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REVIEW ESSAY

TIDAL WAVES: THE NEW COASTAL HISTORY

By Isaac Land

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The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815. By N.A.M. Rodger (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005. lxx plus 907 pp.).

Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution. By Paul A. Gilje (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. xiv plus 344 pp.).

The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century. By Kathleen Wilson. (London: Routledge, 2003. xiii plus 282 pp.).

A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire. Edited by Kathleen Wilson. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. xv plus 385 pp.).

Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain, 1660–1857. By Michael H. Fisher. (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004. xvi plus 487 pp.).

The year 2007 will mark twenty years since the publication of Marcus Rediker's *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750*. This provocative and well-written book introduced a generation of historians to the special problems presented by the social history of seafarers. In the tradition of Edward Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, Rediker placed labor relations and class conflict in a cultural context, emphasizing how life on a deep-sea sailing vessel created unique conditions, isolating captain and crew alike from the norms of society and fostering new forms of consciousness. Not surprisingly for a book that relied heavily upon the proceedings of admiralty courts, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* portrayed a maritime world riven with conflict, ranging from disputes about wages and mistreatment all the way to outright mutiny and whole crews that turned pirate.

Today, a book on this topic would undoubtedly have “Atlantic” somewhere in the title.¹ Rediker's less ambitious reference to “the Anglo-American Maritime World” (and to the “North Atlantic” in his first chapter) actually seems prescient considering the charges leveled at the self-proclaimed “Atlantic History” that has flourished over the last decade. Some critics suggest that it is little more than imperial history under another name. Others have argued that it is simultaneously too big (pretending to subsume the southern Atlantic continents,

Africa and Latin America, without seriously engaging with them) and too small (arbitrarily isolating the Atlantic from other bodies of water).² Rediker's "North Atlantic" perspective turned out to be surprisingly broad, encompassing a string of port cities stretching from the Baltic to as far afield as the East Indies, but the spatial parameters of *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* were—in another sense—far more constricted, focusing on the cramped quarters of the ocean-going vessel. *Devil* began with a chapter on ports, but was organized as a progressive journey away from land, until the final chapter—on pirates—established a self-sufficient maritime society that rejected terrestrial laws and customs. The boundaries that mattered most to Rediker were not the outlines of an ocean basin but the "wooden world" of the ship itself, defined and delimited by the surrounding water. He can probably claim some credit for establishing the trend in academic publishing of putting a ship at sea on the book's cover as a metonym for oceanic history.

Four of the five books under review feature ships on the cover as well, which is somewhat misleading since each of them, in their own way, falls into a category that might be called "coastal" history. None is strictly an oceanic project. In fact, several of them devote considerable effort to developing alternate metonyms—such as the waterfront, the island, or the beach—for the encounter with oceanic space. This quest for an alternative vision has its origins in the critical reception of Rediker's book. *Devil* was hailed as innovative and imaginative, but immediately drew fire for its portrait of sailors as a proletariat in the making. Rediker's preoccupation with the overdetermined space of the ship, with its fixed routines and draconian disciplinary practices, predictably produced an overdetermined narrative.

In contrast, the waterfront—as the intersection of maritime and urban space—is obviously a meeting place rather than a self-contained "world" unto itself. The beach suggests an unstructured environment, or rather one which is restructured daily by competing forces. The ebb and flow of the tide implies exchange, rather than unilateral imposition. An island, which unlike the waterfront or the beach does not even face in a single direction, invites the historian to tell stories from multiple perspectives. The books under review present so much stimulating material, and such a diversity of approaches, that discussing them together is a humbling task. I will confine myself to three questions. First, what is Rediker's legacy thus far? Second, how does the new scholarship build on, or distance itself from, Rediker's work? Third, what are the implications of alternate metonyms (islands, beaches, and so on) for the way that we write history?

1. Oceans

It says a great deal about the mindset of the historical profession in the late 1980s that the Atlantic vision of *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* received so little attention from its early readers. It was received as a work of labor history that was informed to some extent by Immanuel Wallerstein's theories about global capitalism. The *American Historical Review* described *Devil* as a "tour de force," although the closing sentence implied that its appeal was mainly to a specialized readership: "[It] will remain a focus of discussion about eighteenth-century labor

history for some time to come." *Reviews in American History* took a similar line, although Margaret Creighton, writing in *American Quarterly*, did briefly pick up on one of Rediker's larger themes when she described his seaman as "an impressive protagonist in the North Atlantic world of the early eighteenth century." In 1988, Rediker won both the Merle Curti award and the John Hope Franklin prize, implying that *Devil* possessed some larger significance. (Consider, for example, the impact of the 1992 Curti winner, David Roediger's seminal *Wages of Whiteness*.) Indeed, *Lingua Franca*, in a 1998 cover story which included a photograph of Rediker, reported that *Devil* had "stirred to life a rash of feminist, Marxist, and gay studies of what many now call 'the international nautical proletariat.'"³

David Armitage has written, "We are all Atlanticists now."⁴ If so, *Devil* should have become a near-universal reference point, if not a canonical work. Rediker's exhilarating first chapter, subtitled "a tour of the North Atlantic, c. 1740" demonstrated the promise of oceanic thinking at a time when very few historians ventured beyond national boundaries. Yet remarkably, Rediker goes unmentioned in Bernard Bailyn's recent survey of the field's origins, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours*. How did this happen? One explanation could be that *Devil* was the victim of its own success. By promulgating the thesis that sailors were "men apart" whose unique experiences and life choices estranged them from the cultures of the shore, Rediker may have persuaded many readers that sailors, however colorful and interesting, were so different from other people that they are irrelevant to historians who do not focus on maritime topics. This would be a doubly ironic outcome. First, Rediker wrote *Devil* in an effort to redeem sailors from the parochial constraints of maritime historiography. Second, he went on to write (in collaboration with Peter Linebaugh) *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, an important book which explores the ways that sailors did, in fact, interact with a larger population.

Armitage's essay, "Three Concepts of Atlantic History," does make a passing (if dismissive) reference to Rediker's work: "There is even now a red Atlantic history, written in Marxian mode"; observing that it does not fit well into the historiography, he suggests an affinity to Paul Gilroy's book on the black Atlantic.⁵ This, at least, is more information than Bailyn supplies, but Armitage implies that Rediker, and the sailors he studies, are marginal figures from whom we can learn very little. What would oceanic history look like with the sailors left out? Armitage offers us an example later in his essay when he makes the ingenuous remark that the Pacific Ocean, like the Atlantic, was "ultimately a European creation, in the sense that it was Europeans who first saw it whole . . ." ⁶ This would have come as a surprise to circumnavigators like George Anson, who returned to England in 1744 with a crew that included "Lascar Indians, Malays, Persians, Indians of Manila, Timor and Guam, Negroes of Guinea, Creoles of Mexico and Mozambique."⁷ If we are looking for people with a perspective that spanned oceans, and continents, maritime workers should not be an afterthought.

Armitage's trichotomy, which he says "should cover all conceivable forms of Atlantic history but does not preclude their combination," splits the field into *circum*-Atlantic history, emphasizing circulation, exchange, and hybridity; *trans*-Atlantic history, involving comparative studies; and *cis*-Atlantic history, stud-

ies that place nations or localities within their Atlantic context.⁸ The consequences of this approach for a project like Rediker's, however, are disheartening. We are now to discriminate between circum-Atlantic history (that of the ocean itself) and cis-Atlantic history (the oceanic context of a locality, for example an economic history of a port), dividing the ship from the shore and making it even more difficult to integrate seafarers into terrestrial historiographies. One might have thought that the point of Atlantic history was to make connections more, not less, obvious. *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* had only limited success as a work of urban history, hampered as it was by Rediker's insistence that the sailortown districts were isolated from the larger community, but at least his first chapter and his conclusion placed the problem of sailors in cities squarely on the table. Considering how many of the Atlantic rim's major urban centers were also ports, this is a fundamental issue.⁹

In his *Naval History of Britain*, N.A.M. Rodger had an important opportunity to construct a more productive approach to the interface between oceans, ports, and people. In the second volume of this massive opus, *The Command of the Ocean*, Rodger emphasizes that his project is not to write another "company history" of the Royal Navy, but rather to write the history of Britain as inflected by that nation's tremendous financial and human investment in war at sea, "a contribution to political, social, economic, diplomatic, administrative, agricultural, medical, religious, and other histories which will never be complete until the naval component of them is recognized and understood."¹⁰ In short, this was not to be maritime history, but a sort of amphibious undertaking. Unfortunately, Rodger is successful only in integrating the story of naval administration with the story of naval warfare.

Command of the Ocean contains several chapters subtitled "Social History," amounting (in an almost 600-page volume) to a small book of their own. The content of these chapters is unequivocally top-down history from the officer's point of view. The common seaman constitutes first a "manning problem," but once on board, under a suitably firm paternalist hand, he may become a "follower," choosing to accompany the commander on subsequent voyages.¹¹ Meanwhile, the interface between the Navy and urban history is neglected. Naval mobilization had myriad points of impact on shore. It reconfigured urban space and mobilized dockyard laborers, sex workers, and leisure entrepreneurs such as pub owners and stage managers (as Gillian Russell has shown, sailors accounted for a large and vocal percentage of London theater audiences).¹² None of this gets serious attention in the *Naval History of Britain*.¹³ It is possible to excavate some relevant material by looking in Rodger's index under Plymouth and Portsmouth, but it is symptomatic that there are more entries under Gibraltar than for London.

Riots against the press gang and mutiny at sea are not omitted from Rodger's account, but since he is deeply committed to portraying a culture of consensus and a harmonious social order, he has no theoretical tools to address the evidence before him. (Rediker appears in the bibliography, but with an insulting gloss about "French Marxist" interpretations written by those who know nothing of the sea.) Referring to the 1790s–1810s, Rodger proclaims that "flogging was accepted by virtually everybody as a normal and unremarkable practice everywhere in society. It is telling that one could joke about flogging; it had not

yet become a sensitive subject.” Sailors who condemned flogging in their memoirs were re-writing history after the fact, since “they express attitudes which were unknown until well after 1815.” Yet mysteriously, officers were undergoing “a long-term evolution in attitudes toward naval discipline,” and are quoted describing their own practices as “brutal,” admitting in private a revulsion at having to witness flogging, and suggesting that a good officer would keep it to a minimum. Moreover, “starting” (smacking with sticks or with a rope’s end) and running the gauntlet were forbidden in the 1810s. Why? The humanitarian movements of the age, such as the anti-slavery crusade, may have played a part here. Sadly, Rodger’s account is still enough of a “company history” that he is unable, or unwilling, to place these issues in a larger cultural and political context.¹⁴

Paul A. Gilje’s *Liberty on the Waterfront* pursues an agenda similar to the one announced by Rodger—to integrate naval and national history—except that Gilje is dealing with the United States from the Revolution through roughly the 1840s. Some of this had already been accomplished in Harold D. Langley’s classic, *Social Reform in the United States Navy*, which demonstrated overlaps and affinities among different humanitarian reform movements.¹⁵ *Liberty on the Waterfront*’s contribution is its focus on how sailors themselves approached the politics of seafaring. Gilje rejects the celebration of paternalism exhibited by naval historians like Rodger, but he is also skeptical about the revolutionary sailors portrayed by Rediker. Instead, he carefully examines the concept of “liberty” and finds that while sailors cherished it, liberty often meant little more than restless wandering, a woman in every port, and frequent recourse to liquor. Gilje supports his thesis with textual evidence, as well as reproductions of intriguing sketches and scrimshaw carvings. One scrimshaw displays the motto “Free Trade and Sailors Rights” with a sort of heraldic seal at the bottom: a mermaid perched on an anchor, holding a bottle. Rediker interpreted drinking as another form of defiance, but Gilje stresses that sometimes this and other forms of “liberty” were a political dead end. Sailors could jump ship or fight with press gangs, but this transgressive behavior did not necessarily imply a political philosophy much deeper than freedom in the moment.¹⁶

Despite the “waterfront” in Gilje’s title, his *de facto* definition of maritime space ends up resembling Rediker’s. Although he does not appeal to the isolation of the ship in the way that *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* did, Gilje spends a great deal of time discussing homosocial groups of men in a more or less isolated setting, for example American sailors confined in a British prisoner of war camp. Whalers—a population that spent an unusually long period away from home, even for sailors—feature prominently. The Pacific adventures of Herman Melville, in part because he is already a familiar figure, will stay in most readers’ minds far longer than the political activities of the White Oaks—a group of shipwrights and ship carpenters in Philadelphia who tried to protect royal officials during the Stamp Act Crisis. Gilje remarks, “Jesse Lemisch and John K. Alexander argue that the White Oaks should not be confused with common seamen. One of the premises of this study is that the boundary between those on board ship and on the docks was not that clear cut.” This important observation, which could have been the springboard for a larger discussion of occupational culture and maritime space, was unfortunately relegated to an endnote and is not

systematically developed in Gilje's text.¹⁷ Twenty years after Rediker's pioneering efforts, historians are still having difficulties making the history of seafarers speak effectively to the history of the shore, and vice versa. Is the oceanic model itself at fault?

2. Islands

Even the waterfront is too much of a determined space for an historian like Kathleen Wilson; appropriately, her favorite metonym for oceanic encounters is the island, a space that admits entry from multiple directions while nonetheless maintaining its singularity, defying those forces that seek to subsume it under a larger dominion of either land or sea. Wilson's account of the Cook expeditions, for example, decenters the ship and reorients our priorities: "The traffic in men transformed the enlightened explorers into the objects of Polynesian knowledge, who thereby read their own culture on the European male body."¹⁸ An oceanic perspective, thinking in terms of the whole Pacific, would lead us to believe that power, and the initiative, lay with Cook's men; Wilson replaces this with a Pacific Islander perspective, in which women discovered the men, trafficked in their bodies, and used them to obtain goods from the ships. The beach was potentially a more liberating space than the ocean. What would have happened if these women had boarded Cook's ship and sailed away on it? Durba Ghosh's chapter in Wilson's anthology gives us some indication. When women from India uprooted themselves by marriage to a European or actually went overseas, they were often relegated to an anonymous listing as "native woman," posing dilemmas for the historian. Although some, like Begum Samru, found ingenious ways around the problem of naming, deploying new or alternative names as a sign of changed status and enhanced power, Ghosh's anecdotes of "oceanic" experience seem disconcertingly less liberating than those related by Rediker.¹⁹

Margaret Hunt's chapter addresses quite different subject matter—the survival strategies of sweethearts and wives in the face of a naval bureaucracy that seemed alternately unable or unwilling to release sailors' wages—but her analysis leaves a similar impression, that the same ocean which promised freedom and glamorous adventure to a small cadre of young men presented arduous and usually thankless challenges to a much larger subset of the population. Traditional works of maritime history often dismissed "sailortown" women as fickle and predatory; Hunt's characterization of pay ticket speculators as "independent actors making (or trying to make) diversified investments in a financial and sexual marketplace" is a big step forward. Some women became extremely successful at working the system to their advantage. Nonetheless, Hunt's conclusion—that these women and their dependents were "on the front line of the empire" because their privations kept the Royal Navy in the black—unintentionally offers a somber reminder that despite their ingenuity and sacrifice, most sweethearts and wives would never avail themselves of the opportunities presented by the ocean on their doorstep.²⁰

We should avoid, however, the simple conclusion that the sea connected, and liberated, men while it only isolated women. Kathleen Wilson's joyful account of Teresia Constantia Phillips' scandal-ridden life shows that women could exploit the potential of the Atlantic with the best of them. Phillips (1709–1765)

acquired notoriety as the “Black Widow” for her numerous liaisons and marriages—some allegedly bigamous—with wealthy men. Her ocean-hopping career as a blackmailer, memoir-writer, and social critic revealed that “reputation was a commodity, opportunism a virtue and self-fashioning a necessity.” The legend of Phillips’ adventures is reminiscent of the popular tales about pirates who swore to flout *every* law of God and man. Her choice of Jamaican exile was greeted by some writers as exactly fitting, the Caribbean still carrying associations with its anarchic, buccaneering past. Phillips was no swashbuckler, but her social and sexual monstrosity fascinated her contemporaries. She never had children; she left her male victims “suicidal, consumptive (spent) or otherwise robbed of their masculinity”; rumor paired her with the castrato Farinelli, a suitably freakish bed partner. Like a pirate, moreover, Phillips personified many qualities otherwise admired by the age: she was “a true mercantile Spirit” and unabashed fortune-hunter, not to mention a freeborn Englishwoman quick to defy tyrants (in this case, despotic husbands). Jamaica offered her a platform from which to excoriate the hypocrisy of London society (inverting the metropole-colony hierarchy, she claimed that England was a “barbaric land”) and she ended her life as a colonial official, appropriately enough in charge of theater as Mistress of the Revels. Wilson observes that Phillips, a rebel against “conventional notions of English womanhood,” found an outlet in a manner “perfectly complicit with imperial power.”²¹

Phillips’ insouciance in the face of scandalous rumor was, however, the exception that proved the rule: women who traveled, even for the best of reasons, risked losing their reputation, or finding a new and damaging one. Wilson’s intriguing chapter on women and war returns to this important problem repeatedly. The wives of soldiers, who endured great discomfort and performed indispensable labor in lands far from home, had to bear the stigma of being “camp followers.” Unlike Hunt’s naval spouses, these women really did cross the ocean, but they were treated with suspicion by the military authorities and their deaths passed without comment in the campaign histories. Charlotte Browne, a widow serving as a nurse in General Braddock’s army, met with a skeptical reception among a Dutch community in New York, where she was told that she “could not be good to come so far without a Husband.” Browne encountered another unexpected threat to her good name when she received an invitation to a ball in Maryland, which turned out to be a gathering of “Romans, Jews, and Hereticks” who danced “without Stays or Hoops.”²² Even women who never left England, but expressed a curiosity about overseas matters, could be smeared as disreputable for their intellectual voyages. Gillian Russell observes that the Duchess of Portland and other elite women who met with Joseph Banks upon his return from the Pacific were pilloried in crude satires that conflated the Ladies’ Coterie with the Polynesian *arioi*, the libertine, infanticidal “commonwealth of joys.”²³

In keeping with her fondness for indeterminate spaces, Wilson manages to have it both ways, producing globetrotting scholarship while keeping her focus on the small, particular, and fragmented. This is nowhere more evident than in the “Island Race” of her title, which refers to England, a cultural island if, inconveniently, not an actual one. Wilson is a splitter, not a lumpner, and consequently she regards the term “British” with so much mistrust that on more than one occasion she brings up England and Englishness right after an eighteenth-century

source has invoked the B-word, which may get at some underlying truth but comes across as pedantic anyway.²⁴ In choosing the island, rather than the ship, as her metonym, she draws our attention to points that don't connect, or that do not necessarily connect, or that form an archipelago at best, never a continent. This can be instructive. Still, empires are built and sustained by lumpers, not splitters, so Wilson's emphasis on difference, uncertainty, identity crisis, and discontinuity can only go so far in explaining how larger political and cultural units could appear coherent, much less command loyalty or compel obedience.

3. Counterflows

The eighteenth century did possess its own version of Atlantic history. Atlantic space was construed in terms of a history of inequality and exploitation. This became especially evident in the unending comparisons between Hernando Cortes and Captain James Cook. The brutal subjugation of the Aztecs was contrasted with the supposedly British style of polite exploration in the Pacific. As one admiring playwright put it: "[Cook] *came* and he *saw*, not to *conquer* but to *save*."²⁵ Another author managed to displace even the guilt for the slave trade entirely onto Spanish shoulders.²⁶ More recent Atlantic events, such as the disillusioning rebellion in the Thirteen Colonies, created an eager audience for stories about heroes who, like Cook, combined empire-building with sensitivity and respect for human life, thus implicitly refuting the American claims that British rule was despotic and exploitative. For instance, General Wolfe—the hero of Quebec—acquired an entirely undeserved posthumous reputation as an opponent of scalping.²⁷ Even more sophisticated observers, aware of Britain's long and complex imperial history, nevertheless saw the new encounters in the Pacific and elsewhere as a chance for a fresh start or even as potential expiation for past sins against vulnerable peoples.²⁸

The new generation of explorers took pains to show that they were above the temptations of swaggering, sex, and plunder. In a fine example of empire à la mode, George Bogle journeyed to Tibet in the 1770s on behalf of a China-hungry East India Company, but in his letters home, he chose to emphasize his friendly and philosophic intercourse with the Third Panchen Lama.²⁹ In contrast, it was Omai—a Pacific islander brought back to Britain and later repatriated by Cook—who got cast in the conquistador role. In a burlesque of Spanish heavy-handedness, Omai was pictured in the printed version of *Cook's Last Voyage* on horseback, wearing full armor complete with plumed helmet, firing a pistol over the heads of his panicked fellow islanders, who do not yet recognize him.³⁰

However, New World constructions of human difference remained influential in this putatively new and enlightened era of empire-building. This is evident in the obsessive reversion to skin color and other body classifications when new peoples were encountered. British observers identified Pacific islanders as "Indians," but Omai was described, drawn, and painted with a bewildering variety of features and skin tones, in accordance with the meanings assigned to him. Social, and sexual, mixture with blacks had been interpreted as miscegenous in the American context, so not surprisingly a critic of the South Seas voyages as an expensive, frivolous exercise identified Omai as an "exotic Black"

with “velvet skin.”³¹ The painter Joshua Reynolds, however, chose to depict him as pale and aristocratic in bearing (similarly, Bogle identified the Panchen Lama as “white”).³² In contrast, the aborigines of New Holland suffered stigmatization from very early on, because the early explorer William Dampier had characterized them as “black” in color. The illustrations in later editions of Cook’s journals were re-tinted, darkening the other Pacific islanders to correspond with newly influential missionary interpretations of their overall ranking among world cultures.³³

The stadial model of civilization, promulgated by the Scottish Enlightenment, encouraged a form of cultural relativism; British observers of the Pacific now often reported witnessing their “own” culture in a pre-Roman, or pre-Phoenician, incarnation. None of this seems to have prevented an “aesthetic evolutionism” that could shade into essentialism. In the final chapter of *Island Race*, Wilson explores the taxonomy of female breasts advanced by Johann Reinhold Forster, the chief naturalist on Cook’s second voyage. “Pendulous” breasts correlated with savagery, while more firm breasts were a sign of a higher culture, once again placing Tahitians in an exalted position and leaving New Holland far behind.³⁴

If the Atlantic was about exploitation and the Pacific offered the hope of a new beginning, Britain’s most populous colony—India—in many respects defied easy categorization. Michael Fisher’s *Counterflows to Colonialism*, based on meticulous detective work across many archives and several languages, explores the forgotten life stories of early Indian visitors to Britain. Among his more interesting discoveries is that these Asians repeatedly ran afoul of categories of human difference that had developed in an Atlantic context. Although naming Indian servants “Caesar” or “Pompey” was a common practice that appeared to place these men in the same category as African-descended slaves, the East India Company intervened on more than one occasion, and at great expense, to rescue Indians who were being sold into New World slavery.³⁵ The privileges attached to an Asian origin as opposed to an African or Native American one were so great that we are left to wonder whether a few of Fisher’s “Indian” men and women may have been opportunists putting up an elaborate charade.³⁶ Respect for Asian peculiarities did not always result in greater freedom for Asians, however. As Sudipta Sen has shown, Indian protests over taxes, corruption, and the regulation of trade—some of the same issues raised by the American rebels in that same era—were, ironically, dismissed as an expression of India’s addiction to despotism. Asians could not be partners in a reform process that would, necessarily, be imposed from outside.³⁷

Like Marcus Rediker, Fisher draws most of his evidence from court cases, and there is no shortage of conflict in his book. There are, however, few outlaws in *Counterflows to Colonialism*. Instead, Fisher presents a mosaic of individuals who devised ingenious ways to work the system to their private advantage. The ghat serangs of Calcutta served as brokers, controlling the supply of maritime labor and acting as the sailor’s advocate on the voyage.³⁸ Language instructors agreed to come and teach at Haileybury, the East India Company’s school near London, but negotiated salaries that were superior to those of the English-born professors (including Thomas Malthus!).³⁹ Indian princes sailed to Britain and challenged Company policy, but some—such as Dyce Sombre—were not above

becoming major investors in the Company themselves.⁴⁰ Atlantic history, which has tended to start from a premise of resistance and rebellion, has something to learn from Fisher's examples. As Rediker showed, some sailors became pirates; many more, however, served on the crews of ships active in the slave trade, or joined press gangs that abducted fellow sailors to fill out the crew of a warship. Jamaica's maroon community kept its freedom in the mountains in return for betraying escaped slaves that entered their territory. If we want to understand how, and why, brutal and unjust empires were able to persist for centuries, this dimension of loyalism—or at least, collaboration—must be explored seriously.⁴¹

A final lesson from *Counterflows* has to do with the hazards of relying on oceans to do our thinking for us. The complex geography of Fisher's book, and the imperial networks of privilege and opportunity that he delineates, do not conform to the outlines of any ocean basin. Indeed, we meet travellers from Manila, from Jamaica, and from the Madeira Islands in Fisher's pages, a fascinating touch making this as much a work of India-centered global history as a book about Indians per se.⁴² Certainly the book would only have suffered if Fisher had limited himself to travellers from the Indian Ocean. Our current fascination with ocean crossings has, perhaps, left the impression that inter-continental contact must be oceanic. One puzzling feature of *Counterflows* is Fisher's emphasis on the novelty of Indian accounts, and Indian encounters with Europe, despite the fact that his travellers were predominantly Muslim and most of them reached Britain after spending time in Arabia, Egypt, or Morocco. One, after his travels, retired to Baghdad.⁴³ Given that so many of these Indians were also conversant with Persian (and several wrote their accounts in that language), Fisher needed to address the precedents set by earlier Persian as well as Arabic accounts of Europe and the ways in which these may have shaped the assumptions, and writings, of Indians familiar with that tradition.⁴⁴ A similar point could be made about his Armenian and Parsi authors, whose cultures bridged Eurasia. *Counterflows*, literally and figuratively, would not be possible without water, but once again, emphasizing the sea-going vessel may be causing more intellectual trouble than we have acknowledged.

"Oceanic" history was always a metaphor; how many historians ever wrote about salt water? Coastal history is a more productive, and instructive, metaphor. Coastlines would not exist without their proximity to the ocean, but their character is not determined solely by the ocean's action. Coasts may form bulwarks of resistance to the waves, as in the case of coral reefs or towering cliffs. Yet there are messy, intermediate places like tidal flats and brackish estuaries. There are also quiet coves and inlets, connected to the ocean but only gently shaped by it. Rivers and lakes form networks of internal coastlines that bear comparison with the ocean's rim. Coasts are also, sometimes, engineered or artificial environments that may penetrate urban space. In their diversity, and in their ever-changing nature, coasts parallel the diverse experiences of human beings in their confrontation with water, and each other. Some people are knocked over, or borne away on powerful currents. Others just leave footprints in the sand. The coastal continuum admits many fine gradations and strata of experience that "oceanic" history threatens to wash away.

Coastal history will never replace oceanic history; nor should it. A coastal history of whaling—or of the Atlantic slave trade—would have obvious limita-

tions. We will always need histories of seaborne empires. It is, similarly, hard to imagine a successful history of globalization without an oceanic element. However, coastal history can anticipate a remarkable future. In the sea, biomass is concentrated close to the shore and thins out in the deeper water. I would suggest that a similar principle applies to human beings. Historians who cast their nets on the coast will catch considerable numbers of people whose lives and experiences would be missed by a scholar who trawls the oceans. In the end, there is simply more history to be written about the coast than about the deep blue sea.

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ENDNOTES

1. For an important overview—though one which omits Marcus Rediker—see Rainer F. Buschmann, “Oceans of World History: Delineating Aquacentric Notions in the Global Past,” *History Compass* (March 2004).
2. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, “Some caveats about the ‘Atlantic’ paradigm,” *History Compass* (August 2003); Jason Ward, “The Other Atlantic World,” *History Compass* (August 2003); Alison Games, “Atlantic Constraints and Global Opportunities,” *History Compass* (December 2003). Some of these issues were also aired at the American Historical Association panel, “Critical Approaches to Atlantic History,” January 2005.
3. Graham Hodges, “Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea,” *American Historical Review* 95:4 (October 1990): 1164–1165 (quoted page 1165); Margaret Creighton, “Jack Tar Fights Back,” *American Quarterly* 43:1 (March 1991): 103–109 (quoted page 109); Alan Taylor, “Floating Proletarians,” *Reviews in American History* 16:2 (June 1988): 192–197; Paul Gilje, “Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 46:2 (April 1989): 390–392; Jack P. Greene, “Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea,” *Journal of Social History* 22:4 (Summer, 1989): 769–772; Lawrence Osborne, “A Pirate’s Progress,” *Lingua Franca: The Review of Academic Life* 8:2 (March 1998): 34–43 (quoted page 40). I am indebted to Stephen Hum for this last reference.
4. David Armitage, “Three Concepts of Atlantic History,” in David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (New York, 2002), 11–27 (quoted page 11).
5. Armitage, “Three Concepts,” 14–15.
6. Armitage, “Three Concepts,” 18.
7. Glyndwr Williams, *The Great South Sea* (New Haven, 1997), 246.
8. Armitage, “Three Concepts,” 15.
9. For a critique of Rediker’s approach to urban life, see Isaac Land, “The Many-Tongued Hydra: Sea Talk, Maritime Culture, and Atlantic Identities, 1700–1850,” *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures* 25: 3–4 (December 2002): 412–417.

10. N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815* (New York, 2005), lxiii.
11. Rodger, *Command*, 398.
12. Gillian Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society, 1793–1815* (Oxford, 1995), 95–121.
13. On occasion, Rodger notes omissions, but it does not seem to have occurred to him that his putatively comprehensive *Naval History of Britain* should have addressed them: “Unfortunately, there has been virtually no research undertaken into what one might call the female half of the naval community . . .” Rodger, *Command*, 407. There has been considerable scholarship on gender and “sailortown” in the last ten years, however, that could have informed his approach. Margaret Creighton, *Rites and Passages: The Experience of American Whaling, 1830–1870* (Cambridge, 1995); Valerie Burton, “Whoring, Drinking Sailors’: Reflections on Masculinity from the Labour History of Nineteenth-century British Shipping,” in *Working Out Gender: Perspectives from Labour History*, ed. Margaret Walsh (Aldershot, 1999), 84–101; Lisa Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife: New England Women and the Whalefishery, 1720–1870* (Chapel Hill, 2000); Isaac Land, “Where Was Sailortown?: Atlantic History Meets Subculture Theory,” in *City Limits? The European City, 1400–1900*, eds. Judith Owens, Greg Smith, and Glenn Clark (forthcoming).
14. Rodger, *Command*, 403, 489, 492–3. For a different approach to the reform issue, see Isaac Land, “‘Sinful Propensities’: Piracy, Sodomy, and Empire in the Rhetoric of Naval Reform,” in Anupama Rao and Steven Pierce, eds., *Discipline and the Other Body: Humanitarianism, Violence, and the Colonial Exception* (Durham, 2006) 90–114. Daniel James Ennis, *Enter the Press-Gang: Naval Impressment in Eighteenth-Century British Literature* (Newark, 2002) provides valuable cultural context on the debates surrounding the Royal Navy and its practices.
15. Harold D. Langley, *Social Reform in the United States Navy, 1798–1862* (Chicago, 1967).
16. Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia, 2004), 129, 151, 221, 234; scrimshaw is on page 258. For another analysis of drinking, “liberty,” and masculinity, see Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, 1995).
17. Gilje, *Liberty*, 100, 290.
18. Kathleen Wilson, “Thinking Back,” in *New Imperial History*, ed. Wilson, 361.
19. Durba Ghosh, “Decoding the Nameless,” in *New Imperial History*, ed. Wilson, 297–316. See also Pamela Scully, “Malintzin, Pocahontas, and Krotoa: Indigenous Women and Myth Models of the Atlantic World,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 6:3 (Winter 2005).
20. Margaret Hunt, “Women and the Fiscal-Imperial State,” in *New Imperial History*, ed. Wilson, 38, 47.
21. Wilson, *Island Race*, 168, 143–6, 132. See also Hans Turley, *Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash: Piracy, Sexuality, and Masculine Identity* (New York, 1999).
22. Wilson, *Island Race*, 101–2.

23. Gillian Russell, "An 'entertainment of oddities,'" in *New Imperial History*, ed. Wilson, 69.
24. Wilson, *Island Race*, 147, 167.
25. Wilson, *Island Race*, 69.
26. Felicity A. Nussbaum, "The Theatre of Empire," in *New Imperial History*, ed. Wilson 85–86.
27. Nicholas Rogers, "Brave Wolfe," in *New Imperial History*, ed. Wilson, 251–2.
28. Deirdre Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery* (Cambridge, 2005) offers the most sophisticated treatment of this theme. Her refreshing comparisons of colonial projects in West Africa with their counterparts in Australia, however, remind us that ocean basins—so often identified as a stimulant to imaginative research—can artificially limit our perspective.
29. Kate Teltscher, "Writing Home and Crossing Cultures," in *New Imperial History*, ed. Wilson, 292.
30. Harriet Guest, "Ornament and Use," in *New Imperial History*, ed. Wilson, 333.
31. Guest, "Ornament and Use," in *New Imperial History*, ed. Wilson, 318, see also Wilson, *Island Race*, 67.
32. Teltscher, "Writing Home," in *New Imperial History*, ed. Wilson, 293. See also Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2004), 122–126.
33. Wilson, *Island Race*, 84.
34. Wilson, *Island Race*, 179.
35. Fisher, *Counterflows*, 37, 46, 60.
36. The EIC did, in fact, turn away some individuals who could not "prove they were really Indian." Fisher, *Counterflows*, 68.
37. Sudipta Sen, "Liberal Empire and Illiberal Trade," in *New Imperial History*, ed. Wilson, pp. 136–154.
38. Fisher, *Counterflows*, 70; 39–40, 173.
39. Fisher, *Counterflows*, 115.
40. Fisher, *Counterflows*, 321.
41. In Wilson's volume, there is an instructive contrast between Walter Johnson (who notes the maroon example) and Kevin Whelan's less nuanced approach. Walter Johnson, "Time and Revolution in African America," 197–215; Kevin Whelan, "The Green Atlantic," 216–238.
42. Fisher, *Counterflows*, 203, 206, 207.
43. Fisher, *Counterflows*, 274.
44. Fisher, *Counterflows*, 317–318 for predominance of Persian.