

T.M. Devine (ed.)

Recovering Scotland's Slavery Past: The Caribbean Connection. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015. xv + 280 pp. (Paper £19.99)

It is incredibly easy to travel around Scotland and marvel at the beauty of the sandstone architecture, to be in awe of its great estates, and to admire the authority of its ancient universities. One is less inclined, however, to associate these symbols of beauty and progress with an economic system that was built on the labor of stolen Africans. As efforts such as those of the Legacies of British Slave-ownership project inspire deeper investigation of Britain's Caribbean links, researchers are starting to engage with new, more pressing questions about the role played by Scotland. T.M. Devine's collection is "a study of the origins, nature, and effects of involvement with slavery and the slave trade in one European country"—Scotland (p. 2). The essays represent an important contribution to both Scottish and British historiography that will help a new generation of researchers to dig deeper into this painful aspect of Scotland's past. The impressive group of contributors includes both established and emerging researchers.

Apart from three or four of the book's twelve chapters, the work presented is new and interesting. Of particular note are Michael Morris's "Yonder Awa: Slavery and Distancing Strategies in Scottish Literature"; David Alston's "The Habits of These Creatures in Clinging One to the Other': Enslaved Africans, Scots and the Plantations of Guyana"; and Stephen Mullen's "The Great Glasgow West India House of John Campbell, senior, & Co." Morris considers, from a distinctly literary background, how Scottish involvement in the Caribbean became lost to the nation's cultural memory. His writing is thoughtful and compassionate and his discussion of the legacy of rape adds an important gendered dimension that is absent from most writing on the subject. He is supported in this by David Alston, whose chapter does not shy away from acknowledging the ubiquity of the sexual violence experienced by slave women on the plantations. As Alston is the pioneer researcher on the connection between Highlanders and the Caribbean, the collection has benefitted enormously from his contribution. Stephen Mullen's chapter on the activities of John Campbell also stands out in this collection because his meticulous archival research has enabled him to use the example of one family's experience to explore just how significant the West Indies were to the development of Glasgow's wealth. A tireless advocate of unearthing this aspect of Scotland's history, Mullen has conducted research that is changing the way people see Scotland's eighteenth-century merchant class.

Two other chapters are also essential reads: Nicholas Draper's "Scotland and Colonial Slave Ownership: The Evidence of the Slave Compensation Records" and Catherine Hall's "‘The Most Unbending Conservative in Britain’: Archibald Alison and Pro-Slavery Discourse." Drawing on data compiled for the Legacies of British Slave-ownership project, Draper provides an invaluable overview of the scale and significance of the compensation received by Scottish slave owners. Hall's discussion of the proslavery debate reveals that in the rush to atone, the tendency has been to focus on abolition in spite of Scotland's powerful, vocal, and seemingly untiring proslavery lobby. That a significant proportion of the Scottish population would have been more than willing to continue to benefit from the income and lifestyle enjoyed because of slavery is an uncomfortable truth.

Overall, this valuable collection is a great resource for students and researchers, and one that should easily find its way on to first- and second-year university Scottish and British History reading lists. There are, however, some weaknesses. It would have been useful to include more on the Scottish Borders and the Scottish Highlands as a way of revealing just how extensive their involvement was, and an additional chapter or two by Caribbean-based scholars would have helped to highlight the diverse experiences of the legacy. Disappointingly, just two of the book's chapters are by female researchers—a more diverse set of contributors would have widened the range of perspectives, debates, and opinions. Many of the chapters have the same feel and Scottish history would benefit by branching out in fresh new directions. Nevertheless, this is a sound collection; the work of its contributors holds promise for informing and inspiring future research on this aspect of Scotland's past.

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