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Francesco A. Morriello, *Messengers of Empire: Print and Revolution in the Atlantic World*. Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2023. xix + 396 pp. Notes, bibliography, illustrations, and index. \$99.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781802077681.

Review by Elizabeth Andrews Bond, The Ohio State University.

In this compelling account, Francesco Morriello investigates the Caribbean world of print from the ground up, exposing a rich social and material world of communication. His approach is a thematic investigation of key sites of information production and sharing that span the British and French Atlantic. The author's project is to show how the Age of Revolutions transformed print culture. War and revolution are key drivers of change in this book, which begins with the end of the Seven Years' War (1763) and concludes with the end of the Haitian Revolution (1804).

Messengers of Empire reveals the deep connections between the British and French Caribbean colonies. Morriello shows that the British and French colonies were in close contact with Europe and North America, and information was transmitted from a vast community that included "colonial and naval officials, enslaved people, pirates and missionaries" (p. 3). Indeed, Morriello's sustained attention to the many previously unknown figures who made and moved the news is one of the strengths of this book. For example, he shows how enslaved people were integrated into colonial communication networks, especially through the postal systems. In revealing their activity, he adds greater nuance to historical understandings of slavery in the world of print.

The history of print culture in the eighteenth century is a well-established and populous field. For historians of the Enlightenment and the Age of Revolutions, understanding the transmission of new ideas through print has remained a focus for nearly a century.^[1] The high level of attention that historians have paid to print owes at least in part to the work of Jürgen Habermas, who first introduced the idea of the emergence of the public sphere in the eighteenth century.^[2] Moreover, the eighteenth century witnessed a virtual explosion in the volume of print, as book production grew prodigiously, and the range of subject matter expanded apace.^[3] *Messengers of Empire* follows information across the Atlantic and into the British and French Caribbean colonies, tracing many facets of the "communications circuit" Darnton modeled.^[4] This book engages less with much of the recent historiography of the Enlightenment since Morriello interprets the Enlightenment narrowly for the purposes of primarily identifying print works "elevating rationality above 'faith, superstition or revelation'" (p. 9).

As recent work in the history of print culture underscores, the field remains vibrant, especially in the historiography of Europe and North America. Much less scholarly attention has focused

on print culture in the Caribbean, a vital site for understanding the Age of Revolutions. And yet, as Marlene Daut has underscored, “eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Haitian thinkers (broadly construed) contributed to many of the political and cultural theories that govern contemporary historical and literary study.”[5] In short, the Caribbean printers, couriers, booksellers, and writers were central to the formation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thought in the Atlantic world, yet they remain understudied. Morriello’s work is thus a welcome and necessary addition to this field.

One of the most significant issues that Morriello addresses is the impact of war on information. He shows that information circulation was transformed by military conflict and contact between Britain and France, especially from the end of the Seven Years’ War to the end of the Haitian Revolution. Historians have long underscored the increasingly global nature of warfare in the eighteenth century. Morriello highlights the ways in which wars fought in a global arena necessitated new infrastructure (such as swifter shipping routes and new roads) and new uses of print (such as more comprehensive maps and increased use of printing presses), all of which changed communication in the Age of Revolutions. While this book is primarily a history of print culture, Morriello is attentive to the history of technology. For example, he argues that innovation in the size and the copper plating of packet boats decreased the time it took to transport the mail across the ocean.

The comparative extent of this book is also significant. Morriello focuses on the history of communication in Jamaica, Barbados, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Saint-Domingue, all of which were under British control at some point during the period he investigates. By studying the British and French overseas empires together, Morriello is able to show how essential the access to and transfer of information was to the work of empire. He also reveals the many ways in which the two empires were interconnected within a larger Atlantic communication network. Morriello’s integration of the British and French Atlantic into his investigation of communication in the Caribbean is one of the strengths of the book.

Messengers of Empire is divided into three major parts. The first section concerns the establishment of the post and its agents in the British and French Caribbean. Chapter one explains the increasing systematization of postal systems under colonial administrative control, largely in response to the challenges of war and revolution. The growing demand for news prompted new bridge and road projects in the Caribbean and innovations in the packet boats that transported mail. In Chapter two, Morriello shows that enslaved people were integrated into the communication systems of colonial governments and naval officials as couriers and messengers to such an extent that they had specific uniforms and legal protections.

The second section focuses on the press, from the print shops where newspapers were produced, to the content of the publications, to the systems of surveillance and censorship that shaped the news in the Caribbean. Chapter three brings the reader into the print shops in the Caribbean and introduces the people who worked in these spaces. Morriello reveals the social networks between print shops in Europe and in the Caribbean and in one particular case, traces the life of Hector, an enslaved man educated as a printer in France, who later was sent to a print shop in Saint-Domingue before he ultimately escaped. Chapter four focuses on the print shop and the printer as loci of colonial information with growing power. Many of the newspapers published in this period dedicated a significant portion of their pages to advertising, and the printer collected the advertisements he would print. In the Caribbean context, such advertisements focused on real

estate, sale of goods, job ads, lost items, and notices of enslaved people who had run away. Chapter five focuses on the pages of the newspapers themselves, examining their structure, composition, contents, and change over time. Morriello finds that war and revolution were key drivers in the changes to the newspaper page. Chapter six considers press censorship from the vantage point of press coverage of the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution in the British, French, and Caribbean newspapers. Especially in the cases of Saint-Domingue and Jamaica, newspapers were an important information channel, and so the colonial governments attempted to restrict the coverage in their official newspapers.

In the third and final section of the book, Morriello considers the larger print culture environment beyond newspapers through his investigation of almanacs, iconography, and reading salons. Chapter seven underscores the material culture of the almanac as a book that one carried often, relied upon for all manner of practical information, and could tailor to personal preferences. Chapter eight focuses on iconography in print, as images came to convey the ideas and significance in print media, revealing how people in the Caribbean understood the world they inhabited. Images were a prevalent means by which consumers communicated about property and made sense of events. Chapter nine delves into the spaces where Caribbean readers accessed books imported from Europe, such as bookstores, print shops, apothecaries, general stores, and reading salons. Book reading in such salons was an activity of leisure for the Caribbean elite. Once again, Morriello underscores the social dimensions that shaped the consumer culture of print.

Morriello's case is built primarily upon a capacious investigation of newspapers, almanacs, pamphlets, and other print matter, such as public notices and published correspondence dispatches. His analysis of such sources is especially rich in his close examination of both textual and visual print matter. The book also incorporates a range of legal and administrative manuscript sources, including legal assembly minutes, government ordinances, and correspondence. The thematic approach of the book enables Morriello to follow his sources and pursue important lines of inquiry, even where archival records are incomplete. He does admirable work to reconstruct what evidence remains.

The use of sources in *Messengers of Empire* underscores the scope and challenges of writing a comparative history located in the British and French Caribbean. Morriello visited some fifteen repositories on three continents. In Paris, he worked in the Archives nationales and the Bibliothèque nationale de France. He also drew from sources held in the Archives nationales d'outre-mer in Aix-en Provence. In London, his investigation led him to the National Archives and the British Postal Museum and Archive. In the United States, Morriello traveled extensively: to the American Antiquarian Society, the Harvey S. Firestone Memorial Library, the Houghton Library, the John Carter Brown Library, the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library, the Smathers Library, the Widener Library, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Memorial Library.

Even with this expansive approach to archival research, Morriello underscores that a comprehensive study of all information channels and methods across the Caribbean is impossible. In part, the challenge is a pragmatic one, for the sources are held around the world, and even where the sources do exist, lacunae remain. In addition, the sources reflect the structures of power of the eighteenth century. In this respect, Morriello is attentive to the challenges of giving voice to enslaved people and their activity in information exchange, even as he acknowledges the challenges of interpreting their experiences from sources written by white colonists.

Owing to the difficulties of authenticating oral sources, Morriello chose to exclude them from his study, focusing instead on material sources. The impact of oral communication upon the networks traced in this book leaves unanswered questions that are especially pressing in the Caribbean context. In nineteenth-century Haiti, for example, Creole remained a primarily oral language, and most Haitians were monolingual speakers of Haitian Creole. [6]

The argument at the heart of *Messengers of Empire* is that the French Revolutionary Wars changed information appetites throughout the British and French Atlantic. People wanted more news, and demand fueled innovation in the collection and circulation of information. In advancing his investigation of processes of information sharing across a vast Atlantic network, Morriello elucidates the social contexts of information production, locating them in specific spaces, such as print shops, post offices, Christian missions, and secret societies, and in the work of specific people, such as colonial officials, booksellers, printers, postal workers, merchants, and enslaved people. In Morriello's account, one glimpses the many people who made the news.

NOTES

[1] Daniel Mornet, *Les origines intellectuelles de la révolution française, 1715-1787* (Paris: Colin, 1933).

[2] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

[3] Eltjo Buringh and Jan Luiten van Zanden, "Charting the 'Rise of the West': Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe, A Long-Term Perspective from the Sixth through Eighteenth Centuries," *The Journal of Economic History*, 69, no. 2 (June 2009): 409-445.

[4] Robert Darnton, "What is the History of Books?" *Daedalus*, 11, no. 3 (1982): 65-83.

[5] Marlene Daut, *Awakening the Ashes: An Intellectual History of the Haitian Revolution* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2023), p. 3.

[6] Daut, *Awakening the Ashes*, 1.

Elizabeth Andrews Bond
The Ohio State University
Bond.282@osu.edu

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