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Flavio Eichmann, *Krieg und Revolution in der Karibik. Die Kleinen Antillen, 1789-1815*. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019. 553 pp. \$65.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9783110608830; \$65.99 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9783110605853.

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The revolutionary events that transformed the French colony of Saint-Domingue into the independent nation of Haiti have become a central theme in current historiography, but the history of the other French Caribbean islands, particularly Martinique and Guadeloupe, has attracted less attention. The Haitian Revolution led to the abolition of slavery and the end of colonial rule; the events of the revolutionary era in the lesser Antilles, although they included the temporary abolition of slavery in Guadeloupe, ended with the restoration of servitude and these islands remain French territory even today.<sup>[1]</sup> Nevertheless, as the Swiss historian Flavio Eichmann shows in his detailed account of *Krieg und Revolution in der Karibik. Die Kleinen Antillen, 1789-1815* (*War and Revolution in the Caribbean: The Lesser Antilles, 1789-1815*), the story of these islands' experiences in the revolutionary era is an important aspect of the global history of the period. Martinique, Guadeloupe, and the smaller islands around them were battlegrounds in the struggle between the French and British empires. As Eichmann shows, the last battle of the revolutionary wars took place, not at Waterloo on June 15, 1815, but in Guadeloupe on August 8, 1815, when British troops defeated French forces who had proclaimed their loyalty to Napoleon during the Hundred Days.

The revolutionary era in the Lesser Antilles has not been entirely neglected in recent scholarship. William Cormack's *Patriots, Royalists, and Terrorists in the West Indies*, which covers much of the same ground, appeared in the same year as Eichmann's book and is therefore not mentioned in his text, but Eichmann draws extensively on the work of other scholars in the field, including Anne Perotin-Dumon, Laurent Dubois and Frédéric Régent, as well as on recent publications on the Haitian Revolution.<sup>[2]</sup> He has also done extensive original research in French and British archival sources; documents from the latter allow him to shed new light on a number of episodes, such as the struggles for control of the smaller islands in the Lesser Antilles that were often crucial in determining the fate of Martinique and Guadeloupe. Although Martinique and Guadeloupe had fallen behind Saint-Domingue in economic importance by the time of the French Revolution, the region was a major site of contention between rival empires. Nowhere else in the Americas were French and British territories in such close proximity: the British island of Dominica separated Martinique from Guadeloupe and Grenada and Saint-Vincent had passed from French to British control as recently as the end of the Seven Years' War.

In contrast to Laurent Dubois, whose *A Colony of Citizens* he frequently criticizes, Eichmann does not see the struggle against slavery and racial hierarchy as a major theme in these islands' revolutionary experience. "To reduce these political and social upheavals to a conflict about slavery, abolition, and the universal character of human rights and republicanism, hardly does justice to the complexity of this time of ruptures," he writes. "These confrontations were much more part of a larger set of conflicts between the French metropole and its colonies" (p. 504). He therefore highlights the explosive confrontations in the early revolutionary years between wealthy plantation-owners determined to dismantle the French system of trade controls, the *exclusif*, and merchants in the islands' commercial centers who profited from those regulations, and then the bewilderingly complicated struggles for political control of the islands that saw royalist revolts against the metropolitan revolutionary authorities, republican counterstrikes, British occupations and, in the case of Guadeloupe, Victor Hugues's success in setting up a republican dictatorship. Thanks to Hugues and to Toussaint Louverture in Saint-Domingue, British plans to drive their French enemies out of the Caribbean failed; thousands of Britain's best troops fell victim to the region's endemic yellow fever.

Whereas Laurent Dubois saw Hugues's regime, which lasted from 1794 to 1798, as a moment when former slaves and free people of color were able to occupy important positions in the military and obtain legal recognition for their marriages, Eichmann's emphasis is on the harshness of Hugues's labor regulations, which he describes as "disguised slavery" (p. 190). In Eichmann's interpretation, rather than bringing French republicanism to the Caribbean, Hugues, through his promotion of privateering, turned Guadeloupe into a pirate base worthy of a Disney movie. Hugues enriched himself and his cronies on the island by preying on American merchant shipping, dragging France into a quasi-war with the United States that the Directory would have preferred to avoid. Eichmann thus places himself in the camp of scholars such as Philippe Girard and Miranda Spieler, who interpret events in the French Caribbean in the Directory years as undermining the promise of the abolition of slavery, as opposed to those, like Dubois, Sudhir Hazareesingh, Bernard Gainot, and this reviewer, who see evidence of some genuine effort to create a multiracial trans-Atlantic republic. [3]

Napoleon's seizure of power in 1799 opened a new phase of the struggle for control of the Lesser Antilles. Napoleon made it clear from the start that he did not intend to do away with slavery in any of the French colonies where it had not been abolished. This included Martinique, which the British had occupied since 1794, and France's Indian Ocean colonies, but left open the possibility that emancipation and racial equality might be maintained in Saint-Domingue and Guadeloupe. [4] The peace of Amiens, concluded in 1801, restored Martinique to France and opened the way for military expeditions to restore metropolitan authority in the other colonies. Although Eichmann dismisses Laurent Dubois's heroic account of black resistance in Guadeloupe as "exaggerated" (p. 337), he contradicts Philippe Girard's argument that Napoleon had not clearly opted for the restoration of slavery prior to the troops' arrival in the Caribbean, and he does not minimize the violence that accompanied the process in Guadeloupe. [5]

The resumption of war with Britain in mid-1803 left Martinique and Guadeloupe largely cut off from the metropole, and the success of the Haitian struggle for independence at the end of that year raised fears of slave revolts in the other French colonies. By 1807, the looming breakup of the Spanish colonial empire spurred a new British effort to take control of the French islands, in order to prevent any interference with their plans to dominate the region. They had covert support from a number of French planters, who provided information about defense preparations,

and by 1810, all of the Lesser Antilles were under British control. Martinique and Guadeloupe were returned to the French in 1814, and the restored Bourbons handed control of the islands to their white plantation-owners, including many who had openly sided with the British during the revolutionary period. The Hundred Days brought one last reversal in Guadeloupe, where pressure from the army garrison and the poorer members of the population led French officials to reluctantly proclaim their loyalty to Napoleon, even though he had made a show of announcing the abolition of the slave trade. A British landing in the island at the beginning of August 1815, coupled with their occupation of Martinique, ended more than two decades of upheaval in the two islands.

Eichmann does a better job than William Cormack at showing the importance of the Lesser Antilles in the global contest between France and Britain for imperial primacy, and he provides a clear and often dramatic narrative of the internal disputes among rival white factions in Martinique and Guadeloupe and the region's smaller islands. He is justified in pointing out that slavery was not the only thing at stake in the regions' multiple conflicts. In view of the murderous mortality among white troops, all sides in these combats found themselves arming formerly enslaved blacks and trying to recruit support among free people of color, even if they had no intention of promoting the abolition of slavery.

Nevertheless, Eichmann's dismissal of the French National Convention's abolition decree of 16 pluviôse Year II (Feb. 4, 1794) as nothing more than a "cynical device... that served, under the guise of human rights, to reimpose metropolitan control on the overseas empire" (p. 505) is certainly excessive. As he himself acknowledges elsewhere, "the French abolition decree had massively raised the stakes" in the conflicts in the Caribbean (p. 235). Even before it was issued, the white minorities in the Lesser Antilles lived in constant fear of slave revolts and of pressure from the free people of color in their islands. It took the horrific violence of General Richepance's campaign to force the black population of Guadeloupe back into slavery. After 1815, the colonies' white planters realized that they were fighting a rearguard action: once the British had begun to phase out slavery in their Caribbean colonies in the early 1830s, the institution's days in Martinique and Guadeloupe were clearly numbered.[6] Even if Laurent Dubois's claims for the extent of emancipatory progress in the 1790s are overstated, a history of these colonial slave societies that essentially ignores the majority of their population omits an essential element of their story.

## NOTES

[1] For an overview of scholarship on the Haitian Revolution since 2010, see Jeremy D. Popkin, "The Haitian Revolution Comes of Age: Ten Years of New Research," *Slavery and Abolition*, (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2020.1834279>.

[2] William S. Cormack, *Patriots, Royalists, and Terrorists in the West Indies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019); Anne Perotin-Dumon, *Être patriote sous les tropiques. La Guadeloupe, la colonization et la Révolution française (1789-1794)* (Basse-Terre: 1985); idem., *La ville aux îles, la ville dans l'île. Basse-Terre et Pointe-à-Pitre* (Paris: Karthala, 2000); Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Frédéric Régent, *Esclavage, métissage, liberté. La Révolution française en Guadeloupe, 1789-1802* (Paris: Grasset, 2004); idem., *Les Maîtres de la Guadeloupe. Propriétaires d'esclaves 1635-1848* (Paris: Taillandier, 2019).

[3] Philippe Girard, *Toussaint Louverture: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2016); Miranda F. Spieler, "The Legal Structure of Colonial Rule during the French Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 66 (2009): 365-408; Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Black Spartacus: The Epic Life of Toussaint Louverture* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2020); Bernard Gainot, *La Révolution des Esclaves. Haïti, 1763-1803* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2017); Jeremy D. Popkin, "Thermidor, Slavery, and the 'Affaire des colonies,'" *French Historical Studies* 38 (2015): 61-82.

[4] On the Indian Ocean colonies, see Claude Wanquet, *La France et la première abolition de l'esclavage 1794-1802* (Paris: Karthala, 1998).

[5] Philippe Girard, *The Slaves Who Defeated Napoleon: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian War of Independence, 1801-1804* (Tuscaloosa AL: University of Alabama Press, 2011).

[6] On the last decades of slavery in Martinique, see Rebecca Schloss, *Sweet Liberty: The Final Days of Slavery in Martinique* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

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