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The Impact of the Congress of Vienna on Caribbean Politics and Society*

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Franklin W. Knight



As the first black faculty member to gain academic tenure at The Johns Hopkins University, Dr. Franklin W. Knight is important in the African-American history of the University. In 1973, Dr. Knight joined the Hopkins faculty as part of the internationally recognized Atlantic History and Culture Program. Since that time his academic and teaching interests have remained focused on the politics, cultures and societies of Latin America and the Caribbean as well as American slave systems. He has published numerous books, including *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (Oxford, 1978; 2nd Edition, revised 1990; 3rd edition, 2012), *The Modern Caribbean*, co-edited with Colin A. Palmer (University of North Carolina Press, 1989), *The Slave Societies of the Caribbean* (Macmillan, 1997) and *Las Casas: An Introduction, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies* (Hackett, 2003) to name just a few. His latest publication, *Contemporary Caribbean Cultures and Societies in a Global Context*, co-edited with Teresita Martinez-Vergne (University of North Carolina Press, 2005). His *Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biographies* edited with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. will appear from Oxford University Press in 2016. His analyses of Latin American and Caribbean history and politics have aired on National Public Radio, the Voice of America, the British Broadcasting Corporation, the McNeil/Lehrer Report, C-SPAN and a range of local radio and television programs.

Dr. Knight's contributions to the Hopkins community are also numerous. For more than thirty years, Dr. Knight has mentored a wide range of graduate and undergraduate students -- many of whom are now leading scholars of Caribbean and Latin American history in the own right. Between 1974 and 1982, he co-edited the Johns Hopkins University Press series, *Studies in Atlantic History, Culture and Society*. Dr. Knight is currently the Leonard and Helen R. Stulman Professor *Emeritus* of History and Academy Professor. Email: fknight1@jhu.edu

*F*or the hundreds of international delegates gathered at Vienna two hundred years ago, the focus of attention was, understandably, (as we have heard so many times,) the reconstitution of the European political frontiers severely altered during the French Revolutionary military campaigns between 1794 and 1814. The Napoleonic changes affected far more than just geographical boundaries and nominal administrations. There was also a major change in general mentality and political discourse, reflected in the comments of the English-Jamaican planter Bryan Edwards to his colleagues in the British Parliament in 1798:

*The times in which we live will constitute an awful period in the history of the world; for a spirit of subversion has gone forth, which sets at nought the wisdom of our ancestors and the lessons of experience.*¹

Edwards was obviously bemoaning threats to his comfortable way of life, but his lament would become relevant for all societies from that time onward.² The Atlantic World was truly undergoing an age of revolutions.

The delegates at Vienna were patently representative of the European privileged classes. Nevertheless, they fully realized that they were entering a new age.³ The French wars on the continent and overseas had introduced fundamental changes in political attitudes, in military organization, and in administrative hierarchies, not only to France but also to the hundreds of large and small European states affected by Napoleon's nationalist reformism. Yet, few fully understood how profoundly the changes in their world were reciprocally

¹ Cited in J.H. Parry, Philip Sherlock and Anthony Maingot, *A Short History of the West Indies*. Fourth Edition. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p.136

² See, Franco Venturi, *The End of the Old Regime in Europe, 1768-1776. The First Crisis*. Translated by R. Burr Litchfield. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.)

³ The delegates and the general atmosphere are captured graphically in David King, *Vienna 1814. How the Conquerors of Napoleon Made Love, War, and Peace at the Congress of Vienna*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008)

related to the wider non-European world – and that situation would continue for at least the next generation.

And fewer of the delegates at Vienna had any idea how to draw up generally acceptable plans to efficaciously address the disconcertingly new realities of a changed and



Figure 1: Battle of Waterloo by William Sadler II (1782-1839). Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Battle_of_Waterloo_1815.PNG

constantly changing world.⁴ For such plans would require an inherent dynamism that was instinctively contrary to their conservative and atavistic tendencies. Moreover, a balance of power designed to keep the peace in Europe would have increasingly less effect overseas. Despite the plethora of private agendas, those delegates assembled in Vienna

⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1996 [1962]), pp. 99-108; Adam Zamoyski, *Rites of Peace: The Fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), pp.257-258; Barbara Jelavich, *The Habsburg Empire in European Affairs, 1814-1918*. (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), pp. 13-20; Allan J. Kuethe and Kenneth Andrien, *The Spanish Atlantic World in the Eighteenth Century: War and the Bourbon Reforms, 1715-1796*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Gabriel Paquette, *Enlightenment, Governance and Reform in Spain and its Empire, 1759-1808*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

had two interconnected preoccupations that centered on themselves and their place in the new Europe.

One concern was obviously to prevent the return of Napoleon Bonaparte to power in France. The other concern was to roll the clock back as far as feasible to restore the status quo that existed before 1789. Many delegates, however, accepted that that was an impossible task, the more so given the mutual suspicions and private ambitions that prevailed among some delegates.⁵ After all, the overthrow of Napoleon did not effectively end the zealous appeal of the contagious bourgeois ideas that were slowly spreading across the Atlantic world, nor did it satisfy the territorial ambitions of some of the major players such as Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia.

These Eurocentric preoccupations of boundaries and status at the Congress of Vienna in 1814 overshadowed the vast enormous changes that were taking place in the wider world. The Atlantic World was transiting between mercantilism and bullionism on the one hand and free trade and industrial capitalism on the other. Imperialism made an indelible imprint on all trading societies and consequently on markets everywhere. European problems had become inextricably linked with overseas problems as parts of those overseas empires manifested an irresistible urge to create new nation states. Therefore, the problem at Vienna concerned restraining imperial reform and controlling imperial disintegration in such an effervescent age.⁶

Of course, such political reforms and imperial disintegration began long before the French Revolution and would continue long after the members of that famous Congress left

⁵ King, Vienna, 1814, pp. 263-268.

⁶ Manuela Albertone and Antonio De Francesco, editors, *Rethinking the Atlantic World: Europe and America in the age of Democratic Revolutions*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.)

Vienna.⁷ Those ongoing changes resulted from the major secularization of thought that characterized much of the Western World from around the middle decades of the seventeenth century – with the publication of Descartes' *Discourse on Method* (1637) and Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1685) – to the middle of the nineteenth century. As indicated before, the progressive transformation ushered in a new age as well as a new mentality with a new political discourse closely linked to economic self-interest.

One has only to recall how Guillaume Thomas François, the Abbé Raynal, began his six-volume-study, *A philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, first published in French in 1770:

No event has been so interesting to mankind in general, and to the inhabitants of Europe in particular, as the discovery of the New World, and the passage to India by the Cape of Good Hope. It gave rise to a revolution in the commerce, and in the power of nations; as well as in the manners, industry, and government of the whole world. At this period, new connections were formed by the inhabitants of the most distant regions for the supply of wants they had never before experienced. The productions of climates situated under the equator were consumed in countries bordering the pole; the industry of the north was transplanted to the south; and the inhabitants of the west were clothed with the manufactures of the east; a general intercourse of opinions, laws and customs, diseases and remedies, virtues and vices, was established among men... Everything has changed, and must change again. But it is a question, whether the revolutions that are past, or those which must hereafter take place, have been, or can be, of any

⁷ An example of reform is the bold attempt by Charles III of Spain in the 1760s. See, Peter Bakewell, *A History of Spanish America*. 2nd Edition. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp.285-290. Imperial disintegration began with the independence of the United States of America and continued with that of Haiti and the mainland Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the early nineteenth century. See also, Kuethe and Andrien, *The Spanish Atlantic World in the Eighteenth Century*; Paquette, *Spain and its Empire*; and Gabriel Paquette, *Imperial Portugal in the age of the Atlantic Revolutions: The Luso-Brazilian World, c.1770-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

*utility to the human race. Will they add to the tranquility, the happiness, and the pleasures of mankind? Can they improve our present state, or do they only change it?*⁸

This new age, perfectly illustrated by the thinking of Raynal, or of Adam Smith, is generally described in English as the Age of the Enlightenment, in French as the *Éclaircissement*, in Spanish as *el siglo de las luces*, and in German as *die Aufklärung*.⁹ It ended the Middle Ages and made modernity and scientific enquiry fashionable across Western Europe, especially among the elites.

Not surprisingly, political revolutions constituted a prominent dimension of the Age of Enlightenment. For nothing seemed more irrational in political leadership than hereditary monarchy.¹⁰ The political revolutions of the Age of Enlightenment all addressed the nature of government and although historians tend to concentrate on the American and French Revolutions, there were really three great interconnected revolutions and a series of minor ones on both sides of the Atlantic between 1776 and 1814. This transatlantic revolutionary turmoil was still in full swing as the delegates negotiated in fun-filled Vienna in 1814.

The three major revolutions took place in British North America between 1776 and 1783; in France between 1789 and 1814; and in the French Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue,

⁸ The Abbe Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*. Translated by J.O. Justamond, F.R.S. 2nd edition. (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969 [1798]), pp. 1-2.

⁹ The Enlightenment is generally accepted as the radical intellectual transformation that took place between the late sixteenth century and the early nineteenth century. The bibliography is enormous but the contours may be gleaned from Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism*. (London: Wildwood House, 1973); Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenments*. (New York: Random House, 2004); Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment*. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 2001); Robert Darnton, *The Business of the Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775-1800*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Enlightenment*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955); Daniel Roche, *France in Enlightenment*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); and Johnathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution and Human Rights, 1750-1790*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ A good example of this thinking may be found in Simón Bolívar's Letter from Jamaica of September 6, 1815, "Reply of a South American to a Gentleman of this Island [Jamaica]" in *Selected Writings of Bolivar*. Translated by Lewis Bertrand. (New York: The Colonial Press, 1951).pp.11-12

which liberated itself and established the free state of Haiti between 1791 and 1804. These three major revolutions accompanied and influenced other revolutions all across Spanish America and peripheral parts of Europe.¹¹ Political revolutions were, however, not only an event but also a process. There is much written about revolutions as events. There is far less written about revolutions as a process. Nevertheless, the concept appears in works by Crane Brinton and R. R. Palmer and others who have explored the theoretical aspects of revolution.¹²

By 1814, the revolutionary process had been going on for more than a hundred years. It manifested itself explosively in Philadelphia in 1776 and in Versailles in 1789 and especially in North Province, in the French colony of Saint-Domingue in August 1791. Although these three incidents tended to have a definite dramatic beginning, in truth all three revolutions underwent continuous transformation and in many cases had an imprecise denouement. In short, those revolutions started with a bang but, except in the case of Saint-Domingue, ended in a whimper. Nor should it surprise that the revolutionary process did not assume a common form in all three locations. In this sense Crane Brinton's teleological metaphor of revolutions does not appear to have much theoretical application.

Of course, in order to do justice to the questions raised by the Abbé Raynal, or to attempt any proper comparison of revolutions, one must provide a precise definition of the term. For my purposes, **I define a revolution as a fundamental change in the social basis of**

¹¹ Christon I. Archer, editor, *The Wars of Independence in Spanish America*. (Wilmington, DE: Jaguar Books, 2000); Arthur P. Whitaker, *The United States and the Independence of Latin America, 1800-1830*. (New York: Norton, 1964); Antonio García-Baquero González, *Comercio colonial y guerras revolucionarias*. (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1972); Lester D. Langley, *The Americas in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1850*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

¹² Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*. Rev. Edition. (New York: Prentice Hall, 1952); R. R. Palmer and David Armitage, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: a Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Thomas G. Hart, *The Dynamics of Revolution. A Cybernetic Theory of Modern Social Revolution with a study of ideological change and organizational dynamics in the Chinese Revolution*. (Stockholm: Stockholms Universitet, 1971).

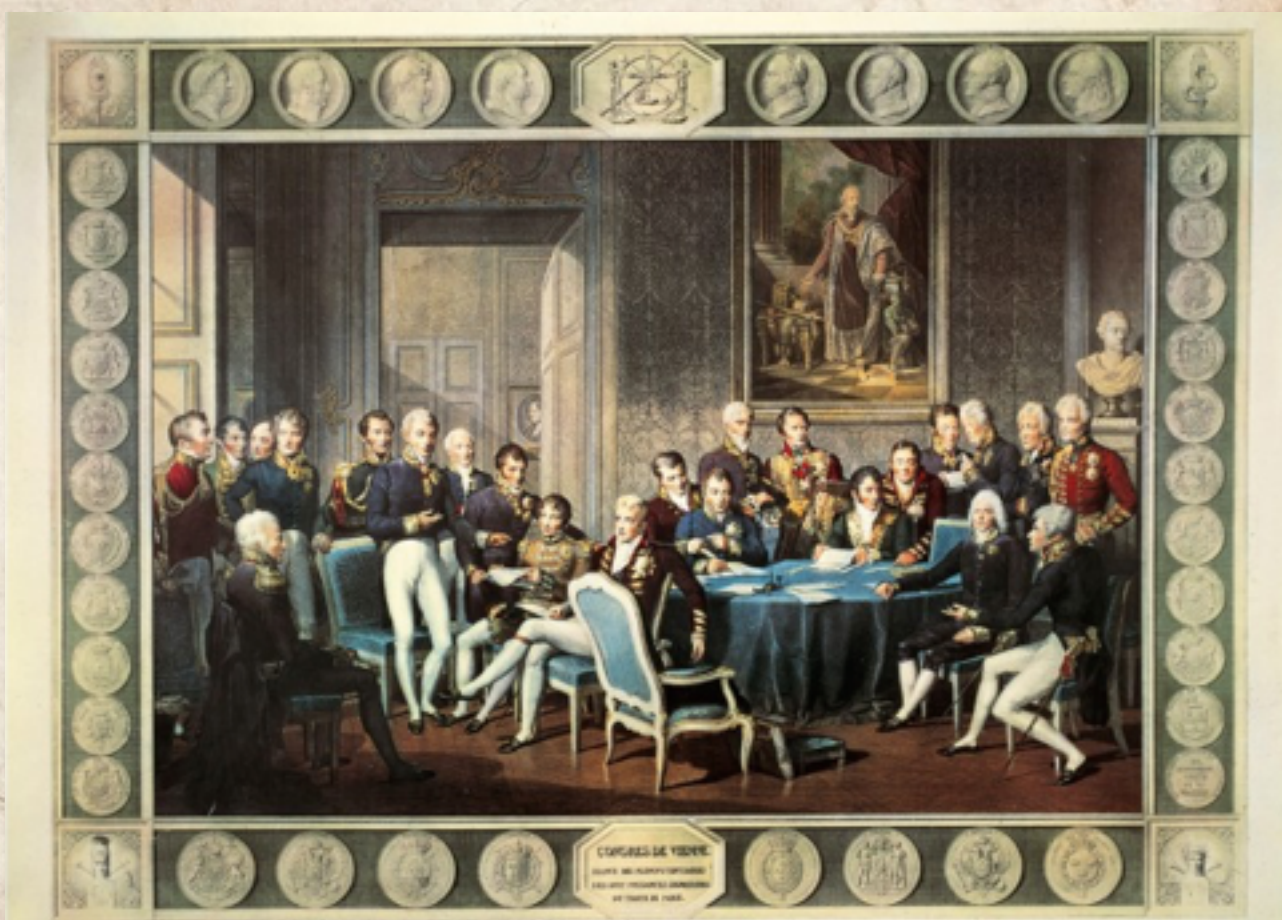


Figure 2: The Congress of Vienna. Source: <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/jahre-wiener-kongress-als-die-tyrannei-der-werte-fehlte-1.2151601>

political power. That allows us to differentiate between genuine revolutions across a wide spectrum of society and simple personnel changes of the administration of the state more characteristic of a *coup d'état*. To have a thorough revolution, political power must significantly change to involve groups with a distinctly different approach to the organization of the state.

That is what I mean by a fundamental change in the social basis of political power.

This definition can be tested by looking at the three examples of revolution that most

preoccupied the delegates at Vienna in 1814.

The American Revolution that ended with the creation of the United States of America was less a social revolution than a great political revolt. No significant changes took place in the social basis of political power. The local colonial political elite that exercised considerable political autonomy before 1776 continued to do so after independence was achieved in 1783. That group strengthened their local political clout but active political participation—and especially political leadership—remained narrowly confined to the small sector of self-selected males of means who already constituted the elites in those far-flung colonies. Political independence allowed them to avoid paying taxes to Great Britain, thus making them successful tax evaders.

This social continuity, despite the rhetoric, is the point that Jack P. Greene makes emphatically in his article on the American Revolution, published in 2000 in *The American Historical Review*:

*With astonishingly few exceptions, however, leaders of late colonial regimes retained authority through the transition to republicanism, and the republican regimes they created in 1776 and after bore a striking resemblance to the social politics they replaced.*¹³

And this, in part, explains why the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Declaration of Independence of the of the Thirteen United States of America both issued in 1776 reflect such closely parallel expression. They were written by the same socio-

¹³ Jack P. Greene, "The American Revolution" in *The American Historical Review*, Volume 105, Number 1 (February 2000): 92-102. The quotation is on page 101. See also, Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.) See Also, Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Alison G. Olson, "British Politics in the Wake of the American Revolution" in Prosser Gifford, editor, *The Treaty of Paris (1783) in a Changing States System*. (Washington: University Press of America, 1985), pp. 47-74.

economic class with an amazingly similar world view expressed in a universalizing discourse of republican democracy.

Section 1 of the declaration of Rights of the People of Virginia written by James Madison and George Mason states:

That all men are by nature equally free and independent and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity: namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.

After its short preamble, the Declaration of Independence composed by Thomas Jefferson from Virginia and Benjamin Franklin from Pennsylvania reads:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness...

Alexander Hamilton, the good friend of the hero of Vienna, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, put it bluntly in 1787 when he argued during the Constitutional Convention that “all communities divide themselves into the few and the many. The first are the rich and well-born, the other the mass of the people.”¹⁴ Government, he insisted, should be the prerogative of the rich and well-born because the masses lacked the consistency and virtuous qualities required in leaders.

So the government established by the newly created United States of America in 1783 was basically anti-democratic and inherently exclusionary. Talking about democracy was not

¹⁴ Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*. (New York: W.W.Norton Company, 2005), p.32

equivalent to practicing democracy – a conflictive reality that would plague the state for the following two hundred years.

This does not suggest that the American Revolution can be categorized simply or easily. Walter McDougall reminds us of the discourse on wealth and ideology in ***Freedom Just Around the Corner***. He writes:

Was the American rebellion caused by conflicts over wealth or ideology, a backward-looking Whig mentality or a future-oriented American dream, a secular discourse of human rights and equality or an evangelical discourse of corruption and virtue? The answer is all of the above, because the whole experience of the colonists dating back to 1607 – and the twin vocabularies they used to interpret that experience – made self-government, religious freedom, economic opportunity, and territorial growth inseparable. Almost anyone from Massachusetts to Georgia could agree that: civil and religious liberty went hand in hand; liberty could not long survive without virtue; an exploding population could aspire to no liberty at all if its territorial expansion were artificially choked. Of course no two colonies or social groups within each colony translated their commitment to liberty to laws and institutions in exactly the same way. But by 1776 all American patriots called the cause of liberty “sacred” and endowed their glorious cause with the attributes of a religion, including a creation myth, a theology, a moral code, a martyrology, and a teleology promising a limitless “empire of liberty” (in Jefferson’s words) if Americans snapped the chains of the Old World corruption and made themselves worthy through abstinence, courage, faith, and community...all patriots made America itself a sort of religion – and that made resistance to Britain and Tories at home into a holy war.¹⁵

¹⁵ Walter A. McDougall, *Freedom Just around the Corner. A New American History, 1585-1828*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004), p. 209.

Nevertheless, the American Revolution probably justifies its appellation (rather than just describing it as a rebellion or a mutiny) because it established a viable and highly reproducible precedent for state formation in the modern world, providing a rational and enlightened alternative to the hereditary dynasties of Europe. The American Revolution changed the parameters of political discourse and became an attractive model of political engineering that quickly became widely contagious, even among noble Frenchmen like the Marquis de Lafayette and Prince Talleyrand.¹⁶ Total control of the local state apparatus permitted Americans to expand their commerce thereby breaking the restrictions of British-imposed mercantilist practices. In short, the American Revolution was essentially a political revolution to achieve specific economic ends with a new political vocabulary that introduced social democracy as a dimension of political aspiration. This was essentially the appeal to French Caribbean colonials in 1789.

Different circumstances, of course, produce different results. The French Revolution from 1789 to 1814 was notably more inclusionary and democratic because it had no other options. Unlike the British North American colonies, France was a major competitor in the European states system and it also had a very successful overseas empire in 1789. The overseas empire introduced race as well as class to the political discourse on democracy. The French revolution established citizenship as a fundamental right and seriously undermined the domestic public appeal of dynastic government by eliminating the monarchy. More than that, it also unleashed a new sense of nationalism as a potent centripetal force across much of the European continent. This is where most of the delegates in Vienna could not understand the full implications of Napoleon or how the French Revolutionary reality was affected by the fact of empire. The reality of empire introduced novel elements to citizenship that Europeans found hard to understand.

Nowhere did the complexity of democratic citizenship work itself out more chaotically than

¹⁶ François Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees who shaped a Nation*. (New York: The Penguin Press, 2014.)

in the French colony of Saint Domingue, for it brought together politics, economic interests, race, color and condition as essential considerations in any definition of citizenship. With considerable justification, the colonists prided themselves as the most successful in the world and considered their economic achievements as important aspects in defining metropolitan citizenship.

According to historian David Geggus, Saint-Domingue in the 1780s accounted for

*... some 40 percent of France's foreign trade, its 7,000 or so plantations were absorbing by the 1790s also 10-15 percent of United States exports and had important commercial links with the British and Spanish West Indies as well. On the coastal plains of this colony little larger than Wales was grown about two-fifths of the world's sugar, while from its mountainous interior came over half of the world's coffee.*¹⁷

In the France of the 1780s the political Estates enjoyed a long political tradition based on a social hierarchy that was closely related to genealogy and hallowed by antiquity. It was a profoundly unequal system of power distribution that discriminated most against the increasingly wealthy urban bourgeoisie.¹⁸ The colonial dimension introduced a baffling complexity compounded by semantic inadequacy when the Estates tried to accommodate the colonial representatives and precisely define French citizenship in 1789.

For many reasons any imperial system – or any constellation of power units for that matter – will always generate continuous tension between the center and the periphery. This was especially so when distance produced an inevitable time lag in communications. Often, administrators at the periphery were forced to take local decisions before they could get

¹⁷ David Geggus, *Slavery, War and Revolution: the British Occupation of Saint-Domingue, 1793-1798*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 6.

¹⁸ David Geggus, *Slavery, War and Revolution: the British Occupation of Saint-Domingue, 1793-1798*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 6.

proper instructions from the center, or prudence might dictate that orders from the center could not be implemented without jeopardizing the imperial relationship. Such situations produced the frequent Spanish colonial bureaucratic attitude of *obedezco pero no cumplo* – I obey but I do not comply.

If the French Revolution was the initial spark that ignited the Haitian Revolution, it did not take long for the two revolutions to deviate sharply as the discussions about political representation and citizenship got heated. Unlike the relative antiquity of French society and politics, Caribbean societies were relatively new, artificially engineered, and notoriously volatile.¹⁹ Therefore, France and its overseas colonies were a cosmopolitan empire that could not be easily reconciled.

The novelty of the Caribbean colonial situation did not produce a separate and particular language reflective of its peculiar reality. In the case of the French Caribbean colonies the limitations of a common language resulted in a pathetic confusion with tragic consequences when discourse degenerated into military conflict in 1790.

Frenchmen at home and overseas were hopelessly and inevitably divided over the popular political slogans generated by the revolution – Liberty, Equality and Fraternity as well as the Rights of Man.²⁰ Neither literally nor connotatively did the slogans have equal application in France and overseas. Even the Estates General, and later, the National Assembly simply could not understand the degree to which a common language, deemed essential for national identification, could produce such deep division and insoluble confusion.

¹⁹ Franklin W. Knight, editor, General History of the Caribbean. Volume III. The Slave Societies of the Caribbean. (London: UNESCO/Macmillan, 1997).

²⁰ Philip D. Curtin, "The Declarations of the Rights of Man in Saint-Domingue, 1788-1791," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 30:2 (May 1950): 157-175; John Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*. (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2006), pp.109-170; Laurent DuBois, *A Colony of Citizens. Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 85-221.

The confusion sprung from two principal sources: the social composition of the colonies; and the different ways in which local groups interpreted and particularized the metropolitan revolutionary slogans.

In the first place the *cahiers de doléances* from the colonies overwhelmingly represented not views from a cross-section of the population as they did in France but rather from a few wealthy plantation owners and middling merchants, a number of whom were absentees resident in the metropolis.²¹ Moreover, as the French were to find out eventually, the colony of Saint-Domingue was unusually complex not only geographically but also demographically. The three provinces clearly illustrated the befuddling complexity of people and production.

The entire free population constituted a minority of the colony. The wealthy, articulate mainly expatriate sugar producers of the *Plain du Nord*, were a distinctly small numerical minority within this small free minority. For those large producer-exporters the issues of slavery as well as free commerce were important considerations. The interests and preoccupations of the middling commercial sorts and petit bureaucrats from West Province in the center of the colony and the mainly free coloreds from South Province were vastly different. West Province had a number of small towns with small mixed-product farmers and white urban commercial types who sincerely believed that they were true citizens by virtue of the color of their skins as well as the fact of many having been born in France. Coffee dominated the economy of South Province and supported a growing number of affluent and well-educated free non-white persons whose claim to citizenship was based on their personal wealth and high culture.

Locally the colonists divided themselves into *grands blancs*, *petits blancs*, *gens de couleur* and *esclaves* (slaves), reflecting their relationship to production as much as their color,

²¹ Unfortunately Gilbert Shapiro and John Markoff do not include the colonial *cahiers* in their analysis but it is obvious that many of the Third Estate *cahiers* would also reflect the colonial sentiments of the free sectors of local society. Shapiro and Markoff, *Revolutionary Demands*, pp. 377-430.

class and legal status.²² Each segment of the free population appropriated and then particularized and promoted only such portions of the metropolitan-generated slogans that applied to their individual purposes. And so eventually would the slaves.

Much like the framers of the North American declaration of independence in Philadelphia in 1776, French colonial *grands blancs* emphasized liberty and the Rights of Man. By that, they meant the rights and privileges of the bourgeois man; what is more, they saw liberty not as a matter of individual freedom but rather as greater colonial autonomy, especially in economic matters. They hoped that the metropolis would authorize greater free trade thereby weakening the constraining effects of the mercantilist *excusif* that regulated commerce between metropolis and colony.

Petits blancs stressed equality, an active citizenship for all white persons, not just wealthy property owners. They also wanted less bureaucratic control over the colonies and the continued subordination of all non-whites. Their fraternity was based on a whiteness of skin color that they assumed to signify genuine French-ness.

For *gens de couleur* the principal issues were the equality and fraternity of all free people regardless of skin color since in every respect they fulfilled all other qualifications for active citizenship. This position approximated a general declaration of basic human rights – except that it overlooked the vast majority of the population who were enslaved.

Discourses on liberty whether in France or overseas could not be separated from a number of other considerations that involved race, color, condition and economic activity.

²² Laurent Dubois and John Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804. A brief History with Documents*. New York; Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006), pp. 9-46; David Geggus, "The Haitian Revolution" in Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer, editors, *The Modern Caribbean*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 21-50; DuBois, *A Colony of Citizens*, pp.30-73; Garrigus, *Before Haiti*, pp. 51-82 and 171-194; and Stewart R. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig. Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint-Domingue*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

At first, the enslaved were not a part of the sloganeering and public discourse, but from their subsequent actions, especially after August 1791, they clearly supported liberty. However, it was not the narrow and nuanced self-serving liberty of the upper-sector whites, but a personal freedom that, if implemented, threatened to undermine their relationship with their masters as well as the plantation structure, thus jeopardizing the wealth of a considerable number of all those who were legally free.



Figure 3: "La Balance Politique", a caricature of the Congress of Vienna, 1815. Source: <http://www.magnoliabox.com/art/338632/la-balance-politique-a-caricature-of-the-congress-of-vienna-1815>

The failure to consistently recognize and incorporate these divergent colonial views proved

fatal for the larger French national economy and eventually for the military prowess of France under Napoleon. This is not to say that at some times, in some places and by some individuals, the fundamental differences between colony and metropolis were not accepted and acted upon.

In general, the policies of the metropolis moved increasingly toward greater political exclusion of non-revolutionaries. First, royalists were eliminated and the fleeting leadership sought to expand the political power base as well as the privileges of the bourgeoisie. By this political litmus test after 1794 the colonial free coloreds appeared to be more revolutionary than colonial whites, especially the *petits blancs*. Power in the colonies moved gradually downward to the majority masses of enslaved, who quickly implemented their peculiar version of liberty, equality and fraternity. And this could be seen as early as 1793 before Toussaint Louverture took command of the black forces in Saint-Domingue.

When it was all over in 1804, the residents of Saint-Domingue had redefined citizenship and created the most revolutionary society found anywhere – and the second independent state in the Western Hemisphere. The recently enslaved became full citizens of a society that legally abolished distinctions of race, color, gender, and national origin.²³ Haiti weaved together race and nationality within their new identity. Haitians fundamentally changed the political organization of their state, the economic basis of their society, as well as the social basis of political power. No other revolution anywhere in the history of the world has achieved such a fundamental transformation.

The new constitution written by Toussaint Louverture in 1801 declared all citizens to be free, equal before the law, and black – a declaration that had profound significance among

²³ Dubois, A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Anne Pérotin-Dumon, Être patriote sous les tropiques : La Guadeloupe, la colonisation et la révolution (1789-1794). Basse-Terre : Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe, 1985).

Atlantic slave societies from Boston to Buenos Aires.²⁴ He also designated himself Governor-General for life with the privilege of nominating his successor. Bonaparte's refusal to accept an autonomous Saint-Domingue resulted in the total independence of the colony under Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who announced a new constitution that repeated the bold assertions of the earlier one -including that *Haitians will henceforth only be known generically as Blacks*.²⁵

The establishment of the free state of Haiti in 1804 represented the most significant political event in Caribbean history since the arrival of Christopher Columbus. But other significant political changes were taking place throughout the eighteenth century across the Caribbean.²⁶ The sugar revolutions arrived in Cuba in the later eighteenth century and the unforeseen demise of sugar production in French Saint Domingue after 1792 stimulated a second sugar revolution (and introduced coffee as a major economic activity)

²⁴ See, Laurent Dubois, *Les esclaves de la République : l'Histoire oubliée de la première émancipation, 1789-1794*. (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1998); Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004); Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti; The Saint-Domingue Revolution from Below*. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990); C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins. Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. (New York: Random House, 1963 [1938]); Thomas Ott, *Thé Haitian Revolution, 1789-1804*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973); David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier. Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); David Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint Domingue, 1793-1798*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); Robert Debs Heintz and Nancy Gordon Heintz, *Written in Blood. The story of the Haitian People, 1492-1971*. (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1978); David Barry Gaspar and David P. Geggus, editors, *A Turbulent Time. The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Franklin W. Knight, "The Haitian Revolution" *American Historical Review*, 105:1 (February 2000):103-115; Franklin W. Knight, "The Haitian Revolution and Human Rights" *The Journal of the Historical Society* 5:3 (Fall, 2005): 391-416; Laurent Dubois and John Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804. A Brief History with Documents*. (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006);

²⁵ Dubois and Garrigus, *Slave Revolution*, p.193.

²⁶ Allan J. Kuethe, *Military Reform and Society in New Granada, 1773-1808*. (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978); Allan J. Kuethe and Kenneth J. Andrien, *The Spanish Atlantic World in the Eighteenth Century: War and the Bourbon Reforms, 1713-1796*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.)

on that neighboring island early in the 1830s.²⁷

That French imperial combination of metropolis and colony created a reality that was quite different from the parochial situation of the rebellious overseas British colonies. Moreover, the social bases of political power could not have been more different in France and its overseas colonies, especially those in the Caribbean (It was also different from the British North American colonies.)

Puerto Rico also experienced the expanding wave of expanding sugar production along with the recently acquired British colonies of Trinidad (captured from the Spanish in 1797) and British Guiana (taken from the Dutch in 1803 and confirmed in 1814). St. Lucia, captured from the French in 1803 did not become a slave society after it was officially ceded in 1814. On the other hand, the Caribbean territories captured (in some cases several times) between the Seven Years War (1756-1763) and the Congress of Vienna reinforced the impression of British naval hegemony and strengthened its bargaining position during the Congress of Vienna.²⁸ Yet, that position was not strong enough to secure – even with the ample and judicious distribution of bribes – the universal abolition of the international slave trade in 1815, but all that was still in the future.

External threats had forced France to focus its attention at home as it rapidly became a nation in arms after 1794. It eventually lost its rich colony of Saint-Domingue along with

²⁷ María del Carmen Barcia, Gloria García and Eduardo Torres-Cuevas, *Historia de Cuba. La Colonia: Evolución socioeconómico y formación nacional de los orígenes hasta 1867*. (Havana: Ciencias Sociales, 1994), pp. 225-464; Franklin W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba During the Nineteenth Century*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970); Franklin W. Knight, *Caribbean*, pp. 62-164; Roland T. Ely, *Cuando reinaba su majestad el azúcar: estudio histórico-sociológico de una tragedia Latino-Americana*. 2nd edition. (Havana: Imagen Contemporánea, 2001 [1994]); Manuel Moreno Fragnals, *El ingenio: el complejo económico-social cubano del azúcar, 1760-1860*. 3 volumes. (Havana: Ciencias Sociales, 1978); B. W. Higman, "The Sugar Revolution", *Economic History Review*, 53:2 (May 2000): 213-236; Oscar Zanetti and Alejandro García, *Sugar and Railroads: A Cuban History, 1837-1959*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

²⁸ Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 307-311; King, *Vienna*, pp.34-37. It should be noted that Great Britain was still at war with the United States of America at the beginning of the Congress.

nearly 40,000 of the finest French troops and sold the Louisiana territory to the United States of America in 1803; hence, by the time of the Congress, France was a far less imposing imperial power than before the revolution in Saint-Domingue. Nevertheless, thanks in large measure to Talleyrand, it continued to behave like a major imperial power in Vienna.

With all those changes going on around the Caribbean, the indelible legacies of imperialism across the Atlantic would, like a ghostly figure, overshadow the Congress of Vienna. The various treaties that followed the Congress of Vienna reaffirmed the Caribbean territorial adjustments and in light of the British and American initiatives to terminate their trans-Atlantic slave trades in 1808, that commerce was generally condemned – despite the fact that the overwhelming number of states participating in the Congress had never participated in that despicable commerce. Despite strenuous efforts, Great Britain signally failed to gain international agreement for the total abolition of the transatlantic slave trade at Vienna.²⁹

From the Caribbean perspective, the Congress of Vienna was relevant in three interrelated areas: the territorial rectifications following the various wars; the ongoing transatlantic slave trade and Caribbean slavery; and the production of sugar and the international sugar market.

The Caribbean territorial acquisitions of Great Britain – St. Lucia, Grenada, St. Vincent, Trinidad, Tobago, and British Guianas – created an administrative split between the older colonies such as Barbados, Antigua, St. Kitts, Nevis, Jamaica – and those newer ones. By

²⁹ Nor should it be overlooked that despite its legal abolition of the overseas slave trade in 1807, the United States had a booming domestic slave trade until 1861. See, Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders and Slaves in the Old South*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). Robert Edgar Conrad believes that between 1810 and 1860 nearly a million slaves were sold across state borders but that figures is dwarfed by the numbers of slaves who were sold within the separate Southern States. Robert Conrad, "The Slave Trade: Brazil and the United States", in Seymour Drescher and Stanley L. Engerman, editors, *A Historical Guide to World Slavery*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Pp. 375-382.

the late eighteenth century, the earlier settled and captured British Caribbean colonies had become transformed into exploitation plantation slave societies. Nevertheless, they continued to pretend that they were microcosms of English society and that their representative assemblies continued to reflect the political equivalents of the British

Parliament. However, nothing, could be farther from the truth. By 1800, a mere 12 percent of the local population of the British West Indies was white. Although after 1797 the British Crown directly administered newly acquired Caribbean colonies, those were allowed to continue the laws and administrative forms of the Dutch in Essequibo, Berbice and Demerara, and of the Spanish in Trinidad.³⁰ More importantly, British naval hegemony had seriously undermined the principles of mercantilism. With a global empire and ruling the oceans as it did, the British were no longer as interested in the protected and privileged Caribbean sugar producers of the old pre-Napoleonic empire. Under such circumstances, the older English sugar-producing colonies saw some short-term advantage in supporting the termination of a transatlantic slave trade that could provide laborers for their potential plantation-producing rivals with ample virgin lands.

The British abolition of the slave trade in 1808 was a harbinger of the emergence of industrial capitalism and free trade.³¹ The transatlantic slave trade and sugar production, despite still being enormously lucrative, were no longer the most profitable routes to

³⁰ Frank Moya Pons, *History of the Caribbean*. (Princeton: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 2007), pp. 126-168; Hilary Beckles, *A History of Barbados From Amerindian settlement to nation-state*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 41-74; Hilary McD. Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627-1715*. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), pp. 79-139; Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962*. (Kingston: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 32-75; Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 217-279; Robert Louis Stein, *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), pp. 1-92; Selwyn H.H. Carrington, *The British West Indies during the American Revolution*. (Dordrecht, Holland: Fortis, 1988), pp. 102-181; Selwyn H.H. Carrington, *The Sugar Industry and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1775-1810*. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002), pp. 221-276; Robert Louis Stein, *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Patrick Villiers, "The Slave and Colonial Trade in France Just Before the Revolution" in Barbara L. Solow, Editor, *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 210-236.

³¹ Barbara L. Solow, Editor, *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

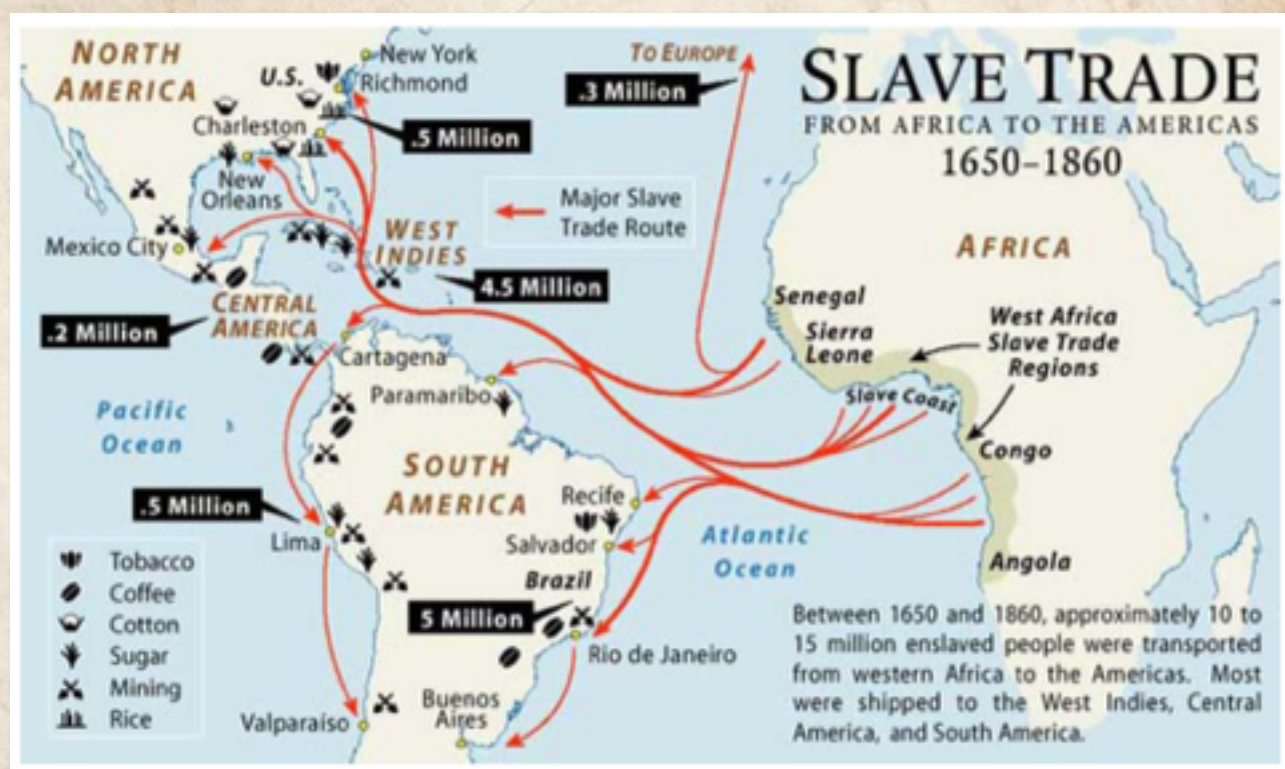


Figure 4: Slave trade from Africa to the Americas, 1650-1860. Source: <http://www.unc.edu/wrc/maps.html>

individual and national wealth. The new diversified trades in cotton, tea, silk and opium were more attractive, and in most cases, less regulated.³² By 1828, Cuba was producing more sugar than Jamaica, the largest single exporter of the British West while in British Guiana sugar production was more than half that of Jamaica.³³ And the older producers would lose out even more as economies of scale were applied under the expanding central factory system.

The Congress of Vienna did not directly address the problem of cane sugar production. The British Caribbean cane sugar producers, despite marked overall increase in production and productivity in Trinidad, Barbados and British Guiana, were about to enter

³² William J. Bernstein, *A Splendid Exchange: How Trade Shaped the World*. (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008), pp. 280-315.

³³ Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, pp. 366-367.

a period of continual crisis for the next one hundred years. The threat came from two sources: the first one was the global expansion of sugarcane growing not only to neighboring slaveholding territories such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and British Guiana but also to free labor producers in South Africa and Australia. Sugar prices in Britain, despite their imperial preference, slowly declined nullifying the efforts of the older producers to offset the decline with new industrial technology that boosted production and productivity. The second one was the development by Napoleon of sugar beet as a reliable source of sugar. By 1814, most continental countries, led by France, Germany and Russia were already depending to an increasing degree on domestic-supplied beet sugar, further eroding the pre-war continental British export market for Caribbean-derived cane sugar.³⁴ By 1830, France was the major beet grower in the world and the neighboring Germanic states were major beet sugar producers.

Conclusion

In the final analysis the impact of the Congress of Vienna, while not altogether unimportant for the Caribbean, was not germane to the ongoing changes in politics, society and economy that were taking place across the region. Still, the fact that Britain, France and Spain were major colonial powers meant that their negotiations before and during the Congress would indirectly affect their Caribbean colonial possessions. The French and British Caribbean experienced the greatest changes. France lost its most important Caribbean colony in Saint Domingue and by 1814 depended more on sugar derived from domestic beet than from sugarcane. France also abolished its slave trade and for a time, lost its interest in its minor Caribbean possessions. Sugar production sharply declined in the French Caribbean. The British Caribbean gradually lost their significance as important sources of trade and wealth accumulation within the expanding interests of a globalizing and industrializing Great Britain. Spain lost its mainland colonies (although not until 1825)

³⁴ Ph. G. Chalmin, "Important Trends in Sugar Diplomacy Before 1914" in Bill Albert and Adrian Graves, *Crisis and Change in the International Sugar Economy 1860-1914*. (Edinburgh: ISC Press, 1984), pp.9-19. See also, Woodruff, *Impact of Western Man*, pp. 264-268.

and thereafter Cuba and Puerto Rico assumed greater importance within the diminished Spanish empire. Cuba would eventually become the single most important producer of sugar for the world market until the Cuban Revolution in 1959.

From the Caribbean perspective, there were six areas in which some degree of impact from the Congress of Vienna could be measured:

1. Slavery and coerced labor. The Congress supported the abolition of the international transatlantic slave trade and the abolition of slavery in principle. It prohibited the mutual enslavement of Christians and non-Christians in the Mediterranean, but that had little effect in the Caribbean which drew its African slaves from south of the Sahara and East Africa. The institution of slavery would continue for more than seventy years in the Caribbean, but with the abolition of slavery in Haiti, slave systems everywhere slowly began to disintegrate.
2. The British standardized their political administrations in the Caribbean providing direct Crown Colony government for the newly acquired territories. This was a tacit admission that these areas were not considered microcosms of British society but rather peculiar colonies designed specifically for the production of commercial export crops. The entire British Caribbean would lose its imperial significance after 1814 as Great Britain became more industrialized and its capitalist and commercial interests became more global.
3. With the establishment of the independent state of Haiti – boosted by the proliferation of independent states on the mainland, significant changes took place in the political culture of Caribbean states. Cuba, in particular, developed a precocious form of proto-nationalism, a pronounced *conciencia de sí* which would be troublesome for its metropolis throughout the nineteenth century. The redefinition of French citizenship gave political representation to the French Antilles within the metropolitan parliament.
4. The emergence of British naval hegemony propelled Great Britain toward more free

trade on a globalized scale, leaving its Caribbean possessions at an increasing disadvantage given their limited scale of plantation production. On the other hand, places like Cuba, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and British Guiana combined their virgin lands and new technologies to expand production so they would continue to compete successfully on the world sugar market for a longer period.

5. Free trade diversified commerce and so banking systems had to be introduced across the Caribbean to handle the local monetary requirements, especially as the labor systems changed from slave labor to wage labor. Paper money and tokens became an important aspect of this diversified commercial system.³⁵
6. Finally, the expansion of beet sugar production (beginning with the continental blockade of the Napoleonic Wars) significantly changed the world sugar market during the nineteenth century. Sugar beet was a temperate climate crop with a much shorter growing season than the tropical sugar cane. Moreover, sugar beet was a crop that more efficaciously complemented cereal and dairy production than sugar cane. In the long run, sugar beet would become the serious rival to sugar cane on the world sugar market until the middle of the twentieth century when both yielded to artificial sweeteners.

For these reasons, 1814 does not appear as one of the significant dates in Caribbean history.

³⁵ Banks came gradually to the Caribbean and it was not until around the middle of the nineteenth century that local banks became accepted components of local and international trade. See, Conseil Général de la Guadeloupe, *Un siècle de Banque à la Guadeloupe, 1850-1990*. (Guadeloupe : Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles de la Guadeloupe, 1996) ; Alain Buffon, *Les Billets de banque de la Caraïbe. Collection Maurice Muszynski*. (Guadeloupe : Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles, n.d.) ; Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *El token azucarero cubano*. (Havana : Museo Numismático de Cuba, n.d.)