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Philipp Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots: Americans in Paris in the Age of Revolution*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010. xv + 239 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$39.50 US (cl). ISBN 978-0-8139-2891-3.

Review by Suzanne Desan, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Cosmopolitan Patriots: Americans in Paris in the Age of Revolution explores the experiences and ideas of several prominent Americans in Paris as a prism for reconsidering the relationship between the American and French Revolutions. As Philipp Ziesche notes, by putting the two revolutions into a competitive framework and arguing over which one was more important or more inspiring, historians “have obscured parallels in the two republics’ nation-building projects” (p. 11). They have also missed the opportunity to examine various forms of transnational exchange.

Challenging the classic contrast between a successful and moderate American Revolution and a violent and destabilizing French one, Ziesche seeks to tell a tale “of similarity in difference” (p. 5). He points out multiple parallels between revolutionary France and the United States. Both nations claimed that they offered a universal model to other parts of the world, but both also remained convinced of their own exceptionalism and believed that other peoples were bound by particular manners and customs, limiting their political possibilities. The elites of both nations wrestled with the problem of claiming legitimacy from “the people” even as they feared them as a potential source of disorder. Within both nations, factions sought to gain power by claiming to speak for the nation and by branding opponents as “foreigners,” in turn justifying political violence. Both struggled with the relationship between universalism and particularity. And finally, both nations used territorial expansionism in order to build national unity, as they moved from “sister republics to republican empires.” (This phrase forms the title of Ziesche’s chapter six, subtitled “The Jeffersonian Divorce from France and the Louisiana Purchase, 1800-1805.”)

Ziesche suggests that American foreigners who visited or lived in Paris during the French Revolution offer a unique vantage point for broader comparisons and interconnections between the two Revolutions. He acknowledges that the actual impact of these Americans on the French Revolution was “minimal. However, ... it is precisely their doubly marginal position—at a remove from the American political scene and on the fringes of the French Revolution—that caused Americans to reflect on the similarities and differences between nation-building in the United States and France.” As foreigners, they were especially likely to confront, experience, and comment on “the paradoxes and ambiguities inherent in the relationship between cosmopolitan universalism and national particularity” (pp. 5-6).

Ziesche does not aim to chart the transfer of ideas between nations, but rather to trace an “*histoire croisée*, an intersecting or entangled history” of nation-building on either side of the Atlantic (p. 10). The principal players in his story are American diplomats, politicians, activists, and authors. Gouverneur Morris, Thomas Jefferson, William Short, Joel Barlow, James Monroe, and Tom Paine receive the most coverage. While the first four chapters conduct case studies of individual Americans, the last two examine the diplomatic maneuverings of the XYZ Affair and the Louisiana Purchase.

As leading Americans attempted to influence events in Paris, they worked out their interpretations of their own Revolution and its unresolved legacy. Even as they viewed themselves in the vanguard of revolutionary change, events in France often outstripped the Americans' expectations. In the summer of 1789, Gouverneur Morris and Thomas Jefferson each hoped that the French authors of the new Constitution would look to the United States for models. Morris threw himself directly into the fray. Just as he had argued at the American Constitutional Convention of 1787 for a strong executive and centralized government to contain the class antagonism between rich and poor, in France he advocated for a king with veto power to hold the legislature and the people in check. In contrast, Jefferson saw events in France through the lens of his own activism in 1776, and he focused on issues of rights rather than executive power. He held secret dialogues with Lafayette over producing a French declaration of rights, but ultimately turned down an invitation to meet with the French Constitutional Committee. In many ways, Jefferson's role was more symbolic than direct. When he left Paris in September of 1789, he remembered as the high point of his stay a dinner party at his home; at this event the *monarchiens* and the more liberal Patriots struggled without success to come to a compromise about the king's right to veto new laws. The influence of the two Americans dwindled as the French Constituent Assembly chose to embrace a unicameral legislature and a suspensive veto.

By exploring the two Americans' private reflections as well as their interventions with the French, Ziesche is able to show how Jefferson and Morris grappled with the significance of French debates for thinking about issues shared by the two nations, such as the cultural particularity of peoples or the role of the elites as leaders of revolutionary change. Interestingly, Ziesche notes that the Americans clung more strongly than many French revolutionaries did to Montesquieu's arguments about customs and cultural heritage. Paradoxically, the French were more ready to break with these viewpoints in 1789 than were their American advisors.

Ziesche skillfully unpacks how Americans abroad developed their political positions in dialogue with the two nations' experiences. To reflect on disillusionment with the regenerative power of sensibility among both French and Americans, he delves into the writings of the author Joel Barlow. In his *Letter to the Inhabitants of Piedmont*, this activist called for exporting republicanism and revolution over the Alps. In *Advice to the Privileged Orders*, he also developed a theory that republicanism—by dispersing power into many hands—would reduce the very exercise of power and promote natural harmony among peoples. These ideas left Barlow unprepared for the violence of the Terror, rendering him disillusioned and nonplussed. Fear of a return to the Terror would lead him and many others to “accept and justify the growing authoritarianism of the French government after Thermidor”—a paradoxical stance given that Americans abroad also used French republicanism to criticize Washington's authoritarian tendencies at home (p. 87).

In various cases, Ziesche illustrates that interactions between individual foreigners and the French revolutionaries simultaneously helped the Americans to understand their own revolution as the leading edge of global revolution and to work out its legacy in practice. For example, in the mid 1790s, James Monroe in Paris sought to maintain good relations with the French and also help Americans back home to understand the causes of the Terror. But French comparisons could easily be misused at home: his attempt to explain the Terror by blaming it on the Jacobin club in France was employed by Federalists (against his intentions) to condemn American Democratic-Republican societies. Ziesche uses Monroe's writing and reactions as a launching point for understanding political dilemmas shared across the Atlantic. Analyzing the diplomat's attempts to comprehend the Parisian popular uprisings of 1795 enables Ziesche to parse out how American and French elites shored up their own power and retooled republican systems allegedly rooted in the “people.”

Ziesche offers succinct and informed discussions of the French political context, and he makes fruitful comparisons between French and American republicanism, but ultimately his work engages more

effectively and extensively with American historiography than with its French corollary. Chapter five on the XYZ Affair enters into dialogue with the current historiographical debate over Federalists as Ziesche probes how this party crafted an anti-cosmopolitan and anti-French stance. And when he turns in chapter six to explore how the “sister republics” became “republican empires,” he essentially asks how the American Democratic-Republicans could separate themselves from the French without rejecting their shared universal principles. He argues that Jefferson and the American republic came to use the “imaginary clean state of the American West” as an “alternative canvas onto which Republicans could project the universalist aspirations they previously had invested in the French Revolution” (p. 137).

Ziesche deftly shows how various thinkers imagined the possibilities of a republican empire in the Louisiana territory. While Monroe and Livingston claimed that expanding American territory would insulate the United States from conflict with Europe and might usher in an era of pacifism, Joel Barlow naïvely hoped that Louisiana could become a slave-free territory, a beginning point for the spread of abolitionism. Jefferson had no such abolitionist dreams. For him the Louisiana Purchase offered the possibility that the republic could be both decentralized and ever larger, coupled with a program to educate and elevate the new Western citizens. While Ziesche’s chapter title, “From Sister Republics to Republican Empires,” implies that he will discuss the French embrace of empire as well, he does not examine this theme at all. Rather, interactions with the French offer Americans the chance to fulfill and think through their imperial republican destiny.

Ziesche’s interpretations, however, span the Atlantic in thought-provoking ways. For example, he aims to overcome the tendency to see cosmopolitanism and nationalism at odds with one another, with nationalism gradually winning precedence. As his book title suggests, he seeks to demonstrate that cosmopolitan interactions often complemented and shaped nationalism. This complementarity works most effectively on the level of the individual. For example, Ziesche depicts how Jefferson’s cosmopolitan desire to find parallels between France and America informed his American nation-building in complex ways. On the level of the nation, Ziesche sometimes uses “universalism” and “cosmopolitanism” interchangeably, although their meanings and resonances in fact differ. He also misses the opportunity to ask how cosmopolitanism as both practice and moral commitment evolved during the revolutionary era, but he does illustrate its staying power and its pivotal role in promoting transnational dialogue. He shows how Franco-American cosmopolitan exchanges and comparisons helped the two nations define themselves via one another. In addition, by asking how the French and the Americans wrestled with similar problems—how to justify elite rule, for example—his work undoubtedly contributes to debunking claims of “exceptionalism” on both sides of the Atlantic.

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