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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Rafe Blaufarb. *Bonapartists in the Borderlands: French Exiles and Refugees on the Gulf Coast, 1815-1835.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005. xix + 302 pp. $50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8173-1487-3.

Reviewed by Ashli White (Department of History, University of Miami)
Published on H-Atlantic (October, 2006)

Atlanticizing the Antebellum West

Rafe Blaufarb's *Bonapartists in the Borderlands* is an account of the Vine and Olive Colony, an endeavor by French exiles in the late 1810s and 1820s to cultivate coveted Mediterranean produce (grapes and olives, as the name suggests) in Alabama. Deeply researched in archives throughout the United States, Europe, and Latin America, Blaufarb's case study is an astute illustration of the benefits of using an Atlantic approach to microhistory.

The author's interest in the colony is twofold: first, he looks to set the record straight. Almost since its founding, the Vine and Olive Colony has been cast as a bungled attempt by dashing French aristocrats to tame the Alabama wilderness. Ill-equipped to handle the vagaries of frontier life, the aristocrats, so the story goes, abandoned their plots within a few years and left the business of land improvement to hardy white Americans. Blaufarb argues that this version says more about the creation of southern planter identity than about the colony itself, and thanks to dogged social historical research, he shows how the archives belie this popular view.

A few aristocrats were associated with the venture, but the French continental exiles were usually men of military rank, who made their reputations from battlefield exploits during the Bonapartist wars. According to Blaufarb, these former soldiers held shares, but rarely settled in the colony; instead, Saint-Dominguan refugees of middling means dominated the grantee rolls. Coming mostly from Philadelphia and often linked by business and marriage ties, the Saint-Dominguans tried to turn a profit. The colony faced enormous setbacks, as neither grapevines nor olive trees were well suited to the climate, and disease, hard labor, and infighting took their toll; yet the settlers were not simply supplanted by American peers. Blaufarb demonstrates that in the 1820s and 1830s a select group of Frenchmen and Anglo-Americans consolidated their land claims, made the move to cotton and slavery, and forged an elite bound together by economic interest as well as personal ties.

This revision is certainly significant for scholars of Alabama history and the U.S. west, as it penetrates fundamental myths about continental expansion. Yet the author also contends that the Vine and Olive Colony is important for his second goal, namely to implement "a truly Atlantic approach to the history of the early nineteenth century" (p. xix). In particular, Blaufarb turns to the methods and sources of diplomatic history in order to reveal how the Vine and Olive Colony was a site for Atlantic geopolitics.

The Vine and Olive Colony stood at a kind of crossroads, where key issues in the United States, Latin America, and Europe intersected and played out on the ground. First, there was the contentious relationship between the United States and Spain over borders near Florida and Texas. The U.S. Congress endorsed the Frenchmen's scheme in the hopes that it would help to secure the Gulf region and to pressure Spain to give up Florida. In addition, Spanish officials watched the colony carefully, worried that the continental exiles–those restless military men looking for action–would use the settlement as a launching pad for stirring up trouble in Latin America and Europe. Their suspicions were not necessarily unfounded, as General Charles-François-Antoine Lallemand, a Bonapartist exile, leveraged his financial and personal ties to the Vine and Olive Colony to support a bizarre and botched invasion of Texas. The French were no less uneasy than their Spanish counterparts regarding the new endeavor: they feared that the disgruntled exiles would take advantage of their secluded location to hatch plots detrimental to the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy.

Through Blaufarb's diplomatic frame we see how U.S. westward expansion was, in many ways, Atlantic. From the transnational backgrounds of migrants to the consequences of settlement, the Vine and Olive Colony indicates that the national context, which normally domi-

nates our understanding of the nineteenth-century west, is only part of the story. All too often studies of the Atlantic world stop at 1800 and privilege Anglophone connections. But Blaufarb illustrates the Atlantic character of the nineteenth century and the centrality of Spain, France, and Latin America to that character. In so doing, his work offers exciting directions–both temporal and spatial–for further scholarship.

Although these contributions are noteworthy, some of Blaufarb's central points warrant further elaboration. Even as Blaufarb makes a case for the "Atlantic-ness" of the early nineteenth century, he stops short of discussing how the Atlantic world of this era differed from or was similar to previous centuries, and the implications of these similarities and differences for Atlantic history more generally. He gestures to these questions briefly when he mentions that the Vine and Olive Colony marked the end of a land settlement strategy that had typified the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but he leaves the reader wondering about other convergences and divergences and their impact on the arc of Atlantic history.

Also, the notion of the "borderlands" seems essential to the author's discussion, yet he shies away from considering the "borderlands" and the "Atlantic" both as concepts (how they are defined) and as methodological tools (how should we apply them). Given the recent debates over the "borderlands" and the "Atlantic," Blaufarb has missed an opportunity to weigh in more emphatically about these two paradigms and, most interestingly, how they interact with one another.

That said, *Bonapartists in the Borderlands* provides a helpful model for making local history resonate on a larger scale. Blaufarb's elegantly written work encourages us to pursue more avenues for writing the history of the antebellum U.S. west from an Atlantic perspective.

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Citation: Ashli White. Review of Blaufarb, Rafe, *Bonapartists in the Borderlands: French Exiles and Refugees on the Gulf Coast, 1815-1835.* H-Atlantic, H-Net Reviews. October, 2006.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12371

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