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Doris Lorraine Garraway. *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008. vi + 280 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-2685-8; $24.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8139-2686-5.

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Unsilencing the Legacies of the Haitian Revolution

Ever since Michel-Rolph Trouillot published *Silencing the Past* in 1995, scholars of the Haitian Revolution have confronted its influential claims.[1] This volume is no exception, as editor Doris L. Garraway asserts that there is a silence within French historiography and cultural memory (p. 7). In his seminal work, Trouillot "argues that the Haitian Revolution was unthinkable within the philosophical milieu of the late-eighteenth-century slaveholding world and has since been systematically suppressed in Western historiography and humanistic scholarship" (p. 5). Garraway contends that while historical study of the Haitian Revolution "has flourished"–perhaps, somewhat of an overstatement–"scholarly understandings of the cultural, literary, and philosophical legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World have lagged considerably behind" (p. 4). While Garraway's assertion is disputable, as other studies of the Haitian Revolution have explored its cultural, literary, and philosophical legacies, this collection makes a significant contribution, both in the way of the content and its admirable aim to open an interdisciplinary dialogue.[2]

This volume seeks to contribute to scholarly understandings of the cultural legacies of the Haitian Revolution through an interdisciplinary approach, with contributions from professors of history, English, and French. The authors, primarily literary scholars, explore historical, cultural, and literary topics from the late eighteenth through the early twenty-first century throughout the Atlantic World. Garraway divided the essays into three sections in an attempt to contain the vast chronological, geographical, and analytical spread of the volume.

The first section, "Reading the Revolution: Contemporary Discourse and Ideology," includes essays by Ada Ferrer, Deborah Jenson, and Doris L. Garraway. Ferrer's "Talk about Haiti" directly engages Trouillot, "not to refute the idea–now so powerful in the literature–of a silencing of the Haitian Revolution, but rather to get inside and move beyond the claim" (p. 22). Through an analysis of official and unofficial communications arriving in Cuba from Saint-Domingue in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Ferrer shows how the Haitian Revolution was not fully silenced in the historical record. In examining "two distinct streams of information," she illustrates the differing representations and understandings of the revolution by varying social groups and in disparate locations. Jenson provides a provocative assessment of Toussaint Louverture's role in the French media, specifically the *Gazette de France* and the *Ancien moniteur*, during the height of his power from 1797 to 1802. She argues that Louverture's use of spin, "a discourse that essentially limits the range of possible descriptions through the repetition of carefully chosen parameters in order to prime public consciousness to receive a political message," was an "essential component of the Haitian Revolutionary strategy" (p. 42). Garraway closes the section with her examination of universalism and nationalism in the Haitian Revolution. The Haitian Revolution built upon the universalist values of the French Revolution, as represented by Leger-Felicité Sonthonax and Toussaint Louverture, to formulate a nationalist movement under Jean-Jacques Dessalines based on the exclusion of the French.

"After the revolution," the second section, the most disjointed of the three groups of essays in the volume, discusses the broad topics of nationalism and postcolonialism. Ifeoma C. K. Nwankwo begins the section with an ambitious study of the influence of Martin Delany's novel *Blake* (1859-62), a representation of the Afro-Cuban experience, on the reconceptualization of a transnational Black community by governments and abolitionists in the Americas. She closes her essay summarizing, "The

black activist discourse born of the [Haitian] Revolution must be understood as a complex, multivalent, dynamic one that indexes both the possibilities and perils of imagining black community while also confronting the reality of disparities in location, identification, color, and class" (p. 109). E. A. Hurley emphasizes the parallels between Aime Cesaire's own experiences with colonization and his representations of Toussaint Louverture in his text. Hurley explains how Cesaire, "concerned about the legacy of colonialism, reinscribes and analyzes the experiences of another colonized leader (Toussaint) whose attitudes and activities hold particular significance for him from his twentieth-century perspective" (p. 113). Valerie Kaussen writes the next essay on the decolonization theories of Haitian novelist Marie Chauvet. Kaussen explains how Chauvet maintained "faith in Haiti's revolutionary project and the freedoms that it briefly made possible" (p. 135). Next, Chris Bongie closely analyzes two passages from a report, known as the Debray Report, produced by a committee charged with assessing Franco-Haitian relations in light of Jean-Bertrand Aristide's calls for restitution for Haiti from France in 2003. He concludes that France will continue to deny Haiti any restitution other than "a symbolic" response through apologetic and regretful forms of foreign aid (p. 166).

The three essays of the final section reflect its title, "Literary Representations of the Haitian Revolution." A. James Arnold provides a valuable examination of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature on the Haitian Revolution, "from Victor Hugo to Derek Walcott," which will serve to introduce non-literary scholars to the evolution of the nonfiction works on the revolution and how they reflected the genres, eras, and locations of the authors (p. 179). In "Toward New Paradigms in Caribbean Studies," Jean Jonassaint explores Haitian literature, with a particular focus on Jean-Jacques Dessalines's *Proclamation of Gonaives* (1804), "a founding document of both the country and its literature" (p. 203). He traces the influence of this and other early texts on twentieth-century Haitian works, such as the creolization of the French language and the use of a "distinctive vocabulary" (p. 206). Paul Breslin's essay concludes the volume with a question: how should the epic of the New World be written? He explores the various ways in which the Haitian Revolution resists representation–echoing Trouillot's argument for an "unthinkable history" (p. 226).[3] Throughout his essay, Breslin highlights how the revolution evades the confines on literary conventions, resulting in "quasi-epics" with "nonlinearity" (p. 227).

The essays in this collection are for an audience with a familiarity with the Haitian Revolution, as well as scholarly debates "about 'Black Atlantic' modernity, transnational and diasporic movements, and even postcolonialism" (p. 4). The broad scope of this volume makes it accessible to an equally broad academic readership, increasing its likelihood to create its desired interdisciplinary dialogue on the cultural legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World. Such a dialogue has the potential to expand and complicate current scholarly understandings of the Haitian Revolution's legacy. Historical studies of the Haitian Revolution continue to seek a more accurate history of the actual events. For example, David P. Geggus and Laurent Dubois have both emphasized the overlapping and contradictory involvement of the colony's three social groups–whites, free people of color, and slaves–in the revolution.[4] However, the textual representations of the Haitian Revolution under examination in these studies center on the slave insurrection, which is reflected in the focus of the essays in this volume. As Ferrer's study shows, official Spanish reports in Cuba attempted to suppress information about the slave uprising in Saint-Domingue to prevent a similar event on the island, but her article does not indicate any concern amongst the Spanish for a possible independence movement amongst the white planters in Cuba. Further, Aimé Cesaire represented Toussaint Louverture as he did, explains Hurley, because Cesaire related to Louverture as another black colonized leader (p. 113). Overall, the authors in *Tree of Liberty* demonstrate how interpretations of the Haitian Revolution have been as significant as the facts of the event by influencing the varied interpretations of the revolution within particular contexts since it occurred.

Notes

[1]. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995). For scholarly references to Trouillot's *Silencing the Past* see for example David P. Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004); Laurent Dubois, *Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Jeremy D. Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005).

[2]. See for example Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); David P. Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); Matt D. Childs, *Eighteen-Twelve Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle against Atlantic Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); and Martin Munro and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw, eds., *Reinterpreting the Haitian Revolution and Its Cultural Aftershocks* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2006).

[3]. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 70-107.

[4]. Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*; Dubois, *Avengers of the New World.*

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