Epilogue: The Age of Revolutions as a Turning Point in the History of Citizenship

In 1826, Samuel Wiselius, the former Batavian ideologue, revolutionary of the first hour in Amsterdam and Holland, and an influential voice on colonial affairs in the national political arena, recalled the revolutionary zeal which had so absorbed him in the 1790s: ‘Who would deny the soundness of the principles of the de Lafayettes, the Condorcets [...] aimed at establishing the happiness of the French people?’, he asked. But ‘did these men, after having preached them, especially after immediately putting them into operation, also see their as such noble efforts be awarded with the desired result? – Alas! – Horrors of which humanity shivers, have followed from it’. Wiselius, who in 1797 had advocated a republican Batavian empire in which non-western natives and black slaves might gradually become citizens, admitted that the ‘liberation of the Negroes’ too, ‘as such deserved the acclaim of Heaven and Earth’, for ‘slavery is contrary to human nature’. But ‘which sensitive heart’, he wondered, ‘has not bled over the cries of anguish caused by the very same liberation?’ The cause of all this, Wiselius held, is ‘that by far the majority of the French, and the Negroes in general, were not sufficiently enlightened’.\(^1\) The republican experiment of the 1790s had not yielded the results Wiselius had hoped for.

As this book has shown, the Haitian Revolution incited the invocation of a discourse of civilizational progress and backwardness to circumvent and counter the invoked logic of the rights of man and citizen. Many of these civilizational arguments for exclusion crystallized in the 1790s, precisely because it was in this decade that citizenship was redefined in a universalistic and egalitarian key. The exclusion of certain groups from citizenship required justifications responsive to the revolutionary principle of the equal rights of man. Saint-Domingue became, and would long remain, a key reference point in such schemes of argumentation. It was widely invoked as the ultimate proof that citizenship should not be attributed to those who are not (yet) civilized or enlightened. This discourse of the inequality between civilizations, which were considered to be in different stages of progress, was a product of a central strand of Enlightenment historical thinking and historiography. If the

Enlightenment contributed to the new conceptions of citizenship that were formulated in the age of revolutions, it also laid the groundwork for the exclusion of those who were not deemed capable to live up to the standards of ‘enlightened’ citizenship.²

From the perspective of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a crucial implication of this concept of citizenship was that it has been both potentially expansive and that it simultaneously could legitimize temporary regimes of exclusion. Gradually, the unenlightened, uneducated or uncivilized, could become enlightened and, thus, eligible for citizenship. In the 1820s and 1830s, for instance, the French abolitionist society Société de la moral chrétienne opposed immediate emancipation, as they wanted to prevent ‘another Saint-Domingue’. Instead, the society proposed freedom by degrees and accordingly organized an essay on the questions of ‘how slaves could gradually be made salaried workers’ and ‘how, by moral and religious education [...] they could be brought gradually, but promptly, without danger to themselves and their present owners, to enjoy fully political and civil liberties’.³ Gradualism, however, did not remain uncontested over the course of the nineteenth century. Virulent scientific racists such as Arthur, comte de Gobineau, in his Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines (1853) declared in a deterministic vogue that ‘in conformity with the highest natural law, the black variety belongs to the kind of branch of humanity that is not able to civilize itself’. The ‘history of Haiti, of democratic Haiti’, proved his point Gobineau thought, as it was ‘nothing but a long account of massacres’.⁴

In the southern United States, the reigning climate of opinion regarding the Saint-Domingue insurrection also hardened after 1800. As has been extensively documented, the greatest anxiety for Americans in the southern states who

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² In his discussion of French republican universalism, Gary Wilder makes a similar point, but is less concerned with the discourse of civilizational inequality as such: ‘[P]olitical exclusion was henceforth only legitimate for those groups whose members did not meet the new criteria of individuality, rationality, and autonomy [...] The point is that new forms of inequality were enabled by and entwined with republican principles; they expressed rather than violated the new political universalism’. Wilder, The French Imperial Nation-State, p. 16. Certain strands of Enlightenment thought, as intellectual historians have demonstrated, did criticize imperial domination and exploitation of slave-labour. But one is hard pressed to find entirely egalitarian conceptions of imperial citizenship. See S. Muthu, Enlightenment Against Empire (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).


observed and reflected on Saint-Domingue was the ‘contagion of rebellion’. The slave rebellion led by the blacksmith Gabriel in Richmond, Virginia, in 1800, as well as later slave rebellions in Barbados (1816), Demerara (1823), Jamaica (1831), and in Virginia (Nat Turner rebellion, 1831) only confirmed the conviction of many southern slaveholders that they should tighten, not loosen, their regime of human bondage. Of these rebellions, the Haitian Revolution was by far the most frightening example of a mass-scale slave insurrection in the antebellum American republic.\footnote{Clavin, \textit{Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War}; Hunt, \textit{Haiti’s Influence on Antebellum America}; Rugemer, \textit{The Problem of Emancipation}, esp. Ch. 2; White, \textit{Encountering Revolution}, esp. Ch. 4.}

The French ‘experiment’ remained a point of reference well into the nineteenth century, as did the argumentation based on civilizational exclusion of black slaves from citizenship. The Jeffersonian democrat John Taylor, a senator and member of the Virginia House of Delegates, generally deemed one of the most influential southern political theorists of the early nineteenth century, expressed an important strand of proslavery thought in his \textit{Arator: Being a Series of Agricultural Essays, Practical and Political, in sixty-one Numbers}, of which five editions appeared between 1813 and 1818. In these essays he combined an initial appreciation of the French Revolution, a conception of the civilizational backwardness of black slaves, and the failure of a philosophical experiment:

The French revolution, bottomed upon as correct abstract principles and sounder practical hopes, turned out to be a foolish and mischievous speculation; what then can be expected from making republicans of negro slaves, and conquerors of ignorant infuriated barbarians? It attempted to make freemen of the people of France; the experiment pronounced that they were incapable of liberty.\footnote{J. Taylor, \textit{Arator: Being a Series of Agricultural Essays, Practical and Political, in sixty-one Numbers} (Georgetown, D.C.: J.M. Carter, 1813), p. 128.}

In addition, Bryan Edwards’ \textit{History of the West Indies} remained one of the prime texts southern pro-slavery advocates referred to. In the Virginia House of Delegates in February 1820, Alexander Smyth, a Republican politician who served in both the Virginia Senate and House of Delegates as well as the US House of Representatives, read entire passages from Edward’s book, drawing parallels between the ‘philosophers, the abolition societies, and societies of friends of the negroes, in Europe, who […] produced the catastrophe of St. Domingo’ and the ‘philanthropists, societies, and popular meetings of the north’ who are pursuing a ‘similar course’. After having quoted the passage
where Edwards argues that the black insurrectionists were driven ‘into those excesses – reluctantly driven – by the vile machinations of men calling themselves philosophers’, Smyth concluded: ‘Here we have a satisfactory proof of the ill effects of partial emancipation in a slave-holding country’.7 The same year extracts of Edward’s *History of the West Indies* also appeared in the *St. Louis Enquirer* (Missouri). The publication appeared in the midst of nationwide debates about the admittance of Missouri as a slave state.8 It resounded the language and fears of the 1790s. The editor’s introduction mentioned that the extracts are submitted in the hope that they will lead them to reflect upon the PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES which must result from the present wide spread SYSTEM of inculcating the NATURAL EQUALITY of the BLACKS and the WHITES, and induce them to take MEASURES in time for the prevention of the CALAMITIES which were produced by the operation of a similar system in the Island of St. Domingo.9

Comparing the ‘Robesperrian society of *Amis des Noirs*’ with the antislavery societies ‘in old England and New England’, who ‘are now labouring to produce the same result in the *South* and *West*’, the author went on to single out the letter of the Abbé Grégoire. This ‘celebrated letter was the text out of which all the restriction advocates took their arguments’. Relying on Edwards, the author pictured a future where liberated black ex-slaves, like the ‘freed negroes of St. Domingo’, would live as ‘savages in the midst of society’.10 By implication, the message of such reflections on the French-Haitian Revolution was that the prospect of black slaves becoming citizens was out of the question.

From the 1830s onward, the discourse of gradualism and environmentalism was increasingly challenged by a more deterministic, quasi-scientific racism based on ethnological research and polygenetic theories of separate races. This body of beliefs, alongside other lines of argumentation, was increasingly employed by pro-slavery advocates in the southern United States to legitimize their slave-based society.11 References to Saint-Domingue and the theme of

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7 *St. Louis Enquirer* (St. Louis, Missouri), April 19, 1820.
9 *St. Louis Enquirer* (St. Louis, Missouri), April 19, 1820.
10 *St. Louis Enquirer* (St. Louis, Missouri), August 26, 1820 (capitalization in original).
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Civilizational inequality, however, persisted. Thomas Roderick Dew, the prominent southern proslavery writer and president of the College of William and Mary, the foremost college of Virginia and the American south at the time, in his widely distributed and influential review of the slavery debate in the Virginia General Assembly in 1831–32 held that the negro race was ‘vastly inferior in the scale of civilization’. The theme of anarchy and exceptional savagery was central to Dew’s invocation of Saint-Domingue. He recalled the ‘bloodiest and most shocking insurrection ever recorded in the annals of history’. The whole island ‘was involved in frightful carnage and anarchy’. After his discussion of the anarchy of Saint-Domingue, Dew concluded: ‘The ground upon which we shall rest our argument on this subject is, that the slaves, in both an economical and moral point of view, are entirely unfit for a state of freedom among the whites’. Dew explicitly based his reasoning on the views of ‘Dr. Robertson’ [the Scottish Enlightenment historian William Robertson, rk], who had explained that societies develop through different stages. ‘Let us reflect on these things’, Dew concluded, referring to the French experiment in Saint-Domingue, ‘and learn wisdom from experience: the relations of society generated by the lapse of ages cannot be altered in a day’.

The reasoning behind this exclusion which was based on the alleged lack of civilization and enlightenment was not only applied to black slaves or non-western peoples. Although one important argument of this book has been that the existing historiography has not sufficiently taken into the account the civilizational qualification of citizenship within the realm of empire, the significance of this discourse of enlightened citizenship was broader. It was also applied domestically. As we have seen, French Thermidorians felt no hesitation to describe Montagnard revolutionaries and the sans-culottes as ‘savages’. Disillusioned Dutch revolutionaries such as Ockerse and Wiselius ascribed the failed experiment of the republican revolutions of the 1790s to the lack of enlightenment of the majority of the population.

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13 ‘Professor Dew on Slavery’, pp. 421–422 (italic in original).

14 ‘Professor Dew on Slavery’, pp. 297, 490 (italic in original).
The view that large sections of the population, both domestically and within the realm of the empire, had to be educated and brought into the ambit of civilization – and until that point had been reached, should be excluded from politics – would become a mainstay in most varieties of nineteenth-century French and Dutch liberalism. The limitations placed on white manhood suffrage were justified by what has been termed a ‘discourse of capacity’ and premised on the ‘immaturity’ of the mass, as Pierre Rosanvallon and Alan Kahan have shown. Citizenship, in short, required education.\(^{15}\) As Eugen Weber has noted, domestic programs in the second half of the nineteenth century aimed at turning ‘peasants into Frenchmen’ bore strong resemblances to colonial civilization missions, as contemporaries themselves also remarked. '[T]he famous hexagon can itself be seen as a colonial empire', peasants too were to be ‘civilized’.\(^{16}\)

In The Netherlands, the spectre of Saint-Domingue also continued to be invoked in relation to the question of slavery. The writings of the progressive colonial reformer Dirk van Hogendorp, the one-year older brother of the future statesman Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp, show that the ‘lessons’ of Saint-Domingue echoed as far as the East Indies. Dirk, a declared admirer of Raynal and Rousseau, had resided in the Dutch Indies between 1785 and 1799 as admiralty officer and merchant of the Dutch East India Company, later as ‘regent’ (colonial administrator) of various regions, and eventually as governor of East Java between 1794 and 1798.\(^{17}\) In a sequel to his *Berigt van den tegenwoordigen toestand der Bataafse nederzettingen* (Report on the Present State of the Batavian Settlements, 1799) Van Hogendorp advocated the gradual extension of civic rights to the indigenous Indonesian population, but declared that he was ‘aware of the danger and fatal consequences that would follow from the

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sudden liberation of slaves; and in the French colonies this has been proven by experience.\(^\text{18}\)

Others, such as the Dutch judge and future president at the Surinam Court of Civil Affairs A.F. Lammens in 1818 looked back at the revolutionary era and sighed that ‘[t]here were no limits anymore to the desire for equality and fraternity’. The ‘careless and wrong’ application of otherwise ‘affectionate principles’ had caused the destruction of Saint-Domingue, once ‘the most beautiful colony in the world’.\(^\text{19}\) That same year, Johannes van den Bosch, the future governor-general of the Dutch East Indies (1830–1833), Minister of the Colonies (1834–1840), and architect of the Cultivation System (\textit{Cultuurstelsel}), argued that political and social institutions should always correspond with a people’s stage of civilization and that colonial reform should always be gradual, otherwise the ‘scenes of Saint-Domingue’ would be repeated.\(^\text{20}\) In his \textit{Bezwaren tegen den geest der Eeuw} (Objections against the Spirit of the Age, 1823), one of the more notorious Dutch counter-enlightenment critiques of the early nineteenth century, the Portuguese Jewish convert and leading figure in the Dutch Protestant \textit{Réveil} Movement, Isaac da Costa, claimed:

Philosophy in this day and age endeavours everywhere to turn the course of nature, as well as of Providence: hence she demanded with loud cries the freedom of negroes, without consideration, without precaution, without examining whether these people were susceptible to, or at least ripe for, liberation. What has been the result? The destruction of the colonies, the murdering of planters, complete anarchy, bloody and lethal wars.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^{18}\) D. van Hogendorp, \textit{Berigt van den tegenwoordigen toestand der Bataafsche nederzettingen in Oost-Indien en den handel op dezelve; benevens eenige denkbeelden tot verandering en hervorming van het bestuur daarover} (Delft: M. Roelofswaert, 1800) [Report on the Present State of the Batavian Settlements in East Indies and of its Trade; Together with some Views on the Change and Reform of its Governance]. The quote can be found in the sequel \textit{Stukken rakende den tegenwoordigen toestand der Bataafsche bezittingen in Oost-Indië en den handel op dezelve} (The Hague: Leeuwestyn, 1801), pp. 377–378.

\(^{19}\) A.F. Lammens, \textit{Redevoering ten betooge: dat de sterfte of het afnemen van het getal der neger-slaven, in de kolonie Suriname, niet zoo zoer aan mishandelingen, maar hoofdzakelijk aan andere oorzaken, moet toegeschreven worden}, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam. G.S. Leeneman van der Kroe, 1823 [1819]).

\(^{20}\) J. van den Bosch, \textit{Nederlandsche bezittingen in Azia, Amerika en Afrika. In derzelver toestand en aangelegenheid voor dit Rijk, wijsgeerig, staatszuishoudkundig en geographisch beschouwd}, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Van Cleef, 1818) [(Dutch possessions in Asia, America, and Africa […] in philosophical, political-economical, and geographical perspective)], i, xvi; ii, p. 212.

Whether conceptualized in terms of permanent racial inferiority or semi-permanent civilizational backwardness, the essential point is that such considerations of the Haitian Revolution discredited the assumption of the inherent potential of black (and non-western) people to raise to the status of full-fledged citizens, an assumption that was foundational to earlier revolutionary pro-emancipatory visions. In the short run, then, across the Atlantic such invocations of the Haitian Revolution worked against, rather than contributed to, the extension of citizenship to black and coloured people. The revolutionary momentum that had spurred unprecedented visions of radically opening up the office of modern republican citizenship was over.

These observations, although far from exhaustive, point to a legacy of references and lines of reasoning that originated in the 1790s and have not yet been made sufficiently explicit in the existing scholarship. Undoubtedly, the Haitian Revolution, which led to the first black independent state in the New World, inspired generations of black, as well as more generally antislavery and anticolonial activists around the world. However, as this book has shown, the 1790s were also the breeding ground for exclusive visions of citizenship based on civilizational inequality, as well as an important moment in the disenchantment of many Americans and Dutchmen at the time, with French revolutionary experiments in racial equality.

While the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue raised questions about equality and the universal applicability of the rights of man, the Terror in Jacobin France led many to substantially reconsider the revolutionary, democratic-republican ideal of participatory citizenship. American Federalists, French Thermidorians, as well as a considerable number of Batavian revolutionaries came to hold deep suspicions about politicized popular societies. They feared a faction-ridden citizenry, and sought to exclude certain social classes from participation in politics. In their view, popular societies were an infringement on the principle of the indivisible unity of the people. They breed faction, and to their minds faction was destructive to a republican polity. Citizens who were attached to popular societies and gathered in unruly masses, they thought, lose their independency of judgment and reasoning. Such platforms of citizen participation do not represent the ‘will of the people’. They only represent particular interests. Federalists, Thermidorians, and certain currents within the

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Batavian revolutionary movement, wanted to get rid of this kind of mediation and bind the citizen directly to the state.

Certainly, the overall revolutionary experience of the 1790s created different political and intellectual legacies on both sides of the Atlantic. Under the constitutional monarchies of the French Bourbons (1814–1830), the July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe I of Orleans (1830–1848), and in The Netherlands under King William I (1815–1840) and King William II (1840–1849), the ideal of a broad, politically active citizenry laid deeply buried under the consensus between ‘notables’ and the constitutionally limited monarch. In the newly founded Dutch kingdom, the vast majority of the population was expected to behave as loyal subjects, not as active citizens, and certainly not in politicized clubs. The vibrant literary and reading societies kept well away from politics and the press hardly discussed political issues until the late 1820s. Domestic life was promoted under the figure of the king as a ‘father amidst his family’, where faction had been substituted for loyalty to a unified fatherland. The politicized, democratic-republican citizenship of the Batavian Revolution was actively suppressed, only to be revived, if in a different and moderate form, in the 1840s.23

In France, the revolution bequeathed a more powerful as well as more contested revolutionary republican tradition.24 The democratic-republican ideal of participatory citizenship only resurfaced with force during the Second Republic (1848–1851). Prominent restoration or ‘Doctrinaire’ liberals such as François Guizot and Pierre Paul Royer-Collard, who had gained prominence and took on leading roles under the July Monarchy (1830–1848), relied on the ‘sovereignty of reason’, and denounced popular sovereignty, universal suffrage, and a politically active citizenry.25 Guizot explicitly referred to the Montagnard constitution of 1793 and the Terror to criticize ‘the unrealistic conception of

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24 S. Hazareesingh, Political Traditions in Modern France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Furet, Revolutionary France.

civic virtue'. The roots of this passive, depoliticized, and socio-politically narrowed down conception of citizenship stem from the 1790s.

In the long-term history of American democracy and citizenship, the decade of the 1790s, however contentious, faction-ridden, and tumultuous, was in a way a test that was passed successfully. Violence was contained; no civil war broke out. The authoritarian Federalist measures of the late 1790s and the infringements on the freedom of opinion and press were reversed. Jefferson's election in 1800 was, in the end, a bloodless affair, a peaceful democratic transition of power. The 'age of federalism' was over. Partisan democratic citizenship, although generally still considered undesirable and dangerous, had not led to the destruction of the republic. In that sense, the 1790s rendered partisanship more acceptable. The decades following the 1790s witnessed gradual democratization and the emergence of a democratic party culture that increasingly clashed with the 'deferential-republican' political culture of the eighteenth century. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, many states expanded white adult male suffrage. The contrast with continental Europe could not be starker. It only enhanced the impression, rooted in the second half of the 1790s, that the early American Republic was set on a different path when compared to France, and that white male American citizenship, as an idea and ideal, was a category sui generis. At any rate, American visions of democratic citizenship were no longer considered to be part of a larger Atlantic revolutionary movement.

Indeed, in the United States as well as in the Batavian Republic, although emphases differed, the notion that there was a particular model of American or Dutch citizenship which was in any case not French – or British – was partly a result from the disenchantment with the idea of a transatlantic revolutionary movement. National citizenship was not only a product of the age of revolutions in the sense that the concept of nation was theorized as the sovereign power in society. National citizenship was also not only a product of nationalism conceived as a political program, even though this was eminently

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30 Cf. Cotlar, Tom Paine’s America.
important.\textsuperscript{31} The experiences of, and reflections on, the age of revolution as such also contributed to the very nationalization of notions of citizenship. The Atlantic Thermidor, the disintegration of the vision of a transatlantic revolutionary movement underpinned by highly universalistic civic ideals, left a vacuum to be filled by more national interpretations of what it means to be a citizen.

The nationalization of citizenship during and after the tumultuous decade of the 1790s differed significantly in the three countries under discussion. In the early American Republic of the 1790s, those who endorsed the Federalist persuasion and whose enthusiasm about the French Revolution had waned early on, were repelled by the news from France about the violence and chaos and what they considered a hopeless universalist utopianism. Although many a Republican would endorse the revolutionary principles from the other side of the Atlantic until deep into the 1790s, slaveholding Republicans from the South would be appalled by the ways in which successive French revolutionary governments dealt with the enslaved population of their crown colony. Taken together, the Haitian Revolution and the Terror estranged large groups of Americans from the notion of a shared Atlantic revolutionary program. The rise of Napoleon Bonaparte and his authoritarian regime essentially only confirmed what revolutionary France had already showed to them, namely that their own form of government and ideal of citizenship, even though Americans also differed amongst themselves, was certainly not French. After the purchase of Louisiana from Napoleon in 1803, and after the War of 1812 with Great Britain broke the ‘emotional connection’ with their former colonial sovereign, Americans turned West, away from the Old World.\textsuperscript{32} The American Revolution, and the gradual democratization of the American polity was no longer associated with a wider Atlantic movement, but set apart from it.

In The Netherlands, the Batavian Revolution could never attain the status in national historiography and collective memory as the American or French revolutions did in the United States and France, respectively. Although the Batavian revolutionaries founded the centralized Dutch nation-state and introduced a representative democracy as well as the first modern constitution, the revolutionary experience would forever be tainted by the gradual French takeover, the occupation, and ultimately the assimilation into Napoleon’s


\textsuperscript{32} Wood, \textit{Empire of Liberty}, p. 701.
empire in 1810. The founding of the constitutional monarchy headed by the House of Orange in 1813–1815 was a moment of liberation, stabilization, and nationalization. The Batavian Republic, a ‘boulevard of broken dreams’, as one historian aptly put it, was actively erased from memory. The disassociation from the age of Atlantic revolutions, and the rejection of its model of democratic-republican citizenship in the nineteenth century, was by implication a way to stow the memories of their own revolutionary experiment.

Finally, we have seen that in France the early nationalization efforts of centrist Thermidorians by invoking a discourse of the ‘good citizen’ failed miserably. Unlike Dutchmen and Americans, Frenchmen could not externalize the 1790s – the defining decade in the history of modern France. Under Napoleon, the republican experiment could be partly incorporated and reshaped, and partly effectively suppressed. Under the constitutional monarchies (1815–1848), ‘national’ citizenship was problematic. In the hands of the republican camp, ‘nationalism’ was divisive rather than unitary, since it was hardly possible for French monarchists and Catholics to identify with it. During most of the nineteenth century, the legacy of the republic was simply too contested to become nationalized.

Recognizing these divergent paths of the nationalization of citizenship, however domestically contested, as products of the very interaction between national political conflicts and a wider, transnational horizon, might gain insights into mechanisms that still seem to operate in many parts of the world today. The limits of citizenship, and the question who is entitled to what citizenship rights, are on top of the political agenda and not likely to be settled, as many countries in the world are struggling with large-scale movements of migrants and refugees. A consensus about the appropriate platform for, and extent of citizen participation in politics is also not likely to be reached soon. Many observe an objectionable and everwidening distance between citizens and political decision-making processes, while at the same time there seems to be a broad skepticism in democracies worldwide about the involvement of citizens in policy making in too direct ways. The perspective on the age of Atlantic revolutions as a turning point in the history of citizenship offered in this


book reminds us that public debates about the limits of inclusion and participation are often bound up with, and shaped by concrete historical experiences that transcend national boundaries. Revolutions, revolutionary ‘experiments’ in democratic participation and civic equality, and the universalistic logics invoked to legitimize them, tend to generate their own counterarguments, as well as create their own regimes of exclusion.