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Beyond Encounters: Religion, Ethnicity, and Violence in the Early Modern Atlantic World, 1492–1700

BRIAN SANDBERG
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In the aftermath of the 1992 quincentennial commemoration of Christopher Columbus's first expedition and the beginning of transatlantic contact, historian James Axtell assessed the explosion of new publications concerning the significance and historical legacy of the 1492 voyage: "One can safely predict that the most durable legacy of the Quincentenary will not be the mediated events of 1992, no matter how muted or serious, but the tremendous flow of scholarship on the wide range of topics encompassed by the now-familiar phrase Columbian Encounters, only some of which was prompted by the historical anniversary." Axtell concluded in 1995 that the concept of "encounters" clearly represented the most powerful way of understanding the historical processes contact initiated.¹

A decade after the quincentennial, our understanding of the early modern Atlantic world produced by the Columbian "encounters" has begun to shift. The cultural history and postmodern approaches to discourse, representations, and power that shaped the concept of "encounters" in 1992 have matured, increasingly recognizing the importance of setting discussions of power/knowledge into broader cultural frameworks, especially when considering intercultural violence. While Axtell's review of quincentenary scholarship included

¹ James Axtell, "Columbian Encounters: 1992–1995," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 52 (October 1995): 650, 695–696; see also James Axtell, "Columbian Encounters: Beyond 1992," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 49 (April 1992): 335–360.

some discussion of recent research on colonial expansion and warfare, not one of his eleven historiographical classifications dealt specifically with violence as an analytic category. Axtell dismissed discussions of atrocities by contrasting the “teachers, scholars, and activists” who condemned Columbus and Europeans for “genocide” and “ecocide” with those who “sought to complicate the moral and historical issues . . . by contextualizing events to avoid anachronism, by emphasizing the impartial role of disease, and by seeking understanding before, if not rather than, judgment.”² This attempt to defend Columbus and to contextualize Atlantic world colonialism unfortunately involved promoting neutral “encounters” and deemphasizing the often atrocious aspects of violence in the Columbian Exchange.

Since the quincentennial, horrifying episodes of ethnic and religious violence in Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, India, Palestine, Afghanistan, and other areas have awakened scholars to the dangers of ignoring conflict when studying intercultural exchanges. Acts of “terrorism” in cities such as Oklahoma City, New York, Jerusalem, and Tokyo have foregrounded atrocities and apocalyptic motivations for violence.³ Formulated partly in response to the killing and

² Axtell, “Columbian Encounters: 1992–1995,” pp. 650–651, 690–692, argues that “During the Quincentenary, teachers, scholars, and activists generally lined up on two sides to debate the nature and 500-year legacy of the Columbian Encounter. One camp blamed Columbus and his European successors for all the deaths and misery of America’s natives (and African slaves) to the present. . . . The other camp sought to complicate the moral and historical issues.” Axtell clearly depicts scholarship on European atrocities as relying on “broad generalities” and “emotionally charged historical vignettes.” In contrast, he associates historians who “complicate” issues and “contextualize” events with those who defend Columbus: “A number of articles defended Columbus and ‘the West’ against the historical attacks and ‘misperceptions’ of the counter-camp, some in mass media publications.” According to Axtell, “the most cogent response” was Robert Royal, *1492 and All That: Political Manipulations of History* (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1992); and Robert Royal, *Columbus on Trial: 1492 v. 1992* (Herndon, Va.: Young America’s Foundation, 1992).

³ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, updated ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Dwight N. Hopkins, Lois Ann Lorentzen, Eduardo Mendieta, and David Bastone, eds., *Religions/Globalizations: Theories and Cases* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001); R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, Md.: Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict and Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Mamphela Ramphele, and Pamela Reynolds, eds., *Violence and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Barbara F. Walter and Jack Snyder, eds., *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Religion, Ethnicity, and Self-Identity: Nations in Turmoil* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1997); Marc Gopin, “Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution,” *Peace & Change* 22 (January 1997): 1–31; Roy Licklider, ed., *Stopping the Killing: How Civil Wars End* (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

destruction witnessed over the past decade, new studies of ethnic and religious violence now provide a theoretical basis for reexamining such violence in comparative perspective.⁴

The articles in this issue represent a new wave of Atlantic world scholarship attempting to place violence at the center of the Columbian Exchange.⁵ The studies here focus on violence in the early modern Atlantic world—considered as a space with particular, though not entirely unique, cross-cultural interactions at the beginning of the period of true globalization.⁶ During the sixteenth century, the triangular transatlantic trading connections that increasingly linked Europe, Africa, and the Americas began to forge hybrid Atlantic cultures.⁷ Although the Atlantic world was created by European navigation and maritime connections that broke down the preexisting isolation of various societies ringing the great ocean, “the birth of an Atlantic world also involved a gigantic international migration of people,” that should be seen neither as Eurocentric nor as peaceful.⁸

Patricia Lopes Don, H. E. Martel, and Melanie Perrault situate their studies of religious and ethnic violence in a common setting: the borderlands and colonial frontiers within this Atlantic world. Historians have long portrayed frontiers as violent, seeing New Spain, for exam-

⁴ Much of the new anthropological, sociological, political science, and historical literature on religious and ethnic violence draws on the theoretical work of René Girard and Martha Nussbaum; see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). For a work that employs Girard’s critical theory in interpreting ritualized violence, execution, and family during the French Revolution, see Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 10–14, 53–64; Appleby, *Ambivalence of the Sacred*, pp. 78–80, critiques Girard’s theory.

⁵ The organization of an upcoming conference on “Warfare and Society in Colonial North America and the Caribbean” by the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, in conjunction with the University of Tennessee Center for the Study of War and Society, suggests that a broad range of scholars are beginning to rethink the role of violence in the Columbian Exchange.

⁶ I am using the concept of an Atlantic world, despite the fundamental problem of geographic limits and periodization with all “waterborne” history. See Jerry H. Bentley, “Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World History,” *American Historical Review* 101 (June 1996): 749–770; Patrick Manning, “The Problem of Interactions in World History,” *American Historical Review* 101 (June 1996): 771–782; Gale Stokes, “The Fates of Human Societies: A Review of Recent Macrohistories,” *American Historical Review* 106 (April 2001): 508–525.

⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 15–47.

⁸ John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 13–42.

ple, as an area in which “war and the frontier advanced together.”⁹ Recent borderlands studies offer new ways of considering intercultural violence and avoid casting violence as a mere by-product of disciplining discourse. Anthropologists R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead have theorized the “violent edge of empire” as a dynamic space of ethnic conflict and social reorganization. “That area continuously affected by the proximity of a state, but not under state administration, we call the ‘tribal zone,’” they explain. “Within the tribal zone, the wider consequence of the presence of the state is the radical transformation of extant sociopolitical formations, often resulting in ‘tribalization,’ the genesis of new tribes.”¹⁰ Ferguson and Whitehead’s useful conceptualization of borderlands as “tribal zones” allows a rethinking of ethnicity and conflict in the Atlantic world, especially if we inject religious violence into their model.

The authors in this issue offer cultural history reinterpretations of classic sources for borderlands studies and Atlantic world history. European travel narratives and cosmographical studies trace the broad outlines of the early modern Atlantic world, highlighting marvelous sights and monstrous creatures encountered by voyagers sailing the Atlantic Ocean or merely rumored by the people with whom they came into contact.¹¹ Such sources often sketch in few details of the peoples living along the Atlantic coast, but colonial chronicles and captivity narratives provide rich descriptions of prolonged interactions between Europeans, Native Americans, and Africans in the Atlantic world.¹² These sources offer details of cultural forms, behavior, and rituals. Inquisition records and missionary accounts delve into both colonial settlers’ and indigenous peoples’ religious beliefs and practices, allowing historians

⁹ Thomas D. Hall, *Social Change in the Southwest, 1350–1880* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), pp. 70–73. A global theory of this dynamic is provided by Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Parker’s arguments are slightly refined in “The Artillery Fortress as an Engine of European Overseas Expansion, 1480–1750,” in *City Walls: The Urban Enceinte in Global Perspective*, ed. James D. Tracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 386–416.

¹⁰ R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead, “The Violent Edge of Empire,” in *War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare*, ed. R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1992), pp. 1–30.

¹¹ Laura Lunger Knoppers and Joan B. Landes, *Monstrous Bodies/Political Monstrosities in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004).

¹² I will use the term “Native American” to refer to all indigenous Americans throughout this text, recognizing that some scholars prefer the terms “American Indian,” “Indian,” or “Amerindian.” For a discussion of the problems of Native American terminology and historiography, see R. David Edmunds, “Native Americans, New Voices: American Indian History, 1895–1995,” *American Historical Review* 100 (June 1995): 717–740.

to explore direct connections between religion and violence. Almost all of these texts are Eurocentric accounts that rely on linguistic interpretation for their depictions of Native American and African cultures, making it difficult, if not impossible, to access indigenous peoples' voices.¹³ The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century audiences for accounts of the Atlantic world were primarily European elites with strong political and religious agendas that probably framed the authors' approaches to their subjects. These fascinating texts, and the processes of their production, thus present complex problems of interpretation for historians attempting to tease out issues of religion, ethnicity, and violence in the early modern Atlantic world.

Obviously, the literature on ethnicity, religion, and violence in the early modern Atlantic world is too large to address comprehensively here; however, a comparative history of organized religious and ethnic violence in the Atlantic world becomes possible by focusing on the *actualization* of violence. In their work on violence and subjectivity, Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman emphasize examining "the processes through which violence is actualized—in the sense that it is both produced and consumed."¹⁴ All three of the authors in this issue attempt to deal precisely with the production of religious and ethnic violence by treating early modern Spanish, Native American, and English practitioners of violence as key historical actors operating through overlapping subject positions. This approach to violence fundamentally questions Michel Foucault's influential portrayal of violence as the inscription of power/knowledge.¹⁵ I will attempt to draw out some common themes from the three articles by situating them in relationship to recent research on ethnic and religious violence, then by discussing the contexts of captivity and atrocity that framed so much violence in the early modern Atlantic world.

¹³ One of the best concise analyses of the problem of Eurocentrism in history and text is Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1–54. The tensions within subaltern approaches to Atlantic world history are discussed in Florencia E. Mallon, "The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History," *American Historical Review* 99 (December 1994): 1491–1515.

¹⁴ Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman, "Introduction," in *Violence and Subjectivity* (see n. 3), pp. 1–18.

¹⁵ Das challenges Foucault's theory of violence and power as she develops her own theory of subjectivity in Veena Das, "The Act of Witnessing: Violence, Poisonous Knowledge, and Subjectivity," in *Violence and Subjectivity* (see n. 3), pp. 205–225. A recent attempt to survey the problem of violence in early modern Europe also questions Foucault directly; see Julius R. Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 6–7, 73–116.

ETHNIC IDENTITIES AND VIOLENCE IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD

From the earliest contacts between Native Americans and Europeans, ethnic identities shaped violence in the Atlantic World. Christopher Columbus's own reports of his expeditions began to mold Europeans' attitudes toward the inhabitants of the Caribbean islands and to construct ethnic identifications.¹⁶ Reports of Hernán Cortés's expedition to Mexico constructed elaborate conquest narratives and fixed representations of the Aztecs that would have a long legacy. Ross Hassig's recent work on the Aztecs challenges the entire notion of a Spanish Conquest, using ethnographic research on Mexico to show that the Aztec empire collapsed because of ethnic clashes among Mesoamericans, many of whom were willing to take advantage of Cortés's presence to attack their Aztec imperial rulers. Certainly Cortés's artillery and siege techniques played some role in the struggles for Tenochtitlán, but Hassig's analysis is convincing, and it demonstrates the effectiveness of ethnohistory approaches in reconceptualizing violence in the early modern Atlantic world.¹⁷

Borderlands studies are reconsidering ethnicity and violence, especially within the Spanish Empire. In Brazil and the Atlantic rim of South America, the processes of ethnic realignment were often linked to changing conditions of colonial expansion and warfare.¹⁸ Cynthia Radding's powerful study of the borderlands of the Spanish empire in northwestern Mexico demonstrates the effectiveness of considering ethnicity spatially. Radding examines the complex human and economic dimensions of Spanish mission communities, stressing Native Americans' shifting social groupings, cultural endurance, and resis-

¹⁶ Christopher Columbus, *The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin Classics, 1992).

¹⁷ Ross Hassig, "War, Politics and the Conquest of Mexico," in *War in the Early Modern World, 1450–1815*, ed. Jeremy Black (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999), pp. 207–235; Ross Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest* (London: Longman, 1994); Ross Hassig, "Aztec and Spanish Conquest in Mesoamerica," in *War in the Tribal Zone* (see n. 10), pp. 83–102; John F. Guilmartin, "The Military Revolution: Origins and First Tests Abroad," in *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe*, ed. Clifford J. Rogers (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 299–333.

¹⁸ Neil L. Whitehead, "Tribes Make States and States Make Tribes: Warfare and the Creation of Colonial Tribes and States in Northeastern South America," in *War in the Tribal Zone* (see n. 10), pp. 127–150.

tance tactics.¹⁹ Radding's consideration of ethnicity, religion, and borderlands can usefully be compared with David Coleman's study of Granada as a "frontier city" in Iberia—highlighting the importance of transatlantic historical comparison.²⁰

Within the borderlands, individuals' identities seem to have been incredibly flexible and changeable. Studies of ethnicity and violence in the Atlantic world often oppose "colonizers" to "indigenous peoples," envisioning a statist imperial program suppressing resistance by the colonized. Yet, the importance of nonstate actors in early modern Atlantic world ethnic violence makes such a focus on states extremely problematic. Conquistadors, military adventurers, and privateers may have acted vaguely in the name of European states, but they also had their personal motivations and programs. Many European travelers, traders, fur trappers, merchants, and castaways were able to construct supple "chameleon" identities, as Hans Staden's identity performances demonstrate.²¹ Runaway slaves, castaways, and maroons could integrate into new communities. Borderlands also allowed people to discard unwanted identities, whether robber, cheat, rapist, or murderer.²² Native American societies' loose affiliations and permeability allowed flexible identifications, even when the proximity of European colonies prompted a more structured "tribalization." Native American war bands freely formed and re-formed around leaders. The identifications presented by individuals could be challenged and transformed through contact and conflict, and perhaps the most important factor in limiting or fixing ethnic identifications was violence.

Ethnic identification was often structured through language, but imperfectly. Communication between Native Americans and Europeans required linguistic translation and cultural explanation, as Tzvetan Todorov's provocative and fiercely debated work on interpretation

¹⁹ Cynthia Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700–1850* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), suggests that Native Americans creatively adapted Catholic religious practices, but her book focuses more on Jesuit missionaries' administration than on the production of syncretic religion in mission communities and the study could consider violence more directly.

²⁰ David Coleman, *Creating Christian Granada: Society and Religious Culture in an Old-World Frontier City, 1492–1600* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).

²¹ Here, I am referring to H. E. Martel's description of Hans Staden as "a practiced chameleon."

²² Interestingly, much of the recent literature on identities seems to emphasize positive roles in identity construction. For an example, see Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist—Or a Short History of Identity," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Guy (London: Sage Publications, 1996), pp. 18–36.

and linguistic conquest suggests.²³ Interpreters such as Malinche, who served as Hernán Cortés's personal translator, had peculiar positions and could wield substantial power in the borderlands, where intercultural miscommunications and misunderstandings were routine. H. E. Martel suggests that in this context, Native American groups used cultural interpretive strategies to address the threat posed by the arrival of European colonists. Rumors, insinuations, and legends could be weapons used to defend against European incursions, at least for a time. Interpreters occupied ambiguous positions despite the vital importance of intercultural communication. On this point, Melanie Perault cites the example of the violent abduction of several Native Americans by English explorers to serve as their informants. If Europeans were dissatisfied with the information supplied by such informants, they could apply brutal violence, as when English colonial leader John Smith whipped a Native American guide for supposedly misleading him. Such evidence fits well with Alfred Cave's research on the origins of the Pequot War, which shows that miscommunications and ethnic responses could also result in escalating violence and disastrous warfare.²⁴

Where Native American and European colonial communities lived in close proximity in borderlands, blurred cross-cultural identities and mixed-ethnic populations emerged. English colonial writings reflected their authors' conflicting impressions of Native American relations with early English colonies and the possibilities of assimilation of "noble savages" into a "civilized" transplanted English society.²⁵ Widespread evidence reveals communication, trading relations, cultural exchanges, and intermarriage between Native Americans and Europeans throughout the Americas. Negotiations, political alliances, and military cooperation between groups of Europeans and Native Americans provide more examples of constructive intercultural relations that broke down barriers, or at least allowed passages across them. In many colonial areas, different European ethnic groups mixed, further destabilizing identities. European settlement colonies promoted a

²³ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

²⁴ Alfred A. Cave, "Who Killed John Stone? A Note on the Origins of the Pequot War," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 49 (July 1992): 509–521; see also Alfred A. Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996).

²⁵ For a study of the persistence of the notions of "noble savage" and of the possibility of Native American "assimilation" into the early nineteenth century, see Bernard W. Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (1973; reprint, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974).

“civilizing mission” that often challenged these cross-cultural identities, expecting conformity instead. Melanie Perrault’s reading of English travel narratives and settlement histories highlights the ironic vision of harmony promoted by early English colonists in Virginia and New England, as they envisioned a patriarchal dominion over subordinated, domesticated “noble savage” dependents.

The possibilities of harmony and assimilation often ran afoul of Europeans’ ethnic identifications, which defined their “civilized” societies in opposition to “barbarous” ones precisely by depicting “savages” as engaging in brutal, as opposed to legitimate, violence.²⁶ Ethnic identities, then, were also conceptualized and distinguished through the violent practices of warfare. The predominant analytical framework for understanding Native American forms of warfare until recently has been the theory of “primitive war,” which portrays “primitive” societies as waging a form of warfare that was irrational and fundamentally different from “real,” supposedly “civilized”, warfare that was fought for rational political goals.²⁷ Recent studies argue that nonurbanized societies’ forms of warfare were influenced by ethnic identities and culture in much more subtle ways. Lawrence H. Keely heavily criticizes the concept of “primitive war,” showing how the notion perpetuates the stereotype of the “savages” as obeying a different “uncivilized” set of rules of war, yet somehow being “peaceful” by practicing a “more stylized, less horrible form of warfare than their civilized counterparts waged.”²⁸ Studies of the “skulking” way of war and Native American fortifications have shown the flexibility and adaptability of Native American warfare, suggesting that notions and practices of violence could change as ethnic identification shifted.²⁹

Extended contact between Native Americans and European settlers in North America during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

²⁶ For a consideration of the later eighteenth-century development of these notions, see Karen Halttunen, “Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture,” *American Historical Review* 100 (April 1995): 303–334.

²⁷ The concept of “primitive war” stems principally from two key theoretical works originally published in the 1940s: Harry Holbert Turney-High, *Primitive War: Its Practice and Concepts*, 2nd ed. (Columbia: South Carolina University Press, 1991) and Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

²⁸ Lawrence H. Keeley, *War before Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 3–24; see also Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origin of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), pp. 117–118.

²⁹ Patrick M. Malone, *The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics among the New England Indians* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1991); Wayne E. Lee, “Fortify, Fight, or Flee: Tuscarora and Cherokee Defensive Warfare and Military Culture Adaptation,” *Journal of Military History* 68 (July 2004): 713–770.

allowed technology transfers and acculturation to gradually reshape both Native American and European colonial practices of warfare. Europeans and Native Americans certainly had differing cultural expectations about the practice of warfare, yet accommodation and cultural adaptation were at times possible.³⁰ In certain aspects of warfare, blurred ethnic identities could emerge. For example, many Native Americans acted as “ethnic soldiers,” providing auxiliary, mercenary, logistical, and reconnaissance services for European colonial military forces.³¹ The diffusion of European diseases, firearms, and animals forced Native Americans to adapt to increasingly deadly warfare. At the same time, European territorial encroachments and colonial economic priorities—especially fur trading and silver mining—intensified warfare among Native American societies.³² Native Americans progressively adopted firearms and certain European military techniques but maintained their “skulking” way of war, as the English described the stealth and ambush tactics employed by indigenous warriors. During King Philip’s War, “the Indian mode of warfare, actually a blend of aboriginal and European elements, proved so successful in numerous engagements that perceptive officers and government officials began to urge changes in colonial military doctrine,” according to Patrick M. Malone.³³ European coastal fortifications, trading factories, and military incursions forced social reorganizations and militarized Native American culture in the “tribal zone.”

Ethnic identifications were also defined by racial conceptions that justified violence. Slave labor provided logistical support for European colonial and military operations in the Atlantic world. Native Americans were enslaved in the growing Spanish *encomienda* system, forced to work in agricultural operations and silver mines in Central and South America. From the beginning of European imperialism in the Atlantic, enslaved Africans played a role in colonial expansion

³⁰ George A. De Vos, “Ethnic Pluralism: Conflict and Accommodation,” in *Ethnic Identity: Creation, Conflict, and Accommodation*, ed. Lola Romanucci-Ross and George A. De Vos (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 1995), pp. 15–47.

³¹ Thomas S. Abler, “Beavers and Muskets: Iroquois Military Fortunes in the Face of European Colonization,” in *War in the Tribal Zone* (see n. 10), pp. 151–174; Richard R. Johnson, “The Search for a Usable Indian: An Aspect of the Defense of Colonial New England,” *Journal of American History* 64 (December 1977): 623–651.

³² For a study of the transformation of Iroquois warfare, see Daniel K. Richter, “War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 40 (October 1983): 537–544; on Spanish expansion into North American and the problem of Native American endemic warfare, see Hall, *Social Change in the Southwest*, pp. 70–86.

³³ Malone, *Skulking Way of War*, pp. 89–90, 96–98.

and mining operations. When European colonies' demands for labor exceeded what the available Native American slaves could provide, Europeans turned increasingly to African slave labor.³⁴

The ethnic violence discussed in this issue needs to be understood in conjunction with the contemporaneous gradual development of the plantation complex, an organization using slave labor and brutal violence to produce an agricultural cash crop for export.³⁵ Early European settler colonies used a mixture of indentured and slave labor. Then, as tobacco and sugar plantations spread through the Caribbean, African slaves became the key workers in the plantation complex. David Eltis offers a provocative explanation for this growing use of African slaves and for the emergence of racism in the early plantations by revealing the unwillingness of Europeans to consider the possibility of using white slaves.³⁶ Eltis's point is supported by the example of the Irish on Montserrat, who initially came to the island as indentured servants to work on tobacco plantations and gradually became "hard and efficient slave masters," overseeing African slaves.³⁷ The plantations seem to have produced their own forms of violence, involving racist attitudes and the physical domination of Africans. Slave masters employed rape as a sexual weapon and established "breeder women" to perpetuate the

³⁴ A recent reassessment, Massimo Livi-Bacci, "Return to Hispaniola: Reassessing a Demographic Catastrophe," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83 (February 2003): 3–51, blames Native American population collapse in Hispaniola partly on the violence of the *encomienda* system. For a good case study of the complex transition from Native American to African slave labor, see Stuart B. Schwartz, "Indian Labor and New World Plantations: European Demands and Indian Responses in Northeastern Brazil," *American Historical Review* 83 (February 1978): 43–79.

³⁵ Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 73–85, 100–102; Sidney W. Mintz, "Pleasure, Profit, and Satiation," in *Seeds of Change: A Quincentennial Commemoration*, ed. Herman J. Viola and Carolyn Margolis (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 112–129; David Barry Gaspar, "Antigua Slaves and Their Struggle to Survive," in *ibid.*, pp. 130–138.

³⁶ David Eltis, "Europeans and the Rise and Fall of Slavery in the Americas: An Interpretation," *American Historical Review* 98 (December 1993): 1399–1423; Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800* (London: Verso, 1996), makes a similar point about the development of racism in early modern slavery. This view has been questioned in a recent study of slavery in the Mediterranean world: Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500–1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 190–193.

³⁷ Donald Harman Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630–1730* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); also, Jane Ohlmeyer, "Seventeenth-Century Ireland and the New British and Atlantic Histories," *American Historical Review* 104 (April 1999): 457–462.

slave population. European planters' racial fears prompted them to use brutal discipline, harsh punishments, and bodily mutilation implemented by dedicated overseers, who played significant roles in a plantation complex that was also sustained by religious values and beliefs.

RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION AND VIOLENCE

Religion played an important role in shaping the Atlantic world from its inception, as extensive religious changes transformed religious beliefs and practices in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. R. Scott Appleby's analysis of the ambiguous nature of religious militancy, coupled with his distinction between religious extremists and fundamentalists, suggests that we consider a broad range of actors participating directly in diverse religious movements and accompanying violent causes in this period.³⁸ Crusading ideologies, religious prophecies, and the Mediterranean struggle between Islam and Christianity clearly motivated Christopher Columbus and his patrons.³⁹ A series of piety movements and religious reformations then swept through Europe, destroying the unity of Latin Christianity through religious conflicts and a gradual process of "confessionalization." At the same time, early European imperialism in the Americas and the epidemic diseases that accompanied colonists devastated Native American societies and destabilized their religious systems.

In central Mexico, however, the swift collapse of the Aztec empire did not bring a sudden end to Mesoamerican religious beliefs and practice. Instead, social and demographic crises prompted religious experimentation and syncretic fusions of Christian and Mesoamerican religions. Religious groupings in mid-sixteenth-century Mexico were fluid and decentralized, allowing shamans to promote various religious interpretations of the catastrophic violence that destroyed the Aztec empire. Martin Ocelotl, the shaman studied by Patricia Lopes Don, seems to have freely drawn from Christian and Mesoamerican sources for his prophecies, mixing political resistance and religious creativity. Don's methodological approach to the Ocelotl case shares much with studies of the "religions of the oppressed" that have recast religious

³⁸ Appleby, *Ambivalence of the Sacred*, pp. 8–15, 81–120.

³⁹ Pauline Moffitt Watts, "Prophecy and Discovery: On the Spiritual Origins of Christopher Columbus's 'Enterprise of the Indies,'" *American Historical Review* 90 (February 1985): 73–102. Axtell, "Columbian Encounters: 1992–1995," pp. 651–655.

nonconformists and heretics as members of movements combining piety practices with the advancement of social interests.⁴⁰

Patricia Lopes Don sees Christian missionaries as both proponents and enactors of religious violence. The Indian Inquisition of the mid-sixteenth century shows that Spanish missionaries often seem to have been more concerned with establishing “correct” religion and disciplining new Christians than with winning new converts. During the sixteenth century, Franciscan, Dominican, and later Jesuit missionaries fanned out across Spanish and Portuguese territories in Central and South America, promoting an increasingly militant Catholicism. With the papacy embattled in Europe, the threat of idolatry, blasphemy, and polygamy in New Spain could seem frightening to these missionaries. The Indian Inquisition officials who attempted to deal with these issues faced a dilemma concerning whether indigenous Americans should be treated like Jews or Muslims—two groups whose ethnic and religious identities had long been considered problematic in Spanish culture. Interestingly, Spanish Inquisition officials operating on the other side of the Atlantic seem to have been just as concerned about “the threat of religious enthusiasm,” as the case against Eugenia de la Torre in Madrid shows.⁴¹

Spanish missionary efforts demanded such discipline because of the paternalism that underlay most contemporary Christian attitudes toward Native Americans. Early modern Christian missionaries generally believed that they were acting to bring the “true faith” to child-like Native Americans who were paradoxically close to Eden.⁴² In the borderlands of the Atlantic world, Catholic missionaries soon competed over who would care for the souls of Native American “children” with Protestant evangelists, such as the Huguenots who were attempting to establish Calvinism in South America. English colonial

⁴⁰ The term “religions of the oppressed” is Vittorio Lanternari’s; Bruce Lincoln has proposed the term “religions of resistance” instead in *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion after September 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 77–79; one of the best early modern studies of this type is Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Viking, 1972). It would be interesting to compare religious/political resistance of Native Americans with religious aspects of African slave resistance; however, the literature seems more oriented toward eighteenth- and nineteenth-century examples, as in Walter Rucker, “Conjure, Magic, and Power: The Influence of Afro-Atlantic Religious Practices on Slave Resistance and Rebellion,” *Journal of Black Studies* 32 (September 2001): 84–103.

⁴¹ Andrew Keitt, “Religious Enthusiasm, the Spanish Inquisition, and the Disenchantment of the World,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65 (April 2004): 231–250.

⁴² On this paradox, see Jorge Canizares Esguerra, “New World, New Stars: Patriotic Astrology and the Invention of Indian and Creole Bodies in Colonial Spanish America, 1600–1650,” *American Historical Review* 104 (February 1999): 33–68.

expansion began slowly, but Protestant missionaries increasingly aimed to create “Praying Indians” in New England.⁴³ Both Protestant and Catholic colonists recognized that Christian Native Americans might be more likely to support European colonial governments or seek accommodation with settlers during periods of warfare.⁴⁴ Although some pragmatic goals certainly motivated missionary activity, religious concerns for proselytism predominated. Conversion processes were hotly debated during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and only a public profession of a “conversion experience” would be accepted as sincere.⁴⁵

Missionaries operating in the borderlands often saw themselves as caught up in a great religious struggle, and they assessed Native Americans’ religiosity according to their experiences with other non-Europeans. The missionary activity in New Spain coincided with other Catholic campaigns to convert heretics in Europe and to bring the “true faith” to “savages” in the Americas, Africa, the Indian Ocean, and Japan.⁴⁶ “From the perspective of the French Franciscans,” Megan C. Armstrong suggests, “the Wars of Religion was one of several fronts in their global war on sin, a war that embraced the rise of an aggressive form of Islamic rule in the East and encounters with New World peoples as well as the spread of Protestantism in Europe.”⁴⁷ These missionaries were not alone in conceiving of religion in terms of struggle.

Contemporary Christian laypeople who experienced the broad

⁴³ Johnson, “Search for a Usable Indian,” pp. 627, 645–651.

⁴⁴ Armstrong Starkey, “European-Native American Warfare in North America, 1513–1815,” in *War in the Early Modern World* (see n. 17), p. 249.

⁴⁵ Michael Wolfe provides an excellent overview of sixteenth-century Catholic notions of conversion in *The Conversion of Henri IV: Politics, Power, and Religious Belief in Early Modern France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 6–21. For a discussion of Protestant understandings of conversion, see Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 108–118.

⁴⁶ Luc Giard and Louis de Vaucelles, eds., *Les Jésuites à l’âge baroque (1540–1640)* (Grenoble: Editions Jérôme Millon, 1996); Christian Sorrel and Frédéric Meyer, eds., *Les Missions intérieures en France et en Italie du XVI^e au XX^e siècle* (Chambéry: Institut d’Études Savoisiennes, 2001).

⁴⁷ Megan C. Armstrong, *The Politics of Piety: Franciscan Preachers During the Wars of Religion, 1560–1600* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2004), pp. 133, 170. While Armstrong’s study is solidly focused on Franciscans operating within France during the religious wars, one hopes that she might develop this global insight in her future work. J. H. Elliott, “The Mental World of Hernán Cortés,” in *Spain and Its World, 1500–1700: Selected Essays* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 38–40, shows that Franciscans in New Spain inspired Cortés’s belief that “there would arise in Mexico a ‘new church, where God will be served and honoured more than in any other region of the earth.’ . . . The Franciscan vision was a world-wide vision.”

religious transformations in the early modern Atlantic world often espoused eschatological visions, perceiving of their world as a “world turned upside-down.” Imagery portraying the symbolic inversion of worldly order was integral to Reformation-era propaganda and to widespread belief in the Antichrist and the impending Apocalypse. Many sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Christians believed that the unsettling “discoveries” of the Americas, the religious discord within Europe, and other portents signaled that the “Last Days” were near.⁴⁸ While Protestants and Catholics had different ways of understanding God’s power and human free will, almost all Europeans interpreted portents as evidence of Providence actively shaping the world around them.

European soldiers, clergy, and settlers all saw God’s agency at work in their Atlantic colonies.⁴⁹ Millenarian beliefs implied that colonists represented instruments in a divine plan and participants in a “cosmic war,” to use Mark Juergensmeyer’s terminology, that involved “martyrs” in the struggle against “demons.”⁵⁰ English colonists in Virginia, as Melanie Perrault points out, could genuinely believe that they were fighting “the Lord’s battles,” and many of their European contemporaries reported visions of cosmic battles in the heavens.⁵¹ H. E. Martel rightly places Hans Staden into the context of a religious iconography of martyrdom and sacrifice. Early modern imperial ideologies incorporated religious commitment, fusing colonial expansionism with engagement in “cosmic war.” An early seventeenth-century pamphlet celebrating the duc de Montmorency’s appointment as admiral of France linked his readiness to fight the “galleys of Mohammed” with his preparedness “to search for new kingdoms for his master, to found new Frances, and to plant *fleurs de lys* all around the world.”⁵² Similar religious discourses underpinned Spanish conquest and expansion in Central and South America. European colonists’ personal religiosity and faith became entangled in an all-encompassing struggle that provided powerful religious justifications for violence, and even holy war, in colonial warfare throughout the early modern Atlantic world.

⁴⁸ Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine and Death in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1–91; R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 148–188; Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*.

⁴⁹ Esguerra, “New World, New Stars,” pp. 33–68.

⁵⁰ Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, pp. 145–63.

⁵¹ Cunningham and Grell, *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, pp. 79–82.

⁵² Antoine d’Arnauld, *Presentation de Monsieur de Montmorency en l’office d’Admiral de France. 1612* (Paris: Denys du Val, 1612). Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 8° Ln²⁷ 14695.

Settlers in Atlantic colonies often already had intimate personal experience with religious violence. Many colonists were religious refugees fleeing what they considered to be repressive persecution in their former homes. Others were refugees from the chaos, political disruption, epidemic disease, and famine that accompanied the European religious wars. Some of these refugees came from areas of Germany, the Netherlands, France, or the British Isles where different religious groups coinhabited the same geographic space and were therefore accustomed to daily struggles over sacred sites during religious conflicts, lasting in some cases for decades.⁵³ Europeans coming from such conflict zones had frequently witnessed, or even participated in, “mimetic violence” that imitated the forms of judicial punishment in order to rid their communities of pollution and ritually cleanse the world.⁵⁴

CAPTIVES AND RITUALIZED VIOLENCE

Organized violence in the early modern Atlantic world often involved captive-taking and prolonged confinement or forced reidentification.⁵⁵ Captured soldiers and civilians alike might experience resettlement, cultural assimilation, forced labor, and violence. In order to understand ethnic and religious violence, we must consider the treatment of captives and the meanings of pain inflicted on human bodies through mutilation, torture, and other ritualized violence.⁵⁶ The early modern accounts of torture tended to sensationalize brutality and depict practitioners of ritual violence as inhuman or monstrous. While captivity is often presented as a solitary episode, early modern captivity narratives

⁵³ Penny Roberts, “The Most Crucial Battle of the Wars of Religion? The Conflict over Sites of Reformed Worship in Sixteenth-Century France,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 89 (1998): 247–267; see also Brian Sandberg, *Heroic Souls: French Nobles and Religious Conflict after the Edict of Nantes, 1598–1635* (forthcoming), where I also deal with this issue.

⁵⁴ The term “mimetic violence” is René Girard’s, but some of the best analyses of such violence can be found in studies of the French Wars of Religion. See Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross*, pp. 76–106; Natalie Zemon Davis, “The Rites of Violence,” in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 152–187; Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 1–38.

⁵⁵ I would like to thank Linda M. Clemmons for sharing her insights on captivity narratives with me.

⁵⁶ Elaine Scarry’s theorization of torture and warfare as bodily injury is especially pertinent here; Elaine Scarry, “Injury and the Structure of War,” *Representations* 10 (Spring 1985): 1–51.

can be read to suggest that “suffering is a social experience,” as Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, and Margaret Lock have proposed.⁵⁷

Ritual human sacrifice and cannibalism have often been seen as the ultimate atrocities, perpetuated by monstrous beings. In this issue, H. E. Martel offers a rereading of the most infamous case of cannibalism in the early modern Atlantic world, that of the Tupinamba of Brazil. While some scholars have questioned whether the Tupinamba actually practiced cannibalism, the ritualistic violence reported by several sixteenth-century European observers has continued to fascinate historians, anthropologists, and social theorists.⁵⁸ The supposedly cannibalistic Tupinamba served as a model for the contemporary Catholic cartographer André Thevet’s cosmography, which has recently been reinterpreted by Frank Lestringant.⁵⁹ As Stephen Greenblatt notes, “the very incoherence of [Thevet’s] cosmography allows a jumbled confusion of remarkable observations, much like the unsystematized, wildly various contents of the ‘wonder cabinets’ beloved of Renaissance collectors. Thevet’s Tupinamba are like living wonder cabinets.”⁶⁰ One of the other key sixteenth-century sources on Tupinamba cannibalism, Calvinist Jean de Léry’s *Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*, is central to Michel de Certeau’s analysis of ethnographic writing and voice. Certeau finds links between Léry’s descriptions of Tupinamba women’s eating of human flesh and contemporary European depictions of witches’ nighttime Sabbath revelry.⁶¹ Cannibalism

⁵⁷ Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock, “Introduction,” in *Social Suffering*, ed. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. ix–xxvii.

⁵⁸ Descriptions of Tupinamba cannibalism were related in sixteenth-century travel narratives written by Europeans and diffused through seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts on marvels and monstrosities, such as Abbé Guyon, *Histoire des Amazones anciennes et modernes, enrichie de médailles* (Paris: Jean Villette, 1740). The influential anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss read many of these early modern accounts before conducting fieldwork with Native Americans in twentieth-century Brazil. He carried a copy of Jean de Léry’s account with him and thought of early modern travel narratives “as [he] set foot on Brazilian soil for the first time.” Interestingly, Lévi-Strauss mentions cannibalism, but avoids directly discussing Tupinamba cannibalism. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (New York: Atheneum, 1975), pp. 81–88, 326, 335, 351–353, 383–393.

⁵⁹ Frank Lestringant, *Mapping the Renaissance World: The Geographical Imagination in the Age of Discovery*, trans. David Fausett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁶⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, foreword to Lestringant, *Mapping the Renaissance World*, pp. vii–xv.

⁶¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 209–243; Jean de Léry’s account of Tupinamba cannibalism is doubly fascinating because he also describes European cannibalism at the siege of Sancerre during the French Wars of Religion; Robert M. Kingdon, *Myths About the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacres, 1572–1576* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 58–62.

represented devilish gorging to European travel writers who were attuned to issues of feast and famine and who believed that “God’s greatest punishment with famine was to induce cannibalism, and especially to thereby induce starving mothers to eat their own babies.”⁶² Europeans describing cannibals in this period of frequent famines and religious conflicts often wanted to emphasize their pious fasting and their “correct” interpretation of the Eucharist. Literary critic René Girard, instead of focusing on European descriptions, treats Tupinamba cannibalism as a “real” practice. Rather than seeing ritualistic cannibalism as an aberration, however, Girard suggests that it is merely another form of ritualistic sacrifice—a fundamental purifying act common to all religious systems and necessary to remove the pollution of violence, or “mimetic desire,” from the community.⁶³ The very concepts of religion, violence, and ethnicity intersect in all of these readings of the Tupinamba.

Martel’s interpretation, based on Hans Staden’s captivity narrative, suggests that the Tupinamba probably were not cannibals but that they actively cultivated a cannibalistic image and successfully used the “subversive power of rumors in resisting imperialism.” Hans Staden’s religion-infused captivity narrative, intended for a Lutheran audience, provides the key source in this rereading of the Tupinamba’s supposed cannibalism. In an interesting move, Martel’s interpretation employs a Christian religious text to locate cannibalistic violence as an ethnic defensive smokescreen. Martel’s findings parallel Gananath Obeyesekere’s reading of Spanish descriptions of Aztec sacrifice and cannibalism, which concludes that “here is an excellent example of Aztecs manipulating a human sacrifice for political purposes, utilizing a conventional sign system to frighten the Spaniards, and no doubt succeeding.”⁶⁴

Captivity narratives written by Europeans seem to have misunderstood Native American ritualistic bodily mutilation practices and exaggerated their dimensions in their outraged descriptions of Native American “barbarities.” The Iroquois and other Native American societies placed great religious significance on captives, ritualistic torture,

⁶² Cunningham and Grell, *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, pp. 200–246.

⁶³ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 145–149, 274–308: “All religious rituals spring from the surrogate victim, and all the great institutions of mankind, both secular and religious, spring from ritual.”

⁶⁴ Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 16–18.

and mourning.⁶⁵ This issue becomes acute in the debate over the origin of the practice of scalping. Archaeological, linguistic, and textual evidence strongly suggest that scalping was practiced by pre-Columbian Native Americans, despite some previous claims that Europeans introduced scalping to Native American societies. However, European colonists clearly did encourage scalping and the mutilation of bodies in early modern colonial warfare through the use of bounties for scalps brought in by Native American warriors.⁶⁶ European religious leaders in North American colonies sometimes provided religious justifications for incidents of bodily mutilation and atrocities.

Europeans' captivity narratives can be compared with trial records of Native Americans who faced European judicial processes. Patricia Lopes Don's research on the Indian Inquisition in Mexico reveals the harsh punishments and executions meted out to Mesoamerican captives in an effort to halt what the inquisitors considered idolatry. Religious rationales sustained torture throughout European judicial systems and their colonial counterparts, not merely in Inquisition courts. A recent study of Catholic French torture finds that "much as chosen suffering sought to crush the rebellious will and thereby to make spiritual space for the indwelling truth of God, so too did judicial torture, by inflicting pain on an accused, seek to destroy the willfulness that diminished the truth of testimony."⁶⁷ European colonists subjected Native Americans to forms of judicial torture and execution that incorporated deliberate, ritualistic infliction of pain.

The most massive and systematic captive-taking operations in the Atlantic world arose in West Africa, as Europeans increasingly relied on African slave labor during the sixteenth century. Europeans' rising demands for African slaves in the seventeenth century seem to have fueled warfare among West African states and societies, encouraging slave-taking operations and supporting an "ideology of militarism [that] was founded in the political economy of the slave trade."⁶⁸ While European desires for slaves provided economic incentives for the slave mar-

⁶⁵ Richter, "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience," pp. 537–544; Anthony F. C. Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), pp. 76–107.

⁶⁶ James Axtell and William C. Sturtevant, "The Unkindest Cut, or Who Invented Scalping," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 37 (July 1980): 451–472; Starkey, "European-Native American Warfare in North America, 1513–1815," pp. 248–249.

⁶⁷ Lisa Silverman, *Tortured Subjects: Pain, Truth, and the Body in Early Modern France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 8–9.

⁶⁸ Robin Law, "Warfare on the West African Slave Coast, 1650–1850," in *War in the Tribal Zone* (see n. 10), pp. 103–26.

ket, the actual enslavement of Africans stemmed largely from wars conducted among African political entities. John Thornton has persuasively argued that “African participation in the slave trade was voluntary and under the control of African decision makers.”⁶⁹ If European slave traders had to compete with internal African economic use of slaves, they controlled the transportation and reselling of slaves. The Middle Passage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a cruel, deadly voyage that killed more than 20 percent of captive Africans shipped across the Atlantic.⁷⁰ Slaves challenged the plantation complex through subtle collective action, revolt, and flight. Africans who escaped from plantations often formed maroon communities in the Caribbean and South America, but they always risked capture and reenslavement. The enormous scale of the early modern slave trade and the intense organization of the violence suffered by its captives should be contextualized by an examination of contemporaries’ understanding of atrocities.

MASS VIOLENCE AND ATROCITY

Perhaps no single source had done more to shape our images of atrocity in the early modern Atlantic world than Bartolomé de Las Casas’s famous account of atrocities in New Spain.⁷¹ Travel narratives and polemical works written by Protestants built on critical Spanish accounts, such as Las Casas’s, to fashion a “Black Legend” of Spanish cruelty in the mines and *encomiendas* of New Spain. Hans Staden’s narrative probably criticized Portuguese slavery in order to please a Lutheran audience, and many of the facets of the Black Legend were undoubtedly a product of the religious propaganda of European wars of religion.⁷² Yet, many of the atrocious episodes recounted in propaganda pieces did relate horribly real excessive violence practiced by Spanish colonial soldiers and settlers against noncombatants, as well

⁶⁹ Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, pp. 98–125.

⁷⁰ David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert S. Klein, eds., *The Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1562–1867: A Database CD-Rom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 130–160.

⁷¹ Bartolomé de Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, trans. Nigel Griffin (London: Penguin Classics, 1992).

⁷² For a historiographical discussion of the Black Legend and the “decline of Spain,” see Richard L. Kagan, “Prescott’s Paradigm: American Historical Scholarship and the Decline of Spain,” in *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past*, ed. Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 324–348.

as by other Europeans and Native Americans embroiled in conflicts in the colonial borderlands. Analyzing early modern atrocities is complicated not only by the outrage that accompanied most of these descriptions of atrocity, but also by ambiguous legal distinctions and gender conceptions that often made defining “noncombatants” very difficult.⁷³ Tracing the connections between religion and ethnicity can help in understanding the massive scale and disturbing character of the atrocities committed in the early modern Atlantic world.

The Virginia Massacre, as the Powhatan Confederacy’s 1622 attack on English settlers in Jamestown colony is generally known, and the reprisal massacres perpetrated by English colonists reveal the dynamics of mass atrocities in this period. Melanie Perrault shows that during the decade before the massacre, deep contradictions emerged in English paternalistic attitudes that portrayed Native Americans as “noble savages” who lived in an Eden-like paradise. English colonial voyager Thomas Harriot thought that Native Americans would eventually come to “honor, obey, fear, and love us.” Perrault reveals how such paternalistic attitudes created tensions in the Virginia colony and antagonized the settlers’ Native American neighbors. When intercultural violence did occur, English political culture sanctioned extreme forms of violence against Native Americans as a justifiable means of upholding the colonial community and maintaining social order.⁷⁴

The increasingly brutal character of violence between English colonists and Native Americans highlights the failure of restraints in colonial warfare in the Atlantic world during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. All wars involve the forging of conventions between groups of combatants regarding the appropriate means and forms of violence; however, these conventional practices of warfare and restraints on violence are periodically violated and can at times break down.⁷⁵

⁷³ A comparative approach to atrocity is provided by Mark Grimsley and Clifford J. Rogers, eds., *Civilians in the Path of War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002). There is not space here to develop the complexities of gender conceptions and relations in determining combatant/noncombatant status; however, I discuss this issue in a case study, Brian Sandberg, “‘Generous Amazons Came to the Breach’: Besieged Women, Agency and Subjectivity During the French Wars of Religion,” *Gender & History* 16 (November 2004): 654–688.

⁷⁴ Perrault’s analysis effectively explains the explosion of violence in Virginia, supporting interpretations that see the Virginia Massacre as a rupture in English policies toward, and relations with, Native Americans; see Alden T. Vaughan, “‘Expulsion of the Savages’: English Policy and the Virginia Massacre of 1622,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 35 (January 1978): 57–84.

⁷⁵ The best introduction to the massive literature on the theories and the practices of “laws of war,” including the concepts of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*, is provided by Michael

Differing cultural expectations about violence and communication difficulties seem to have exacerbated problems in maintaining restraints on intercultural violence in areas such as Virginia and New England. Colonial military and militia units seem to have accepted the routine use of excessive violence, as the images of self-defense used by early seventeenth-century settler colonies incorporated notions of a “militarized frontier” and a “militia myth.”⁷⁶

Europeans were increasingly accustomed to failures of restraints on warfare during the religious wars that engulfed vast areas of Europe from the mid-sixteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century. Cities in the conflict zones of the Dutch Revolt, the French Wars of Religion, the Thirty Years’ War, and the English Civil Wars could suffer catastrophic violence as the most extreme applications of the “law of the siege” became normal. European soldiers, who were often ill-supplied and underpaid, became habituated to pillaging and burning towns that attempted to resist them. Massacres of inhabitants and executions of civic leaders followed the end of many sieges due to the brutal conditions of early modern European warfare and the excessive zeal of many soldiers participating in religious warfare.⁷⁷

Strong religious motivations often underlay the atrocities committed by the European combatants who fought in colonial wars. Mark Juergensmeyer argues that “warriors” in religious conflicts experience symbolic empowerment through their performance of violence in what they perceive as a “cosmic war.”⁷⁸ This approach to religious conflict provides a way of interpreting early modern European soldiers’ commitment to a cause and their willingness to inflict violence. For combatants in the European wars of religion, heretics and infidels both

Howard, George J. Andreopoulos, and Mark R. Shulman, eds., *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994); see also James Turner Johnson, “Maintaining the Protection of Non-Combatants,” *Journal of Peace Research* 37 (July 2000): 421–448; and Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

⁷⁶ Don Higginbotham, “The Military Institutions of Colonial America: The Rhetoric and the Reality,” in *Tools of War: Instruments, Ideas, and Institutions of Warfare, 1445–1871*, ed. John A. Lynn (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), pp. 131–153.

⁷⁷ Geoffrey Parker, “Early Modern Europe,” in *Laws of War* (see n. 75), pp. 40–58; Mark Greengrass, “Hidden Transcripts: Secret Histories and Personal Testimonies of Religious Violence in the French Wars of Religion,” in *The Massacre in History*, ed. Mark Levene and Penny Roberts (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 69–88; Brian Sandberg, “Only the Sack and the Noose for its Citizens’: Atrocities against Civilians in the Wars of Religion in Early Seventeenth-Century France,” (forthcoming).

⁷⁸ Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, pp. 145–163, 187–215.

represented agents of the Devil, with shared abominable characteristics. Colonial encounters with indigenous peoples became sites of religious and theological dispute in confessional propaganda of the religious wars. If the Tupinamba could be compared to witches by the Protestant French writer Léry, so too could Huguenot “heretics” be portrayed as witches and sorcerers by Catholic polemicists in France.⁷⁹ For Christians anticipating the Apocalypse, waging warfare against the Ottomans in the Mediterranean or against the Powhatans in Virginia signified participating in the great struggle against the Antichrist. Many European soldiers and colonists who were directly involved in the production of violence in Europe’s global expansion exported religious warfare into colonial contexts. Incidents of religious violence erupted among Europeans in colonial territories, such as the conflict between French Calvinists and Catholics at Fort Coligny. The English colonial leader John Smith explained that “the Warres in *Europe*, *Asia*, and *Affrica* . . . taught me how to subdue the wilde Salvages in *Virginia*.”⁸⁰

A transatlantic comparative perspective can make Smith’s comment even more significant and the atrocities surrounding the Virginia Massacre more comprehensible. English colonization in Ireland and the Americas developed as serious religious divisions emerged in the British Isles in the sixteenth century between Catholic Ireland, Calvinist Scotland, and an Anglican-dominated but religiously mixed England. Elizabethan England seems to have become increasingly militarized just as it began its imperial policies in the Atlantic as a result of the pressures of fighting in religious conflicts in the divided Netherlands and in Catholic Ireland during the late sixteenth century. As Nicholas P. Canny points out, “We find the [English] colonists in the New World using the same pretexts for the extermination of the Indians as their counterparts had used in the 1560s and 1570s for the slaughter of numbers of the Irish.”⁸¹ Aggressive English colonization in Ireland continued during the religious conflicts of the mid-seventeenth-century civil wars, which involved so much atrocity that the violence in Ireland has recently been likened to late twentieth-century

⁷⁹ Luc Racaut, *Hatred in Print: Catholic Propaganda and Protestant Identity during the French Wars of Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 56–58, 77–79, 91–92.

⁸⁰ John Smith quoted in Vaughan, “Expulsion of the Savages,” pp. 62–63.

⁸¹ John S. Nolan, “The Militarization of the Elizabethan State,” *Journal of Military History* 58 (July 1994): 391–420; Nicholas P. Canny, “The Ideology of English Colonization: From Ireland to America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 30 (October 1973): 596–597.

“ethnic cleansing.”⁸² English, Irish, and Scottish soldiers who experienced the atrocities of the civil wars in the 1640s and 1650s may have been even more prepared to practice warfare beyond restraint. They had witnessed the erosion of conventional limits on warfare among Christians and the infusion of bitter religious hatred into European conflicts.⁸³ The atrocious nature of this sort of conflict arguably shaped later English attitudes toward both Irish and Native Americans.⁸⁴ The combination of ethnic stereotypes, imperial ideologies, and religious justifications not only sanctioned atrocities but gave them expansive meaning.

THE ATLANTIC WORLD AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF VIOLENCE

This issue highlights the advantages of examining the perpetrators of violence carefully as historical actors adopting multiple subject positions: violence’s participant, manipulator, collaborator, witness, and even victim. The articles here are careful to explore the “gray zones” between oppressors and victims, and such an approach to the production of religious and ethnic violence offers new directions in the historiography of the Atlantic world that can complement studies of the “reception” of violence.⁸⁵

Understanding religious and ethnic violence comparatively can also help integrate the history of the Americas into broader world historical perspectives, avoiding the production of an America-centered Atlantic world.⁸⁶ When historians focus on the oppressive nature of European imperialism, they can best respond to Eric Wolf’s call to

⁸² Robin Clifton, “‘An Indiscriminate Blackness?’ Massacre, Counter-Massacre, and Ethnic Cleansing in Ireland, 1640–1660,” in *Massacre in History* (see n. 77), pp. 107–126.

⁸³ Barbara Donagan, “Atrocity, War Crime, and Treason in the English Civil War,” *American Historical Review* 99 (October 1994): 1137–1166.

⁸⁴ Nicholas P. Canny, *Kingdom and Colony: Ireland in the Atlantic World, 1560–1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Harold E. Selesky, “Colonial America,” in *Laws of War* (see n. 75), pp. 60–62.

⁸⁵ This usage of “gray zones” is adapted from Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage, 1989).

⁸⁶ Michael Adas, “From Settler Colony to Global Hegemon: Integrating the Exceptionalist Narrative of the American Experience into World History,” *American Historical Review* 106 (December 2001): 1692–1720, argues passionately that American historiography needs to overcome its central paradox of seeing America as an exceptional “city upon the hill” while also stressing America as a model for the rest of the world. For a historiographical study of American exceptionalism, see Daniel T. Rodgers, “Exceptionalism,” in *Imagined Histories* (see n. 72), pp. 21–40.

break down Eurocentric historiography by reconceptualizing Europeans' roles in the production of transatlantic and global violence, rather than by ignoring the European dimensions of early modern globalization.⁸⁷ After all, as Talal Asad argues, "Europe did not simply expand overseas; it made itself through that expansion."⁸⁸ The earliest and perhaps fullest combination of aggressive transoceanic imperialism, settler colonies, and racial slavery first developed in the Atlantic world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although the forms of ethnic and religious violence produced in this context were shaped by ongoing or contemporaneous imperial relationships in the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean, Eurasia, and Southeast Asia, the performances of violence in the Atlantic world arguably served as models for the globalization of violence throughout the early modern world.

Alfred W. Crosby's demarcation of a Columbian Exchange has provided a broad concept that continues to be useful, but we should remember that his depiction of the processes of transatlantic exchange emphasizes the violent, destructive clashes of conquering germs, plants, animals, and humans.⁸⁹ In contrast, the term "encounters," which seemed so dominant during the Columbian quinqucentennial, represents a problematic concept precisely because it obscures agency in the production of violence and deflects attention from the horrendous consequences of armed conflict. Moving beyond the notion of "encounters" requires inserting a comprehensive examination of violence into comparative histories and metanarratives of early modern globalization.

⁸⁷ Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

⁸⁸ Talal Asad, "Muslims and European Identity: Can Europe Represent Islam?" in *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 209–227.

⁸⁹ Consider Crosby's insistence on deadly disease, "biological imperialism," and "expansion," in Alfred W. Crosby Jr., *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Alfred W. Crosby Jr., *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1972).