

ror our assumptions about the history of women in the United States rather than appreciating the unique expectations that burden presidents and their spouses.

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CARIBBEAN AND LATIN AMERICA

VINCENT BROWN. *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2008. Pp. x, 340. \$35.00.

Jamaica during the time of slavery was a demographic catastrophe. No one, white or black, enslaved or free, could expect to survive for more than a few years after arrival. Historians have long known this statistical truth but have usually examined its implications either for whites or for blacks, not for both. Vincent Brown is the first to take Jamaica's "extravagant death rate" as the starting point for an investigation of a whole society. His vision of the death rate as "the landscape of culture itself . . . the principal arena of social life" (p. 59) undergirds this extraordinarily powerful rewriting of many familiar narratives in the history of Caribbean and Atlantic slavery.

This monograph, Brown tells us, is a "materialist history of the supernatural imagination" (p. 5). Its early chapters are thematic and synchronic, using analysis of funerals, mortuary rituals, and inheritance practices to examine the relationship between the living and the dead. The rest of the book presents a chronological narrative. It takes the reader from Tacky's Revolt of 1760 and its aftermath of torture and spectacular execution through the development of the abolitionist movement, which Brown interprets in the light of changing British attitudes toward death, showing how abolitionism was built through its participants' imaginative relationships with dead Africans such as those thrown overboard from the slave ship *Zong*. The author then proceeds to the work of missionaries, whose own rapid death rate, he argues, influenced the development of African Christianity in Jamaica. Finally, Brown discusses practices of memorialization in the 1830s, both by slave owners in response to the small numbers of white deaths during the 1831 rebellion and by freed slaves who conducted symbolic funerals for slavery as part of Baptist communities. He shows that each of these developments can be understood differently by considering their connection to death—both to mortality rates and, even more interestingly, to living people's understanding of the role of the dead in their own lives and those of others, whether as ghosts, ancestors, or martyrs.

This is a rich and multilayered book, and different readers will take different things from it. For me, one of its greatest strengths is its consistent investigation of parallels and intersections between enslaved and free people's experiences and understandings of death. One example is Brown's examination of the coffin divinations that took place at many funerals of enslaved peo-

ple, rituals at which the spirit of the deceased was thought to take hold of the pallbearers to indicate responsibility for death. He reads beyond the dismissive descriptions of these rituals in the sources to investigate their meanings. In the same chapter, he applies similar analytic questions to coroners' inquests, arguing that these, like coffin divinations, "laid out the axes, boundaries, and values of community" (p. 78). In this way, and in his examination of many other parallels, Brown demonstrates the potential of interpretations that place enslaved people and free people, Europeans and Africans, within a single analytic framework and a single Atlantic world. Rather than examining white-organized inquests as part of a modern world of law while considering coffin divination in relation to questions about cultural survival, he analyzes both for what they tell us about the ways in which people dealt with questions of responsibility in a world where death was ubiquitous. He makes concrete the claim that modernity was not a straightforward secularizing process, that "the modern world was still an enchanted one" (p. 258).

Treating Jamaica as a society formed by death produces a grim and gloomy view, albeit one that functions as a corrective to some recent work in slavery studies that celebrates the ability of enslaved people to overcome adversity. This is part of a wider shift toward texts that pay more attention to the damage and destruction caused by slavery; Brown's work joins books by Walter Johnson and William Dusbiberre, among others, in this regard. It should be influential, and not only for studies of Jamaica. Through the title, which eschews mention of Jamaica, and in an epilogue, Brown suggests that other slave societies could also be seen through the lens of "mortuary politics" and that the story of colonial Jamaica was integral to the world that produced the United States. He is less direct in presenting *The Reaper's Garden* as a story of an evolving British world, but it is that, too. It is also a beautifully written, evocative, and often elegiac book.

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LOUIS A. PÉREZ, JR. *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2008. Pp. xii, 333. \$34.95.

Louis A. Pérez, Jr. has dedicated a good part of his prolific scholarship to the study of the complex effects of North American imperial policies in Cuba. This book expands on this long-term interest, but from a different angle. The goal here is to analyze how, since the nineteenth century, North Americans produced a body of knowledge about Cuba that naturalized the imperial project in a narrative of selfless sacrifice, generosity, and moral rectitude. This language of power rested on a number of self-confirming metaphorical constructs that made common sense of North American interests and rendered the imperial project both plausible and palatable. By studying how these metaphors—of gender, race, age, family, and geographic proximity—were