Jean-Pierre Le Glaunec, *The Cry of Vertières: Liberation, Memory, and the Beginning of Haiti*. Montreal QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020. xx + 216 pp. (Cloth US\$ 29.95)

This book, a translation (by Jonathan Kaplansky) of Jean-Pierre Le Glaunec's *L'armée indigène: La défaite de Napoléon en Haïti* (2014), focuses on the battle of Vertières of November 18, 1803, which secured Haiti's victory in its war of independence. Le Glaunec, a professor of history at Sherbrooke University in Canada, was inspired by Georges Duby's 1973 approach to landmark battles in *Le dimanche de Bouvines*. (Pierre Nora's *Les lieux de mémoires* [1984] also comes to mind.) Accordingly, his main goal in *The Cry of Vertières* is not to retrace the military specifics of the battle (he dispenses with that task in Chapter 3), but to provide "a broader interpretation, focusing not on the unfolding of events, but on the traces they left behind" (p. 18). This is a book about public memory (or the absence of it), which might be hard to process for lay readers as the narrative occasionally jumps back and forth in time, but which will give experts in the field much to discuss—and occasionally disagree with.

Le Glaunec's primary interest lies in the "silencing" of Vertières in France: that term references the title of the famous *Silencing the Past* (1995) by Michel-Rolph Trouillot, whose brother, novelist Lyonel Trouillot, penned the foreword to this book. Despite the historical relevance of the battle, which Le Glaunec aptly compares to Valmy and Yorktown, nineteenth- and twentieth-century French historians glossed over the event in their works (as well as, one might add, the Haitian Revolution in general). France was obviously eager to forget a defeat; also, as long as France held an overseas empire, it preferred not to explore the more shameful moments of its colonial past.

Le Glaunec is less convincing when arguing that this silencing is still ongoing. Current historians may not all use the terms "French genocidal hell" to describe the Leclerc expedition as Le Glaunec does (p. 77), but they no longer shy away from covering the crimes committed under French rule. Similarly, Le Glaunec makes much of President Nicolas Sarkozy's reluctance to show "repentance" for France's colonial past (p. 6). But the current French political class has been far more willing than its predecessors to commemorate the evils of slavery, for example mandating under a 2001 law that slavery be covered in the school curriculum and that May 10 be earmarked as a day of remembrance.

Silencing the Past appeared in 1995, so historians are now well aware of the traditional silencing of the Haitian Revolution. Le Glaunec truly breaks new ground in Chapters 7 and 8 when he explains how the battle of Vertières became a rallying point in Haiti itself. The process was more recent and convoluted than one might expect, in part because early Haitian rulers preferred to

celebrate their own battles rather than those of Jean-Jacques Dessalines. The cult of Vertières, which is now ubiquitous in Haiti, only dates back to centennial and sesquicentennial celebrations, Le Glaunec shows, and was purposely nurtured by Haitian rulers eager to foster national pride and, incidentally, their political careers. Le Glaunec then again overplays his hand in the ninth and final chapter when he describes the poor state of memorials like the statue of General Capois-la-mort as a “symbol of the systemic way in which the traces of the Battle of Vertières have been obliterated” (p. 140). These comparatively minor sites spread around the outskirts of Cap-Haïtien seem to have simply been the victim of neglect and lack of funds: the main memorial in Vertières is still standing strong.

The research for this book, conducted in France and Haiti, is generally comprehensive, except when Le Glaunec overlooks some contradictory evidence to push the “silencing” narrative too far. He writes that Dessalines’s personal account of the battle of Vertières has been “strangely neglected by historians” (p. 38) when in fact it has been used before, for example in my own *The Slaves Who Defeated Napoléon* (p. 416). On p. 101, he writes that Jean Price-Mars, the Haitian author of *Ainsi parla l’oncle* (1928), was the first to mention how the warriors of Vertières sang “*Grenadiers à l’assaut*,” but the song was already mentioned in Jean-Baptiste Lemonnier-Delafoffe’s *Seconde campagne de Saint-Domingue* in 1846 (p. 85). Lemonnier-Delafoffe, like many of the French veterans who wrote the first histories of the Leclerc expedition, was a complicated figure who was racist yet who publicly lauded the courage of his Black adversaries. Introducing such nuances in the argument would have made an interesting book even more convincing.

Philippe Girard

Department of History, McNeese State University, Lake Charles LA, U.S.A.

girard@mcneese.edu