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Ashli White. *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. ix + 267 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-9415-2.

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The Web They Wove

In the last two decades, a wave of books dealing with the Haitian Revolution and its impact on the Atlantic world has appeared. From Laurent Dubois's elegant survey (*Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* [2004]) to Madison Smartt Bell's novelistic trilogy (*All Souls Rising: A Novel of Haiti* [1995], *Master of the Crossroads* [2000], and *The Stone That the Builder Refused* [2004]), from Jeremy D. Popkin's well-chosen collection of eyewitness accounts (*Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* [2007]) to Susan Buck-Morss's (*Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* [2009]) and Sibylle Fischer's (*Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* [2004]) assessments of the relative modernity of Caribbean slave revolt, and from Carolyn Fick's groundbreaking treatment of Saint Dominguan maroons and voodoo rituals (*The Making of Haiti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution from Below* [1990]) to Matthew J. Clavin's exploration of the meaning of Haitian revolutionary imagery during the American Civil War (*Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution* [2009]), scholars have been drawn to an event that for too long remained mostly hidden in the shadows.[1] So compelling is this new field that various conferences–including two large ones in 2004, the bicentennial of Haiti's declaration of independence–have been devoted to it.[2] In addition, recent accounts of what is frequently termed the Age of Revolutions all place the Saint Dominguan uprising of 1791 on an equal footing with the American, British, and Latin American revolutions.[3] The Haitian Revolution, in brief, is hot.

With *Encountering Revolution*, Ashli White makes a significant contribution to this burgeoning field. Eschewing what she describes as the "chain" paradigm of Atlantic revolution, "in which political principles and activity at one site inform revolution in another," White concentrates on the "web model," wherein a network of diverse peoples constantly act upon each other as dynamic receptors and agents (p. 6). Along the same lines, the author does not follow the diasporic interpretive method with its "quantitative breakdowns of population demographics," "extensive biographies of exiles," and "in-depth account[s] of community building and identity formation." Instead, White writes, "this work focuses on interactions between U.S. residents and Saint-Dominguan refugees" (p. 8). The result is something akin to what Eliga H. Gould recently described as "entangled history." For just as Gould discussed "interconnected processes" that decisively shaped the "British and Spanish Atlantic worlds throughout the early modern era," so White analyzes overlapping developments that mutually constituted the United States and the French Caribbean.[4] A crucial irony in White's study, then, is the degree to which the "entangled" nature of Saint Dominguan and American developments in the 1790s played a critical role in the process of nation making. The author is well aware of this irony and, drawing on Peter S. Onuf's groundbreaking work on nationhood in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, astutely argues that "Saint-Domingue was central to initial U.S. attempts to stake out a place as a sovereign nation in the thriving Atlantic system" (p. 7).[5]

The first section of chapter 1 offers an examination of the ways in which, "from an Atlantic perspective, Saint-Domingue and the United States shared key traits that made them comparable, particularly their urban ar-

eas" (p. 13). According to White, cities like Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Cap Francais, Saint Domingue, were "second-tier New World cities" that depended on the thriving Atlantic port system of trade (p. 16). Both were also cosmopolitan places that experienced building and population booms in the late eighteenth century. Many European Americans in both cities, moreover, felt ambivalence regarding their status as Creoles; eager to counter the rhetorical slights of Europeans who saw them as degenerates living beyond the pale, they nevertheless expressed concern about the lack of civilizing institutions around them. All in all, White summarizes, "contrasts [between Saint Dominguan and U.S. cities] certainly existed, yet more noteworthy are the common characteristics" (p. 16).

In some ways, this opening section is the weakest of the book. White never explains, for one thing, why "common characteristics" were more significant than the "contrasts." Indeed, simply relying on the evidence the author provides regarding divergences–there was a much larger percentage of slaves in Saint Domingue and a much smaller and weaker community of free blacks in the United States, for instance–it can easily be argued that the differences between Saint Domingue and the United States were more "noteworthy" than the similarities. From a philosophy of history perspective, moreover, it would have been worthwhile if White had somehow broached the issue of how exactly historians should make judgments about whether resemblances or differences are "more noteworthy." What is more, the emphasis on "structural similarities between Saint-Dominguan and U.S. cities" subtly undermines the "web model" of Atlantic revolutions, in the sense that it unintentionally threatens to transform a host of complicated geopolitical and sociocultural relationships into a rather straightforward depiction of virtual sameness across national boundaries, of a rigid international grid lacking historical nuance (p. 49).

Fortunately, this less than convincing viewpoint on the similarities between the United States and Saint Domingue does not seriously impinge on or even inform most of the discussion in *Encountering Revolution*. The latter parts of chapter 1, for example, offer a highly informative description of the social and cultural dynamics surrounding the arrival of Saint Dominguan refugees in the United States. According to White, most white exiles rented rooms in urban boardinghouses in large part because they assumed (or hoped) that the slave rebellion on their native island would be crushed quickly, which would in turn allow them to return to their homes in the Caribbean. Once settled in the United States, these refugees paid rent not only by selling their property (including "textiles, silver, and slaves"), but also by working in "almost every line of employment" (pp. 26, 32). Because they faced stiff competition in urban settings, white Saint Dominguans "played up their backgrounds to bring in business" and to acquire jobs (p. 34). Last but not least, white refugees joined Catholic churches in large numbers, dramatically "chang[ing] the make-up of [particular] congregations," helping to construct new buildings, and occasionally prompting controversy (p. 29).

For their part, Haitian slaves who came to the United States found rooms in "ramshackle backyard sheds or slept inside their masters' houses on the floor" (p. 25). As in their Caribbean homeland, enslaved individuals usually worked as domestic laborers. Yet as White adroitly points out, "while the actual labor performed by most black refugees did not change, the conditions of their work did" (p. 33). In particular, many slaves were rented out to local American citizens or worked side by side with their white Caribbean masters. Some individuals in bondage, meanwhile, took advantage of gradual emancipation laws in the North and gained their liberty. Different as their experience of work and newfound freedom was, Caribbean blacks nonetheless mirrored their white counterparts in that they joined American Catholic churches in large numbers.

In chapter 2, White skillfully delineates the controversies associated with the Enlightenment concept of "philanthropy" and how it might apply to the Saint Dominguan exiles. Although many white Americans were predisposed to view slave rebellion in the Caribbean as a natural outgrowth of the indolence, greed, and incompetence of Haitian masters, they nevertheless put aside those fears when thousands of exiles began pouring into American port cities in the summer of 1793. Indeed, rather than focusing on the vices of the masters, American newspaper writers homed in on the supposed savagery and malevolence of the slave rebels. This jaundiced view of the revolt in turn converted tyrannical Caribbean masters into unfortunate victims in need of sympathy, and many residents of the United States on both sides of the political aisle responded with dramatic action. More specifically, Americans at the local, state, and national levels offered their homes to white refugees, raised money for relief, and put on benefit theatrical performances. Aside from the fact that demand always outstripped charity supplies, significant problems plagued those seeking to assist white Saint Dominguan refugees. For one thing, it was difficult to determine which indi-

viduals and groups were most in need of support. In addition, White writes, "relief committees based their budgets on the supposition that the influx of refugees would be short, yet exiles continued to arrive in significant numbers" well past the summer of 1793 (p. 69). Accounts of price gouging by American shopkeepers and merchants contributed yet another layer of turmoil and grief. Finally, when Congress took up the issue of relief for Saint Dominguan refugees in 1794, still another problem emerged–namely, did the federal government have the authority to allocate funds to foreign exiles in need? On the one hand, Thomas Jefferson and like-minded individuals responded in the negative because doing so would represent an unconstitutional usurpation of state sovereignty. Elias Boudinot and those of his ilk, on the other hand, argued that the "general welfare" clause of Section 8 of the Constitution, as well as motives of humanitarianism, practically dictated congressional action in favor of the Saint Dominguan exiles. In the end, Congress appropriated fifteen thousand dollars for the refugees, although it cleverly sidestepped issues of state versus federal authority by stipulating that the relief money was to be taken from the money the United States owed France for the latter's assistance during the American Revolutionary War. As with state and local monies, however, federal assistance ran out rather quickly, and although "renewed campaigns for the exiles" emerged at various points throughout the 1790s, "the inconsistency of donations required many refugees to fend for themselves, look to private organizations or the French state, or enter charitable institutions such as almshouses, workhouses, and orphanages" (p. 77).

Even as they were the objects of relief efforts, Saint Dominguan exiles weighed in on debates over benevolence, in large part because they considered themselves "victims of French Revolutionary philanthropy gone awry" (p. 78). More to the point, "the white refugees associated French philanthropy with abolitionist sentiments" (p. 79). Although this section of chapter 2 would have benefited from insights contained in Evan Radcliffe's work on universal benevolence, White nonetheless does a stellar job of clarifying the major elements of the white exiles' claim that they were victims of abolition-tinged philanthropy.[6] Indeed, as the author shows, many Saint Dominguans living in the United States–including Bernard-Barnabe O'Shiell and Monsieur Chotard–contended that the Amis des Noirs in France grabbed hold of the abolition issue in order to promulgate anarchic, Jacobin conspiracies. The result of this "false philanthropy," according to some, was not only the downfall of civic order in France, but also "carnage" and "destruction" on an unspeakable scale in Saint Domingue (pp. 79, 82). Truly "*reflecting* sensibility" supposedly directed its efforts at white refugees rather than black rebels (p. 85).

Discussions of philanthropy, false masks, and abolition societies quite naturally overlapped with heated debates over the "political affiliations of the white [refugee] population," and chapter 3 consequently discusses the partisan maneuverings of white Saint Dominguan refugees in the United States (p. 88). Confronted with the charge that they were aristocrats who "had provoked their bondsmen to revolt, with the intent of blaming the French Revolution for inciting the rebellion," Caribbean planter exiles argued that they were in fact patriotic republicans undone by the corrupt actions of Leger-Felicite Sonthonax and Etienne Polverel, the most prominent French revolutionary commissioners sent to Saint Domingue, and Citizen Genet, the first minister of the French Republic to the United States (p. 90). Sonthonax and Polverel earned the disdain of many Saint Dominguan whites by deporting numerous suspected royalists and by giving freedom to slaves who fought in republican military units. Genet merited scorn not only because he was in league with Sonthonax and Polverel, but also because he characterized Saint Dominguan exiles as "counter-revolutionists" unworthy of American charity (p. 107). Planter refugees' claims that they were loyal to the French revolutionary cause were made problematic, however, by the fact that some in their cohort were–as Genet had asserted–diehard, outspoken royalists. Indeed, so brazen were some antirevolutionary Saint Dominguan whites in the United States that they publicly toasted the Duke of Brunswick, the Prussian commander leading the military onslaught on Paris in the summer and early fall of 1792.

Americans listening to and seeing these conflicting reports about the political loyalties of white Saint Dominguan exiles responded by frequently taking sides, even as they lamented the factionalization of the public sphere. One manifestation of this polarization was the 1794-95 congressional debate over the naturalization of immigrants. During this little-known legislative scrap, Democratic-Republican William Branch Giles proposed an amendment stating that any aristocratic emigrant to the United States must renounce all claims to nobility before becoming a citizen. Federalist Samuel Dexter, in response, proposed an additional amendment whereby all new emigrants to the United States would "renounce all right and claim" to holding other humans as property

(p. 114). "In the end," White writes, "Dexter's resolution failed and Giles's passed–a predictable outcome given the prevailing attitudes toward slavery" in the United States (p. 115). Perhaps more significantly, the author suggests with a great deal of acuity, the debate over Dexter's and Giles's amendments illuminated the contorted political position of white Saint Dominguans in the United States. On the one hand, Caribbean planters took delight in Federalists' attacks against the excesses of the French Revolution. On the other hand, white refugees from Haiti "found comfort in the Democratic Republicans' determination to uphold slavery and white property rights" (p. 115). Thus the "entangled" experiences of Saint Dominguan exiles and politically active Americans resulted in something much more complicated than straightforward partisanship. Indeed, just as race in Saint Domingue was not necessarily a predictor of political loyalties, so refugee and slave-owning status in the United States dictated ambivalent sympathies.

American proceedings over the fate of the Saint Dominguan refugees were mirrored–at least to a degree–by events in France. Twice in the 1790s, French legislators debated the legal situation of Haitian exiles. In the first instance, during the 1795 hearings of Sonthonax and Polverel before the Colonial Commission, it was determined not only that the controversial republican commissioners were blameless, but also that the Saint Dominguan exiles were a threat to France and its colonial possessions. Two years later, a 1797-98 debate over whether the Saint Dominguan exiles were legitimate "refugees" or disloyal "émigrés" resulted in a decision to evaluate on an individual basis the status of white Saint Dominguans who fled their homeland during the slave uprising. This latter debate was particularly poignant for Haitian Revolution refugees because it occurred at the same time that Americans were reeling from the XYZ Affair and considering repressive measures against various immigrants.

In the end, then, the politics of refugee loyalty cannot be easily characterized because it crisscrossed various national, regional, and ideological boundaries. The refugees "existed in a kind of political no man's land," White comments. "Whereas other groups, like the Girondins and Jacobins, rode a revolutionary wave until it crested and finally broke, the Saint-Dominguans were constantly treading the tumultuous political waters of the Atlantic. Aristocratic associations dogged them, yet the competing and ever changing visions of republicanism both in France and the United States made the exiles difficult to discount completely" (p. 122). The analysis here is exactly right and speaks to the author's ability to portray the complicated fullness of political debate in an era when some Caribbean exiles readily entered into–or more accurately, were part and parcel of–partisan dynamics in three distinct nations. Indeed, by drawing on an array of Saint Dominguan, American, and French primary sources, White contextualizes her subjects with a keen eye toward transnational relationships and irony.

Irony also plays a prominent role in chapter 4, which focuses on American responses to the "contagion of rebellion." Although most "present-day appraisals of the effects of the Haitian Revolution [on the United States] typically emphasize the fear that it evoked among Atlantic slaveholders," White forcefully shows that popular reaction to Saint Dominguan slave rebellion was much more complex (p. 125). For while racial paranoia and worries about a Haiti-like uprising informed the opinions of many individuals, a belief in the uniqueness of the American Republic and its purportedly superior version of slavery simultaneously operated quite powerfully. This "enormous confidence in the health and stability of their society" rested on a self-flattering comparison of Caribbean and American slavery (p. 125). Whereas the former, according to residents of the United States, was characterized by tyrannical masters, unspeakable working and living conditions, and the enervating climate of the West Indies, the latter was eminently "humane" (p. 129). The "hell of negroes, the West-India islands" thus drove Saint Dominguan slaves to revolt, whereas supposedly good conditions in the United States preempted any possibility of slave insurgency (p. 126).

In many ways, White's insight about Americans' confidence in their slave society is the most striking, original, and important of the book. To be sure, most of her citations buttressing this theme come from newspapers, which inclined toward propaganda and thus sought to create feelings and attitudes that may or may not have been reflected in the populace at large. In that vein, White's argument about Americans' faith in their slave system would have been stronger if she had quoted more liberally from private sources, like planter letters and diaries. Even so, the evidence White has gathered is sufficiently compelling to prompt a major reworking of the conclusions scholars draw regarding popular responses to the Haitian Revolution in the United States. From now on, historians of the early Republic will have to balance assertions about widespread fear of slave uprising with statements about many white Americans' nonchalant attitude toward–and sometimes even disregard of–the possibility of slave revolution in the United States. Only a few years after thousands of slaves fled their masters

in order to fight for the British in the American Revolution, only a few years before Gabriel's conspiracy in Richmond, Virginia, and only a few decades before Nat Turner's Rebellion in Virginia, white Americans somehow managed to "convince themselves [that] their society was immune from rebellion" (p. 133). This extraordinary faith in the stability of American slavery reveals not only the depths of human beings' capacity for self-delusion, but also the relationship between transnational history and nationalist ideology. More specifically, many white residents of the United States delineated an exceptionalist national narrative precisely because they were confronted with the realities of the Haitian Revolution, precisely because their fate was intertwined with that of Caribbean masters and slaves.

The ways in which the future of the United States was connected to that of Haiti came to light once again in 1809, when another large wave of Saint Dominguan refugees–approximately ten thousand in all–appeared in American cities via Cuba. Most of these refugees, White states in the fifth and final chapter, headed toward New Orleans, which at the time was a small city of seventeen thousand people. As in the 1790s, the influx of exiles in 1809 created tremendous social problems, and residents of the United States "organized charity campaigns" (p. 173). More troublesome was the fact that the American abolition of the international slave trade took effect on January 1, 1808, which raised the question of whether planter refugees' slaves should be admitted into the country. Most southern states decided to bar "the entry of black and colored refugees in 1809," in large part because, after the Haitian declaration of independence in 1804, "Caribbean slaves, in particular those from Saint-Domingue, were seen as tainted by their experiences ... and likely to bring insurrection to the United States" (p. 177). In the then-territory of Louisiana, Governor William Claiborne's "actions [initially] resembled those of officials in Georgia and South Carolina: slaves and free people of color had to remain on board" (p. 191). Within a matter of weeks, however, Claiborne changed course to accommodate pressure from Saint Dominguan masters, francophone residents living in New Orleans, and the logistical difficulties posed by thousands of slaves stationed in the harbor in boats. More specifically, the governor released exiled slaves to their owners as long as the latter agreed to certain stipulations. Claiborne justified this action by insisting that the dispersal of black and white Saint Dominguan exiles into the countryside would simultaneously promote settlement of the land and "neutralize the threat of slave rebellion" (p. 193). Others worried about the "horrors of St. Domingo," however, and very soon the issue of Louisiana's admission of Haitian slaves into their territory sparked political debate at the national level (p. 196). In June 1809, Congress decided to grant Louisiana an exemption to the slave-trade ban, with supporters of the bill suggesting that exigent circumstances demanded flexibility. Yet as White shrewdly notes, the rhetorical "gymnastics employed in favor of an exemption circumvented the real problem at hand: if Congress held the refugees accountable to the law, how would federal officials enforce it? " (p. 197). More than three thousand slaves accordingly entered New Orleans in 1809 and 1810, which meant that once again, Americans came face to face with a substantial cohort of Saint Dominguan refugees, who very quickly "founded gazettes and schools, ran theaters and ballets, filled the pews of Catholic churches, and engaged in trade, crafts, and plantation agriculture" (p. 201).

With these five illuminating chapters, as well as a useful introduction and conclusion, White has written the go-to or standard account of the Haitian Revolution's impact on the United States. Even more important, she has done so in a way that opens up rather than closes off new avenues of exploration. For one thing, even this rather lengthy review does not do full justice to the range of historical and historiographical topics explored by the author. Although it would have been helpful if White had weighed in directly on the relevance and recent criticism of Michel-Rolph Trouillot's oft-cited assertion that contemporaries of the Haitian Revolution silenced the realities of the Saint Dominguan slave rebellion because they could not comprehend it (*Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* [1995]), readers will nonetheless have little trouble finding particular arguments and anecdotes worth further exploration and analysis.[7] In addition, White has fleshed out various border-crossing phenomena in a way that helps explain the emergence of American exceptionalist ideology. Too often transnationalism and nationalism are depicted as opposites that have little relation to each other. Yet as White shows, it is impossible to understand the emergence of American nationalism without coming to terms with its transnational roots.[8] "Entangled history," in that sense, is not simply a faddish term; it is a version of scholarship wherein some of the most complicated, significant historical developments can be most fully understood.

Notes

[1]. See also Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief His-*

tory with Documents (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 2006); Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Jeremy D. Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus, eds., *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); David Patrick Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); David Patrick Geggus, ed., *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); Madison Smartt Bell, *Toussaint Louverture: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon, 2007); Tim Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy: Haitian-American Relations during the Early Republic* (Westport: Praeger, 2003); Doris L. Garraway, ed., *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008); David Patrick Geggus and Norman Fiering, eds., *The World of the Haitian Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988); Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); James Alexander Dun, "Philadelphia not Philanthropolis: The Limits of Pennsylvanian Antislavery in the Era of the Haitian Revolution," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 135, no. 1 (2011): 73-102; and James Alexander Dun, " 'What avenues of commerce, will you, Americans, not explore!': Commercial Philadelphia's Vantage onto the Early Haitian Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2005): 473-504.

[2]. Garraway, ed., *The Tree of Liberty*; and Geggus and Fiering, eds., *The World of the Haitian Revolution* are both products of large conferences. The former came from a symposium entitled "The Haitian Revolution: History, Memory, Representation," held at Northwestern University on October 22-23, 2004. The latter was the product of a conference held at the John Carter Brown Library from June 17-20, 2004.

[3]. See, for example, David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Manuela Albertone and Antonino De Francesco, eds., *Rethinking the Atlantic World: Europe and America in the Age of Democratic Revolutions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

[4]. Eliga H. Gould, "Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (2007): 764-786, esp. 766-767.

[5]. White cites Peter S. Onuf, "Nations, Revolutions, and the End of History," in *Revolutionary Currents: Nation Building in the Transatlantic World*, ed. Michael A. Morrison and Melinda Zook (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 173-188. See also Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000); and Peter S. Onuf, *The Mind of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007).

[6]. Evan Radcliffe, "Revolutionary Writing, Moral Philosophy, and Universal Benevolence in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54 (1993): 221-240.

[7]. For recent criticisms–or at the very least, modifications–of Trouillot's work, see Ada Ferrer, "Talk about Haiti: The Archive and the Atlantic's Haitian Revolution," in Garraway, *Tree of Liberty*, 21-40; Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*; Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*; and Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 4 (2000): 821-865. Trouillot is not cited in the index of *Encountering Revolution*, but White cites his work in the second footnote of the introduction.

[8]. See also Philipp Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots: Americans in Paris in the Age of Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

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