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Manuel Covo, *Entrepôt of Revolutions: Saint-Domingue, Commercial Sovereignty, and the French-American Alliance*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. 320 pp. Notes, references, illustrations, and index. \$110.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9780197626382. \$27.99 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9780197626399.

Review Essay by Pernille Røge, University of Pittsburgh

Suppose anyone doubted that the French Revolution unfolded within the framework of a colonial empire (rather than a fully formed nation-state) or that it was inextricably connected with the American and Haitian Revolutions. In that case, they need only examine the trajectory of Captain Joshua Barney. From the port city of Baltimore, Barney had become a naval lieutenant at sixteen, gaining prominence in the American Revolutionary War capturing British frigates. Upon American Independence, he devoted himself to a merchant career. He participated in smuggling and the slave trade to the Spanish Caribbean before he started providing provisions to the newly freed Blacks in French Saint-Domingue following the abolition of slavery. Making political connections in the U.S., Saint-Domingue, and France along the way, Barney was invited by the French National Convention in September 1794 to accompany James Monroe, U.S. ambassador to France, to present the union of the French and American flags to the Assembly. An *accolade fraternelle*, an offer of French citizenship, and appointment to an officer in the French Navy followed. Riding the wave of Atlantic republicanism in the 1790s while tending to his commercial affairs, Barney ended his days in 1818 as a slave owner in Kentucky.

Barney's career trajectory, as we learn from Manuel Covo's fascinating new book, *Entrepôt of Revolutions: Saint-Domingue, Commercial Sovereignty, and the French-American Alliance*, was no anomaly. In an era characterized by revolutionary uprisings, warfare, fast-shifting international alliances, and expanding markets, numerous merchants adeptly maneuvered to pursue profits while temporarily aligning themselves with fluctuating national, imperial, political, and diplomatic agendas. Fixing his eyes on these "shrewd" merchants and their commercial networks, Covo examines how their entrepreneurial activities solidified and compromised the French-American Alliance from its inception in 1784 to its collapse by the end of the century. Centering Saint-Domingue within this story—then the greatest producer of sugar and coffee in the world—he reveals in compelling detail the role of French- and U.S.-based merchants in the colony's economic expansion, peak, and decline. Fears of losing commercial sovereignty therefore plagued both sides when the French-American alliance came into force. A spirit of "commercial republicanism" temporarily dampened such anxieties, but they returned with renewed force once the French Revolution radicalized, warfare spread across the Atlantic, and Saint-Domingue was in revolt, pushing apart the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions. Combining the foundational texts of C. L. R. James and R. R. Palmer with recent studies that privilege the role of capitalism in the breakdown of Old Regime France and its prized colony, *Entrepôt of Revolutions* posits that imperial trade rather than democratic ideals drove the Age of Revolutions. In so doing, Covo situates the French Revolution in "both the context of the American and the Haitian Revolutions and the longer history of colonial capitalism" (p. 2).[1]

To unpack these entwined processes, Covo adopts a multiscale approach. The book's nine chapters, largely organized chronologically, begin with the outbreak of the American Revolution and conclude with Haitian Independence, each chapter moving between France, Saint-Domingue, the United States, their port cities, and broader Caribbean, European, and Atlantic contexts. Using the post-Seven Years War period of French imperial crisis and reform as his point of departure, Covo builds his arguments around a set of core questions: would the French-American alliance generate a refashioned French colonial empire that would allow France to still rival its British counterpart? Would a liberty of commerce between the U.S. and France jeopardize French colonial trade in the Caribbean? Would U.S. access to French Caribbean markets push Saint-Domingue into the arms of the U.S.? Would open trade alter the meaning of colonies and reshape their relationship to the metropole? Could "commercial republicanism," defined as "the effort to put trade at the service of a political agenda that aimed to expand citizens' rights internally and generate more equal relationships with foreign nations externally," (p. 3) forge a novel relationship between France, Saint-Domingue, and the U.S.? To get at these issues, Covo deftly mines diplomatic correspondence, international treaties, newspapers, merchant ledgers, political economic treatises, merchant diaries, colonial governors' correspondence, and trade statistics. Echoing methodologies of recent studies that combine the history of political economy with that of the French colonial empire, *Entrepôt of Revolutions* is a history that is at once intellectual, political, social, and economic.[2]

There is much to like about this book. Foremost, Covo succeeds remarkably well at flipping the script of the French-American Alliance to a colonial story that exposes the centrality of Saint-Domingue within this alliance. By 1784, Saint-Domingue was the crown jewel of the French Caribbean. However, to achieve that status, the colony had long relied on illicit commercial networks in the Caribbean, with non-French merchants supplying provisions, naval stores, building materials, and enslaved people via free ports such as Dutch Curaçao and St. Eustatius, Danish St. Thomas, and through trade with British colonies in North America.[3] *Entrepôt of Revolutions* explores that dependency in the 1770s, 1780s, and 1790s, showing how Saint-Domingue increasingly became the crown jewel of the United States. Exports from the U.S. to the French Caribbean colonies increased from 16.3 percent to 18.6 percent of total U.S. exports between 1790 and 1793 alone, with merchants adapting quickly to revolutionary conditions both in France and on Saint-Domingue. Slave traders redirected their ships toward Cuba after the uprising of the enslaved in 1791, while other merchants in American ports continued to export foodstuff to Saint-Domingue in exchange for colonial commodities.

One of the significant achievements of this book lies in Covo's examination of merchants' commercial strategies to profit from Saint-Domingue during decades of upheaval. The book contains a wealth of micro-studies of little-known merchants and their transatlantic commercial networks and political affiliations. Alongside well-known policymakers such as Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, the Comte de Vergennes, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams, political economists such as Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours, and Saint-Domingue revolutionaries such as André Rigaud and Toussaint Louverture, Covo features merchant families whose business networks and life trajectories reached from Philadelphia, Boston, and New York via Cap Français, Port-au-Prince, and Les Cayes to Bordeaux and Marseille in France. Whether of French origin like the brothers Etienne and Jean Girard or Etienne and Jean Dutilh, or a powerful

commercial firm such as John Smith & Sons or the New York Mumford family, Covo reveals how merchants developed strategies to engage in illicit and licit maritime trade through the Age of Revolutions. They did so by relocating temporarily or by exploiting the flags and passports of neutral powers, always ready to shift their national belonging and political affiliation in chameleon-like fashion.

Along with his attention to merchant circuits, Covo also explores how policymakers drew on discourses of political economy to address commercial anxieties. A key concern of metropolitan merchants in French ports, planters and merchants in Saint-Domingue, and merchants in the US was how the French-American Alliance would influence France's long-held policy, the *Exclusif*. This policy offered domestic French merchants the exclusive right to trade with the French colonies overseas. After the Seven Years War, the French crown had adopted a softer version, the *Exclusif mitigée*. In 1767, it created two free ports in the French Caribbean from where foreigners were permitted to supply the French colonies with a limited number of essential goods. While Covo's analysis of the transition from the *Exclusif* to the *Exclusif mitigée* and the adjoining debates on the alleged virtues of free trade over monopoly trade, the rights of neutral powers to trade with warring sides, the liberty of commerce at sea, and the commercial role of colonies perhaps cover quite familiar ground, his examination of the effort to legislate on the *Exclusif* through the French Revolutionary decade fills a critical historiographical gap.[4] Until now, most scholars merely acknowledge that the *Exclusif* collapsed as revolutionary warfare pitted France against the main maritime powers. Yet, as Covo reveals, the French Revolutionary government continued to legislate on the *Exclusif* in what proved to be an extremely chaotic history of commercial policy-making and failure in the face of U.S. neutrality, the Jay Treaty between the United States and Britain in 1794-95 (that opened a limited U.S. trade with the British Caribbean), and Toussaint Louverture's increasingly autonomous commercial policies in Saint-Domingue. Indeed, another intriguing aspect of this book is Covo's discussion of Toussaint Louverture's political economy within this context and his development of a quasi-sovereign fiscal-military state within the French colonial empire.

In a book that juggles three interconnected revolutions in a multiscale analysis, not all levels can be treated with equal attention. Although Covo examines local, national, and regional levels, he tends to pay less attention to the intra-imperial level. His triangular focus on France, Saint-Domingue, and the United States, therefore, sometimes lead him to see novelty where there was perhaps repetition. For instance, efforts to reconceptualize colonial-metropolitan relations in discussions over French metropolitan monopoly on colonial markets were not necessarily developed in dialogue with American revolutionaries alone nor unique to Saint-Domingue. Turgot may have been "inspired by the American revolutionaries' rhetoric" in 1776 when he described the colonies as "enslaved provinces" as Covo notes (p. 20). However, the notion that colonies were treated as "enslaved" territories already circulated within administrative and intellectual circles a decade before the American Revolution. In 1765, ministerial instructions to the soon-to-be governor and intendant of Martinique stipulated that plantation owners were free planters "on an enslaved territory" (*sol esclave*) (p.20). Similarly, when the Chamber of Agriculture du Cap suggested in a report on February 17, 1784, that Saint-Domingue should become an "entrepôt equally useful to [French] commerce, to the colony and the Americans" and "should emerge as the gathering point between both nations" (p. 42), it was adopting an argument already formulated by its sister society in Martinique four years earlier. In 1780, the

latter suggested that the French Caribbean islands should become a commercial nodal point--a *nœud de commerce*—between France and America.[5] This suggests an intra-imperial circuit of political economic claims-making and sharing against the metropole in which Saint-Domingue was not necessarily articulating new ideas nor developing them in dialogue with revolutionary Americans alone.

This minor request for more attention to the intra-imperial level detracts little from Covo's overarching argument that imperial trade drove the Age of Revolution more so than any democratic impulse blowing across the Atlantic. Nor does it challenge his insistence on situating the French Revolution within the context of the American and Haitian ones. On all these accounts, the book succeeds extremely well. By the end of the book, however, it is less apparent how Covo situates all this within the long history of colonial capitalism. Although trade, markets, and profits appear on every page of the book, "capitalism" is surprisingly absent. The first seven chapters carry no mention of it. It appears briefly in chapter eight in the section on "Francophile Trade or Casino Capitalism?" (p. 193) in which Covo questions whether the triangular trade of merchants between France, the United States, and Saint-Domingue were driven by any political or ideological meaning or what Covo calls "casino capitalism." He mentions it again in the same chapter when he notes that the port of Jérémie became "the stronghold of slavery capitalism" in Saint-Domingue after 1794 (p. 200). Finally, it returns in the epilogue when Covo concludes that "commercial republicanism emerged as a potential solution to reconcile global capitalism with the assertion of popular sovereignty and a reorganization of the international order" (p. 244). But how "casino," "slavery," and "global" capitalisms fit into a "long history of colonial capitalism" is unclear. So is any sense of how Covo understands that long history.

In a footnote, Covo explains that his approach is indebted to the scholarship of Jean Jaurès, Anna J. Cooper, and C.L.R. James whose "research connected the French Revolution with the history of colonialism and slavery and placed it within a larger narrative of global capitalism from a Marxian perspective" (p. 252). Yet if indebted to a Marxian perspective, *Entrepôt of Revolutions* does not read like a Marxist history. The "capitalist bourgeois" appears nowhere, nor does Covo discuss class struggle and the deeper structural tensions undergirding the age of revolutionary upheaval and imperial crisis.[6] An alternative reading could be that Covo seeks to align himself with what is now known as "the new history of capitalism" most prominently associated with Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman. In his introduction, Covo observes that this new history has rarely discussed the French Revolution "as an important factor" (p. 7). The question is, then, if Covo is trying to fill that gap and, if so, sees his "long history of colonial capitalism" as an equivalent to Beckert's war capitalism or his and Rockman's U.S.-focused Slavery's Capitalism?

Ultimately, readers will have to draw their own conclusions about the precise ways in which the book fits into the history of capitalism. Even so, *Entrepôt of Revolutions* is a stimulating and ambitious work and a pleasure to read. Deeply researched and underpinned by a sophisticated multiscale approach, it is sure to become essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the interconnections between the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions.

NOTES

[1] C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Secker & Warburg Ltd., 1938); R.R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959-1964); Trevor Burnard and John Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Paul Cheney, *Cul de Sac: Patrimony, Capitalism, and Slavery in French Saint-Domingue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[2] See for instance, John Shovlin, *Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006); Paul Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce: Globalization and the French Monarchy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); David Todd, *Free Trade and Its Enemies in France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Pernille Røge, *Economistes and the Reinvention of Empire: France in the Americas and Africa, c. 1750-1802* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); John Shovlin, *Trading with the Enemy: Britain, France, and the 18th-Century Quest for a Peaceful World Order* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021); David Todd, *A Velvet Empire: French Informal Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021); Elizabeth Cross, *Company Politics: Commerce, Scandal, and French Visions of Indian Empire in the Revolutionary Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

[3] As Thomas M. Truxes has shown, maritime merchants in the port of New York were making fortunes “trading with the enemy” (the French West Indies) before and during the Seven Years War. Thomas M. Truxes, *Defying Empire: Trading with the Enemy in Colonial New York* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).

[4] The most comprehensive work on the transition from the *Exclusif* to the *Exclusif mitigée* is Jean Tarrade, *Le Commerce Colonial de la France à la fin de l'Ancien Régime: L'évolution du régime de "l'Exclusif" de 1763 à 1789*, 2. vol (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972). For anglophone scholarship that covers this transition, see for instance Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce*, chapters six and seven; Røge, *Economistes*, chapters two and three; Shovlin, *Trading*, chapter five.

[5] Røge, *Economistes*, pp. 124, 130.

[6] Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books edition, 2015); Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds., *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

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