

traditional monopolies, such as the East India Company, to allow freer trade. Conversely, Americans learned new ways to accumulate and invest capital, enabling them to create a new business class that, at least briefly, surpassed imperial-sponsored merchants in Europe. In essence, America and Great Britain learned from each other; "British merchants gained free trade, becoming more like their American counterparts, and American merchants gained capital and became more like their opposite numbers in Britain" (4). New means of financing trade, rather than the development of new industries, helped British and Anglo-American merchants shift the center of global commerce from Asia to the North Atlantic by the mid-nineteenth century, taking advantage of what Kenneth Pomeranz has called the "great divergence."

While other historians, such as James Gibson, Jacques Downs, and Jonathan Goldstein, have traced the rise of American global commercial might during this period through the China trade, Fichter broadens our understanding of the "East Indies" to include American shipping through a number of global port towns and their participation in the India trade. Indeed, some of the strongest chapters deal with the subcontinent, outlining the precarious nature of British tolerance for American merchants in South Asia, even as Great Britain continued to pressure American commercial enterprise elsewhere in the world. Examining the purchase and sale of pepper, tea, India cloth, and chinaware at the turn of the nineteenth century, the author demonstrates America's growing competitiveness with Great Britain and other European nations in both domestic commercial sales and re-export of goods. Taking advantage of their claims to neutrality in the early nineteenth century, Americans gained access to a number of lucrative European ports and their consumers. In this sense, Fichter contributes to a growing body of literature that ties the Atlantic World to broader oceanic networks of trade. However, the author would do well to engage more directly with the vast historiography on Atlantic and global trade and culture, which has opened up new ways of reading the evolution of postrevolutionary American economies, merchant culture, and capitalism.

Old Dominion University

JANE T. MERRITT

Dangerous to Know: Women, Crime, and Notoriety in the Early Republic. By SUSAN BRANSON. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. 200 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$39.95.)

In *Dangerous to Know*, Susan Branson presents the fascinating story of Ann Carson and the author who documented her extraordinary tale, Mary Clark. Born of middle-class parents, Carson experienced the challenges associated with maintaining that identity in the tumultuous economy of the early republic. When

her father fell ill and could no longer work, the family was subject to eviction. Carson struck out on her own, opening a china shop while clinging to her middling status. She married John Carson, a sea captain, drunk, and abusive spouse. One can only imagine Carson's sigh of relief when John went missing for two years and was presumed dead. Carson, vulnerable as a single, working mother, decided to move on with her life and married Richard Smith. But John Carson wasn't actually dead.

John Carson returned from his absence and was shot and killed by Smith. Smith and Carson stood trial, Smith for murder and Carson for acting as an accessory. Carson was acquitted but Smith was scheduled to hang for his crime. In desperation, Carson hatched a plan to kidnap the governor of Pennsylvania to negotiate Smith's release. The plot failed and Smith was executed.

Carson was accustomed to scrambling to keep afloat in a society that witnessed violent economic upheavals. Alone and with a family to support, Carson pursued author and playwright Mary Clark, who agreed to ghostwrite her story. Clark was a single mother who also clung to her class status even as she saw it slipping from her grasp. Their unlikely relationship resulted in *The History of the Celebrated Mrs. Ann Carson* (1822). The narrative was a huge sensation with a wide reading audience, which included the president, vice president, and governor of Pennsylvania, as well as an early republic public that feasted on sensational crime literature.

By joining Clark's and Carson's stories, Branson allows the reader to fully appreciate the complexity of class in the postrevolutionary period. In Carson and Clark's *History*, Carson explains throughout her narrative that she only resorted to a life of crime to maintain her status in society. Certain they would find a sympathetic audience, Clark and Carson indeed became popular figures of the period, even if they are unfamiliar to us today.

Similar to Patricia Cline Cohen's *Murder of Helen Jewett*, Branson's retelling of Carson's tale is complicated. In Carson and Clark's narrative, characters come and go, the plot twists, and the complexities of nineteenth-century jurisprudence play out. The danger in working with such material is that readers become too bogged down in the details and lose track of larger themes. While Branson works hard to keep the themes of gender and class visible and weaves them into the details of her story, at times her narrative is slowed down by minutia.

Branson's real strength is showing the dynamics of class and gender through an incredibly captivating story. If one can move past the detailed retelling of Carson's complicated life, the themes of class, gender, and identity raise provocative questions regarding the fluidity of boundaries in postrevolutionary society. No doubt undergraduates will be intrigued by the tale while also appreciating a different take on class and gender relationships in the early republic.