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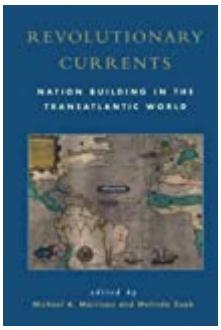

Michael M. Morrison, Melinda S. Zook. *Revolutionary Currents: Nation Building in the Transatlantic World.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004. 192 S. $87.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-2164-3; $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7425-2165-0.

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This volume began as a set of lectures on "transatlantic revolutionary traditions" by four distinguished historians, each offering a broad, synthetic account in their fields of expertise. Each essay was later revised in light of the others, and the editors added an introductory essay by Jack P. Greene as well as a brief historiographical conclusion by Peter Onuf. This format gives the volume a thematic integration unusual for a collection of essays.

It is always a pleasure to read work by historians of this caliber. Each essay summarizes the state of its field, while advancing an original interpretation. All the contributors are extremely well-versed in the scholarship of their fields, and each essay includes extensive footnotes that could easily serve as graduate reading lists. The essays are notable for their clarity of writing and analysis, and I think they would be appropriate for an upper-level undergraduate seminar.

Greene's introduction sets the essays in the context of state formation in early modern Europe. Surveying ground tilled by world-systems theorists, Greene situates the essays in the long history of power struggles between the centralizing tendencies of emergent European nation-states and the centrifugal tendencies of regional elites. Ably synthesizing these already synthetic essays, Greene's introduction offers a compelling framework to help readers think about revolutionary movements and nationalism on both sides of the Atlantic.

Lois G. Schwoerer follows, tracing the long history of "jury ideology," a politicized understanding of juries as an institution protecting traditional rights from governmental assault. Schwoerer dates the emergence of this ideology to the political struggles of seventeenth-century England, when a history of juries was invented that "rooted [them] in custom and the distant past," "contemporaneous with the nation itself" (pp. 40, 44). "Englishmen," Schwoerer observes, "had a propensity for declaring as ancient law what they wanted to be law and for interpreting it in ways to suit their needs" (p. 48). This may have been bad history and jurisprudence, but it was excellent politics. Favoring locals in the regional/centralizing tensions of Greene's framework, this jury ideology proved to be a powerful weapon against the assertion of royal absolutism, and established long-standing rights that could be defended through pamphlets and popular protest.

Schwoerer's essay brings legal developments into a social and cultural setting from which much historiography separates them. By the end of the seventeenth century, this jury ideology had taken its place alongside aggressive Protestantism as a pillar of an emergent English nationalism. Understood as "unique to England," the right to trial by jury embodied the alleged superiority of

England to the benighted peoples of France or Italy, and advanced the "sense of identity and self-consciousness ... [that] contributed to the ongoing creation of an 'imagined community' of England" (p. 54). Transmitted through widely reprinted Whig political tracts, this jury ideology would travel across the Atlantic to inform American resistance to new encroachments by the British state.

John M. Murrin picks up here, placing the American Revolution in the context of British imperial development. For Murrin, the American Revolution presents a curious puzzle. "The British Empire by 1763," he observes, had "achieved a level of integration it had never known before," as its victory over France inspired an outpouring of militant patriotism that capped off the "anglicizing tendencies" of the eighteenth century (p. 72). In a few short years, however, victory was converted into defeat, integration into disintegration. Murrin's American Revolution is not a story about the development of liberty, the search for principles, or even a struggle for independence: it was "a countercyclical event," a "crisis of imperial integration that the British state could not handle" (p. 67). Murrin's essay provides a masterful synthesis of the mutual misunderstanding that led to war between the colonists and their mother country. Anyone looking to put together a solid lecture on the coming of the American Revolution need look no further.

Murrin concludes with a few pages on the formation of national identity–engendered, he argues, because most Americans "realized that they were not yet a nation" (p. 82). This last section, however, is less successful in evaluating the factors that generated U.S. nationalism and determined its particular configurations. If Murrin's essay suggests why localism would remain a prominent feature of nineteenth-century U.S. nationalism, it does less to explain how that nationalism was also a powerful integrative force, succeeding in the unlikely achievement of uniting the territories in the trans-Appalachian and then trans-Mississippi West with the fractious states along the coast. Nor does Murrin's thesis explain how U.S. nationalism persuaded hundreds of thousands of Americans, many of them from those territories in the "Old Northwest," to fight for the nation's survival, successfully suppressing the countercyclical events of 1861-65 in a way Britain had failed to do some eighty-five years earlier.

Where, for Murrin, the American Revolution resulted from the failure of the British state-making project, William H. Sewell Jr. sees the French Revolution as its fulfillment. Sewell's essay is the only one to engage at length with the theme of nation building promised in the volume's title. Sewell begins by challenging Benedict Anderson's famous argument about the New World origins of nationalism, and seeks to set the emergence of the "nation form"–a term he borrows from Etienne Balibar–in a larger Atlantic setting: "linked together in a common revolutionary dynamic ... whose initiative oscillated back and forth between Europe and the Americas" (p. 92). Sewell also, I think, seeks to restore the French Revolution to the place it traditionally held: instigator of the modern "nation form," if not of nationalism, and perhaps even of modernity itself.

The French Revolution achieved what the American Revolution patently did not: it asserted "the supremacy of the nation" above all forms of local prerogative, indeed, "over all other solidary bonds," establishing the nation as "the supreme object of loyalty" (pp. 100, 108). It thus transformed not just political but social relationships, reconstituting subjects as rights-bearing citizens. Sewell examines the post-revolutionary reforms in territorial administration as a case study. Building on Anderson's conception of "homogenous, empty time" (itself borrowed from Walter Benjamin) as a central feature of nationalism, Sewell proposes a conception of "empty, homogenous space" as equally important. He concludes by suggesting where later nationalisms would depart from the "modular" French version.

Eric Van Young adds a contrarian note to the volume, questioning the extent to which Mexico's independence movement (1810-15) followed in the Atlantic world's currents. Young argues that while Mexico's Creole revolutionaries may have been influenced by the intellectual traditions of the Atlantic World, the further down the social scale one descends, "the further away from any recognizable Atlantic revolution tradition" one moves (p. 139). Beneath familiar talk of independence, Young finds what he calls "localocentrism." At its more popular levels, he argues, the Mexican independence movement was "peasant, substantially indigenous in composition, local and contingent in occasion and form," with strong millennial elements, and driven by a "communitarian sensibility" largely detached from European ideologies (pp. 148, 158).

Young's insistence on a divergence in aims and ideology between the upper and lower strata of the Mexican Revolution strikes me as important, and no doubt correct. Nevertheless, I found myself unpersuaded by some of Young's arguments. One wonders, for instance, to

what extent Schwoerer's arresting observation that conservative rhetoric often hides radical aims applies to the Mexican context. What is more, some of the rhetoric cited by Young as evidence of divergence would, I suspect, have sounded quite familiar to spokesmen for the revolutionary cause in North America, as in other parts of the Atlantic world. Finally, to identify millennialism as something detached from European revolutionary currents is entirely unpersuasive in light of the strong millennial strains historians have identified in the American Revolution, in the English revolution before it, and even in France, the most prototypically "modern" revolution (at least according to Sewell).

Ultimately, Young's essay fits uneasily into this volume, and I think the reasons lie less with his argument than with the book's conceptual structure. Young introduces issues that do not map onto the matrix laid out in this volume: revolution in the context of state formation, and contests between imperial centers and regional peripheries. Insisting on the indigenous component and rural character of the Mexican Revolution, Young sees a "poor fit" with the Atlantic Revolutionary movements (p. 158). Perhaps the poor fit, however, is not with the Atlantic currents themselves, but with the way they are conceptualized in this book.

It is in this regard that the absence of a chapter on Saint Domingue–noted by Greene alone–is most glaring. In the first place, an essay on the Haitian Revolution is certainly warranted in a volume on Atlantic revolutionary traditions and nation building, particularly one published on the two-hundredth anniversary of Haitian independence. And while it is clear that no brief volume can examine all Atlantic revolutions, to have introduced Haiti into this volume would have done more than rectifying a simple omission. It would have changed the very nature of the revolutionary currents examined here, adding an entire dimension to the analysis of revolutions and nation formation: the racial ideologies so central to nationalisms throughout the Atlantic world, which are barely addressed in this volume.

It might also have better contextualized Young's account of the Mexican independence movement, making what seemed anomalous about Mexico into something, perhaps, more in the flow of the Atlantic's currents. Finally, it would have added a whole undercurrent to the Atlantic world's revolutionary traditions, conceptualizing "revolution" not merely in its statist sense, but also in its broader social sense. It would have allowed resistance to slavery, and the slave rebellions throughout the Americas–which, after the 1790s, so often found their inspiration in the Haitian Revolution–to be understood as an integral part of the Atlantic world's revolutionary currents. Certainly that is how many slaves understood them, and what many slaveholders feared they were.

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