



# A Path in the Mighty Waters: Shipboard Life and Atlantic Crossings to the New World

*Stephen R. Berry*

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In October 1735, James Oglethorpe's Georgia Expedition set sail from London, bound for Georgia. Two hundred and twenty-seven passengers boarded two merchant ships accompanied by a British naval vessel and began a transformative voyage across the Atlantic that would last nearly five months. Chronicling their passage in journals, letters, and other accounts, the migrants described the challenges of physical confinement, the experiences of living closely with people from different regions, religions, and classes, and the multi-faceted character of the ocean itself.

Using their specific journey as his narrative arc, Stephen Berry's *A Path in the Mighty Waters* tells the broader and hereto underexplored story of how people experienced their crossings to the New World in the eighteenth-century. During this time, hundreds of thousands of Europeans – mainly Irish and German – crossed the Atlantic as part of their martial, mercantile, political, or religious calling. Histories of these migrations, however, have often erased the ocean itself, giving priority to activities performed on solid ground. Reframing these histories, Berry shows how the ocean was more than a backdrop for human events; it actively shaped historical experiences by furnishing a dissociative break from normal patterns of life and a formative stage in travelers' processes of collective identification. Shipboard life, serving as a profound conversion experience for travelers, both spiritually and culturally, resembled the conditions of a frontier or border zone where the chaos of pure possibility encountered an inner need for stability and continuity, producing permutations on existing beliefs.

Drawing on an impressive array of archival collections, Berry's vivid and rich account reveals the crucial role the Atlantic played in history and how it has lingered in American memory as a defining experience.



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