Swiss American Historical Society Review

Volume 50 | Number 3 Article 5

11-2014

Book Review: Two Troubled Souls: An EighteenthCentury Couple's Spiritual Journey in the Atlantic World

Travis Jaquess
University of Mississippi

Book Reviews

Aaron Spencer Fogleman. *Two Troubled Souls: An Eighteenth-Century Couple's Spiritual Journey in the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2013).

In his new microhistory, *Two Troubled Souls*, Fogleman argues that the Atlantic world's "structures" and "central features" had the power to fundamentally shape and to transform individuals and co-opted most of them into acceptance of the dominant mores of slavery, gender relations, economic systems, cultural exchange and religious diversity (10). Fogleman makes this broad claim by tracing the lives of two troubled souls, husband and wife Jean-François Reynier and Maria Barbara Knoll, Moravian missionaries. Fogleman chronicles their search for religious truth, personal fulfillment, and emotional rest in various parts of the Atlantic World. The book follows the couple from central Europe to Pennsylvania, South Carolina, London, Suriname, the island of St. Thomas, and Georgia. Along the way they encountered notable religious figures and witnessed events such as the Stono Rebellion, the first Great Awakening, the French and Indian War, and the American Revolution.

Reynier first enters the Atlantic world as a young indentured servant in Philadelphia. Upon completion of his indenture, he began his spiritual journey which led to a cloister in Ephrata, Pennsylvania where he experienced his first public bout with madness. After recovering his wits enough to travel, he moved to a Moravian community in Georgia and then returned to Europe. In Europe he finally met his wife Knoll and Count Zinzendorf who sent the couple as missionaries to spread the word in Suriname and St. Thomas.

Nestled in the body of his moving narrative are the typical themes of Atlantic History: movement, slavery, cultural exchange, and religious diversity. Where Fogleman sets himself apart is ability to weave gender prominently into the tapestry. Fogleman illustrates gender roles in Moravian communities, the Atlantic world, and effectively juxtaposes masculine and feminine migration patterns. Fogleman concludes that although Knoll joined the Moravians freely, her decision to emigrate was not hers alone, but coerced through

the prodding of the male leadership of the community. By the end of her life, however, "driven by spiritual ambition and powerful sexual impulses," Knoll separated herself from her troubled husband--who had rejected Moravian teachings--and returned to the communal life she desired (215).

Fogleman most successfully demonstrates his ideological transformation thesis through Reynier's evolving views on race. Fogleman maintains that Reynier entered the "Atlantic System" with the intentions of changing it so that it would no longer be dependent on plantation slavery, but on skilled craftsmen as in Europe. Time in the Caribbean Sea, however, dissolved this utopian vision. After only a few months, Reynier demonstrates that he had succumbed to a more prototypical European view of race when he wrote that "slavery has become so natural to the Negroes" that they would not accept his evangelism (130). Months later, while marooned on the island of St. Thomas, Reynier convinced the missionaries to switch from a craft based economy to slave run sugar plantation (163). By the end of his life, both he and his wife owned slaves while living in Savannah, Georgia. Instead of freeing his slaves upon his death, as his earlier convictions would suggest, he willed them to his wife for the rest of her natural life. Knoll, likewise, did not free her slaves, which indicates that both individuals eventually supported Atlantic slavery.

While Fogleman demonstrates clearly that his two main characters would not have been exposed to as many languages, religions, and complex social relations had they remained in their ancestral homes of Vevey, Switzerland, he does not demonstrate that they were fundamentally altered as a result of their travels. In fact, Fogleman describes throughout the book that, in the case of Reynier, the personality of the individual was the greatest determinate of the mission's success or failure. Reynier's inability to cooperate with others, including his wife, remained constant regardless of his geography. The question that remains is whether the tumultuous and erratic nature of the Atlantic World caused his madness, which Fogleman suggests in his introduction, or did Reynier simply bring his madness with him to the Atlantic world.

Likewise, Fogleman's argument that the harsh environment made Knoll more assertive and more apt to challenge authority is un-

convincing. Knoll, while in Germany, had already rebuffed the sexual advances of one of the most power Moravian leaders. She did not, therefore, suddenly became assertive in the New World.

Fogleman's first book, *Hopeful Journeys*, posits that European immigrants who traveled and settled in groups had greater economic success, higher standards of living, and greater political influence in their new community than those who traversed alone. Fogleman's latest book tests his original hypothesis in reverse. *Two Trouble Souls* does not have as great a historiographical impact as his first, but offers a beautifully written glimpse into the "underside of the Atlantic System"(259). For that, we are grateful.

Travis Jaquess
University of Mississippi