spanish domains, and how the slaving networks linked the Pacific to the Americas, the Caribbean and the Atlantic Ocean. Maya slaves captured by shrewd pirates are the topic of the second article, and the third one is about the trade of Guiana Indians to Barbados. The last two articles cover the aftermath of colonial wars against the Wampanoag of Massachusetts, and the French used of captives in the lower Louisiana.

Several of the authors stress differences in the quality and nature of unfree statuses during this period. Although this has been a common theme of ethno-historical scholarship of indigenous American slaveries since its inception, this current research confirms that because of this unique character an overarching account of Amerindian slaveries can be difficult to draw. Scholar Joyce Chaplin once called this the “history without a narrative.” This volume proves that despite all the difficulties, a new history of Amerindian slaveries is now starting to emerge from blurry, albeit very promising, boundaries. The variety of forms of bondage and slippages between categories explored by the five authors (captives, prisoners, slaves, labourers, guides, translators, gifts) indicate that scholars should try to weave together a comprehensive narrative from this complex checkerboard pattern of historical intersections. If a linear narrative of Amerindian slaveries is at present hard to build, it is because its structure is still incredibly fragmented. As proven in this collection, much more work is needed to fill the gaps left by years of neglect of this crucial element in indigenous-European relationships. The scholars gathered here have demonstrated not only that original research can elicit new questions about geographical areas and historical periods still greatly under researched, but also that the ethno-historical cases in this special issue are a crucial component in the history of the continent, one whose textured details greatly enrich the fabric of our understanding of early phases of the colonization of the Americas.

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