Julia Gaffield

Haitian Connections in the Atlantic World: Recognition after Revolution. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. xiii + 254 pp. (Paper US\$ 29.95)

With *Haitian Connections*, Julia Gaffield joins a number of recent historians who have enriched our understanding of Haiti's place in the world immediately after its independence in 1804. Unlike her predecessors Ada Ferrer, Sara Johnson, and Deborah Jensen, she has written a diplomatic history. Her main point is that historians have overemphasized Haiti's early diplomatic isolation, which lasted until 1825, when France recognized its existence in exchange for a heavy indemnity. No other New World colony had to wait for its former empire to accept its independence before other nations would send ambassadors. However, Gaffield argues that there was no international conspiracy to isolate Haiti. Nor, she contends, was racism a central factor in the nonrecognition policy of other powers. Indeed, Haiti had considerable trade with Great Britain, the United States, and other Caribbean islands throughout this period. Significantly, she shows how Great Britain's Haitian policies invented the "informal empire" that shaped its relations with Latin America for the next century. Haiti's international status from 1804 to 1810, she tells us, was ambiguous and can only be understood in full Atlantic context.

The book's first chapter, which illustrates the largely unsuccessful attempts of French officials in the Caribbean to get other powers to isolate Haiti, is one of its most original. French representatives in Dutch Curaçao and Danish St. Thomas did eventually convince administrators to outlaw trade with France's former colony. However, these bans had little effect on illegal commerce with Saint-Domingue/Haiti. Another French strategy was to spread word that Haiti was encouraging slave conspiracies in islands such as St. Thomas and Trinidad. Here Gaffield sides with David Geggus, concluding that there is little evidence of such conspiracies.

The second chapter examines Britain's attempts to benefit from the independence of France's most valuable colony. In 1804 Jean-Jacques Dessalines refused to sign an agreement with Governor Nugent of Jamaica that would have given British merchants exclusive rights in Haitian ports and put Haiti under a British naval protectorate. This, Gaffield shows, was precisely the situation that emerged after Dessalines's assassination in 1806.

Chapter 3 will be the book's most important one for many readers. It explains how Britain developed a policy that withheld diplomatic recognition of Haiti while at the same time permitting its subjects to trade there. Here Gaffield focuses on British judges more than diplomats. As the Royal Navy captured merchant ships trading in Haiti, British courts had to determine whether they

were trading with the enemy, that is to say, with the French. After several affirmative decisions, the British Privy Council ruled in 1806 that although Haitian territory was technically French, the enemy no longer controlled a number of ports there. From this point on, British merchants who received a Haitian trading license from the Council could not be accused of aiding the French. Because no other state developed such a formal system, British merchants enjoyed a privileged status in Haitian ports after 1806. This British policy created a vital commercial outlet for Haiti, especially after the Jefferson administration prohibited U.S. merchants from trading there in 1806.

Chapter 4 provides an illuminating Atlantic perspective on early U.S. relations with Haiti. Gaffield shows that commercial courts in the United States and Britain interpreted their countries' diplomatic stance toward Haiti in opposite ways. In other words, there was no coordinated international campaign to isolate Haiti commercially. After 1808 the United States generally permitted Haitian trade, but contradictory rulings in various courts made this commerce less secure for U.S. merchants than for their British counterparts.

Chapter 5 returns to Britain's relations with Haiti, which were complicated after 1806 by the emergence of rival Haitian states under Henri Christophe and Alexandre Pétion. Examining diplomatic as opposed to commercial policy, Gaffield follows two years of Christophe's attempts to win British recognition. His agent in London sent Whitehall some 13 letters and memoranda on behalf of Haiti. The British refused to answer a single one in writing, even though Christophe offered the commercial exclusivity that Dessalines had rejected.

Haitian Connections demonstrates that the country's international position in 1804 was far more delicate and controversial than previous historians have suggested. Gaffield shows that Haiti did have some leverage over foreign powers because of its valuable trade. I would have liked to see evidence of the overall volume of Haiti's early nineteenth-century exports and the extent to which they declined after neighboring countries began to produce coffee for foreign markets. Independence did not stop traders from flocking to Haiti, but by 1810 Britain's naval dominance meant that the nation's leaders could not compel the one power that partially acknowledged their existence to pay them any official attention.

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