THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION IN WORLD HISTORY

Edited by Alan Forrest and Matthias Middell
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The Routledge Companion to the French Revolution in World History engages with some of the most recent trends in French revolutionary scholarship by considering the Revolution in its global context. Across seventeen chapters an international team of contributors examines the impact of the Revolution not only on its European neighbours but on Latin America, North America and Africa, assesses how far events there impacted on the Revolution in France and suggests something of the Revolution’s enduring legacy in the modern world.

The Companion views the French Revolution through a deliberately wide lens. The first section deals with its global repercussions from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean and includes a discussion of major insurrections such as those in Haiti and Venezuela. Three chapters then dissect the often complex and entangled relations with other revolutionary movements, in seventeenth-century Britain, the American colonies and Meiji Japan. The focus then switches to international involvement in the events of 1789 and the circulation of ideas, people, goods and capital. In a final section contributors throw light on how the Revolution was and is still remembered across the globe, with chapters on Russia, China and Australasia. An introduction by the editors places the Revolution in its political, historical and historiographical context.

The Routledge Companion to the French Revolution in World History is a timely and important contribution to scholarship of the French Revolution.

Alan Forrest is emeritus professor of modern history at the University of York. His publications include Paris, the Provinces and the French Revolution (2004); The Legacy of the French Revolutionary Wars: The Nation-in-Arms in French Republican Memory (2009); Napoleon: Life, Legacy and Image (2011); and, most recently, Waterloo (2015).

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This book has its origins in a project of the International Commission in the History of the French Revolution and debates at the International Congress of CISH, in Amsterdam, in 2010. Some of the chapters presented here started out as papers at the Amsterdam colloquium; others have been added since. But the aim of the volume remains unchanged: to show something of the outreach of the French Revolution across the globe, and to emphasize the interactive nature of the links that developed between France and the wider world. Making this possible has incurred innumerable debts: to the International Commission itself for the academic contacts, within Europe and beyond, which it has made possible; to Alain Chevalier and his team at the Musée de la Révolution Française in Vizille for their support and hospitality over the last ten years; to the Global and European Studies Institute and the Centre for French Studies at Leipzig University for its financial and institutional backing; to Godfrey Rogers in Bordeaux for his impeccable work in translating texts from the French and to Forrest Kilinnik in Leipzig for his help with translation from German; to Catherine Aitken at Routledge for her unswerving faith in our project; and to our two editorial assistants in Leipzig, Julia Oheim and Katharina Döring, for their unstinting work in preparing the manuscript for publication. To all of them we owe a debt of gratitude, as we do to our families for their forbearance. There must have been moments over the past months when Rosemary and Katharina have felt that the global outreach of the French Revolution was extending uncomfortably close to home.

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The Prussian naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt had close contacts with the enlightened elites of Spanish America, but he was also an extremely sharp observer and analyst of demographic patterns, cultural conflicts, economies and social hierarchies. Until 1792 he was a strong supporter of the French Revolution, and thereafter, though he opposed what he viewed as its excesses, he continued to believe in the humanism and human rights which it proclaimed. He knew what a revolution involved. Humboldt travelled in 1799 to Spanish America, using his connections with Spanish enlightened intellectuals and court elites. He moved from Venezuela and Western Cuba, the booming new agricultural zones of the Spanish empire which relied heavily on slavery (1799–early 1801), to more conservative centres like Bogotá, Lima, New Spain and the city of México. His observations, written down in his diaries, are filled with his reflections on race and class conflicts, on the social and economic problems of Indians, blacks and slaves, on rebellions, exploitation, injustice and oppression, whether by monks and the Church or by colonial bureaucrats. But a close reading of Humboldt’s texts makes it clear that, based on his observations, he rejected the possibility of a revolution in Spanish America, led by the local elites, whether or not it was influenced by revolution elsewhere. So, he did not claim there was any direct link between the Spanish American elites and the French Revolution. Humboldt writes in 1803 that

European governments have been so successful in spreading hatred and disunity in the Colonies that the pleasures of society are unknown. Hence the inconceivable confusion of ideas and emotions, a general tendency to revolution. But this desire is restricted to chasing out the Europeans and then making war among themselves.' 1

But while Humboldt had very good sources of information about Creoles and the Spanish elites, he knew much less about revolutionary sentiments or the plans of other social groups – pardos, slaves, Indians, free blacks or poor whites (canarios): here he was largely dependent on hearsay. There was also a significant delay before he wrote up his
experiences. He started to publish in 1809, using and rewriting the material from his diaries, and continued writing until 1831. In turn, his published works were used by the new elite of the Latin American republics (after the Independencia) to interpret their revolutionary movements as being strongly influenced by the French Revolution. Yet in Humboldt’s diaries themselves the French Revolution, together with the slave revolution of Saint-Domingue, makes little appearance.

For the elites in Spanish America, Europe was a distant world. For them the real revolution was the Saint-Domingue Revolution of 1791–1803, a revolution of former black slaves and free people of colour in the most densely populated slave region of their world – the Greater Caribbean. The colonial authorities of the Spanish empire and all Creole elites feared a possible rebellion or revolution of the ‘coloured castes’, which explains why they described all conspiracies and rebellions as French or as revolution. They were afraid: they had miedo a la revolución. For this reason, while they informed themselves about the revolution in Saint-Domingue (and plotted, together with the Spanish elites of the metropolis, to suppress it militarily), they dismissed any idea of revolution at home as being unthinkable. So most mentions of France in Humboldt’s diaries have to do either with the Enlightenment and the scientific revolution or with the global politics of the Napoleonic era. Humboldt, who had been in Paris during the revolution, discussed what he called ‘the tragedy of colonial enlightenment’, where only the higher elite had direct access to French works or newspapers. He rejected any notion of a ‘Creole revolution’.

At the same time slavery and slaves are key elements in understanding the Independencia as an unfinished or superficial social revolution in relation to the destruction of the major structures of colonialism, caste hierarchies (the basis for racism) and slavery. Humboldt arrived in America in August 1799, in Cumaná/Eastern Venezuela, eight years after the beginning of the slave revolution in Saint-Domingue. He had crossed an Atlantic in revolution, being an enemy of the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution and an enemy of slavery in the Greater Caribbean and across the world. Humboldt must have had some knowledge of the revolution in Saint-Domingue (as Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel and others did) before his arrival. He opens the section on slavery in the Political Essay on the Island of Cuba (1826) with these words: ‘As a historian of America, I wanted to clarify facts and specify ideas by means of comparisons and statistical data.’

In real time, 1800, Humboldt was travelling through a landscape of plantations and mass slavery in Venezuela (the Aragua and Tuy valleys). This chapter of his diaries presents one of the most vibrant analyses of plantation economies and mass slavery, and it contains negative echoes of the French Revolution (and its prehistory in French enlightenment) on a slave society. This is also a reflection of Humboldt’s own sense of disillusionment over the question of slavery. Humboldt writes:

The Portuguese thought that a white republic should be founded at a time when, undoubtedly, the French republic will allow slavery again in a white republic not even the free people of color [mulatos; pardos] are granted rights, slaves serve their masters on their knees, and the masters in turn sell their children. This is the product of the American Enlightenment. Unearth your Encyclopedia and your Raynal, shameless men.
This political objective, a white republic (with more slavery and more power for the white Creole elite, achieved by status reduction for the free people of colour), Humboldt saw as the main result of any future rebellion against Spain. He saw his fears of a white republic confirmed when he looked at the United States:

In North America, white men have established a republic for themselves and have left intact the most infamous laws of slavery . . . in the same way the nobles of South America want to found a republic for themselves, at the cost of the misery of the coloured races [the pardos].

Humboldt based his judgement on intense debates with Fernando Peñalver (later an influential adviser to Simón Bolívar), the Ibarra family (one of whom would be Bolívar’s adjutant), the Ribas (or Rivas) family (who later presented themselves as Jacobins), and finally to the young Simón Bolívar, and indirectly to Francisco de Miranda. They were some of the most important representatives of the Creoles’ autonomist movement and – afterwards – the Spanish American independence movements. In April 1801, when Humboldt and Bonpland were travelling from Cartagena to Bogotá, they met the French doctor Luis (Louis) de Rieux (from Carcassonne), physician to the viceroy of Nueva Granada. He travelled with them for weeks. Humboldt writes:

Our companion to S Fe [Bogotá] were the doctor D[on] Luis de Rieux and his amiable son from Carcassonne, a young mulato lady, who was to serve the Father [de Rieux] as Maîtresse . . . De Rieux, formerly physician to the Bis[hop] Góngora [13] was accused of being a state criminal and, at night from his home in Onda [Honda], was loaded with fetters and dragged to Carthagena [because he had printed the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, and also the French constitution of 1791 – MZ].

After long years of incarceration in Spain, he was absolved and returned to Nueva Granada (today Colombia). When Humboldt and Bonpland visited De Rieux in Honda, Humboldt commented:

Outrageous it appears to me, as the immoral De Rieux (the same one who was gaoled for his revolutionary sentiments for years, the same who then spoke of slave freedom, and as long as it was useful to him, played the French citizen) with cold blood let the negroes of the Aegytiaca [name of a plantation] fall to their knees before him. Miserable human scum who plays the philosopher in Europe.

It was in such terms that the tragedy of European enlightenment in colonial slave societies became visible to Humboldt during his journey.

Humboldt noticed when his ship passed the westernmost point of Jamaica:

In Europe, you go to the countryside to enjoy quiet pleasures. Here you can hear rattling chains – and one speaks of the happiness of Jamaica, of the splendour of St. Domingue. Who is or has been happy there? . . . Everything
unnatural disappears in the world, and it is not natural that a pair of rocky islands produce so much. 16

After his travels through Spanish America, in 1804, Humboldt stayed for a second time in Havana. There he heard how the elites spoke about the proclamation of an independent Haiti: Saint-Domingue and slavery played a central role, and again there was no mention of the French Revolution. 17

**Actors and transfers culturels of the French Revolution: French in Spanish America and Spanish-Americans (españoles) in France**

Monarchies around Europe had willingly – more or less – accepted the Enlightenment. In many cases, they had started to modernize the State, and had extended this to their colonies, in the case of Spain through the so-called Bourbon reforms. After the first phase of the French Revolution (around 1793), they turned against the revolutionary government, and all the kingdoms that had not been conquered by French troops began to stop French citizens who wanted to cross the border to prevent the entry of revolutionary agents. This was linked to a veritable antirevolutionary fever and paranoia, and it extended to building a kind of cordon sanitaire around the French colonies in the Caribbean. In the case of Spain, the measures taken in the metropolis were also applied in the colonies, through a series of laws to prevent the passage of the revolution to Spain’s American territories. But the different parts of this colonial empire had different contact zones to French territories. The most direct contacts were with the port cities of the Caribbean, including New Orleans (part of La Luisiana, a Spanish colony from 1764 until 1804), Veracruz, Omoa (today Honduras) and Cartagena de Indias/Panamá (by then the viceroyalty of Nueva Granada). But the territories with most intense contacts were the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo (the former Hispaniola, the first and oldest Spanish territory in the New World), Cuba, Puerto Rico and tierra firme (the Caribbean parts of the northern coast of South America – by then the Captaincy General of Venezuela and the Caribbean parts of Nueva Granada, today Colombia and Panama). The most intense links, through slavery and the slave trade, smuggling, piracy, cimarronaje (marronage), and hidden movements of all kinds, were with Venezuela and across the Caribbean as a whole. 18

**Venezuela: the baseline of the Caribbean**

Venezuela did not yet exist. Formally, since the Bourbon reforms, the Captaincy General of Caracas or Venezuela, with its capital in Caracas, had military and political control over some peripheral provinces of a somewhat complicated edge of the Spanish empire. Javier Laviña argues that Spanish immigration policy had always been obsessed with foreign control of the empire’s traders, merchants, liberal professions, artisans, seamen, fishermen, runaway slaves, corsairs and smugglers. Although the Laws of the Indies forbade the residence of foreigners in America, the truth is that there was significant international settlement; their stay in America could even be legal, and could be registered (as the so-called naturalizados) or settled without any disclosure requirement. 19
The extensive Caribbean and Atlantic coasts of what is now Venezuela played an important role as a sounding board when the French Revolution erupted. These coasts were also the baseline of the American méditerranée, and close to South American and Caribbean colonies of other powers (first Curaçao and Suriname; then Essequibo, Cayenne, and Martinique and Guadeloupe; and, from 1797 onwards, Trinidad and Tobago). During the 1780s, the governors gave orders to the tenientes de justicia (local judges) to detain foreigners for any suspicious behaviour. When the events in France became known, the Captain General of Caracas decided to expel all foreigners (the majority of them from French islands), to avoid introducing propaganda. Carrying out this order was left to the local lieutenants of justice, who did not always act according to the letter of the law (some of them mistook canarios, immigrants from the Spanish Canary Islands, for foreigners).  

After the execution of Louis XVI and the declaration of war between Spain and France, in 1793, suspicions raged even more against the French. The colonial authorities decided to arrest anyone believed to show sympathy for the French system. The authorities tried to obtain precise intelligence on the colony, especially controlling the French and ordering the expulsion of all French citizens whom they considered harmful. The monitoring of these citizens was quite effective, but led to paranoia throughout the territories. The accusations were often false. When in 1792 a supporter of the revolution was stopped and sent to Spain, the authorities first thought he was Italian, but he was in fact Spanish and his name was Fernando Ribas. He was accused of having had seditious conversations and of having ‘travelled to Europe and both Americas’ – so the Captain General considered him a dangerous and destabilizing element. The proclamations of the French Convention sparked further fears of French revolutionary influence. In April 1793 the local authorities stopped a French doctor at Guanare who, they said, had celebrated regicide.

But the influence of the French Revolution was very limited. There were very few cases of confiscated literature, newspapers or propaganda material. As for the two revolutionary events – the rebellion in Coro in 1795 and a plot in Maracaibo in 1799 – which are often linked to the French Revolution because of their connection with the French (and Dutch) Caribbean, ‘though both movements had links with the French Caribbean . . . in neither of them was any Republican project developed to replace the Old Spanish colonial regime.’

Only one event in La Guaira in 1797, traditionally known as the conspiracy of Manuel Gual and José María España, can be shown to have a strong textual link to political discourses of the French Revolution (namely the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and some songs), adapted by Spanish radical liberales. It had pardos as leaders and some free Blacks among its activists, and was undoubtedly the most radical conspiracy organized in the Spanish Atlantic before the period of independence. Inspired by the Jacobins, the conspirators sought to replace the colonial government with a republic in which socioracial distinctions and slavery would be abolished. Initially led by local whites and some Spanish prisoners who had been sent out from Spain, where they had been arrested for organizing a similar plot, the movement won the support of four sergeants of the Pardo Militia and at least three black soldiers. Among these the figure of Narciso del Valle stands out as one of the most
active leaders of the revolutionary movement. He was executed in June 1799. The leaders’ proposal for a republic was influenced by models other than that of France. As Alejandro Gómez explains:

This was due to a number of factors, including the diverse origins of the conspirators (they included Spaniards who had previously led a Jacobin conspiracy in Madrid in 1795, as well as free white Creoles and local men of colour), who had direct links with Franco-Antillean revolutionaries, mainly in Guadeloupe.

Those most frightened by the events in Saint-Domingue were the pardos, the colonial bureaucrats and the oligarchic elites (mantuanos) of Venezuela. A Junta, held in 1793, estimated that there were already 100,000 slaves and more than 450,000 freed blacks and mulattos (pardos) in the territory (where less than 0.5 per cent of the population belonged to the mantuanos). This report shows the true fear of the notables of Caracas: the pardocracia (the rule of pardos), with the possibility that they might organize politically around ideas of equality borrowed from the French Revolution. That is why they tried to declare all forms of unrest, all conspiracies and rebellions to be French (and revolution). The pardos formed a majority in the militia (in a relation 10:1 to whites). This fear was also apparent when the Crown issued the Real Gracias al Sacar (Royal Decree of Grace, 1795) whereby rich pardos could buy purity of blood in exchange for a stipulated fee. What concerned Creole notables and the Captain General of Venezuela was the rupture of the social hierarchy imposed in the colony since the beginning of colonization, with pardos finally recognized as vecinos (urban settlers with full rights). The fears of Captain General Pedro Carbonell and the Junta of Caracas, which was composed of notable residents of the city, were not unfounded, as there was a certain proclivity among coloured groups to claim equality with whites; but this did not need the influence of the French Revolution to develop. In fact, the Revolution could derail the aspirations of enriched pardos, as they were the only ones who wanted to achieve equality with whites but were not prepared to share equality with popular groups of colour, far less with slaves or ex-slaves.

For this reason the Captain General of Venezuela rejected all kinds of contact with people from the French Caribbean – most importantly the black and coloured allies of Spanish troops in Santo Domingo (as a bad example for their own pardos), but also prisoners of war (whom the Spanish colonial authorities used to banish to peripheral fortresses like Puerto Cabello in Venezuela) and deserters from the French army.

*Santo Domingo: fighting the French and using rebellious mulattoes and ex-slaves to correct history*

The nearest territory to Saint-Domingue by land (and with an unclear frontier) was the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo. For one hundred years, the French colony was an extremely dynamic plantation-colony, while Spanish Santo Domingo represented a more leisurely colonialism with many free coloured farmers, some big cattle ranches
with a few enslaved cowboys, and a strong informal smuggling economy. In its cities were some powerful white families with many slaves.

With the declaration of war between revolutionary France and Spain, Spain became a belligerent nation and integrated large numbers of the black rebels into the Spanish army as *tropas auxiliares*. This made the situation untenable for the French Republicans (the best known of whom were Léger-Félicité Sonthonax and Étienne Polverel). The French commissioners were gradually losing the little support they had in the field. These developments weakened Republican power in the French part of the island, which was largely limited to the cities, while on the border with Santo Domingo raids by auxiliary and Spanish troops gained significant advances. Meanwhile British forces landed in the northern part of Saint-Domingue, separated from the Spaniards by the former slaves and rebels who controlled the interior of the colony. In 1797, after fierce and complex wars, Toussaint Louverture and his generals overthrew the other groups and powers, and tried to organize a new state, a new society, and a new economy.

The coming to power of Napoleon and the peace with Spain revived the interest of the French in the colonial world. They tried to reconquer the West Indies, especially Saint-Domingue (which they saw as the keystone of a revived French colonial presence in the Americas, between Louisiana and Cayenne), allocating the mission to General Leclerc; but the resistance of former slaves and the scourge of malaria caused the expedition to fail in 1803. The independence of the French ex-colony resulted in a huge contingent of French royalists, revolutionary soldiers, former allies of the Spanish or British and army deserters scouring the Caribbean looking for a place to settle. They were met with suspicion by the Spanish colonial authorities, who now saw every Frenchman as a potential danger to the stability of the empire.

Humboldt mentions encountering some of them at Cartagena de Indias: ‘We spent [. . .] six very uncomfortable days in a very miserable inn. In it were officers who had fled from Saint-Domingue, filled with wrath against Toussaint, the general of the Blacks.’ Refugees from the French part of Hispaniola headed to various European colonies while they waited for the situation to be resolved in their favour. They did not think of this as exile, since they could return to the colony at any time and chose to maintain their properties there. But events soon turned what had originally been a refuge into a permanent place of residence for many. At first, the emigrants headed for areas close to home. A considerable group moved to the Spanish ex-colony of Santo Domingo, as the border was but a step to protect their lives. But there they may have met ex-slaves from Saint-Domingue, now military allies of the Spanish. When the troops of Toussaint occupied the Spanish part of Hispaniola in 1801, declaring the abolition of slavery, they fled again to another territory. A second group went to Jamaica, hoping that the British could also reconquer the colony of Saint-Domingue and reestablish slavery and the old colonial order. In Venezuela, as we know, they were not welcome. After a brief hiatus, many of the exiles moved on to Cuba, where they established their permanent residence and invested in sugar and coffee plantations. Finally, another group retired to the United States after the Louisiana Purchase, where they settled permanently (this group grew rapidly after the expulsion of all French from the Spanish territories in 1809).
Cuba and Puerto Rico: ‘Haiti’ as an icon of terror and a motor for the development of Second Slavery

Alain Yacou has estimated that between June 1803 and January 1804, 18,213 people moved from Saint-Domingue to Santiago de Cuba (a census in Santiago de Cuba in 1808 listed some 7,500 French, 22 per cent of the urban population, of whom only 28 per cent had actually been born in France). But in the following year, the Junta Central in Spain, which was then allied to Britain, ordered the expulsion of all French émigrés from Spain’s American territories. Between 1791 and 1803, there had been a considerable influx, most settling in and around Santiago. Thirty thousand men, women and children (many of them former slaves) came from Santo Domingo to Cuba, of whom two-thirds came in 1803 alone. In 1809, in response to the expulsion decree, 8,870 people left Santiago – the majority for Louisiana.

But Cuba, with its extremely rich soils and the presence of the oligarchic elite of Havana, proved irresistible to many of the former managers of Saint-Domingue plantations. They stayed on, hired by the Cuban plantation owners to develop export agriculture of tropical crops using slave labour. In the east and near Matanzas they mostly ran coffee plantations; in the west, in the so-called Cuba grande, we find the great sugar estates. These men reacted immediately to the revolution in Saint-Domingue. Francisco de Arango y Parreño (1765–1837), the Adam Smith of America’s plantation economy who met Humboldt in Havana, wrote in 1808: ‘On November 20, 1791, the news about the Guarico [the old Spanish name for Le Cap] insurrection reached Madrid.’ On that same day, Arango wrote to the king with a string of questions: what was the level of sugar production in Saint-Domingue? What was it in Cuba? What had to change? As a member of the Cuban elite, Arango played a central role in politics. In his famous Discurso sobre la agricultura de la Habana y medios de fomentarla (1792), he insisted that there were significant differences between slavery in Saint-Domingue and that in the Spanish-American territories.

In August 1790, a bando (regulation) was published that made it illegal to bring slaves from the French islands to Cuba. In 1793–94 the rumour spread that all esclavos franceses (French slaves – as slaves from the French colonies in Cuba were called) were to be set free because of the French Abolition decrees and the new bando issued by the Spanish king. One amo (master) of these French slaves, Fernando Rodríguez, complained that one of his slaves had demanded his freedom with the words ‘that the Blacks of the colony of Le Cap Français were all free because they had acquired freedom’. Rodríguez had responded by having the slave thrown into prison. The following day, he had organized a meeting of amos de negros franceses and had put a sign around the neck of the slave who had demanded his freedom. The inscription was unambiguous: ‘This is the fruit of the imaginary freedom of the French Negroes: it is in virtue that the true freedom lies.’ The circulars prohibiting the purchase of slaves from Saint-Domingue and other places of contact with the great Caribbean rebellion were frequently reproduced, which would seem to indicate that they had had low efficacy in the face of a deeply rooted tradition among the slaveholders, especially those of Jamaica and Saint-Domingue, to smuggle rebellious slaves and maroons to Cuba and sell them there.
again forbade any further introduction of slaves which were not ‘bozal-negroes from the coast of Africa’.\textsuperscript{46} No slaves from the French colonies were admitted in Cuban ports, and, when they were picked up elsewhere on the island, they were condemned to be expelled from the country. However, all colonial officials recognized, given the mass exodus that had occurred from Saint-Domingue, that these orders would be extremely difficult to enforce.

The Captain General, Someruelos, sent Arango on an observation mission to the north coast of Saint-Domingue in 1803 while war was still raging. Arango wrote in his report on the \textit{parte francesa}: ‘The pen falls from my hands when I try to start the sad task of depicting the present condition of what was once the most flourishing and rich colony in the world.’\textsuperscript{47} Arango described the terrible atrocities committed by the French against the rebellious blacks. He suggested that the solution was not to recognize the independence of Saint-Domingue, but to support the French in their attempt to suppress the revolution. And he asked the brutal question: ‘What fate or destiny have the negroes who are taken captive?’ He writes:

\begin{quote}
All die, and it has happened since the last days of General Leclerc [the leader of the expedition, who died of yellow fever in 1803]. The gentlest death for those unfortunates is to be shot or killed, and it is not the worst; some are tied back to back to be thrown into the sea two at a time. What shocked me is what I heard from Chief of Brigade Nerau, commander of the guard of the General-in-chief, that he had had a captive black woman thrown to the dogs the previous night; and, on another occasion, that he had that very morning surprised a group of twelve rebels, whose leader was passed to the [French] troops, who had asked for him to be punished by having his eyes torn out’.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

Although the intellectuals and writers of the master-cultures of the Caribbean tried to deny it, this white terror against Jacobin officers was well known to contemporaries, who, despite tepid protests, some directed at Arango, concluded that such treatment provided an appropriate remedy for the problem of ‘Negro’ insurgency. The insurgents responded in turn by massacring the whites. That is what led Humboldt to note in his diary that ‘in 1803 terrorism reigned in the Colonies’.\textsuperscript{49}

But the most interesting outcome was that spokesmen for the Creole oligarchy, like Arango, developed the image of the ‘black terror’ as a synonym for revolution in general, using this iconic image of fear as a propellant, almost like a rocket engine, for the development of a new form of slavery, the so-called Second Slavery, in Cuba and Puerto Rico – a combination of mass slavery and technological modernity on sugar estates that were strongly dependent on the Atlantic slave trade. The most important result of the slave revolution in the Caribbean was thus an extremely strong counter-revolution which took the form of economic modernity and reformism.\textsuperscript{50} The Spanish king feared the loss of Cuba so much that he made a gift to the Creole oligarchy, after the restoration of absolutism in the metropolis in 1814, of full capitalist property rights and the right to plant forests across much of the island.\textsuperscript{51} As the price of this, they had to accept Spanish governors as military dictators.
Throughout the Spanish Caribbean and Spanish America: deserters, prisoners and revolutionary agents

In 1790, France had sent troops to the colonies to enforce the colonial pact. In principle, the planters and settlers of Saint-Domingue, Martinique and Guadeloupe (and, at some distance, Cayenne) saw these military reinforcements as the salvation of their properties, which had been widely threatened by radical groups. The majority of the officers and sailors who came out from France were loyal to the Crown and opposed attempts to establish autonomy, whether by settlers or by revolutionaries. The soldiers and younger officers were often Jacobins. However, the repression carried out by the French army and navy did not solve the problems of the West Indies. In January 1793 Charles-Joseph Mascarène, Chevalier de Rivièrè, the divisional commander of the Leeward Islands, and some higher officers had to withdraw precipitously from the islands because the Jacobins had threatened to sink the fleet. The colonists from Martinique, where there was also a revolutionary movement, did not accept the troops’ presence because the greater part of them wanted to achieve self-government and decided to support the Jacobins. This forced the withdrawal of those troops and officers who remained loyal to the Crown. Royalist French army officers fled to Trinidad, where they hoped to gain protection from the Spanish king; for them, the Spanish monarch was primarily a Bourbon, and they regarded the family pact, signed in 1762, as still being in force. These soldiers were well received by the Spanish military authorities, as they provided a good understanding of the situation of the French colonies and of French ambitions in the colonial war. The Spanish Crown accepted their oath of allegiance to the king, and he responded by according the French members of the Spanish army the same rank they had previously held in France.

The Spanish commander wanted to send them to the border with Santo Domingo where Spain had opened a new front. This would have led to a fierce conflict and heavy losses. The governor of Santo Domingo (and Captain General) did not, however, agree to this proposal. He counted among his troops several black units in the struggle against the French, and he valued the alliance with former slaves that they could offer the royalist officers. In fact, the Spanish, in collaboration with the black auxiliary troops under Toussaint, had already begun an offensive on the French side of the island and had regained some territories. This was in 1793–95 and formed the military background for the abolition of slavery by the French commissioners in Saint-Domingue, the step which had led Toussaint to change sides (from the Spanish to the French). The Spanish ordered the transfer of the French officers to Caracas, where they were to wait to learn their final destination. However, the new destination seemed never to arrive. One high-ranking officer sent a letter to the Captain General of Caracas in which he complained of the inaction that had been forced on them. The reasons for such inaction had largely to do with a lack of money, the age-old problem of the royal treasury in the colonies which was not allowed to allocate extraordinary expenses for the services of the French military. But the lack of activity was also due to the counter-revolutionary fever that affected the colonial authorities and led them to fear everything that was related to France; this delirium affected especially the Captain General of Caracas. After innumerable conflicts and suspicions, the court decided
by royal order to make use of the royalist migrants not on the Caribbean fronts but in Europe, and they were sent to Cádiz on several separate occasions.

Even bigger headaches were caused by French prisoners of war, men who were captured in Santo Domingo. During the first months of the war the Spanish colonial army made considerable gains. The collaboration of the slaves of Saint-Domingue allowed them to seize some territory in the French part of the island. These victories resulted in their taking a considerable number of French prisoners (of all kinds, including blacks who had remained loyal to their former masters). They could not be held in the Spanish part of the island due to the lack of security. The governor of Santo Domingo feared that the French presence on the island would cause a disaster similar to that which the French part had already suffered. Naturally, the most dangerous prisoners were soldiers of the French army, men who were revolutionaries, often Jacobins, and addicted to the idea of the Republic; this background alarmed the Spanish authorities and meant that no governor would accept the arrival of the prisoners on their territory.  

The governor of Santo Domingo had an easy excuse to expel the French from his jurisdiction, since the war on his territory was already creating serious problems and he had no wish to add to the sense of insecurity. So he proposed that prisoners captured in the war be referred to Puerto Cabello (the strongest fortress on the Venezuelan coast), and from there sent to Havana or Spain. However, the circumstances of the war prevented the transfer of these prisoners from Venezuela to other prisons, despite repeated protests by both Pedro Carbonell, the Captain General of Caracas, and the Junta of the city.

The situation in Santo Domingo was further aggravated by the lack of resources in the royal treasury, and Joaquín García, Captain General of Santo Domingo, felt under even greater pressure to send the prisoners to Venezuela. The governor distinguished between two groups of prisoners: (mostly white) patriots, whom he saw as the cause of all the revolutionary disorders, and blacks. The patriots came from the expeditionary forces of metropolitan France, and were regarded as propagandists for the revolution; blacks, although they were responsible for revolutionary violence on the island and had taken part in the movement for independence, were not considered dangerous by the Captain General of Santo Domingo. He sent his black prisoners to Venezuela, with the recommendation that they should be sold as slaves. The problem for the Venezuelan (and the Cuban and Puerto Rican) elites was that, because of their pardos, they feared these blacks even more than the patriots.

The attitude of the Captain General of Santo Domingo is understandable, given that the Spanish army, as we know, had a body of ex-slaves from Saint-Domingue who fought against the French on the island. However, the tolerance of Joaquín García toward blacks was not shared by Pedro Carbonell in Venezuela. Carbonell saw in the French blacks the greatest danger to the security of the Captaincy of Venezuela, as they sought the abolition of slavery and the end of colonial rule. Naturally, the Captain General of Venezuela refused to allow the blacks to be sold in the Captaincy as slaves (as the Cuban elites did). He assumed that ‘there will be in all those states who buy some of these slaves, or even get them for nothing’ a serious security problem, since ‘nobody wants to introduce into his family a pernicious seducer embedded in exaggerated ideas of insubordination and freedom.’
The influence of French prisoners and blacks was primarily felt, as the Caracas authorities stated, in the most disadvantaged groups in society. In fact, these groups had offered active resistance to the domination of the Creoles, and had openly challenged the complicity between the French government and the Creoles, without resorting to the slogans of the French revolutionaries. Although the impact of the revolution in Haiti created divisions within the monolithic block of American slave societies, it was less through its ideological influence than through the stimulus it produced amid the inertia of colonial society. The ambiguity comes from the use by marginal groups of the word freedom, a word which Creoles associated with France because of their fear of revolution in general and especially a revolution of the pardos.

The French presence in the Captaincy of Venezuela led to the spread of rumours among the coloured population, free and slave, and among the inmates of La Guaira. The Junta instructed its members to investigate these rumours so that it might ‘know the true state of opinion and the impact of rumour among slaves and free people of colour’. The only official recognition of the revolutionary influence among the population of free coloured and slaves of Venezuela was in the Junta of 2 November 1793, and referred to conversations that some informants had overheard among blacks. After long and extremely complicated conflicts between the different sectors of the colonial bureaucracy (the Captain General, the intendant and the military officers, most prominently the commander-in-chief of the Royal Navy) inside and outside Venezuela, the Venezuelans had to accept several hundred prisoners from Santo Domingo who had been held in the jail of La Guaira, the port of Caracas. They did so reluctantly, the Junta of Caracas insisting on the danger that was posed to ‘these countries and throughout the mainland by the contagious and execrable opinions that have perverted and ruined France and its colonies, upsetting the whole social order and the most sacred principles of religion and the state’. He continued to believe that the prisoners harboured the ‘harmful doctrinal system of the French regicides’. As they implied, ‘their disheveled freedom and notions of equality’ posed a direct threat to social peace, while ‘some also plot attacks on religion and plan to disseminate their ‘detestable ideas’.”

As Javier Laviña noted, there was not a single trace of any French revolutionary influence in the Captaincy of Venezuela. As we know too, only one reference appears to direct French influence in the Conspiracy of La Guaira in 1797 that was said to be inspired by the example of the French prisoners. Narciso del Valle and José María España were executed in 1799, while Manuel Gual was poisoned in Trinidad in October 1800. However, La Guaira, the most important harbour of colonial Venezuela, does have a special significance here. It was a crucial point of transferts culturels between the South American land mass and the Caribbean because of the huge numbers of people passing through.

Humboldt rarely makes direct mention of these rumours, conflicts, rebellions and conspiracies, not because he was unaware of them or under pressure to keep them quiet, as was the case with imperial officials, but because he considered that it was more important to end slavery by a programme of reform. Humboldt was well acquainted with some oral communication networks, including those in Venezuela; the monks on missions, capuchins or foreigners, told him many things. When he noted for the first time the name ‘Gual’, he wrote ‘Wal’, because he had not seen the name written,
only heard it, possibly in a mumbled tone. Humboldt writes of ‘an old Irishman,’ Gaspar Juliac y Marmión, in Puerto Cabello: ‘They found in the papers of a plotter (of his son-in-law who fled to France), that [José María] España wanted to change the [Caracas] provincial administration after the great tragedy.’ Humboldt is referring here to the 1797 conspiracy and the tragic death of José María España. When Humboldt complains about the injustice of the judicial system in 1799 in Cumaná, he also mentions that ‘the history of the revolution in Caracas [meaning again the 1797 conspiracy of La Guaira] proved the degree of violence and the arbitrariness of the justice system.’ On 9 or 10 March 1800, when visiting Villa de Cura to the south of Lake Valencia, he finds the Peraza sisters, whose brother was held ‘prisoner in Havana, involved in this same ‘revolutionary event’.

We already know from other research that the French Revolution had a deep and direct impact on individuals like Francisco de Miranda and Simón Bolívar, who would be among the most popular figures of the Independencia. Miranda was a French general at the time of the Girondin administration, and he lived in France or Great Britain from 1784 until 1810 (with a short interruption in 1806 when he tried to intervene militarily in Venezuela with the help of the Americans, British and the new Haitian government), experiencing all the vicissitudes of the French Revolution and Napoleonic policies, as well as the effects of British policies in the region. As a consequence, he had little impact on the early stages of the wars for Venezuelan independence and the racial conflicts that scarred the country. Nevertheless, there was a sense in which he had a global biography. This biography shows the failures of liberal elites when confronted with the problems of slavery and racism and with the racialized conflicts in plantation societies. The result was that his pupil Bolivar (who had himself been in France between 1804 and 1806) knew that he had to adopt Jacobin policies (without, of course, making this public) and use open and mass violence (guerra a muerte – war to death) to maintain control over the movement. In Bolivar’s case, it is interesting to read his own opinions about what he terms French influences. He only very sparingly mentions the French Revolution, but he liked to emphasize his debt to the Enlighten-ment and to list in full his enlightened readings: Locke, Condillac, Buffon, D’Alembert, Helvétius, Montesquieu, Mably, Filangieri, Lalande, Rousseau, Voltaire, Rollin, Berthot, and all the old classics, the philosophers, historians, orators and poets; and all the mod-ern classics of Spain, France, Italy and many of those in English.

There was not one French Revolution, but different revolutions and many different French revolutionaries

Much of the conflict in colonial and slave society was already taking place before the French migrations (including those of slaves and ex-slaves from Saint-Domingue) made them more visible and audible. This would not have happened without the revolution in Europe.

In the Caribbean and in Spanish America, the only revolutions that happened as compact macro-events immediately before the Independencia were those in Saint-Domingue/Haiti and Guadeloupe. There was not a single French Revolution in the French colonies of the Caribbean, but a specific revolution in each colony. The history of Guadeloupe had a similar influence in the Americas to the revolution in Haiti.
Because of the restoration of the colonial ancien régime (including the reinstatement of slavery) in 1802, it has been categorized a confiscated revolution. Martinique is a very different case. Here slavery was not abolished in 1794, because the island had been captured by the British. With some notable exceptions the history of Guadeloupe and Martinique, as well as their connection to Venezuela, have remained relatively overlooked by historians of the Caribbean in the period before the Independencia. The historiography of the Caribbean in the era of the French Revolution is still dominated by studies of Saint-Domingue and linked to the chronology of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804).

The French (or European) Revolution was only of very indirect importance in Spanish America, where its significance took three distinct forms. First, it was instrumental in unleashing waves of refugees – French émigrés and prisoners – fleeing to Spanish territories and searching for a place to stay (especially after the final defeat of the French troops in Saint-Domingue in 1803). Second, France, in the sense of an expansionist French empire, was very present during the Napoleonic era, culminating in the occupation of Spain and the usurpation of the throne in Madrid (1808). It was that event which triggered the revolution of the Creole elites, which started as a conservative rebellion for more autonomy against the metropolitan elites (with the compromise position of legalizing rich pardos as citizens), taking the form of local wars between local elites (Caracas-Coro), or as a preventive movement against more democratic and radical groups (pardos – free people of colour, seamen, artisans, slaves and llaneros, poor whites from the Canary Islands) – over whom the Haitian revolution had a great influence, and most especially on the pardo populations in the Greater Caribbean). Third, we must recognize that the American Revolution (1776–83), as an anticolonial revolution, still seemed so much nearer than the French Revolution in Europe, even though it had taken place over a generation before. It is true, of course, that the American Revolution had not led to great change in the social order, and it did not abolish slavery. But it had taken place in their world, in their hemisphere. And here, by the early nineteenth century, there would be a more important America, Spanish América.

This explains why Francisco de Arango y Parreño used the concept of Nuestra América (Our America), to distinguish it from what he saw in 1811 as the two greatest dangers for the Spanish elites (in this context the Creole elites referred to themselves as españoles), the ‘terrible risks emanating from the vicinity of the black King Henri Christophe and from the United States’.

Notes

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8 The Peñalver family was of Portuguese descent (which is often linked to the slave trade).

9 In a later passage of his diaries, Humboldt mentions directly ‘echoes’ of the French Revolution, linking them to slavery and the slave trade (in the form of deep disillusionment):

‘Voilà donc le fruit de tant de sang répandu aux Indes, voilà cette espérance dont se flattaient les gens de bien que les Français suivant à embrasser la Cause de l’humanité proposeraient dans la paix générale aux autres puissances [a reference to the peace of Amiens (1802–03) – MZ] un plan [de] diminuer et abolir peu à peu l’esclavage.’ In a note Humboldt refers directly to the French Revolution: ‘Les loix que les Danois avaient données longtemps avant la révolution française, les propositions que Pitt certainement de l’aveu de sa Cour fit en 1800 pour la diminution de l’esclavage donnaient des espérances . . .’. Humboldt concludes: ‘Que n’excite-t-on pas l’autorité du pape pour les pays Catholiques . . .’, in Humboldt and Faak, Lateinamerika am Vorabend der Unabhängigkeitsrevolution, pp. 249–54 (Doc. No. 168).

10 Humboldt and Faak, Reise durch Venezuela, p. 208.


12 M. Zeuske, ‘Comparando el Caribe: Alexander von Humboldt, Saint-Domingue y los comienzos de la comparación de la esclavitud en las Américas’, Estudios AfroAsiáticos 26 (2), 2004,

13 He was also physician to the Viceroy Ezpeleta.
14 Humboldt and Faak, Lateinamerika am Vorabend der Unabhängigkeitsrevolution, pp. 109–10 (Doc. No. 45).
15 Ibid., p. 258 (Doc. No. 174).
16 Ibid., pp. 247–48 (Doc. No. 165).
17 These parts of Humboldt’s writings remain unpublished and they are stored in Kraków; Poland: Humboldt, Diary of 1804, in Biblioteka Jagiellońska Kraków, Oddział Rękopisów, A. v. Humboldt Nachlaß 3.
23 Personal communication with A. Gómez in August 2014.
27 J. Laviña, ‘Ecos de revolución en Venezuela’.


33 Laviña, ‘Ecos de revolución en Venezuela’.


36 Laviña, ‘Ecos de revolución en Venezuela’.


42 Ibid., p. 111.
43 Archivo Nacional de Cuba, La Habana (ANC), Junta de Fomento de la Isla de Cuba (JF), leg. 72, no. 2774 (Noviembre 13 de 1795): ‘Relativo á las precauciones y seguridad en orden á los negros en gral., y en particular á los introducidos de las colonias estranjeras’, f. 30v.
44 Ibid., f. 31r.
46 Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla (AGI), Estado 4, N 3: Bando del Capitán General de la Isla de Cuba D. Luis de las Casas, La Habana, 25 de febrero de 1796.
48 Ibid., p. 363.
55 Laviña, ‘Ecos de revolución en Venezuela’.
57 Laviña, ‘Ecos de revolución en Venezuela’.
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60 Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla, Sección Estado, leg 58: Informe de la Junta de Caracas (November 2, 1793).
64 Humboldt and Faak, Reise durch Venezuela, p. 211.
66 Humboldt, Lateinamerika am Vorabend der Unabhängigkeitsrevolution, p. 278 (Doc. No. 201).
67 P. Verna, Tres franceses en la historia de Venezuela, Caracas: Monte Ávila, 1973; S. E. Ortiz, Franceses en la independencia de la Gran Colombia, Bogotá: Editorial ABC, 1971; see also, on the role of Frenchmen in non-Bolivarian parts of the Independencia movement, P. Verna, Monsieur Bideau, el mulato francés que fue el segundo organizador de la Expedición de Chacachacare, Caracas: Fundación John Boulton, 1968.
75 ‘Representación de la Ciudad de la Habana a las Cortes, el 20 de julio de 1811, con motivo de las proposiciones hechas por D. José Miguel Guridi Alcocer y D. Agustín de Argüelles, sobre el tráfico y esclavitud de los negros; extendida por el Alférez Mayor de la Ciudad, D. Francisco de Arango, por encargo del Ayuntamiento, Consulado y Sociedad Patriótica de la Habana’, in Arango y Parreño, Obras, vol. 2, p. 173.
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