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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.

Author's Response by Manuel Covo, University of California Santa Barbara

November 2023 saw the opening of the “Oser la liberté” exhibition at the Panthéon, which honors those who fought against slavery in French history. In the crypt dedicated to great French people, the freedom fighters of Saint-Domingue and the Haitian Revolution are recognized as major protagonists in the story told by France’s National Mausoleum.[1] Reflecting the belated acknowledgement of a history long sidelined in France, this commemoration was made possible by a robust and expanding body of scholarship that has rendered justice to the Haitian Revolution as “the paradigm-shifting event” of the revolutionary era, to use Jesús Ruiz’s eloquent phrasing. Having followed a French high school curriculum at a time when not a word was said about race and slavery when it came to the French Revolution, I found the exhibition deeply moving. It also echoed an episode from the opening pages of *Entrepôt of Revolutions* with which Pernille Røge starts her review. After being acclaimed by the French National Convention in September 1794, Captain Joshua Barney, an American naval officer and businessman whose career was intimately associated with Saint-Domingue, was invited to attend Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s burial in the Pantheon a few weeks later. Barney’s presence as a guest of honor suggests that the centrality of Saint-Domingue played out on many levels and that slavery and the wealth it generated influenced many aspects of French history in the Age of Revolutions.

The centrality of Saint-Domingue has been recognized by the four reviewers who honored me with their comments and observations on *Entrepôt of Revolutions*. I would like to express my gratitude to Mary Lewis, Pernille Røge, Jesús Ruiz, and Robert Taber for their extremely generous and close readings. I greatly admire the groundbreaking research they have conducted on connected topics: Mary Lewis’s research into the commercial history of Haiti after independence, Pernille Røge’s work on the political economy of the French colonial empire in the eighteenth century, Jesús Ruiz’s studies of royalism during the Haitian Revolution, and Robert Taber’s work on the history of colonial Saint-Domingue. All have been particularly inspiring to me. I also want to thank Junko Takeda and *H-France Forum* for making this in-depth discussion possible.

I am very pleased that all reviewers were convinced by the monograph’s two main theses: that Saint-Domingue lies at the heart of the French-American relationship and that trade was a major force in the age of revolutions. Getting these points across is all the more satisfying as writing this book meant overcoming several obstacles. Writing a polycentric transnational history of the trade between Saint Domingue and the United States raised historiographical and methodological challenges. Despite the expansion of Atlantic and global history as fields of study, putting compartmentalized bodies of scholarship into conversation has remained difficult. Furthermore, I

aimed to examine both legal and illegal trade, two types of commerce whose boundaries were porous, contested, and politically corrosive. *Entrepôt of Revolutions* examines trade laws and the debates they ignited, contrasting these political controversies with the practices of traders, ship captains, and smugglers. Weaving all of the book's threads together meant using a wide variety of sources, as Mary Lewis and Robert Taber note: customs records, administrative correspondence, treatises on political economy, as well as merchant correspondence, consular records, newspapers, and notarial deeds. This involved unearthing sources held in various archival depositories in several countries, which remains an arduous task for practitioners of Atlantic, global, and transnational history, even at a time when the digitization of sources is progressing apace.

All four reviewers also raise questions about what might have been productively included in the book. Jesús Ruiz rightly draws attention to the role played by the Spanish empire in the geopolitical and commercial reconfigurations that affected Saint-Domingue in the Age of Revolutions. Historians have demonstrated that Saint-Domingue's commercial demise propelled a Cuban boom and that Santo Domingo was profoundly affected by the Haitian Revolution, but we lack a more comprehensive approach to envisage the Spanish empire holistically.[2] I was struck to discover that the illicit trade between Jean François and Biassou's armies and Spanish suppliers was one of the main cited causes for France's declaration of war on Spain in March 1793. The Directory, as I have argued in another article, reimagined a new role for Louisiana, a region that underwent a complicated struggle of influences between Amerindian peoples, Spain, the United States, Great Britain, and France, with Saint-Domingue in the background.[3] In sum, *Entrepôt of Revolutions* could not do full justice to a subject that deserves its own monograph.

Pernille Røge points out that, due to my focus on the Saint-Domingue-France-United States triangulation, I talk less about mutual interactions among French colonies. Yet I was well aware that the American trade penetrated other French insular spaces and that these commercial experiences were interconnected. Thanks to the work of Anne Pérotin Dumon, we already know the role played by US provisioning to Guadeloupe and the scope of Victor Hugues' privateering war against US vessels, but the US trade with Martinique, Guyane, and the Mascarene Islands was also significant.[4] One of the Baltimore merchants whose papers I examined, for example, outfitted vessels to Ile-de-France (Mauritius) after failing in the Saint-Domingue market. Beyond this specific topic, more research should be conducted on the peripheral interconnections among French colonies.[5] The nature and density of the links between Saint-Domingue and the Lesser Antilles remain largely unknown but would merit several studies, far beyond the scope of my book.

I have tried as far as possible to avoid a top-down story, but I also sometimes focus on certain well-known leaders such as Jacques-Pierre Brissot, Thomas Jefferson, or Toussaint Louverture. With regard to the latter, I noticed that biographers dwelt at length on his military and diplomatic achievements but paid no attention to his discourse on political economy--a discipline generally associated with white men in the secondary literature. Recognizing Toussaint Louverture's practical contribution to political economy was important to me and I am glad that Jesús Ruiz, Robert Taber, and Pernille Røge seem to agree. Originally, I expected to say a lot more about the commercial practices of newly free men and women on the ground. This is a topic I broach in the seventh chapter, but I had to make do with archival fragments, usually based on rumors and vague descriptions. I would have liked to be more specific about the informal exchanges between

ordinary Haitians and American ship captains. I found evidence that such traffic existed, but merchants' papers were virtually silent on the topic. I tried to make up for this archival imbalance and I hope that future studies will unearth other sources that will allow us to better understand the functioning of this trade on the ground.

I must, however, clear up a misunderstanding regarding the book's purpose. Pernille Røge asserts that I saw "novelty where there was perhaps repetition." I agree with her when she states that certain ideas formulated during the American Revolution dated back to the mid-century physiocrats. I would even go further back in time than she does: many of the projects and programs put forward predated the Age of Revolutions entirely, and in some cases were conceived in the early eighteenth century and the aftermath of the Treaty of Utrecht.[6] My goal was not to find out who formulated such ideas first. Instead, I argue that the creation of the United States, an independent state in continental America, whose trade policy was based on the opening up of colonial markets, constituted a real break with the past. I admire the erudition and exhaustiveness of Jean Tarrade's work, but in concluding his study in 1789, he failed to see the upheaval caused by the birth of the United States.[7] Relying exclusively on French sources, Tarrade understood the American Revolution as a secondary development in the aftermath of the Seven Years' War. The first chapter of *Entrepôt of Revolutions* shows that the Revolution affected French colonial policy more substantially than Tarrade suggested.

Pernille Røge also asks me to be more explicit about my positioning in the connected history of revolutions, capitalism, and slavery. The difficulty lies in the historiographical compartmentalization of these conversations. For instance, Albert Soboul's Jacobin interpretation of the French Revolution did not talk to Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery*. [8] Until recently, few historians have linked the history of French capitalism to the Haitian Revolution. [9] This is why I went back to Jean Jaurès and C.L.R. James, who tried to do so. One of their significant contributions was the recognition of capital accumulation through colonial trade. They also drew attention to the making of a capitalist bourgeoisie whose wealth stemmed from colonial extraction. *Entrepôt of Revolutions* deals only peripherally with the question of production and labor. [10] Instead the book focuses on merchant capitalism from an imperial and transnational angle.

Linking the history of the French Revolution, and more broadly the Age of Revolutions, to the history of capitalism in a global or transnational perspective, and no longer the national framework of a Georges Lefebvre or a Soboul, will be a major undertaking and will require many more books to come. The most promising perspective is precisely that being pursued by Mary Lewis on nineteenth-century Haiti and French informal capitalism. [11] Thanks to the work of Lewis, along with that of Gusti-Klara Gaillard, Julia Gaffield, and Arielle Alterwaite, we will be able to better understand the economic and financial ramifications of that sequence in the era that followed the revolution. [12]

Entrepôt of Revolutions emphasizes that historians of revolutionary France and Saint-Domingue must look to the United States. Mary Lewis observes "that the early United States were partly responsible for the hugely profitable enterprise that was the Saint-Domingue cash crop economy in the 1770s and 1780s." As Robert Taber notes, the book addresses the "merchants' revolution" paradigm, a major theme in early American historiography. In that respect, we also need to remember that Saint-Domingue's French colonial past reciprocally enriched the great merchants

of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York. Beyond that specific interaction, I saw the book as an invitation to free ourselves from the framework of the nation-state to recover the intertwined history of capitalism, slavery, and sovereignty in the Atlantic world.

NOTES

[1] The exhibit was supported by the *Centre des monuments nationaux* and the *Fondation pour la Mémoire de l'Esclavage*, and was curated by Florence Alexis.

[2] Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Graham T. Nessler, *An Islandwide Struggle for Freedom: Revolution, Emancipation, and Reenslavement in Hispaniola, 1789-1809* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

[3] Manuel Covo, "Why Did France Want Louisiana Back? Imperial Schemes, Political Economy, and Revolutionary Ventures in a Caribbean Borderland," In Matthias Middell and Megan Maruschke, eds. *The French Revolution as a Moment of Respatialization* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), pp. 23-46.

[4] Anne Pérotin-Dumon, *La ville aux îles, la ville dans l'île. Basse-Terre et Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, 1650-1820* (Paris: Karthala, 2000).

[5] Important recent exceptions include Laurie Wood, *Archipelago of Justice: Law in France's Early Modern Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020) and Tessa Murphy, *The Creole Archipelago: Race and Borders in the Colonial Border* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).

[6] Paul Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce. Globalization and the French Monarchy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); John Shovlin, *Trading with the Enemy: Britain, France, and the 18th-Century Quest for a Peaceful World Order* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

[7] 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 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972).

[8] Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944); Albert Soboul, *Les Sans-Culottes parisiens en l'An II. Mouvement populaire et gouvernement révolutionnaire: 2 juin 1793-9 thermidor an II* (Paris : Éditions Librairie Clavreuil, 1958).

[9] Lauren Clay's promising research will also build off of these foundations. See Lauren Clay, "Liberty, Equality, Slavery: Debating the Slave Trade in Revolutionary France," *The American Historical Review* 128, no. 1 (2023): 89-119.

[10] 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); Johnhenry Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019).

[11] Mary Dewhurst Lewis, "Repairing Damage: The Slave Ship Marcelin and the Haiti Trade in the Age of Abolition," *The American Historical Review* 125, no. 3 (2020): 869-898.

[12] Julia Gaffield, *Haitian Connections in the Atlantic World: Recognition after Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Gusti-Klara Gaillard-Pourchet, "Haïti-France. Permanences, évolutions et incidences d'une pratique de relations inégales au xixe siècle." *La Révolution française. Cahiers de l'Institut d'histoire de la Révolution française* 16 (2019). Arielle Alterwaite is completing a dissertation on the Haitian debt from a transnational perspective.

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