Alan Forrest, *The Death of the French Atlantic: Trade, War, and Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. xxxii + 320 pp. (Cloth US\$ 43.91)

Alan Forrest is a veteran and prolific historian of France during the revolutionary and Napoleonic era whose work spans the fields of military, political, and social history. *Death of the French Atlantic*, his first major venture into Atlantic and colonial studies, deals with France's demise as a colonial power, chiefly during the period 1763–1815, which it attributes to three factors: war, revolution, and antislavery thought. The first five chapters cover the late Ancien Régime, and the next six, the period of war and revolution. A final section contains three chapters on the Congress of Vienna, the illegal slave trade, and the slave trade in collective memory. The book draws on a very wide bibliography that includes numerous scholarly articles on local history, and at least a few chapters show extensive use of primary sources.

The first section focuses on the development of France's Atlantic ports, emigration to the colonies, and the slave trade. Among the themes treated are the economic geography of the major ports; urban life on both sides of the ocean; war and privateering; and aristocracy, religion, and commerce. The gaps are large, however, and the exposition of several topics suggests the author's unfamiliarity with them. Neither the structure nor the mechanisms of trade is discussed, nor is France's position in the Atlantic market. Uninformed readers will have no idea that (let alone why) France dominated trade in tropical produce and was the world's major exporter at different times of sugar, coffee, and indigo. Key issues such as colonial debt and commercial credit, plantation profits, and the chronic uncompetitiveness of the French slave trade are never raised. The contentious free-port system, the importance of colonial commerce to France's tax base and balance of payments, and the country's inability to absorb even a third of its colonies' exports are also passed over. Forrest's focus is excessively urban. He ignores the world of plantation employees, which is where a large proportion of French migrants ended up. Yet the Martiniquan city of Saint-Pierre, easily the largest French American city, is not mentioned once. The only colonies to receive attention are Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe, and Louisiana.

The book's middle section includes two chapters on revolutionary politics in France, and others on antislavery thought, revolution in the Caribbean, the Saint-Domingue diaspora, and the French ports' decline during wartime. The problems of coverage and balance in the first section reappear here along with an unusual level of factual inaccuracy in some chapters. Neither political maneuvering and legislation in Paris nor events in the Caribbean are handled well. Vital issues go unexplained, chronologies are distorted, and dates

and statistics are frequently faulty. In places, slavery gets confused with the slave trade, racial equality with slave emancipation, Port-au-Prince with Cap Français, and the first Civil Commission with the second. Léger-Félicité Sonthonax's abolition of slavery in 1793 would have been the perfect opportunity to assess the relative influence of revolution, war, and abolitionism in the French empire's decline but, though it is presented as the book's overarching thesis, it is nowhere pursued very seriously. Forrest also fails to pursue questions where his expertise would have been valuable, as in explaining the split among Bordeaux merchants over racial equality in 1791, and the background of the Girondin deputies who became leading opponents of slavery. Although he is a biographer of Napoleon Bonaparte, he offers a very simplified view of that ruler's role in Saint-Domingue's loss. In the chapter on economic decline, the debt question is once again ignored.

Because of the wide variety of publications cited, specialists are likely to find new nuggets of information in this book, but other readers will get a very imperfect introduction to many of the topics covered. Chapters sometimes seem more like assemblages of various details than comprehensive or synthetic overviews of a subject. Forrest not only missed some major works (such as Charles Frostin on White autonomism, Jean Tarrade on international trade, Robin Blackburn and Yves Bénot on the colonial question in the French Revolution), but his acquaintance with many of the studies cited appears to have been fleeting. Oxford University Press has produced a handsome volume with genuine footnotes and several maps, but neglected to provide adequate copy-editing.

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