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David Wheat. *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570-1640.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016. 352 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-2341-2.

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Slavery and the geography of empire, like slavery and the plantation complex, have long intertwined to form a web of shared assumptions which shape historians' understanding of the Caribbean. In *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570-1640,* David Wheat challenges or complicates these assumptions. In the port cities of the late sixteenth-century Spanish Caribbean, he argues, West Africans took the place of Spanish settlers. Comprising the numeric majority of these colonial cities' populations, Upper Guinean and Angolan forced migrants "performed the basic functions of colonization" and constituted "the backbone of the Spanish Caribbean's labor force" (p. 4). Unlike in later years, when the enslaved backbone of the Caribbean supported its vast and terrible plantation complex, the earlier era on which Wheat's important volume sheds light was one in which enslaved African laborers served as Spain's "surrogate colonists" in the Caribbean, filling most of the important nonelite roles in the prosaic economies that allowed these port cities to support the Spanish colonial enterprise in the region (p. 14). In these decades before the full-scale arrival of the plantation complex, then, the Spanish Caribbean was profoundly shaped by overlapping Iberian and African worlds that continued to influence the region well into the nineteenth century.

Drawing on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century treatises and ethnonymic data in slave ship rosters, Wheat shows how these worlds began to overlap long before West Africans settled the Spanish Caribbean. Upper Guinean captives formed a significant majority of enslaved captives in the Atlantic trade throughout the sixteenth century, Wheat shows, where Spanish observers took careful note of their geographic and ethno-linguistic origins. In addition to their numeric importance, Wheat argues, Upper Guinean captives played an important part in the formation of a unique Luso-African culture in the Cape Verde Islands and elsewhere in the Luso-Atlantic. By the time they were forced to take up the burden of Spanish colonization in the Caribbean, then, Upper Guineans were more likely to have lived and labored in close proximity with Iberians, who often entrusted them with authority over other African laborers.

The interwoven textile of Iberian and Atlantic African custom took firmer shape in the Caribbean, where extensive contact between Portuguese mariners, West African merchants and captives, and, later, Spanish mariners, merchants, and administrators pulled Atlantic Africans into

divergent but prominent roles throughout the region. The expansion of Portuguese interests in Angola supplied the burgeoning Spanish Caribbean enterprise with a captive workforce, on the one hand, while the growth of the Caribbean colonies afforded unique opportunities for Portuguese and Luso-African go-betweens, free African women, and a growing black peasantry to exert influence on the other. Luso-African merchants and go-betweens, first, highlight the extensive intermingling of African and Iberian cultures while pointing to the important role that these syncretic individuals played in shaping the Caribbean. ***Tangomãos***, Portuguese merchants with extensive experience in Upper Guinea, developed a vast knowledge—along with their crews—of African identities, languages, and cultural practices, selectively adopting the most useful and carrying them to other Atlantic ports. In the Caribbean, these Portuguese merchants and Luso-African creoles served as mediators between Iberian settlers and newly arrived Africans, often forging deep bonds among the first generation of African settlers in the region.

African context and the agency of go-betweens afforded unique opportunities to free women of color in the Caribbean as well, who were disproportionately represented in the region's sizable free black population, according to Wheat. Often taking intermediate roles similar to ***nharas*** on the Upper Guinean coast or ***donas*** in West Central Africa—powerful merchant women who frequently brokered complicated arrangements of power these port cities—free women of color in Havana and elsewhere in the Spanish Caribbean were less powerful than their African counterparts but benefited nonetheless by providing Iberian sailors access to local resources and services. Many married Iberian men and became landowners, but all greatly contributed to Spain's colonization of the Caribbean. Historians have frequently noted the absence of Iberian women in the Caribbean colonies. Wheat's focus on African precedent, as he points out, allows scholars to see the remarkable ***presence*** of African women instead (p. 180).

Black peasants, men and women, played an even greater role in the Spanish Caribbean. Before the arrival of the plantation complex, Spain's Caribbean colonies were sustained by local subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry. The bulk of this labor was performed by people of African origin, Wheat argues, which constituted a "surrogate Iberian peasantry" throughout the region (p. 214). As Caribbean economies were later transformed into the extractive plantation powerhouses which historians have traditionally associated with the region, these surrogate peasants, along with their counterpart surrogate colonists in the cities, continued to guide and mediate the experience of newly arrived Africans.

Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean is extremely well documented and tightly argued. Wheat's extensive research in Spanish and Latin American archives—evident in five illuminating appendices and a helpful essay on sources—is buttressed by his exhaustive reading of Spanish secondary sources. He pays careful attention to the differences of ethnicity, identity, gender, and language. Scholars of Florida will be somewhat disappointed by the relative lack of attention to Spain's enterprise on the northern rim of the Caribbean. The continuing presence and power of indigenous peoples in Florida and the limited Iberian presence throughout the vast territory in this period offer an intriguing counterpoint to Wheat's Caribbean, but a thorough comparative analysis of Florida would not significantly augment his argument. Instead, Wheat's analysis of the early Caribbean should inspire scholars to revisit Jane Landers and Daniel Schafer's studies of Spanish Florida in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and reconsider Florida's role in the later Caribbean. For scholars of the early modern Atlantic world, the African diaspora, and the Caribbean, ***Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean*** is a signal contribution that

should reframe scholarly debates about slavery in the Caribbean for some time to come.

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