*Between Fitness and Death: Disability and Slavery in the Caribbean*. By Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020. Pp. xii, 228. $110.00 cloth, $28.00 paper, $19.95 ebook).

Of all the human experiences under the regimes of slavery in the Atlantic World, that of disability has been, at least until very recently, the most underexplored, despite being so commonplace and visible across a range of essential historical sources, including ex-slave narratives, plantation records and runaway advertisements. While a few essays and articles on the topic started to appear from the late 2000s, including significant contributions by Jim Downs and Rachel Dudley in the online journal *Disability Studies Quarterly*, it was the publication of Dea Boster’s *African American Slavery and Disability: Bodies, Property, and Power in the Antebellum South, 1800-1860* (2013) that truly marked the arrival of disability in slavery studies. As the first of two slavery-focused publications for the University of Illinois Press Disability Histories series (the other book is Jenifer L. Barclay’s *The Mark of Slavery: Disability, Race, and Gender in Antebellum America*), Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy’s *Between Fitness and Death* traces both representations and embodied experiences of disabled bondspeople back to an earlier time-period, spanning the sixteenth through to the early nineteenth-century, in the geographic context of the sugar producing colonies of the British Caribbean.

Based on deep and wide-ranging archival research, illuminated by sharp and focused theoretically informed intersectional critical analysis, *Between Fitness and Death* offers a number of important arguments that significantly develop understanding of the function and origins of representations of disability in the making of Anglo anti-Black racism, the mechanisms by which slavery’s violence manufactured and sustained disability and the ways in which enslaved people endured and sometimes overcame the “physical, emotional and psychological impairments produced by the institution” (p.4). The opening chapter, ‘Imagining Africa, Inheriting Monstrosity’, for example, consults and evaluates a wide array of early-modern travel accounts to explore the closely interwoven genealogies and formations of disability, anti-Black racism and racial slavery in the Anglo-Atlantic. Hunt-Kennedy draws attention to how Africans were maliciously misrepresented in these early travel writings as “deformed and monstrous beings,” occupying a “liminal space between the human and the animal,” at once both devious notions that facilitated the wilful exploitation of Africans in the contexts of colonization and slavery, and enduring and pervasive myths of Black difference and inferiority that remain embedded at the heart of the white racial worldview (p.14). Taking this a stage further, engaging the insights of Giorgio Agamben, Julia Kristeva, and Achille Mbembe, in chapter two, ‘Between Human and Animal’, Hunt-Kennedy argues that this debasing ideology, in parallel with the disabling force of slave laws, not only framed Africans as “an abject form of humanity”, but quite purposefully placed the enslaved in a “space of disablement, or ‘state of exception’” (p.41). The slave codes fulfilled this brutal policy by setting severe limits on mobility, freedom, and autonomy, and sanctioning punishments that disabled and disfigured the enslaved, such as “flogging, amputation, and branding” (p.42), while the system’s principle of maternal inheritance simultaneously undermined reproductive agency and sought to deny the legitimacy of enslaved families (p.58).

In chapter four, ‘Incorrigible Runaways’, Hunt-Kennedy skilfully demonstrates the value of a database “of nearly a thousand” runaway advertisements, bringing to light the far-reaching damage that slavery inflicted upon the bodies, minds, senses and feelings of bondspeople (p.96). In addition to this appalling catalogue of “the disabling material conditions of enslavement” and the traumas endured by the enslaved, Hunt-Kennedy highlights the anti-Black racism that the advertisements displayed and circulated and how they functioned discursively as a key element of slavery’s apparatus of surveillance “to keep black people in a state of terror” (p.98). *Between Fitness and Death’s* importance is, however, by no means limited to elucidating the calculated incapacitating violence of Atlantic slavery. The richly layered and deftly integrated approach taken by Hunt-Kennedy, revealing how disability and race were mutually constituted over time in the British Caribbean, should encourage others to examine how the debilitating ideas and practices developed under colonial slavery underpinned and furthered ableism and racism in its aftermath and in the modern metropole.

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