Julia Gaffield (ed.)

The Haitian Declaration of Independence: Creation, Context, and Legacy. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016. x + 280 pp. (Cloth US\$ 39.50)

Locating the Haitian Revolution within the Age of Atlantic Revolutions remains a moving target for scholars. Was the Haitian Revolution similar to the American Revolution? Was it an extension of the French Revolution? The refusal by Atlantic world powers to recognize Haitian independence on January 1, 1804 continues to raise questions among historians about the significance of the momentous event. If Haiti declared independence but no other country recognized it, did Haitian independence really happen? In recent years scholars and publishers have gained an interest in trying to address the lingering questions around Haiti's most appropriate place within Atlantic history. To that end, Julia Gaffield has put together an edited volume that uses the Haitian Declaration of Independence as a historical lens through which to discuss the country's appropriate place within Atlantic history.

Gaffield's earlier *Haitian Connections in the Atlantic World: Recognition after Revolution* (2015) focused on Haiti's diplomatic prowess in an Atlantic world hostile to its independence. For this follow-up book, she assembled well-known scholars of Haitian and Haitian Revolutionary history to produce eleven essays organized in three parts. The introduction, by Gaffield and David Armitage, discusses the scholarly relevance of the Haitian Declaration of Independence and places the subsequent chapters in the broader historical discussion. "The essays collected in this volume allow us to see why [the Declaration of Independence] so immediately shaped national memory, beginning in 1804, and why it should still be commemorated and studied over two hundred years later" (p. 17).

In Part One "Writing the Declaration," essays by David Geggus, John Garrigus, Patrick Tardieu, and Deborah Jensen offer responses to questions concerning the creation of the Declaration and the establishment of Haitian independence. Should early Haiti be considered a republic or dictatorship? Was the Declaration a "declaration" or an "act" of independence? What was the significance of the Declaration being issued *after* the Haitian Revolution rather than before, like the U.S. Declaration of Independence? Who wrote the Declaration? Should the document produced on November 29, 1803 or the document of January 1, 1804 be considered the "official" Declaration of Independence? Regarding the effects on the Declaration of lower levels of literacy among Haitian leaders, Jensen's essay suggests: "A public process of declaring independence verbally, and copying it for the idiosyncratic literary birth of former slaves turned nation builders, presents a moving example of the use of poetry

by the unschooled (or less schooled) in dialogue with and contestation of the revolutionary discourses of Western Europe" (p. 77).

Part Two, "Haitian Independence and the Atlantic," locates the Haitian independence movement within the Atlantic revolutionary context. Jeremy D. Popkin addresses the connections between the Declaration and violence against the French who remained in postindependence Haiti. Malick W. Ghachem's contribution suggests a sobering thought for all who study Haitian history: "Haiti's path, unlike that of either revolutionary America or France, was emphatically a path out of racial plantation slavery for the overwhelming majority of the population ... no other nation, faced with the same challenges, has managed to do much better" (p. 98).

Part Three, "The Legacy of the Haitian Declaration of Independence," discusses Haiti's international existence. Laurent Dubois creatively invokes the language and song of Vodou to illuminate the complexities of Haitian independence and its consequences for the lived experiences of the Haitian populace. Erin Zavitz details the historical journey around the memory of Jean-Jacques Dessalines—its decline and resurrection, depending on the country's political situation across the nineteenth century. Like most works on Haitian history, this volume concludes on a sobering note. Jean Casimir's essay on the struggles over sovereignty between the Haitian State and the people of Haiti suggests to those who build on *The Haitian Declaration of Independence* that "It is necessary to be careful not to exult 1804 to the detriment of the sovereign people and civil society" (p. 198).

After reading the essays, in which contributing authors discuss (and at times disagree with each other over) selected portions of the Declaration of Independence, the appendix offers a transcription of the complete document. In it are found words that must have resounded as a clarion's victorious whoop to a population of formerly enslaved people who had fought for 15 years to be forever free: "the day has arrived, this day will eternalize our glory, our independence" (p. 245). One of the most lasting gifts of an edited volume like this one is the encouragement for researchers to draw on sections that are useful to their interests. Scholars and graduate students will use *The Haitian Declaration of Independence* for years to come "to remind us that the mere fact of Haiti's existence as a separate state in the Atlantic World of 1804 was a tremendous novelty, a revolutionary act in its own right" (p. 109).

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