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Erin Greenwald, *Marc-Antoine Caillot and the Company of the Indies in Louisiana: Trade in the French Atlantic World*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016. xiii + 224 pp. Acknowledgments, illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliography and index. \$45 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8071-6285-9.

Review by Bertie Mandelblatt, University of Toronto.

Erin Greenwald's monograph, *Marc-Antoine Caillot and the Company of the Indies in Louisiana: Trade in the French Atlantic World*, offers readers an engaging microhistory of the two years spent by one Frenchman working as clerk for the *Compagnie des Indes* during the last years it controlled the French colony of Louisiana (1729-31). The book is a close study of a previously unpublished, originally anonymous, manuscript that Greenwald's employer, the Historic New Orleans Collection, bought at auction in 2004. In her curatorial practice, Greenwald identified Marc-Antoine Caillot as the manuscript's author. Subsequently, she also edited and wrote the introduction to an English translation published as *A Company Man: The Remarkable French-Atlantic Voyage of a Clerk of the Company of the Indies; a Memoire by Marc-Antoine Caillot* (2013).

Greenwald argues that the particular value of Caillot's manuscript is the new light it sheds on the history of French Louisiana as a colony belonging to the *Compagnie des Indes*, specifically during its last two years. Although the historiography of colonial Louisiana during its French period, which existed most broadly between 1682 and 1763, is rich in religious, cultural and political history and the history of slavery, there have been markedly fewer recent trade and economic histories of the colony.[1] The explicit focus of Greenwald's monograph on trade, specifically, on the *Compagnie des Indes*, and her elucidations of the internal culture of the Company, the role of Louisiana in the Company's global operations and the impact the Company had on the development of the colony, then, is enormously welcome. Through her study of Caillot's manuscript, Greenwald underlines both how potential for trade shaped the plans of a variety of French (and other) actors for the colony, and the ways in which local and global trade determined not only the conditions of everyday life in Louisiana but also its political economic relations with the French metropole, including the ultimate decision made by the French Crown to cede the colony to Spain at the end of the Seven Years War.

The first chapter describes the historical evolution and the internal structures of the *Compagnie des Indes*, and the history of Louisiana before 1717, at which date the control of the colony passed from Antoine Crozat to a number of chartered commercial companies (including, briefly, John Law's Mississippi Company) which were consolidated in 1719 with the creation of the *Compagnie des Indes*. The subsequent five chapters mirror closely the structure of Caillot's narrative, which itself follows the geographical trajectory of Caillot's journey from his home in Paris, where he worked at the Company headquarters, to New Orleans where, after receiving his first overseas commission, he began his new post as a Company clerk. Following this trajectory, chapter two focuses on Caillot's departure from Paris in February 1729 and on his journey to Lorient, on the French Atlantic coast where Caillot embarked on the ship that transported him across the Atlantic Ocean. As well as describing the three-week Paris-Lorient overland journey itself, chapter two also incorporates an extended discussion of Nantes, where Caillot spent

several days before resuming the journey to Lorient. Here Greenwald highlights the central role of Nantes both in the French slave trade and as the site, until 1734, of the annual market held by the *Compagnie des Indes*. In chapter three, she follows Caillot to Lorient, taking the opportunity to examine the rise of the port city that had been founded by Colbert in 1666 as the base for an earlier chartered commercial company, the meteoric growth of the port following the reorganization of the *Compagnie des Indes* in 1721, and its pivotal role in the management of Company business and the outfitting of Company trading vessels. This chapter is particularly effective at highlighting the global reach of the *Compagnie des Indes* through the detailed description of the outfitting of the three Company ships being prepared for departure from Lorient in the spring of 1729 when Caillot arrived: a huge 800-ton vessel headed for the East Indies, a much smaller 120-ton ship of a type primarily used in coastal navigation, and for that reason bound for Senegal and the slave trade where it was suitable for riverine sailing, and, finally, Caillot's vessel, the *Durance*, the 500-ton ship being outfitted for its transatlantic crossing with a final destination of the Balize, at the mouth of the Mississippi River from whence travellers embarked on the riverboats that would take them the 35 leagues upriver to New Orleans. Chapter three concludes with an examination of the Atlantic crossing and seaboard mariner culture, including the phenomenon of the Baptism of the Tropics, a set of ritual, anarchic festivities that sailors typically carried out on the occasion of 'crossing the line', i.e. crossing either the equator or, as in this case, the Tropic of Cancer.

Still following Caillot's trajectory, chapter four focuses on the Caribbean, using as a point of departure the stopover taken by the *Durance* in May 1729 at La Caye Saint Louis, located on the south coast of the French colony of Saint Domingue, on the island of Hispaniola. Greenwald takes this opportunity to discuss briefly the business of *Compagnie des Indes* at this port (the only one it controlled in the colony), as well as the deadly prevalence of scurvy. She follows the historical narrative of the *Galathée*, a slaving vessel the *Durance* crosses paths with upon departing from Saint Domingue, concluding with the latter's arrival at the Balize. Chapter five, then, directly addresses the colony of Louisiana, the role of Jesuits and Capuchin missionaries, the evolution of New Orleans, Company governance, and the Company's investment in and attempts at developing plantation agriculture based on slave labour. In one of the strongest sections of the book, Greenwald skilfully analyses the importance of the plantation settlements north of New Orleans, the complex interplay between the local cultures of trade with the Natchez, the Choctaw and the Chickasaw Indians that lay at the core of the colony's survival and the Company's external trade imperatives that drove it to expand its cultivation of tobacco into areas north of the capital. This expansion was a direct cause of the Natchez attack of 1729 that ultimately led to the decision taken by the *Compagnie des Indes* to relinquish its control over the colony. The book's final chapter, chapter six, describes this attack and its aftermath: the negotiations that took place between 1730 and 1731 that resulted in the Company's withdrawal from the colony to focus on its more profitable East Indies trade, the retrocession of the colony to the French Crown and the leasing of the Company's tobacco monopoly to the *Ferme générale* (translated here as the "United General Farms"). The conclusion of this chapter and a short epilogue provide a brief overview of Caillot's departure from Louisiana, his subsequent 30-year career with the *Compagnie des Indes* in India and his death at sea in 1758. There is no formal conclusion to the book: Greenwald summarizes her reflections on the reasons for the Company's "abandonment" of Louisiana in a few paragraphs: "the company chose trade over colonization, thereby ensuring its survival into the second half of the eighteenth century" (pp. 155).

Greenwald's decision to structure her book to mirror Caillot's narrative is useful to the reader in many ways. The comprehensive nature of the narrative means that Greenwald is able to expand on, and connect, many of the intertwined yet distinct aspects of French overseas trade in this period that are most often studied in isolation, and there are many happy examples of this kind of mutually-beneficial juxtaposing of elements often considered disparate. Among other things, Greenwald succeeds in illuminating: the royal *Maison du roi* for which Caillot's family worked at the Chateau de Meudon, the shifts that happened within this institution after the death of Louis XIV in 1715 (when Caillot was eight years old), and the consequences for Caillot's choice of career; the connections between Paris and trading ports on the Atlantic coasts of France, including the rise of Nantes as a merchant center and its

relationship to other ports; the internal administrative structures of the *Compagnie des Indes*, its management of its global network of overseas *comptoirs*, and the role of clerks in the company; and the complexities of outfitting trade vessels destined to sail to opposite sides of France's global trading empire.

Indeed, Lara Putnam has written about the perhaps surprising methodological affinities that exist between microhistory and Atlantic history. She observes that “[1]ike Atlantic history, microhistory has attempted to elucidate historical processes transcontinental in scope... Like microhistory, Atlantic history has been characterized by researchers' purposive manipulation of their scale of observation, so that reconstructing the trajectory of a Yoruba Muslim and his kinsmen may occasion a re-evaluation of the dynamics of slave rebellions across the nineteenth-century Atlantic world.”[2] In a similar way, exploring the everyday experiences of a single Frenchman making his way in the world created by French Atlantic trade—both geographically along the overland, transatlantic and coastal networks and routes traced by the carriages, ships, and riverboats that carried out Company business and also professionally, through the bureaucratic structures of a global trading company operating across the Atlantic world, in Africa and in Asia in the eighteenth century—is a rich narrative device that Greenwald has effectively used to build up a detailed look at many sites along Caillot's journey within the complex world of trade that existed under the aegis of the *Compagnie des Indes*.

Yet this meandering structure is also—perhaps inevitably—responsible for a certain level of narrative unruliness, as the reader is left searching for the central focus of *M. A. Caillot and the Company of the Indies*. Given the nature of the manuscript that lies at the heart of Greenwald's book, as well as the author's own stated goals, the central focus must ultimately be the *Compagnie des Indes*, its Louisiana trade and the impact of both on the colony during the years the Company maintained responsibility for the colony's development. However, given the relative slightness of Louisiana's trade within the wider world of global trade carried on by the Company, the only way that a Louisiana-based microhistory can be seen accurately for what it was and can have the capacity to shed light on the broader flows and patterns of which it was a part, is if this broader context is always made clear. Separated out of its historical and political economic context and away from comparative material that would permit an understanding of Louisiana's part within this context, the seeming meagreness of Louisiana's trade figures and overall demography (see the population figures, pp. 124 and 127) are confusing, if not misleading. This broader economic context is not always made clear.

For instance, Greenwald writes, “For company ships (slavers or not) on the Atlantic circuit in 1729, Louisiana was the primary and final port of call” (pp. 73). Without figures that indicate Louisiana's place in either (or both): 1) global Company trade, and 2) overall French Atlantic trade, this statement leaves readers with the impression that Louisiana trade dominated French Atlantic trade in this period, which is far from the case. As Cécile Vidal observes, “Between 1723 and 1730 ... the Company devoted 15% of its shipping to Louisiana, but the colony only furnished 5% of its returns.”[3] To provide an accurate evaluation of Louisiana's place in the Company's global trade, therefore, Greenwald would need to provide figures related to the Company's Asian and African trades.

Broader political economic questions related to the *Compagnie des Indes*, the role it played in French Atlantic trade, the relationship between public interest and private trade, and the importance of French colonial trade policies also remain underdeveloped. How did Louisiana figure within the Company's broader global calculations, in the few years that the Company considered it worth investing in? What proportion of overall French colonial trade was carried on by the Company during these years, and where did Louisiana fit within it? Although focused on the Caribbean, chapter four contains no material on the volume or value of private French trade from its Caribbean colonies, which certainly outweighed that of trade from Louisiana, nor on non-Company French colonization efforts. While Greenwald does mention the *lettres patentes* of 1716 and 1717 that lay down the tenets of French colonial trade policy in the post-War of Spanish Succession era, there is no reference to *l'Exclusif*—the evolving mercantilist set

of principles and laws that had guided French colonial trade policy since Colbert in the 1670s—or the role played by the *Compagnie des Indes*, and other chartered commercial companies, within it. While chapter one contains brief sections treating the historical evolution of the *Compagnie des Indes* (pp. 5, 17-20), this reader wanted to know more about its relationship with earlier French commercial companies, how their collapse and re-formation led to a transformed *Compagnie des Indes* and whether these shifts reflected changing views on colonial profitability and value more deeply.

These trade- and company-related questions take on a particular valence considering Greenwald's conclusion that "company administrators' decision to withdraw from North America in 1731 was not a given but, rather, resulted from the company's failure to adapt the structure of a global trading company to the demands of governing and developing a colony" (pp. 10). Greenwald places little emphasis on the Louisiana's geopolitical strategic value as a bulwark against the English to the East and the Spanish to the West, only raising this point fleetingly (pp. 147, 149). More typically, historians have argued that this strategic role, in fact, explains the value of the colony to France in the face of decades of economic underperformance relative to other colonies, and enormous economic losses.[4] While on occasion Greenwald does briefly address the connections between public and private trade and their relevance for the governance of the colony (pp. 138-139, for instance), more on these questions would have permitted a more nuanced approach to her ultimate conclusions about the failures of the *Compagnie des Indes*.[5]

Curiously for a work so anchored in a personal narrative, the voice of Marc Antoine Caillot itself appears oddly muted. Apart from a short section that addresses the narrative genre in French literary studies in which Greenwald discusses Caillot's presumed audience and literary aims (pp. 5-7), we are left wondering what Caillot himself was really like. Also, the regrettable absence of contemporary maps (of French Indian Ocean *comptoirs*, of Senegambia, of the Caribbean) prevents readers from being able to visualize and to integrate the extraordinary scope of these global networks.

A great strength of the book is its global spread and its ability to counter critiques of Atlantic history—particularly of Atlantic trade—that accuse it of being anachronistically attached to an exclusively transatlantic zone of exchanges. Greenwald has produced an enormously compelling and fertile book that effectively conjures up the multifaceted world of maritime trade in the Atlantic world, its intimate connections to geographic points well beyond the Atlantic Ocean, the intricacies of global trading companies in the eighteenth century and the profound ways in which trade, and limits on trade, shaped the early colonial history of Louisiana.

## NOTES

[1] The exception to this observation is the work of Daniel Usner: see especially, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783*, Williamsburg (Virginia: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), and *American Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley: Social and Economic Histories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

[2] Lara Putnam, "To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and Atlantic History," *Journal of Social History* 39, 3 (2006):615-630, 616.

[3] Cécile Vidal, "French Louisiana in the Age of the Companies, 1712-1731," in L.H. Roper and B. Van Ruymbeke eds., *Constructing Early Modern Empires: Proprietary Ventures in the Atlantic World, 1500-1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 133-161, 157.

[4] For a summary of this perspective, see Vidal, pp. 158-59.

[5] A classic and essential analysis of this relationship is Pierre Boule's "French Mercantilism, Commercial Companies and Colonial Profitability," in L. Blussé and F. S. Gaastra eds., *Companies and*

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*Trade: Essays on Overseas Trading Companies During the Ancien Regime* (The Hague: Leiden University Press, 1981), pp. 97-117.

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