



Caribbean Studies

ISSN: 0008-6533

iec.ics@upr.edu

Instituto de Estudios del Caribe

Puerto Rico

Burnard, Trevor

Late Slavery and Emancipation in the Greater Caribbean

Caribbean Studies, vol. 41, núm. 1, enero-junio, 2013, pp. 181-194

Instituto de Estudios del Caribe

San Juan, Puerto Rico

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=39229305007>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's homepage in redalyc.org

redalyc.org

Scientific Information System

Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal

Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative

## LATE SLAVERY AND EMANCIPATION IN THE GREATER CARIBBEAN

---

*Trevor Burnard*

School of Historical and Philosophical Studies  
University of Melbourne  
tburnard@unimelb.edu.au

Manuel Barcia. 2008. *Seeds of Insurrection: Domination and Resistance on Western Cuban Plantations, 1808-1843*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 211 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8071-3365-1.

Jane G. Landers. 2010. *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 340 pp. ISBN: 978-0-674-03591-1.

Christer Petley. 2009. *Slaveholders in Jamaica: Colonial Society and Culture during the Era of Abolition*. London: Pickering and Chatto. 211 pp. ISBN: 978-1-851-96990-6.

Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss. 2009. *Sweet Liberty: The Final Days of Slavery in Martinique*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 300 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8122-4172-3.

The profession of academic history is going through one of its periodic reorientations, although it is doing so more gradually and with less blood on the floor than in the past. When the “new” social history displaced traditional political and economic history in the 1970s and when the cultural and linguistic turn of the 1980s became manifested in different kinds of history written in the 1990s, controversy over new ways of doing history was intense. The controversy is less now but the change in focus is just as significant as in more heralded re-directions. The hegemony of cultural history—so prominent in the last twenty years—and the dominance of historical explorations of identity, be it racial, gendered or class-inflected, has been supplanted, if gently, by a renewed emphasis on institutions, especially those related to the making of empires and nations, and by an abiding concern with borders, boundaries and movement in, between and over such boundaries. To an extent that must seem surprising to people used to history written according to the tenets of cultural anthropology and literary criticism, as was fashionable until the last decade, historians are increasingly fascinated in this new century by how people in various periods of the past

became globally connected and once again concerned with old questions of modernity (when did the world become modern and what did that mean?) and sovereignty (how did authority work, especially in complex societies and in places with a multiplicity of competing structures of power). Perhaps nowhere is this turn towards politics, towards materiality, and towards historical geography been stronger than in accounts of the early modern period, leading into the mid-nineteenth century.

All of these changes should make the study of the Caribbean more important. It is the region of the world, *par excellence*, where empires have collided and where colonialism and the movement and mixtures of people have most shaped historical development. It was the region where until the mid-nineteenth century European empires fought out their battles, almost by proxy, and where the making of new peoples, new societies and new economic products, notably sugar, made it the cutting edge of generative change, both cultural and political. The Caribbean was a disturbing, sometimes frightening, world but it was indubitably modern, inherently global, and an area where ideas of sovereignty and authority were tested and challenged as in perhaps no other region of the world. In the Enlightenment, in particular, the West Indies were an object of much fascination among philosophes, men and women both attracted and also repelled by the Caribbean's fabulous wealth and capacity to act as a transformative crucible in which new and undoubtedly modern ways of selfhood and relating to people were being established. As Abbé Raynal of encyclopedia fame commented in the mid-eighteenth century, "the labours of the colonists settled in these long-scorned islands are the sole basis of the African trade, extend the fisheries and cultivation of North America, provide advantageous outlets for the manufacture of Asia, double perhaps triple the activity of the whole of Europe. They can be regarded as the principal cause of the rapid movement which stirs the universe."<sup>1</sup>

To an extent, the new changes in historiographical fashion have been good news for the development of the historiography of the Caribbean during the period of slavery. The region is more visible than it has been for some time, with a number of important works being published in recent years, often by historians whose primary interest has been in other areas of the world rather than the Caribbean, on aspects of Caribbean history. It would be tedious to list them all but Jeremy Popkin's outstanding recent book on the start of the Haitian Revolution might stand in for a number of other works. Popkin is a historian of *ancien régime* and revolutionary France who has become convinced, as a growing number of French historians are beginning to be convinced, that the Haitian Revolution was not a sideshow to the bigger European revolutionary conflict but may have been the real event. He does not go as far as other

scholars, who see in the birth of Haiti an alternative history of the origins of human rights and a challenge to accounts of the rise of democracy and racial exclusiveness in western Europe and the Americas, but his interest in this so-called silent revolution—the amount of works on the topic produced in recent years suggest it is silent no more—is indicative of a more general interest in the Caribbean as a result of changes in how the historical profession is now writing history.<sup>2</sup>

Yet there is a long way to go before the Caribbean can be said to have been properly integrated into the history of the making of the modern world. There are more works written about the Caribbean every year but only a few manage to get much recognition within a wider literature in which the Caribbean, so obviously important to eighteenth century commentators like Raynal and Adam Smith, remains tangential and marginal to wider historical discourse. Those works that do get traction within a wider historical world tend to be those that concentrate on the histories of extraordinary individuals whose lives were spent not just in the Caribbean but in many places in an integrating late eighteenth world of global empires. Thus, histories of extraordinarily mobile individuals and families who moved between the Caribbean, Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas, chronicled by Rebecca Scott and Jean Hebrand, Linda Colley, and Emma Rothschild have attracted considerable attention.<sup>3</sup> Some historians, such as Maya Jasanoff in her account of the loyalist diaspora after the American Revolution, Andrew O'Shaughnessy in his careful account of how Britain lost the American War of Independence in part through mismanaging what happened in the Caribbean, and Nicholas Draper in his evaluation of how slave emancipation in the British West Indies fueled wealth accumulation by ex-slaveholders in Britain, have successfully linked the West Indies to wider historical currents.<sup>4</sup> But in general what happened in the Caribbean during the period of slavery is acknowledged by historians of other places but not effectively incorporated into their analyses. A host of examples could be paraded here but two, from the Oxford University Press's acclaimed Handbook series can be mentioned here. Despite the editors of the handbooks on the Ancien Regime and the American Revolution both promising that their books would be Atlantic in focus and global in reach, with the editors making a nod to the Caribbean in their introductions, virtually none of the many contributors to these volumes mention the Caribbean, even though its importance to European empires in this period, economically, politically, and culturally, was immense.<sup>5</sup>

To an extent, the changes in historiographical fashion have happened too soon for Caribbean historiography. Implicit in the move to cultural history and then to a concern with spatial interactions is an assumption that the labours of social historians in the quantitatively inclined years

of the 1970s has provided a bedrock of foundational knowledge about how the society and economy of early modern society worked. We can write microhistories and cultural histories of New England and Dutch New York, as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Donna Merwick do so brilliantly, and of early modern France and England, as has been done in a host of studies, because the influence of *Annales*-inflected scholarship means we know a great deal about population patterns, family structures, and economic patterns in these regions.<sup>6</sup> That historical bedrock of foundational knowledge is largely missing for much of the early modern Caribbean. Our knowledge of the Caribbean after the excitement of the Columbian encounter is patchy and there are large topics in the history of the Caribbean during the period when the Atlantic slave trade was most important in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that have attracted virtually no scholarship, certainly not in English.

We lack, for example, a decent history of the slave society of Saint-Domingue before the cataclysm of the Haitian Revolution in which basic details of plantation structure, population and trade patterns are laid out. The absence of such a work means that the sudden and welcome interest in the Haitian Revolution from a number of scholars is hampered. Writers can give only the sketchiest of outlines of what Saint-Domingue was like before launching into explanations of how this mostly unknown society was changed from 1791 to 1804. Our understanding of eighteenth-century Cuba is similarly limited, at least in comparison with more historiographically crowded fields, such as the history of eighteenth century Western Europe. So too we do not have a study of a major eighteenth century slave society in the British West Indies. Despite the magnificent advances in our understanding of slavery in general over the last generation and despite the heroic achievement of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Data Base, which allows us to trace virtually every slaving voyage to the Caribbean during the period of the Atlantic slave trade, we don't have any finely grained and empirically based study of slavery in Jamaica, Barbados or Antigua in order to compare with what we know about slavery in British North America. We don't have, moreover, a study that explains the role of the early eighteenth-century Caribbean and the slave trade that sustained slavery in the region in creating either a stable fiscal-military state in Britain or else a state that was troubled by not being able to pay for expensive West Indian wars.

The result of such deficiencies and gaps within Caribbean historiography is that no matter how hard Caribbean scholars try and contribute to wider historical discussion for the period before 1800, they are faced with having to extrapolate large conclusions from limited evidence. We know, for example, that Saint-Domingue's sugar economy accounted for an enormous proportion of French wealth on the eve of Revolution

and that the defense of that island, and the expansion of the successful Saint-Domingue sugar-slave plantation complex to other areas of the Caribbean, was crucial in French geo-politics both before and after the French Revolution. The French government, even more than the British, recognized Saint Domingue's strategic and economic importance and devoted ever increasing proportions of their resources to its protection and development. It gave beneficial terms to slave traders, fuelling the boom in Atlantic commerce, and expending massive sums on rebuilding and expanding the navy.

The results were remarkable. Atlantic trade for the first time in French history challenged trade to the Mediterranean as the dominant sector in French commerce. But the costs of catering to the growth of Saint Domingue were considerable, helping to lead to the collapse of the *ancien regime* in France as the economy collapsed from the cumulative cost of international competition, not least the ever-increasing expense of a large navy. As William Doyle notes, it is not "a complete exaggeration to suggest that the costs of upholding a colonial system that could only work through slavery were what ultimately brought down the Ancien Régime in France."<sup>7</sup> It is difficult, however, for Caribbean historians to build upon that throw-away line by the doyen of Anglophone historians of the French Revolution when they don't have the empirical evidence to back up their statements. It is true in related areas as well. How, for example, do we proclaim the significance of the West Indies to the causes and outcome of the American Revolution when there is only one serious recent monograph on the American Revolution in the British Caribbean trying to hold up its end against a massive outpouring of work on the American Revolution in British North America? The fact that the largest loss of life in the American Revolution occurred through loss of men to disease in an aborted attempted invasion of Jamaica from Saint-Domingue is entirely hidden from current histories, mainly because no primary research has been done into that event.<sup>8</sup>

The one period of early modern Caribbean history in which substantial amounts of social history has been done has been during the Age of Revolutions, a period tellingly thought of in Caribbean historiography as the era of abolition—thus making more specific and more obviously regional a global phenomenon in which much more than just the abolition of the slave trade and slavery was discussed. Here, some important work has been done, both in regard to developing a wealth of empirical information and also in regard to developing robust historical theories that have some purchase in wider realms of historical scholarship. Scholars of West Indian slave societies in the age of revolution and slave emancipation, such as the authors of the four books here under review, have a comparative wealth of information on basic matters of

society, politics and economy compared to students of earlier periods of Caribbean history. The work of scholars such as Manuel Moreno Fraginals and especially B.W. Higman have provided a relative abundance of empirical evidence to build studies upon while scholars like C.L.R. James and Eric Williams in the mid-twentieth century and more recent work by scholars such as Emilia Viotti da Costa, Robert Paquette, João Reis, Jeremy Adeleman, and David Geggus has provided provocative theories that make a case for the Caribbean being a catalyst for change in other regions of the world.

Nevertheless, what is clear from the four books under review is that Caribbean historians are still building up local historiographies rather than trying to contribute a great deal to larger historical narratives. We are in a rather strange historical situation, where a number of historians not expert in Caribbean history venture into Caribbean history in order to make wider points, such as how Haiti contributed to discourses of human rights, without much understanding of the actual histories of these regions—a point David Geggus, a major historian of the Haitian Revolution, has made repeatedly.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, those historians who specialize in Caribbean history, such as the authors of these books, keep quite narrowly to manageable topics in which they try and increase our empirical knowledge of important components of Caribbean historiography.

Certainly, this is how I read the three books written by Christer Petley, Rebecca Hartkopf and Manuel Barcia. Each author has worked intensively and impressively in Caribbean archives in order to present finely grained studies of three significant slave societies between the French Revolution and the mid-nineteenth century: Jamaica, Martinique, and Cuba. Each makes a nod, and in the case of Petley in particular more than a nod, to the relatively new sub-discipline of Atlantic history but in the end each writer is mostly concerned with tracing the distinctive patterns of history over time in societies that they tend to see as distinctive. What strikes the reader, however, in reading all three together is that the commonalities between the colonies studied are greater than the differences. Both Schloss and Petley place a lot of emphasis upon *gens de couleur* and women as galvanizing influences in causing dominant white planters concern. Barcia puts less emphasis upon women but also pays attention to free people of colour as vital agents of change. Reflecting recent scholarship, all see the destruction of Saint-Domingue and the creation of the black republic, sometimes monarchy, of Haiti as the example and shadow that hovered over all Caribbean societies during the nineteenth century. Each are also concerned, as is also Landers in her rather different book, with trying to recapture the lives of individuals. For Petley, the key figure is the immensely rich Simon Taylor, whom he

sees as the authentic planter voice. Schloss uses the remarkable diaries of Pierre Dieudonné Dessalles for similar purpose. And in each of the three books, a dominant theme is the tension between white power and black resistance. Here, the deficiencies of evidence have an impact on how all four authors try and recreate past West Indian societies. Slaves, even in Barcia's careful reconstruction of Lucumís from the Oyo Empire in present-day southwestern Nigeria, have a shadowy presence in these books, in part because it is so difficult to recreate the lives of ordinary and often illiterate enslaved people.

The book with the richest evidentiary base is Petley's very impressive history of early nineteenth-century slaveholders. Petley has three fine chapters on the social, economic and political aspects of planter life. He shows that accounts of their economic decline as the slave trade came to an end were much exaggerated. His careful analysis of inventories and case study of the especially rich parish of St. James in north-west Jamaica shows that planters remained wealthier than might have been expected after the start of abolitionism. Drawing on records mainly in Jamaican archives, Petley confirms the power of the white elite in maintaining a profitable plantation system. He proves by careful empirical research that there was very little substance to older claims that the abolition of the slave trade spelled the end of white economic dominance and white Jamaican wealth. Europeans went to Jamaica to make money and many of them succeeded in their aim. Slavery was a way of making money and helped people stay rich, even when slavery was ended. Nicholas Draper has shown that the end of slavery just meant that slave owners were relieved of much of the responsibility of managing depreciating assets and instead got substantial cash infusion which they used in ways to accentuate privilege within the British Empire.<sup>10</sup> Where they were less powerful after the end of the slave trade was in the area of politics. They worked hard, but eventually unsuccessfully to counter the competing encroaches upon their authority by the imperial government, by free people of colour and eventually, in 1831, by enslaved people who attacked white planters in a massive assault. It is a well-told story. The major weakness is that Petley's determination to understand Jamaica from the viewpoint in trying to recreate the planter world view means that he does not investigate as much he might have the world of the slaves and how that was changing in the first three decades of the nineteenth century.

Thus, just as was the case for planters, the Baptist slave revolts of 1831 arise unexpectedly in Petley's account and in ways that made it hard to explain. Enslaved rebels failed in their ambitions and were put to death with the usual maximum cruelty that slaveholders exhibited towards slaves who dared to oppose them. But, as Petley eloquently



describes, the slaveholders lost also and perhaps more permanently. Planters used the example of the Haitian Revolution to proclaim that this sort of social and cultural disaster would also be visited upon Jamaica if imperial officials were so foolish as to follow through on emancipation. But imperial officials no longer concerned themselves much by the 1830s with the view of people they thought backward and undeservedly violent. The tale that Petley tells is thus one of loss and sadness. Planters lost the battle for representation and gradually declined in influence and eventually in wealth. But if emancipation transformed Jamaica, it did not lead to black prosperity. The end of planter dominance saw Jamaica become a political and most importantly an economic backwater—a great comedown from its assertive insistence that it was a vital support of the British Empire current in the eighteenth century.

Schloss's sensitively written history of the end period of slavery in nineteenth century Martinique, as seen mostly through the eyes of a planter class convinced the island was going to the dogs, is similarly elegiac and downbeat about how Martinique declined as abolition approached. She is mostly interested in questions of citizenship and identity in a society undergoing some considerable political change but very little economic change, at least until the emancipation of enslaved people occurred in 1848. The people who determine Martiniquian identity in her cultural history approach were white planters, white and brown women, and gens de couleur generally. She has much to say about each group. The best parts of her book revolve around white male identity, as exemplified in the Desalles family, especially early in the nineteenth century when they were rich but politically insecure. Martinique changed hands between the British and the French during the latter part of the Napoleonic War and Schloss's chapter on this episode is the richest in the book, arguing that the occupation played a significant role in strengthening the power of white Creole planters against a French state they felt intrusive. Throughout the period of her study there was a constant tug of war between colons keen to assert themselves and an imperial state eager to limit local expectations of autonomy. The principal power always lay in the hands of the imperial state but planters fought tenaciously to hold onto as much power as they could. Here, Martiniquian planters could only look longingly to the presumed greater power of planters in the British Caribbean and even more so, though Schloss does not make this point, to the fiercely independent planters of the booming ex-French colony of Louisiana.

Schloss has worked assiduously in the archives and has found out much new information about Martinique, which she is keen to present in much detail. She does not have as much control over her material as does Petley and the result is that the reader is sometimes overwhelmed

by the detail in her book, making it hard to see what the ultimate ambition of the book is, besides giving us some idea of how difficult it was for any member of Martiniquian society to be able to convince metropolitan Frenchmen that they were as French as anyone in France. I would have liked to have seen more interplay between what was happening in Martinique and what was happening in France in regard to determining the contours of colonial liberty. The island's *gens de couleur*, women, and even *petit blancs*, all challenged the hegemony of elite planters like Desalles but it was really imperial France that was the real opponent of the Creole dream of autonomy within the French Empire. Schloss's relentless focus on what happened in Martinique—often without it being put in the larger contexts that the reader needs to understand what was going on—diverts attention away from the contest between white planters and metropolitan Frenchmen. The former could never understand why their economic power—constant for much of the first three decades of the nineteenth century—did not equate into political power, as once it had done. The reason, as Schloss hints at but does not dwell on at length, was that the nineteenth century Atlantic world was one that existed after both the Age of Revolutions and also the founding of Saint-Domingue. That event haunted whites in Martinique. It was not quite so much a constraint for metropolitan France. As in many works that purport to be about Atlantic history, a reluctance to engage with the power structures of imperialism and a focus on the periphery rather than the center obscures some of the processes of historical change.

Schloss does not deal in much depth with the majority of the population who labored as slaves on Martinique's sugar plantations. She does accept, though does not elaborate upon, the commonplace notion that enslaved people fought against the plantation system in myriad ways. That commonplace is elaborated upon in more depth by Barcia in his careful investigation of patterns of resistance in the most dynamic area of slave produced agriculture in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The Age of Revolutions may have handicapped the planters of Jamaica and Martinique but its impact was either limited or mainly positive in Spanish America—a region in the Caribbean where abolitionism famously had less impact than elsewhere. Barcia uses court records to write a classic social history book. He explores the African background of slaves in western Cuba, as is nowadays fashionable, and argues that African captives experiences with war, especially if they were from the Oyo empire, the Gold Coast or the region that is now Sierra Leone and Liberia, made them predisposed to resist enslavement. Indeed, he argues, many of these captured warriors were time-bombs, set to explode into homicide, conspiracies and revolts.

Barcia traverses expertly the range of types of resistance that Cuban

slaves of African birth participated in, arguing strongly for the direct linkages between African heritage and Cuban actions. He downplays the significance of revolutionary ideas imported from elsewhere to Cuba—say, from Haiti—as the source of the surprisingly frequent revolts that occurred in western Cuba. He argues instead that slave's opposition to their enslavement arose out of their personal experience, especially their experience of life in Africa. It is a powerful and mostly convincing argument. The problem he has in making this argument, however, is that most slave revolts and conspiracies, as he admits, included Creole slaves and freemen, as well as Africans. It is a bit difficult to therefore argue for their intrinsically "African" character when many of the participants were not African-born. Moreover, as he shows in some detail, the mixture of Africans in the island was considerable—Cuba, like eighteenth century Jamaica but unlike nineteenth century Bahia, was a *mélange* of different African ethnicities. It is hard to see that Barcia has the evidentiary base that allows him to make such sweeping statements as he does about "Africanness." It is just as plausible that resistance was influenced by African inheritances but conditioned by Cuban experience. But in most cases it is hard to tell, given the intrinsic difficulty of working out what enslaved people were actually thinking when they chose to resist their condition.

What is also problematic about Barcia's generally exemplary research is that he does not question some of his fundamental assumptions, noticeably his assumption that resistance was something that came naturally to all enslaved people. He argues that for Africans freedom "was an unforgettable experience they were keen to regain and for which they were willing to die" (p. 132). How does he know this? Most enslaved people did not die as rebels but survived as slaves—was their desire to resist thwarted or were they somehow deficient as people? Barcia is so convinced that enslaved people wanted to resist slavery at any cost that he lumps in revolts, marronage, and suicide as if they were all similar forms of resistance. It may be that the likelihood of death was so certain that a slave deciding to revolt was embarking upon a suicidal mission but it is still difficult to see how suicides can be lumped together with revolts as if they were conceptually the same. I have always had great difficulty in arguments, such as Barcia makes, that assume that individual acts of pathology such as infanticide or suicide as best interpreted through the lenses of resistance. When someone kills oneself or kills one child, it is usually seen within the psychological literature as a sign of a deeply disturbed self. That so many slaves committed suicide may be less signs of their determination to upset their master than a sign that enslavement was so physically crushing that it led to pathological despair. I am not sure that we get to understand slaves better by thinking that their every willed act was an act of resistance. Moreover, and most importantly, if

the aim of every slave was to resist and to regain or gain freedom and that this is the measure by which the value of their lives should be judged, then most slaves who did not commit suicide, who did not kill their master or try and use the law to gain advantages for themselves, who did not escape into marronage and who did not plot, conspire, and revolt against their owners can be deemed to have lived lives that were failures. Barcia admonishes us at the end of his book to think of enslaved people as real people, not fictional characters but in assuming that we can see them as always resisting and as such always demonstrating the endurance of the human will, he doesn't follow his own wise advice.

What is missing from Barcia's account, and also from Schloss's book and to an extent with Petley's work, is a consideration of the power dynamics at work on the slave plantation. Evaluating what slaves did to counter how planters tried to dehumanize them without taking into account that they had little power and the people doing the dehumanizing had enormous resources in which they could get their own way is limited. What was important about those works of some generations past that connected West Indian history to American and European history was their close consideration of power relations. Without an examination of how power worked on the plantation and simultaneously how power operated in colonial settings our understanding of Caribbean social, economic, political, and cultural patterns is incomplete. Of course, Barcia, Petley, and Schloss are writing their first books and it is unfair to expect them to do too much along this line. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the author who contemplates the issue of power more comprehensively is Jane Landers, whose work builds upon her strong knowledge of Atlantic interactions in the circum-Caribbean of the American South and the West Indies.

Landers's book is more wide-ranging and ambitious than the relatively circumscribed books by more junior scholars. She is much less concerned with place than the other authors and much more interested in mobility. Her book is easily the book that is most explicitly Atlantic in orientation. She draws on the insights of Ira Berlin, who developed the notion of enslaved Africans who were Atlantic Creoles, men (usually) who came from cosmopolitan if often marginal backgrounds, and extends that concept from where Berlin placed it—before the introduction of the large plantation complex—and argues that there was a recrudescence in the phenomenon of the Atlantic Creole during the Age of Revolution. Her interest in power concerns the people who were usually powerless—enslaved people living in plantation societies. She shows how the fissures that arose in prolonged periods of warfare and disruption during the American, French, Haitian and Latin American Revolutions gave opportunities to black people and that some of the more enterprising

and lucky black people took advantage of these opportunities to forge interesting lives.

Only one of the black men whose unusual careers Landers chronicles is a person of world-historical importance. That man was Georges Biassou, a black general in the conflagrations that swept Saint-Domingue after 1793, and an early leader of slave rebels. Biassou has not received the attention he deserves, mainly because he remained a royalist and, as someone who switched allegiance early on to the King of Spain, was as much a counter-revolutionary as a revolutionary. Landers' aim in part is to introduce new and fascinating ex-slaves into historical discourse—men like the intriguing Prince Whitten, an African born slave who moved from British South Carolina to Spanish Florida in the tumults of revolutionary change in the Gulf Coast region. More than this, she wants to argue that these cosmopolitan Atlantic Creoles who moved between empires and between various kinds of status show us how power relations functioned in the Atlantic world during the Age of Revolutions. The Atlantic World of the greater Caribbean was a world of fluidity rather than stability which means, it is implied, that close grained studies of single colonies or regions miss the dynamism that marked the region out. The world she describes, and the black Atlantic Creoles who fashioned out of uncertain times lives of some meaning for themselves, was one where mutability was constant and adaptation was paramount. It was a very modern world, she insists, and understanding how these Atlantic Creoles operated helps us understand their contribution to the making of the modern world. It is a bold and brave historical assertion that is not always borne out by the facts. We can see these Atlantic Creoles in part as creators of their own destiny but can also see them just as easily as victims of changing times, borne aloft on the flotsam of revolutionary detritus. Her emphasis on individual agency might have been balanced more by attention to the structural constraints and possibilities that were embodied in the powerful imperial systems in which individuals were encased.

Landers' book, however, points to the direction in which scholarship on the Caribbean during the age of Revolutions should go. We need the kind of close studies that are exemplified in the books by Petley, Schloss, and Barcia, because without the sort of empirical evidence they provide, it is hard to move to firm conclusions about the nature of Caribbean society in this period. Yet we also need books that put forward the sort of grand themes that Landers tries to put forward. The new trends in history stress shifting spatial boundaries, the significances of empires as much as nations in shaping historical development, and how the interconnectedness of individual interactions led towards modernity. These are all themes drawn out in Landers' book. The trick now for Caribbean

historians is to show that this developing empirical base of historical knowledge and these depictions of the people and lands of the Caribbean as highly significant zones influencing larger patterns of historical change needs to be taken into account by historians trying to understand what was and was not distinctive about the changing world created out an age of revolution and the related growth of emancipatory politics.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Abbé Raynal, as cited in Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War with Revolutionary France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 6.
- <sup>2</sup> Jeremy D. Popkin, *You Are All Free: the Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- <sup>3</sup> Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York: Random House, 2008); Rebecca Scott and Jean Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).
- <sup>4</sup> Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Random House, 2011); Andrew O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Nicholas Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-ownership, Compensation, and British Society at the End of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- <sup>5</sup> William Doyle, *The Oxford Handbook of the Ancien Régime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Edward Gray and Jane Kamensky, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- <sup>6</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based Upon her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990); Donna Merwick, *Stuyvesant Bound: An Essay on Loss Across Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).
- <sup>7</sup> William Doyle, "Slavery and Serfdom," in idem, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Ancien Régime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 271. This theme is expanded upon in Paul Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce: Globalization and the French Monarchy* (Cambridge,

MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*.

<sup>9</sup> David Geggus, "Haiti and its Revolution: Four New Books," *Radical History Review* 115 (2013), 195-202.

<sup>10</sup> Draper, *Price of Emancipation*.