

vulnerable, as previous avenues to economic prosperity (such as joining the officer ranks of the East India Company) were being made off limits to them. A series of detailed case studies from the 1790s into the first decades of the nineteenth century reveals that while many absentee planters continued to financially support their mixed-race offspring, they did so while keeping them physically and affectively removed from the legitimate households they established in Britain.

The achievements of *Children of Uncertain Fortunes* are many. Foremost is Livesay's unearthing and analysis of an impressive amount of testamentary and other legal documentation, which he augments with evidence from family papers, published treatises, and works of fiction to identify ideological shifts over time. Through this source work, he simultaneously brings to life biographies of mixed-raced individuals who embodied the complexities and paradoxes of Britain's rapidly evolving global empire. On this score, the stories of James and John Taylor—products of the union between the Scottish slave trader John Tailyour and the enslaved mixed-raced woman Polly Graham—are especially illuminating. Livesay also adds to a growing literature showing how imperial families were unstable formations that could be constructed based on criteria ranging from racial endogamy to affection, as well as demonstrates how family membership was influenced by discourses and developments on both sides of the Atlantic. These include demographic concerns in Jamaica and both the diminishing acceptance of dual households and changes in marriage and inheritance laws in Britain.

On its principal objective, this book succeeds admirably in revealing how “negotiating family membership with a relative of color produced much more careful ... considerations of difference” (pp. 9-10) than abstract debates about race and policy. However, identifying the negotiation of family membership as an “explanation” for “more strident racial prejudice developing over time” (p. 9) is more debatable. Indeed, causality is notoriously difficult to prove, and the families featured in the most prominent case studies appear to respond to as much as shape ideological trends, particularly that of seeing race as fixed and binary. The major historiographic contribution of *Children of Uncertain Fortune*, therefore, is to open up what promises to be a lively debate about which social registers and frames of analysis deserve attention from historians of race and empire.

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RAPPAPORT, Erika – *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World*.
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. Pp. 568.

Deep historical examinations of everyday commodities are no longer the new kind of scholarship that they were in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, they can still surprise, especially when the commodity in question is ordinary enough to be mostly invisible and undifferentiated enough that we do

not have to think about where it comes from. Tea fits this description perfectly, and Erika Rappaport's exhaustive recent study of tea production, distribution, and consumption across the so-called British World from the seventeenth century to the present is a welcome addition to the genre of commodity histories. It opens with an image taken in 1941 on English soil featuring Indian soldiers, the Imperial British army they worked for, the background mosque in which they practiced their alien religion, and the ubiquitous cup of tea that normalized the otherwise possibly incongruous multicultural scene. How did this slice of world history come to be? What was its connection to the over two thousand-year old history of a plant first (and long) cultivated only in China? What might it tell us about the by now well-studied rise of European consumer culture, the making (and persistence) of nineteenth-century "Britishness," the nature of empire, the functioning of labour markets and global trade systems, and the development of modern advertising? All these questions, and some intriguing answers too, find their way into this deeply researched and compelling book.

This is a book rich in narrative detail and correspondingly sparse on theory, whether economic or cultural. For someone looking for a quick and dirty explanation of the mechanisms that facilitated a Chinese plant coming to symbolize the essence of being British, this book will disappoint. However, if you want to follow the many twists and turns involved in getting tea consumption (and to a lesser extent production) out of East Asia and into virtually every corner of the world in four eventful centuries, complete with a cast of characters so voluminous as to defy even this historian's imagination, *A Thirst for Empire* is likely to be the definitive reference for a long time to come. As the title suggests, the inner and outer workings of empire is the one constant theme across the pages, whether the author's focus is at the moment on planters, pickers, packers, opportunists, local elites, retail sellers, wholesalers, blenders, advertisers, hucksters, corporate boards, working-class consumers, middle-class housewives, Victorian moralists, native southern Africans, Red Cross volunteers, Indian nationalists, bohemian intellectuals, or even, with a bracing improbability, Frank Sinatra. And this list is far from exhaustive. In all this panoply of actors, Rappaport is less interested in what she calls "the sociology of markets" than in the development and perseverance of "deeply embedded and long-lasting ideologies" (p. 10). Not surprisingly, then, her source material is overwhelmingly textual and visual—from boards of trade records, letters, diaries, pamphlets, policy documents, and advertising—rather than quantitative. The book touches on a number of economic questions, but it is not an economic history or even really a business history, although it usefully draws insights from both of those fields. It is definitely a history of globalization, however, and an especially poignant one as tea (exotic, rare, and a genuine puzzle to most of the world initially) really did grow in only one place for well over a thousand years, before relatively quickly, starting in the nineteenth century, becoming both ubiquitous and, to the chagrin of the newly independent twentieth-century tea growers and the British tea industry alike, boring.

Rappaport shows us convincingly that tea, or perhaps the ideology of tea, is a chameleon. It has been an inspiration for and tool of war, but also a highly

effective instrument of free market economics, an oppressor of the conquered and the laborer, while also bringing comfort or even liberation to the working masses. It is a feminine drink that can make men strong. It soothes the nerves, but also steels them for feats of vigor. It is health-giving and soul-sapping, depending on with whom you consult. It powered an empire, but also fueled its collapse. It seems to be from nowhere in particular but in actuality grows in only a limited number of very specific places, even after the application of the methods of modern agriculture. Indeed, the confusion about where tea should be historically located is so complete that one post-Second World War British housewife told a researcher that she “didn’t know the Chinese like tea” (quoted on p. 391). I can corroborate this confusion with a story of my own. A number of years ago an undergraduate I was teaching at MIT became very upset with me when I mentioned in lecture that until the latter nineteenth century tea was grown only in China, thereby giving it a kind of monopoly power over global prices. The student was of South Asian descent and as such he insisted vehemently that tea was originally from India and only lately exported to China. After class he would not let it drop and followed me back to my office, refusing to leave until I would concede that he knew more about this than I possibly could. I was saved only by consulting Wikipedia, a reliable source that he grudgingly admitted seemed to confirm my story.

This is a delightful book, full of puzzling contrasts and contradictions—not ones of the author’s making but rather of the history itself. Her achievement is in digging out those contradictions and holding them together in a way that is comprehensive but never quite overwhelming, compelling but definitely never simplified. When she remarks on the “tensions between nostalgia and modernity” that “reverberated in advertising, propaganda, and the shape of consumer markets throughout the 1950s and 1960s” she could just as well be summing up her telling of the larger history of tea in the modern British world (p. 374). It was clearly a history full of tensions. We are lucky to have Rappaport to document them, and even unravel them some, for the rest of us.

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REDIKER, Marcus – *The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf who became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2017. Pp. 212.

This fascinating and engaging biography illuminates the life of Benjamin Lay, who became an early “prophet against slavery” in the British colonial world. Born a Quaker commoner in Essex in 1682, Lay learned a number of trades in England before he became a sailor, in which capacity he first witnessed the harsh realities of Atlantic slavery. He and his beloved wife, Sarah, a Quaker minister, lived for a time in Barbados before obtaining permission to settle in the North American Quaker colony of Pennsylvania. Lay was an autodidact and worked