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Jeremy D. Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xv + 422 pp. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$90.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-521-51722-5; \$24.99 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-521-73194-2.

Review by Sue Peabody, Washington State University Vancouver.

Following closely on the publication of his document collection, *Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Revolution*, Jeremy Popkin proffers a new narrative of France's first general emancipation act, the Decree of 16 Pluviôse, An II (February 4, 1794), grounded in the detailed, on-the-ground, day-by-day developments in Cap Français, Saint Domingue, the United States and Paris. Popkin argues that this abolition act, widely held to be significant to Atlantic and world history, grew inexorably from a series of haphazard events and decisions that took place on June 20, 1793, resulting in the burning and total destruction of Cap Français. While acknowledging an ever-widening historiography on the Haitian Revolution in the introduction and at some moments in the text, Popkin's narrative hews closely to an extraordinarily rich body of primary sources—official and personal correspondence, political decrees and orders, ships' logs, police interrogations, newspapers, pamphlets and contemporary publications—to produce a lively, engaging and compelling account.

Popkin's argument is that the general emancipation act of 16 Pluviôse was an abrupt, startling near-accident that neither resulted from deliberate pursuit of policy (as did the English anti-slavery movement) nor appeared a likely outcome of the preceding events. Popkin emphasizes the gulf between the expectations and goals of the main agents of abolition and the unanticipated outcome of decree of 16 Pluviôse. For the most part, Frenchmen who opposed slavery, including Sonthonax, Polverel and Raimond, favored gradualist approaches. The slaves of Saint-Domingue, on the other hand, expected slavery to be legally abolished by the king and eschewed republican ideology and means to advance their pursuit of liberty. Building on Yves Bénot's insights, Popkin argues that the French universal emancipation decree was not supported by Robespierre and seemed highly unlikely as recently as a week before its promulgation by the Convention. The most important agents in Popkin's account are Sonthonax and Louis Dufay, the white delegate from Saint-Domingue whose carefully prepared speech carried the Convention. The Parisian decree, however, turned on key events in Saint Domingue eight months earlier.

The book is organized around a detailed, vivid account of events in Saint-Domingue's capital city, Cap Français, on of the days June 20–21, 1793, spanning the two central chapters (six and seven) of the book. The introduction reviews recent historiography regarding the Haitian Revolution and argues for the central significance of the events of June 20 for the eventual abolition decree in Paris. Chapters one and two set the stage, depicting the geography and social order of Cap Français and detailing the unfolding of the Revolution in Saint-Domingue, through the August 1791 slave uprising. Chapters three and four narrate Parisian policy and actions toward colonial Saint Domingue, the arrival of the Second Civil Commissioners Sonthonax and Polverel, and their political maneuvering to gain the upper hand over rival factions of white colonists through their alliance of free men of color and to extend their governance to the southern and western provinces. In chapter five, a rival metropolitan authority, Governor-General Galbaud, "fill[s] the vacuum" (p. 154) in Cap-Français created by the commissioners' absence, aligning himself with the remaining whites who resented Sonthonax's coalition with prominent

citizens of color. Following the events of June 20–21, the capital city was reduced to ashes and the desperate commissioners instigated a limited policy of liberation for slaves who would fight on their behalf against Galbaud and his allies. Chapters eight through ten narrate Sonthonax's gradual extension of emancipation to the entire colony, the dispersal of Galbaud and the refugees up the eastern seaboard of the United States, and the arrival of Sonthonax' delegation in Paris, culminating in the declaration of 16 Pluviôse.[2]

A central unit in Popkin's analysis, borrowed from metropolitan accounts of the Revolution, is the *journée*, a day of social violence resulting in significant political reversal or realignment. Three of these *jours* (October 19, November 14, and December 2), arising out of racial conflict between whites and free people of color in Cap Français, were critical to the commissioners' consolidation of power in the fall of 1792. Popkin's account of the *journée* of June 20, 1793 emphasizes the headstrong racism of the sailors forbidden to leave Cap Français' harbor from mid-May to late June 1793, who repeatedly took out their frustration on the city's free men of color. When Galbaud decided to challenge Sonthonax and Polverel directly, he placed himself at the head of this mob over the objections of some of his navy officers and attempted to re-take Cap Français by force. The city's free non-white population, however, remained loyal to the commissioners and, despite severe losses, put up significant resistance. It was the decision to recruit the majority population of slaves that stimulated panic and ultimately turned the conflict decisively against Galbaud's men.

The book is a very engaging read, making the most of a rich array of eyewitness testimony, rhetorical polemic and period images. Popkin's mastery of these sources is impressive, as is his deft *bricolage* rendering them into lively prose. The characters are vividly drawn; there is irony and humor alongside empathy and authoritative insights into the political intrigue on both sides of the Atlantic. The tale of the mercurial Galbaud and his artful aristocratic wife's flight from republican clutches into Canada is memorable and amusing.

Popkin's adroit invocation of the counterfactual argues for the messy, contingent nature of history's unfolding events. Repeatedly, the minute turns of fortune lead accidentally—not inexorably—to the climactic abolition of slavery in 1794. There is something of the “all for the want of a horseshoe nail” quality to the story that is gripping and compelling. For example, the mob of sailors (who have gotten ahead of Galbaud himself), nearly breached the commissioners' refuge in the Government House during the assault of June 20 1793, but they were held off by the free men of color, including Jean-Baptiste Belley, the black officer who would eventually join the Paris delegation who proposed the abolition decree (pp. 202–209).

Popkin's attentive fidelity to eyewitness sources also contributes to the book's primary weakness. Since the people most likely to set their version of events in written form were those with the capacity, inclination, resources, leisure and assistance to write, we are left with a narrative driven primarily by white French men, especially those with official standing in the French government. Popkin acknowledges this dilemma, but his account ultimately reinforces the notion that Sonthonax and Polverel were in the driver's seat, when some of the same sources utilized by Popkin indicate that the free men of color and the slaves themselves may have been the instigators of the June 21, 1793 proposal to arm the slaves in exchange for their liberation.

Popkin's careful reconstruction of the events of the *journée* of June 20 contains several references to free men of color who announced to urban slaves that they were free prior to the commissioners' written decree issued the following day—including the original Creole quotation from which Popkin takes his title: “*Zotes tous libres!* You are all free!” (pp. 210–211). In fact, the version of events offered to the Convention by the white delegate, Louis Dufay, specifically states that it was the slaves who proposed the martial liberation plan to the commissioners (p. 360). Popkin doesn't take issue with this account—indeed, he emphasizes Sonthonax and Polverel's reluctance to open this Pandora's box—but the book's

narrative emphasis on the commissioners as protagonists tends to minimize the agency of both the free colored men and the slaves in proposing or enacting the limited enfranchisement of June 20-21, 1793.

Such questions of interpretation will make for excellent discussions in classes on the French Revolution and the Age of Atlantic Revolution, for which this book is especially well suited. Of course, it must vie for a place with the other English-language histories of the Haitian Revolution which have proliferated in recent years.[3] For sheer polemical force and devotion to Marxist categories of analysis, C.L.R. James' account retains its iconic status and would be interesting to teach side-by-side with Popkin's more cautious, liberal and top-down perspective. Caroline Fick and David Geggus's important early monographs contributed to the recent resurgence of interest in the Haitian Revolution, but do not focus primarily on this question of general emancipation.[4] The first and second books in Madison Smartt Bell's magnificent trilogy cover many of the same events analyzed here (save the action in the United States and Paris) with remarkable historical sophistication for works of fiction and with strong characterization of the black characters.[5] These latter, however, are inappropriate for history classroom use due to their length and the pedagogical challenges of distinguishing the real from the imaginary in historical fiction. The most important rival to Popkin's *You Are All Free*, at least for classroom use, is Laurent Dubois' acclaimed *Avengers of the New World*. [6] Dubois' synthesis covers a wider span of time—from the pre-revolutionary colony through the declaration of Haitian Independence on January 1, 1804 and relies much more heavily on secondary sources than Popkin's scrupulous source-driven narrative.

Popkin's gripping story, vivid characters and fine attention to primary sources make this an excellent book for students and teachers of history, as well as a wider, historically engaged public. Whether it will stand the test of time as the best interpretation of this crucial world history event remains to be seen.

NOTES

[1] Jeremy D. Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Revolution* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[2] This focus on Franco-American liaisons does not address the 1793 emigration to the colonies of the circum-Caribbean, including Louisiana. See, for example: Jacques de Cauna-Ladevie, "The Diaspora of Colonists from Haiti and the Creole world: The Case of Jamaica," *Revue Francaise d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer* 81/3(1994): 333-359; Alain Yacou, "Esclaves et libres français à Cuba au lendemain de la révolution de Saint-Domingue," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* 28(1991): 163-197 ; Nathalie Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).

[3] In addition to the monographs discussed here and Popkin's document collection cited in note 1 above, there are several primary source collections available for classroom use: Laurent DuBois and John Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006); Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon, eds., *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution: Selected Essays and Historical Documents* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009); and The Louverture Project, www.thelouvertureproject.org.

[4] Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1990) and David P. Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution: the British occupation of Saint Domingue, 1793-1798* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). Some of the most important of Geggus' many subsequent and erudite essays on the Haitian Revolution have been re-issued in David P. Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

[5] Madison Smartt Bell, *All Souls' Rising* (New York: Penguin, 1995); *Master of the Crossroads* (New York: Penguin, 2000); and *The Stone that the Builder Refused* (New York: Pantheon, 2004).

[6] Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2004).

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