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All of these outstanding essays point to the multifaceted nature of slavery and the merits of avoiding simplistic “dichotomous choices” while investigating the lives of the enslaved. They also demonstrate how far studies of slavery have progressed, while hinting at future possible lines of research.

The only setback was the exclusion of any entries tackling the question of masculinity under the section “Gender and Slavery.” Instead, the three essays solely focused on women and gender. This is unfortunate because the gendered experiences of enslaved men form an important historical point of investigation, as demonstrated recently by Jeff Forret’s article on slave conflict in the *Journal of Southern History* (August 2008). Ironically, Baptist himself produced an exceptional essay on masculinity and enslaved men on the antebellum plantation frontier that appeared in an edited collection by Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover entitled *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens, GA, 2004). Accordingly, perhaps one entry in the gender section could have included a discussion of masculinity, or at the very least the issue could have been raised in the impressive historiographical introductory essay.

It is also worth noting that this is mostly an anthology of previously published pieces, and therefore perhaps less useful to specialists of slavery who have kept abreast of current scholarship. However, Baptist and Camp’s anthology remains compulsory reading for undergraduates seeking to familiarize themselves with the rich and enormous field of slavery studies. It also serves as an essential reference point for both postgraduates and academics, particularly those who find themselves overwhelmed with the seemingly daily flourishing of new publications on slavery.

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***The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery.*** By Vincent Brown. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. Pp. x, 340. Cloth: \$35.00.)

*Reviewed by Randy M. Browne*

Caribbean slave societies were notoriously deadly. African captives who survived the middle passage and a period of “adjustment” in colonial

Jamaica could expect to live less than two decades; between one quarter and one half of all enslaved children born on the island died before reaching their first birthday (24, 54). Whites also faced a grim reality: Throughout the eighteenth century, the death rate for the British in Jamaica exceeded 10 percent (13). Over the past several decades, works such as Richard B. Sheridan's *Doctors and Slaves: A Medical and Demographic History of Slavery in the British West Indies, 1680–1834* (Cambridge, UK, 1985) and Joseph C. Miller's *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade* (Madison, WI, 1988) have done much to document and explain these staggering mortality rates. Other historians have emphasized the role of this demographic catastrophe in inhibiting the maintenance of African cultural practices and in disrupting social life. In *The Reaper's Garden*, however, Vincent Brown takes a different approach. How, he asks, did “death shape daily life” (6)?

The result is a gripping, provocative, and broadly compelling analysis of the role of death in shaping cultures, social practices, and political discourses. The “extravagant death rate in Jamaican society” should not be seen “as an impediment to the formation of culture,” Brown argues: It was actually “the landscape of culture itself, the ground that produced Atlantic slavery’s most meaningful idioms” (59). Exploring a broad range of themes, including burial rites, inheritance, missionary activity and conversion of blacks to Christianity, slave resistance, the antislavery movement in England, the judicial treatment of enslaved peoples, and efforts to construct a collective memory of slavery, Brown concludes that “death in Jamaica destroyed individuals, while generating a society” (127). In this deeply researched and imaginative book, Brown shows how death in Jamaica had different consequences for three interrelated groups: enslaved blacks, white Jamaicans, and even British people on the other side of the Atlantic.

“For all its economic success as an outpost of empire,” Brown explains, “Jamaica routinely destroyed its black people” (49). And yet, instead of stifling the cultural creativity of the enslaved, this grim reality was the very basis of the culture they formed. The social crises caused by the slave trade, for example, forced captives to form fictive kinship bonds onboard slave ships. In Jamaica, these “‘shipmates’ were treated as brothers and sisters” (44–45). Those who died while enslaved on the island also profoundly shaped the culture of Jamaican slavery. Burial ceremonies were central rituals of “social communion,” Brown argues; they functioned to reinforce bonds of “kinship and friendship” and helped establish social order in volatile, dynamic slave communities (63,

73). Funerals were also important occasions for white Jamaicans, who actually died at a higher rate than blacks in the eighteenth century (13). Like blacks, whites used funeral ceremonies as opportunities to demonstrate the “social and financial status of the deceased,” which made burial “a civil and economic event [as much] as it was a personal and familial one” (82). After burial, the dead continued to influence the world of the living through the bequeathing of property, which was an attempt “to pass down their hopeful vision of the social order, beyond the limit of their lifetimes” (92). Enslaved Jamaicans managed to wrest “near-legal rights” of inheritance from the Jamaican plantocracy—a victory, Brown argues, that should “caution historians and others against viewing ‘social death’ as an actual state of being” (125, 127).

In one of the most provocative sections of *The Reaper’s Garden*, Brown discusses “necromancy,” or “the conjuration and manipulation of the dead for the purpose of shaping actions and events” among the living (130). He shows, for example, how slaveholders tortured slaves convicted of various crimes and mutilated their bodies in an effort to intimidate and control the enslaved population. Convicted rebels and slaves who committed suicide, for example, were often decapitated (their heads then placed in prominent locations to serve as warnings to others), or otherwise denied a proper burial (135–42, 148). Slaveholders thought this sort of “spiritual terror” would deter such “crimes.” Yet, Brown points out, the practice of terrorizing the living by mutilating the dead developed out of English traditions. Whether such practices served the same deterrent function for Africans is open to question, since “there is little or no direct evidence that Africans believed that losing their head or a limb would prevent their return to ancestral lands” after death (133–34).

The dead took on new life in Anglo-Atlantic politics, where they became “central players in the politics of antislavery” (157). In a chapter on “The Soul of the British Empire,” Brown demonstrates how some metropolitans came to see executed slave rebels as martyrs. They became “transatlantic spirits” and “played a generative role in the history of slavery,” as sentimental English readers of graveyard literature read about their exploits and sympathized with their plight (152, 154, 157). As antislavery activists increasingly focused on the appalling mortality rates in England’s slave colonies, “the dead became a symbol, a rhetorical device that abolitionists could bring to bear on political life” (157–62). The *Zong* case, Brown shows, was but the most salient example of this broader trend (172–74).

Particularly fresh and productive is Brown’s approach to questions of

cultural formation and practice. In contrast to much recent scholarship on African culture in the Diaspora, Brown is not primarily interested in the search for the African roots of Jamaican slave culture. “Rather than ask of a cultural practice or idea, ‘How African is it?’” Brown argues, it might be more fruitful to ask “‘What was it used for? What were its consequences?’” (8). As he acknowledges in the introduction, this book is influenced by the model of creolization developed by Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, which problematized the quest for Africanisms and emphasized “the cultural creativity of the enslaved” (7).<sup>1</sup> This approach allows Brown to better envision and explain “how in specific contexts particular cultural configurations shaped political experience and action” (8). By grounding his analysis of belief systems in cultural practices and social functions, Brown is able to paint an extraordinarily rich picture of Jamaican slave society. At the same time, Brown reminds us that slave culture was in no way deficient simply because it was not purely African. The culture of enslaved Jamaicans, Brown reveals, was as much a product of creativity, invention, and hard-fought negotiations as it was of loss and rupture.

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*A Most Amazing Scene of Wonders: Electricity and Enlightenment in Early America.* By James Delbourgo. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006. Pp. 367. Cloth, \$29.95.)

*Doctor Franklin’s Medicine.* By Stanley Finger. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. Pp. xiii, 379. Cloth, \$39.95.)

*Science and Empire in the Atlantic World.* Edited by James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew. (New York: Routledge, 2008. Pp. xiv, 365. Cloth, \$95.00; Paper, \$31.95.)

*Reviewed by Carla Mulford*

In recent decades, scholarship on the scientific revolution and Enlightenment studies more generally has taken a turn away from intellectual his-

1. Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston, 1992).