

STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWA

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

Volume 72 | Number 2 (Spring 2013)

pps. 166-167

Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slaveries in New France

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ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

Martin, Bonnie. "Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slaveries in New France." *The Annals of Iowa* 72 (2013), 166-167.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.1690>

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Book Reviews and Notices

Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slaveries in New France, by Brett Rushforth. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2012. xv, 406 pp. Maps, tables, illustrations, appendixes, index. \$39.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Bonnie Martin is visiting assistant professor of history at Pacific Lutheran University. She is a coeditor of the forthcoming *Uniting the Histories of Slavery in North America*.

General readers and professional historians alike will enjoy and learn from Brett Rushforth's fresh look at slavery in colonial North America and the Caribbean. Although the title suggests a regional study, the scope of the book is much broader. Rushforth pulls New France into the larger continental and Atlantic stories of economics and cultural exchanges in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Readers interested in colonial, borderlands, or Atlantic world history, as well as the history of slavery, will find this a worthwhile investment.

Rushforth's writing style is engaging. He uses little of the jargon that can discourage students or the reading public. At the same time, he addresses the professional conversation on slavery in North America and supports his arguments with the kind of documentation demanded by professional historians. He successfully blends history and historiography with narratives and analysis.

The book opens with a powerful vignette that draws in the reader. An Indian woman of a slaveholding tribe is crafting what is simultaneously a work of native art and also an instrument of degradation and torture—a slave halter. She weaves into the utilitarian hemp base beads and animal hair in vibrant colors. As in Euro-American slavery, indigenous peoples used art to reinforce their slave systems by highlighting the power of slaveholders and underlining the helplessness of the enslaved. The halter was a ritual statement of control and pride. It reinforced unity among her own group, while stressing the alien inferiority of the captive's group.

As the monograph develops, we get a closer look at the captives. They are not seized from local enemies as we might expect. Using the catchall label "Panis" (Pawnees), Indian slave traders offered buyers in New France plains Indian and Apache captives from as far away as New Mexico. As was typical in the indigenous slave trade, most of the slaves were women and children. Rushforth traces the intimate, serial

connections between the Great Lakes and the trans-Mississippi West. The connections were not limited by the continent, however. Through the trade links with France and its Caribbean colonies, French owners shipped North American captives from towns like Montreal to places like Cap-Français in the Caribbean.

Bonds of Alliance forces us to reconsider stereotypes. For example, indigenous bondage is often characterized as “soft slavery” —in which captives are incorporated into captor societies. Rushforth resharpens the edges of life for slaves of Indian masters and mistresses while re-assessing the opportunities for the slaves of Euro-Americans in frontier places like New France. He demonstrates, probably to the surprise of some, that there was a range of constructed kinship relationships available across these cultures.

Taking the story to another level, Rushforth reminds us that more than laborers and commodities were exchanged across the Atlantic. The early colonial period was a time of rousing debates over which people might be ethically enslaved and under what conditions. With Rushforth as our guide, we are swept into the current of arguments over the “natural freedom” due Indians versus Africans, medieval allegories of a France free from unjust slavery, and the economic realities faced by settlers in New France and St. Domingue.

Historians will appreciate how Rushforth’s data and conclusions inform and are informed by the work of borderlands experts such as Pekka Hämäläinen, Juliana Barr, and James Brooks. Similar, strong parallels can be drawn to the insights provided by researchers of Indian slave traffickers east of the Mississippi such as Eric Bowne and Alan Gallay. The philosophical and legal debates invoke directly or indirectly studies of the Atlantic world by Sue Peabody and Malik Ghachem. On the other hand, students and general readers will enjoy the way Rushforth balances big economic and cultural stories with personal case studies of slavery from the vantage of French colonial North America.

The Indianization of Lewis and Clark, by William R. Swagerty. Norman: Arthur H. Clark Company and University of Oklahoma Press, 2012. xxvii, 778 pp. (in 2 volumes). Illustrations (including color plates), maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$90.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Thomas D. Thiessen is retired from his position as archeologist with the National Park Service’s Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, Nebraska.

In this massive book, historian William Swagerty explores and reviews much more subject matter than the title implies. “Indianization,” the