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William S. Cormack, *Patriots, Royalists, and the Terrorists in the West Indies. The French Revolution in Martinique and Guadeloupe 1789–1802*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019. x +390 pp. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$54.00 U.S. (cl.). ISBN 9781487503956; \$54.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781487519155.

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William S. Cormack's new study deals with the revolutionary turmoil in the early 1790s in the French Caribbean colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe. Cormack is especially interested in the conflicts among the free, predominantly white population of the two colonies. He is not the first historian to deal with these events. Most notably Laurent Dubois and Frédéric Régent both published seminal studies on the French Revolution in Guadeloupe in 2004.^[1] A lot of groundwork had also been covered by Anne-Perotin Dumon's book on the same subject published in 1985.^[2] The events in Martinique drew less attention from scholarship, however, since slavery had not been abolished in this colony up until 1848. Somewhat surprising, nonetheless, is the fact that Cormack did not consult Abel A. Louis's *Les libres de couleurs en Martinique*, which was published in 2012.^[3]

Most historians thus far have been mostly interested in the abolition of slavery in 1793-94 and, therefore, concentrated on the role of free men of color and/or African slaves in this process. Cormack's focus on the white population, especially colonial administrators, military and navy officers, planters, merchants, and the white proletariat (sailors, soldiers, etc., the so-called *petits blancs*) hence seems to be a bit old-fashioned at first glance, but there are good reasons for such an approach. First, in both colonies the conflicts between these social groups were on the main stage of the revolutionary turmoil during the early years of the French Revolution. Second, as the German historian Oliver Gliedt showed in his study on the white planter class in revolutionary Saint-Domingue in 2011, the internal conflicts among the white elite created the structural preconditions for the subsequent slave revolution to succeed.^[4] The study of conflicts among the white (elite) population in the colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe at the same period is thus more important than it might seem.

Cormack gives a traditional political history of the events. The eight chapters are arranged chronologically. The study is based mainly on the voluminous official correspondence between the colonies and the minister of the navy and the colonies in Paris. As a consequence, we follow the events mostly through the eyes of colonial officials. The events were complicated, and their reconstruction based on archival sources is a highly difficult matter, as I experienced myself during my research in the archives. Following the path first traveled by Jeremy Popkin in *You Are All Free*, Cormack stresses the importance of local contingencies for the unfolding of the

events.^[5] He, and rightly so in my opinion, does not believe in an over-arching, “inevitable logic of revolutionary ideology” that paved the way to the abolition of slavery in 1794 (p. 6).

In his first chapter, Cormack gives an overview of the two islands on the eve of the French Revolution. The chapter develops four themes: firstly, the common defying of colonial authorities by the planters. Whether it was the mercantilist trade regulations (the *exclusif mitigé*) or the implementation of the *code noir*, planters subverted state power at every step. Secondly, Cormack discusses the role of the rootless white proletariat, especially sailors, who were the bearer of news and rumors. They constituted an important social factor, and their permanent class struggle against the so-called *grand blancs* was a constant cause of conflict. Thirdly, Cormack shows how even before the outbreak of the Revolution, the situation in Martinique was tense, not the least because a hurricane had devastated large parts of the colony, which led to widespread hunger, especially among the slaves. Fourthly, Cormack illustrates how discrimination against free men of color grew in the decades leading up to the French Revolution. Considering Cormack’s focus on the two colonies’ white population, one wonders why he did not use more ink to discuss their connections with the metropolis and their political lobbying against the *Société des amis des Noirs*.

Chapter two starts with the slave uprising of August 1789 in Martinique, which erupted even before news of the events in France reached the colony. Cormack believes that the philanthropic writing of enlightened authors influenced the rebellious slaves. Competing planters and merchants quickly used the event to discredit the colonial authorities. The planters were especially successful in pressuring the colonial governments to open the ports to foreign shipping. The decay of state authorities worsened, when news reached the colonies of the events in France. The planters and merchants from the city of Saint-Pierre quickly organized themselves in competing assemblies, which undermined colonial administrators even further. Here, a central theme of Cormack’s study emerges: did legitimate authority lie with the government or the colonists? Further, if it resided with the colonists, whom did they represent exactly? By following the unfolding events in detail, Cormack gives one of the best accounts of the revolutionary turmoil in both colonies to date.

In Martinique, these conflicts led to a civil war in 1790, as chapter three examines. The alliances between different social groups and political actors became apparent: planters and free men of color fought the merchants of Saint-Pierre and their urban allies, the *petit blancs*. While the latter wanted to maintain a social hierarchy based on racial segregation at all costs, the planters were more liberal towards free men of color and could thus gain their allegiance. Governor Damas sided with the planters as well, because they at least respected his authority. However, his power dwindled, as the planters worked towards more autonomy, if not independence. In all this, mutinous soldiers and sailors played an important part in favor of the so-called patriots in Saint-Pierre, hence further undermining state authorities. It is telling that in 1790, governor Vioménil asks his superiors in Paris for foreign regiments, which were not influenced by the revolutionary events in France—a subject, which, on a sidenote, is found in the governmental correspondence with the colonies of the restoration monarchy in 1815 as well.^[6] Cormack works all the aforementioned lines of conflict in great detail. At the heart of the conflict between the planters and the merchants from Saint-Pierre were different economic interests. The planters’ debts were an particularly central issue. This could have been discussed in a bit more detail, as it is an omnipresent theme in the archival sources.

Chapter four examines the metropolitan attempt to end the civil war in Martinique in spring 1791. The merchant community in Bordeaux pressured for this intervention, as their Caribbean trade suffered from the events in the colonies. A large expeditionary force of about 6000 soldiers and several men-of-war were sent to restore peace in the colony. They were commanded by a new governor, who was accompanied by four commissioners, whose mission was to determine the causes of the civil war and to find its instigators. Competences were far from clear, which soon led to discord between governor Béhague and the commissioners. Although the expeditionary force managed to end the armed struggle, peace was restored only on the surface, underneath the conflicts lingered. Both parties tried to defend their actions and portray themselves as the true embodiment of the revolution in numerous letters sent to Paris. When news of the flight to Varennes reached the colonies, however, Béhague found himself representing a failed government. His position was hence weak, to say the least. To Cormack the failure of Béhague comes as no surprise, since the liberal revolution of 1791 never had any real support in the colonies (p. 114).

The fifth chapter focuses on the counterrevolutionary takeover of the two colonies and the patriots' propaganda war to win the allegiance of free men of color. Cormack first discusses the origins of the law of April 4, 1792, which declared free men of color citizens of the French republic. Thus, all assemblies in the colonies were to be dissolved and elected according to the new electorate. New colonial officials and national guards were to be sent to the colonies to watch over the implementation of the law. However, news of the law reached the colonies before the national guards did. The colonial assemblies quickly made free men of color some minor concessions without fully adopting the law of April 4. Hence, the planters' colonial assemblies in Martinique and Guadeloupe tried to convince the new metropolitan government that it was not necessary to intervene in the colonies, as they had allegedly already adopted the new law. Their fear of metropolitan intervention was founded not only on concern about the softening of the racial hierarchy, but also on their dread of the national guards that were to be sent to the colonies. When an expeditionary force from France anchored in the bay of Fort-Royal in Martinique, the colonial assembly denied any communications. The naval station's superior men-of-war even threatened to open fire and chased the convoy away from their waters towards Saint-Domingue. Guadeloupe and Martinique were in the hands of counterrevolutionary forces. Both colonial assemblies sent emissaries to London to negotiate a handover of the colonies. Patriots fled to the nearby islands, especially Sainte-Lucie, became a rallying point for the remaining republicans in the archipelago. Thus, when a frigate under the command of Captain Lacrosse arrived from France in December 1792, he could use this island as a base of operations. He started an effective propaganda campaign to appeal to free men of color of Martinique and Guadeloupe to join the republican forces, as Cormack describes in detail. The colonial assemblies' grip over the two islands crumbled after free men of color switched sides. The planters grudgingly saw themselves forced to invite Lacrosse to take over power in early 1793.

However, the republic's authority over the two islands remained weak, as chapter six demonstrates. In Guadeloupe, governor Collot's ties to the Girondins made him suspect in the eyes of both planters and the Jacobin clubs. When slaves massacred multiple royalist planters in Trois-Rivières, Collot's indecisive handling of the affair revealed his weak support among the colony's free population. The insurgent slaves, on the other hand, used the political situation to portray themselves as loyal servants of the French Republic. In Martinique, an armed rebellion by planters soon demonstrated the fragility of governor Rochambeau's rule as well. In response, republican militias under the command of a free colored man named Bellegarde and planters alike

soon started to arm slaves. Their civil status, however, remained unclear. In summer 1793, a British attempt to come to the planters' aid failed miserably and republican forces managed to suppress the rebellion. Despite this first military success, the republicans' grip over the Eastern Caribbean remained weak. When in early 1794 a major British expeditionary force attacked Martinique and Guadeloupe, it conquered Guadeloupe with ease. Only in Martinique was Rochambeau able to sustain a longer siege until he had to give in to superior forces.

In chapter seven, Cormack then discusses the abolition of slavery in the French empire. Following Popkin's interpretation, he stresses the contingency of events. Why the Committee of Public Safety nominated Victor Hugues, a fervent advocate of slavery, for the expedition to implement the abolition decree in the Windward islands, remains unclear, according to Cormack (p. 191).^[7] With little more than 1000 national guards, Hugues's small expeditionary force managed to land in Guadeloupe, take the port of Pointe-à-Pitre, and proclaim the abolition of slavery. Together with newly recruited former slaves, the republicans drove the British from the island. Through sheer terror he established a firm grip over the colony. His attempts to export the revolution to the adjacent islands were however less successful, only Sainte-Lucie was temporarily reconquered. Hugues's despotic rule, his ties to the "terrorists" and the corsair war against US-American and neutral trade, made him more and more untenable.^[8] But it was only in 1798, that he was replaced by General Desfourneaux.

Cormack gives a useful overview of the events after the abolition of slavery in 1794, but his account is not as detailed and nuanced as in the previous chapters. In general, one misses an analysis of how the abolition of slavery, Hugues's dictatorial regime of terror, and the rise of the corsairs changed the socio-economic structures of the colony. Some of Cormack's arguments are also debatable. For example, he claims Hugues made a personal conversion "from Saul to Paul" in regard to his views on (former) slaves (p. 198). However, this claim is based on only one letter; in many others Hugues continued with his racist accusations.

Chapter eight discusses the British rule over Martinique from 1794 to the Peace of Amiens in 1802. This is a most welcome addition to research, as this issue up to now had only been researched in detail in an unpublished dissertation from the 1980s.^[9] Even though the British deported some of the most prominent republican ringleaders, the relationship between the colonial administration and the planters remained uneasy. Again, the most important bone of contention was the opening of the colony's port to foreign trade. The merchants of Saint-Pierre, and especially women, were still suspected of republican intrigues, as Cormack argues. This is an important point and merits more research.^[10] On the other hand, free men of color remained in a difficult position, since they had lost their civic rights. However, Cormack shows that their old bonds with the white plantation elite remained intact (p. 242). The chapter concludes with the rise of Bonaparte and the Peace of Amiens, in which Martinique was returned to France. Cormack claims that the planters were sure that Bonaparte would not abolish slavery and thus welcomed the restitution of the colony to France (p. 253). In this regard, his interpretation differs from mine.^[11]

The book concludes with an epilogue, which briefly describes the reestablishment of slavery in the French empire. One wonders, however, whether this is an adequate conclusion for a book, which is mainly focused on the free population of the two colonies? Many of the conflicts between planters and merchants and between *grands* and *petits blancs* continued up until the peace of 1815 and beyond. But, perhaps this is material for another volume? We can only hope so.

Cormack produced a fine study, which is strongest in its meticulous analysis of the early years of the French Revolution. Given the chaotic nature of events, this is an admirable achievement. This clearly written study deserves a broad readership: specialists and newcomers to the field will find this book most useful. Additionally, this book opens new paths to further research. For example, we need to know more about individual planters, merchants, and their Atlantic networks. Biographies of men like Louis-François Dubuc or Louis de Curt would be most welcome. We also need to know more about the smaller islands such as Sainte-Lucie, Tobago, or Marie-Galante. And what about the relationship with the Dutch, Danish, and Swedish colonies in the archipelago? Lots of research remains to be done!

NOTES

[1] Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens. Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Frédéric Régent, *Esclavage, métissage, liberté. La Révolution française en Guadeloupe 1789–1802* (Paris: Grasset, 2004). My own study on *War and Revolution in the Lesser Antilles, 1789–1815* was published like Cormack's book in 2019. See Flavio Eichmann, *Krieg und Revolution in der Karibik: Die Kleinen Antillen 1789–1815* (Berlin: de Gruyter 2019).

[2] Anne Pérotin-Dumon, *Être patriote sous les tropiques. La Guadeloupe, la colonization et la Révolution française (1789–1794)* (Basse-Terre: Société d'histoire de la Guadeloupe, 1985).

[3] Abel A. Louis, *Les libres de couleur en Martinique*, 3 vols. (Paris: L'Harmattan 2012).

[4] Oliver Glied, *Saint-Domingue und die Französische Revolution. Das Ende der weißen Herrschaft in einer karibischen Plantagenwirtschaft* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2011).

[5] Jeremy Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[6] See Eichmann, *Krieg und Revolution in der Karibik*, 503.

[7] On the nomination of Hugues see Michel Rodigneaux, *Victor Hugues. L'ambition d'entrer dans l'Histoire 1762–1826* (Paris: Éditions SPM, 2017), 185–192, which Cormack did not consult. See also my interpretation: Eichmann, *Krieg und Revolution in der Karibik*, 151–54.

[8] It is surprising that Cormack in his analysis of the corsair war did not use Michel Rodigneaux, *La guerre de course en Guadeloupe XVIIIe – XIXe siècles ou Alger sous les tropiques* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016).

[9] Kieran R. Kleczewski, "Martinique and the British Occupation, 1794–1802," (Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown University, 1988).

[10] The role of women in the revolutionary turmoil of the 1790s is an issue first discussed by Kit Candlin, *The Last Caribbean Frontier, 1795–1815* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[11] See Flavio Eichmann, “Local Cooperation in a Subversive Colony: Martinique 1802–1809”, in Tanja Bühner et al (ed.), *Cooperation and Empire. Local Realities of Global Processes* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), pp. 115; and in more detail in Eichmann, *Krieg und Revolution in der Karibik*, pp. 381–83.

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