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JULIE FLAVELL. *When London Was Capital of America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010. Pp. 320. $32.50 (cloth).

Mid-eighteenth-century London comes alive in Julie Flavell's *When London Was Capital of America*. This rich portrait of a bustling city captures the decades before and during the American Revolution from the perspective of a series of colonial visitors, transforming the metropolitan landscape into a space of American encounter. Flavell estimates (on the basis of quantitative methods described briefly in an appendix) that about 1,000 white colonists from British America lived in London between 1755 and 1775. Her biographical approach to reconstructing these colonial communities throws into relief the complex kinship, trade, and religious networks that integrated London into American lives, implicitly mapping how specific histories of colonization shaped the possibilities for "cross-colony sociability" and social advancement in the metropole (24).

Flavell produces a multidimensional urban space from her characters' colorful array of experiences and perspectives. The opening chapters follow the family of South Carolina planter Henry Laurens to London in the early 1770s. One of many southern gentlemen who traveled to England after the Seven Years' War, Henry was involved in a rather stuffy struggle to have his children schooled in the Old World that unfolded into stories of a rebellious slave, problematic relatives, a difficult father-son relationship, and an expatriate South Carolina community—all set within London's transatlantic network of trade, politics, and gossip.

Robert (formerly Scipio), soon-to-be-renegade slave to the Laurens family, finds new opportunities as Flavell reconstructs his paths through town. His familiarity with other black Americans, sociability with but also distinction among London's underclass, and potential romance with an English woman brings the "downstairs" London world of colonial South Carolina into view. Flavell's biographical perspective subtly reconstructs how Henry and Robert's relationship changed as they encountered metropolitan notions of servitude. Limitations on mastery eroded Henry's ability to wield the autocratic power legally possible in South Carolina, empowering Robert, who also found new financial possibilities and physical mobility in his role as London servant, to seek his freedom. This picture of a planter-slave relationship devolving into a master-servant relationship recovers the gulf between colonial and metropolitan practices and understandings of African slavery and highlights what London could mean to an African slave.

All American visitors could find opportunities for social improvement in London, although they often proved difficult to realize and came with challenges that changed the course of lives. In her account of John Laurens's struggle to find an "appropriate" career, Flavell reveals a London where young, rich Americans turned into English gentlemen but also confronted questions about the colonial foundations of their social authority. John's friendship with abolitionist Thomas Day, for instance, left him with a lifelong concern with African slavery, even as his experience at the Inns of Court deepened his class snobbery. His cousin Molsy's traumatic fall from grace and eventual suicide reenvisions this transatlantic space as a place of hiding, in which families could negotiate challenges to their reputation or manage various forms of family fragmentation. Colonists came to England for reasons other than trade or politics, and those who arrived with expectations of advancement could find themselves isolated or abandoned. By incorporating the dissociative potential of migration, Flavell's microhistory of colonial London centralizes the contingencies and fragility of these individual lives.

The second half of the book leaves the Laurens family behind, as Flavell turns to tales of less well-heeled northerners (including those from the middle colonies). Different kinship networks and religious affiliations shaped their route to and reception in London, but these migrants similarly searched for gentility. The feckless Long Islander Stephen Sayre's preferred route to leisure—through a rich widow—did not pan out, but other northerners managed to become prosperous metropolitans. Like Sayre, they capitalized on a metropolitan belief that northerners were abstemious, pious rustics, only to reverse the more typical narrative of men going to the colonies to seek their fortune.

As Flavell traces Sayre's circle in London and its radicalization during the Wilkite reform movements, the imperial and political consequences of these growing colonial communities become apparent. The final two chapters build on this transatlantic conversation as they follow Benjamin Franklin in London from 1757 to 1775. Ambitious for himself and his son William, Franklin met a London less accepting of his humbler background than he might have wished. Lacking the social graces of a man like Laurens, Franklin experienced firsthand the power of metropolitan stereotypes about white colonists. Flavell uses his struggle to substitute the simple farmer for the rich southern elite in metropolitan notions of the "American" to integrate the two parts of her book, creating a colonial dialogue that she extends, in its mediated metropolitan form, into the antebellum United States.

Revolution significantly changed London's colonial community. Long-term colonial residents had to choose sides, while thousands of loyalist refugees altered the colonial enclaves' character. The city, however, remained a financial and cultural center for newly minted Americans well into the following century. Flavell's epilogue hints at Americans' continuing struggle to define their country and themselves in this former capital.

Its vivid portrayal of Revolutionary London makes *When London Was Capital of America* an excellent resource for anyone teaching or reading in British and American history. Flavell emphasizes the city's role as a place where colonists encountered one another, as well as metropolitan Britons. London was part of colonial British America, even as the New World became part and parcel of London. Scholars may balk at the north-south divide of her colonial visitors as an anachronistic bifurcation of British America. Spanish and French Americanists may take issue with the Anglocentric story. British historians may also want a deeper sense of how these communities shaped London itself. But these minor quibbles do not detract from this nuanced and provocative story about London as a colonial city.

The book's ultimate reward is that it raises a wealth of new questions: Was it a contradiction, as Flavell suggests, that American metropolitan tourism escalated during a period of intensifying imperial conflict? Or were these travels constitutive of that conflict? How do we understand these intimate encounters in relationship to historical narratives that locate the origins of American exceptionalism in eighteenth-century British America's supra-anglicization? How did the London experiences of men like Franklin translate into specific formulations of colonial rebellion and independence? And what are the implications of Flavell's portrait of London as capital for our understanding of the role played by other metropolitan centers of early North America? *When London Was Capital of America* is worth reading both for what it is and for its richly suggestive analysis that opens multiple paths for future research.

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