

Ben Marsh, Mike Rapport, eds.. *Understanding and Teaching the Age of Revolutions*. The Harvey Goldberg Series for Understanding and Teaching History. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2017. xi + 362 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-299-31190-2.

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The old adage that one should never judge a book by its cover is certainly worth heeding. Yet, even at first glance, the image that graces the cover of *Understanding and Teaching the Age of Revolutions* is instructive. The reproduction of Tito Salas's *El terremoto de 1812 con Simón Bolívar en Caracas* encapsulates many of the themes presented within: with the South American revolutionary Simón Bolívar set in the center, in a vigorous pose and taking the high ground, the rest of the tumultuous scene is populated with an array of men and women, people of color, clergy, workers, and bourgeoisie. Some figures signal encouragement, some reach out to him imploringly; others flee in fear, as a hazy royal icon fades into the background. While Salas's mural literally depicts the 1812 earthquake that rocked Caracas, it seems clearly intended to metaphorically capture Bolívar's central place in earth-shattering revolutionary events. Editors Ben Marsh and Mike Rapport have collected essays that similarly enliven the historiography of the Age of Revolutions. Examining the tectonic sociopolitical shifts of Europe and the Americas in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the essays invite teachers to incorporate recent social and cultural histories into class lessons, while also suggesting new ways to interpret the roles of revolutionary "Great

Men" and Enlightenment figures, such as Bolívar, Jean-Jacque Rousseau, and Toussaint Louverture.

The collection is divided into three sections. Part 1, "Reflections," consists of a pair of essays by Peter McPhee and Lester D. Langley, which offer overviews of historiographic debates and changes in world history scholarship over the course of their careers. The essays in part 2, "Sources and Methods," suggest useful primary sources and class exercises for students to engage with subjects from the Enlightenment to the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions. Part 3, "Specific Themes and Revolutions," brings the first two sections together, with essays that discuss historiography and sources, along with ideas about how to engage students in thinking about the causes, complexities, and contradictions of the Age of Revolutions. By presenting historiographic, hemispheric, Atlantic, and global perspectives, Marsh and Rapport prompt history instructors to contemplate their approaches to the Enlightenment and revolutions.

Overall, the collection shows attention to race, gender, ideology, place, and periodization. Source analysis and culture also receive thorough coverage. And the final chapters challenge historians to use the past to grapple with the implications of environmental change and the Internet as topics

that students will find familiar—and perhaps urgent. *Understanding and Teaching the Age of Revolutions* is therefore useful at education levels from high schools to research universities. Focused on critical thinking throughout, the collection's essays will push students and instructors alike to wrestle with its massive topics in new and revealing ways.

McPhee's and Langley's opening essays provide some perspective and food for thought. Their aim is less to provide practical teaching advice than to remind us that the discipline of history has its own history, therefore encouraging openness to experimentation. McPhee describes the shifts in world history from the "Western Civ" approach—focusing on the fiscal and intellectual connections of the Atlantic world and its "republic of letters"—through Marxist critiques in the 1960s, revisionists in the 1980s, and new social and cultural histories more recently. Langley argues for a "Hemispheric" approach to North and South American revolutions that reflects the transnational turn of the last two decades. While recognizing the fundamental significance of the Revolution of 1776 that founded the United States, Langley nonetheless insists that it should be contextualized within developments in the Americas as a whole, as well as its place within the Atlantic world. McPhee and Langley therefore set up both context and a springboard into the more specific essays that follow.

Ambrogio Caiani opens the second section with a deceptively simple question: who, when, and where was the Enlightenment? He proceeds to suggest ways of historicizing various Enlightenment figures, the variety of their ideas, and debates over periodization and location through classroom discussions and assignments. As he states, "It is helpful to direct students toward considering how far the ideas and mental outlook of eighteenth-century writers and thinkers were constrained by their cultural, economic, and social backgrounds" (p. 62). Similarly, Julia Gaffield

examines the relationships between "universal rights, the local, and the global" through the lens of the Haitian Declaration of Independence (p. 78). Gaffield effectively offers ways to guide students through the Haitian declaration's place in the expression of Enlightenment ideas through comparisons with the American Declaration of Independence, as well as Louverture's and Jean-Jacques Dessalines's dizzying efforts to steer emancipation on Saint-Domingue amid the turbulence of European imperial rivalries. Edward Larkin also uses a significant primary source, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (1776), in this case to illustrate the relations between language, literary form, and revolutionary ideas. And Mark C. Carnes, Mark Ledbury, and James Jackson Ashton each provide novel approaches to the classroom by suggesting ways to use role-playing games, visual art, and music to spark students' imaginations and explore historical empathy through the senses.

The third section broadens the scope of historical themes, while becoming less concentrated on classroom activities and assignments. The essays here will be of most use for enriching advanced college curricula, although, as with the second section, all education levels can benefit from their perspectives. Lindsay A. H. Parker brings a welcome corrective to many presentations of the French Revolution by placing women's rights squarely within its frame—both among its calls for sociopolitical change and in women's counterrevolutionary agency. Colin Nicolson and David Andress each use particular events—the American Stamp Act Riots and the Terror under the Jacobins—to encourage students to challenge popular conceptions of the past and grapple with social complexities and moral ambiguities amid political upheavals. Similarly, Christopher Hodson and Alan Forrest each use familiar historical figures—Louverture and Napoleon Bonaparte—to guide students through the intricate topics of

emerging modernity and nineteenth-century nationalism.

Like the Haitian Revolution, Latin American revolutions often got short shrift in world history textbooks and syllabi in the United States until recent decades. Marcella Echeverri's essay encompasses recent scholarship that challenges both nationalist narratives, centered on each country's usable past, and Marxist critiques that decried the atavistic social relations that resulted from elite domination of independent nations. Echeverri insists that the "new cultural history has productively transformed our understanding of categories such as 'political' and 'social'" by exploring the "self-understanding that multiple social groups had of the historical changes under way" (p. 264). This includes close attention to the ways people of African descent and indigenous peoples, in addition to Creole elites such as Bolívar, navigated the politics of empire and independence. And Jane Judge joins Annie Jourdan in arguing that "small" revolutions, in Belgium and the Netherlands, respectively, can nonetheless offer big lessons in historical change and contingency.

Perhaps most provocatively, Sharla Chittick calls for attention to environment, climate change, and weather as drivers of human action—and vice versa. Some historians might (justifiably) cry "Determinism!" in response to her query as to whether "Venezuelans today should celebrate Bolívar or the mosquito as 'El Libertador'" (p. 338). But Chittick makes a convincing case that natural phenomena, from the mosquito-borne malaria that killed thousands of Spanish troops in South America to the Icelandic volcanic eruption that devastated French crop yields in the 1780s, helped propel the outcomes of historical events—a point that will not be lost on students in our own era of climate change. Lastly, part 3 concludes with a reference to an online chapter that provides several useful Web resources for images and documents, as well as suggestions for implementing digital content in class lessons.

Given the many strengths of *Understanding and Teaching the Age of Revolutions*, attentive historians will also notice a few surprising shortcomings. As Parker states near the start of her essay on women's rights, a key challenge of teaching the French Revolution is "resisting the temptation to segregate women's history into its own unit" (p. 163). Yet this is precisely what the collection does: women's history is all but absent from other chapters—even in moments when such figures as Mary Wollstonecraft or Olympe de Gouges could have been included seamlessly. Similarly, the role of slavery is downplayed in discussions of the American Revolution. As I have found instructive to discuss with students, Thomas Jefferson's declaration insists not only that "all men are created equal" but also that one of the colonists' grievances against the king was that "he has excited domestic insurrections amongst us." Knowing the anger aroused in colonial planters by Lord Dunmore's Proclamation—which offered emancipation to enslaved persons who would help the Crown put down rebellion in Virginia—it is clear that the American Revolution's dual nature was born of both enlightened democratic ideals and conservative fears of abolition within the British Empire. Lastly, while the collection understandably leans toward the American and French Revolutions, more space might have been provided for discussions of Latin America. Although the separate chapters on Belgium and the Netherlands are interesting indeed, for the benefit of the whole they could perhaps have been combined to allow for a second chapter on the Latin American revolutions, which, after all, swept across an entire continent and established over a dozen independent nations.

While teachers might have to tease out the above elements on their own, *Understanding and Teaching the Age of Revolutions* nonetheless proves a valuable resource for enriching students' experiences. Combining practical advice and model lessons with discussion of historical concepts, the collection helps demonstrate that de-

bate is a healthy thing—both in the classroom and in the wider public sphere. Such multi-perspective approaches are at the core of the historical discipline and its development of students' critical thinking. Marsh and Rapport have made the weight of that task much lighter for teachers to carry.

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