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Michael Morrison and Melinda Zook, Eds., *Revolutionary Currents: Nation Building in the Transatlantic World*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004. 192 pp. Notes, select bibliography, and index. \$24.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-7425-2165-6.

Review by Doina Pasca Harsanyi, Central Michigan University.

This excellent collection of essays grew out of a one-day symposium held at Purdue University on the theme "Transatlantic Revolutionary Traditions." The authors, eminent specialists in the different geographic fields that cover the Atlantic world, explore and attempt to integrate three lines of inquiry: revolutionary ideology, trans-Atlantic circulation of ideas, and state/nation building. The last of these themes proved to be the most challenging, as the construction of the state does not always parallel the formation of nations and of the national identities that go with it.

Jack P. Greene's introduction locates the roots of all the revolutions across the Atlantic world in the struggle between center and periphery. The Dutch, like the American colonists and later the Mexicans, fought to protect local liberties against the integrative policies of the empires of which they were a part; the French and the English fought to protect local and corporate rights and privileges against the centralizing ambitions of their governments. The long-term process of state formation, Greene argues, was essentially a balancing act in which the governments managed to expand by building central institutions that did not hurt, or did not appear to hurt, local liberties and customs. The consent of various local and corporate bodies provided stability and allowed for a relatively smooth, if slow, continuous expansion of the state. Revolutions occurred when heads of governments became impatient and tried to push for a speedier process of building state power at the expense of local liberties. Such was the case of the Stuarts in England—kings with absolutist tendencies who tried to root their claims to legitimacy in the doctrine of divine right. Resistance to absolutist policies which sought to disregard rather than to cooperate with traditional bodies such as parliament generated the language of liberty and rights that later informed revolutionary rhetoric. Similarly, in the sixteenth-century Netherlands, the Spanish suzerain tried to impose taxes without consulting local bodies, which prompted a flurry of writings pointing to the Dutch provinces' right to rebel when Dutch liberties were at stake. The Bourbons in France, the masters of the game of absolutism, likewise encountered resistance from provincial authorities and corporate bodies. Greene mentions the Fronde of the nobles against Mazarin. The increased resistance of the parlements to the centralizing efforts of Louis XV and Louis XVI should fit in the same pattern. Moving to the Americas, the resistance of the colonies to the encroaching powers of the metropolis provides an even clearer illustration for the pattern of periphery versus center as the fountainhead of revolutions. Once this conceptual frame is in place, the subsequent essays analyze how the unhurried process of centralization based on consent and cooperation functioned or malfunctioned in each case, how the language of local liberty inspired revolutionary actions, and to what extent the entire process resulted in producing a state, or a nation, or both.

Lois G. Schwoerer demonstrates convincingly that the jury ideology contributed greatly to the clarification of English constitutional thought during the late Stuart era. As Schwoerer shows, juries had their admirers and their critics, attitudes towards the jury being linked with attitudes towards the power the king ought to have in England. In the eyes of its defenders, the institution of the jury functioned as a guarantee for the proper implementation of the English liberties already guaranteed by law. It was this opinion that prevailed, and the right to trial by jury, enriched with several reforms in response to specific contemporary court cases, was included in the Bill of Rights that settled the

revolution of 1688-1689. As a specific English institution that proved every day the uniqueness of English liberties, it contributed to the creation of national sentiment, of pride in the tradition of common law that set England apart. Was this enough to create the nation, or even the nation-state? Schwoerer does not venture into answering this question on account of the complex edifice that was the English state in the sixteenth century, so different from the contemporary notion of nation-state. She argues, however, that such sentiments formed the core of the English national identity, for the English came to see themselves as the people who enjoyed liberties unknown to the European nations. Transplanted to the American colonies, the jury ideology influenced the Americans' understanding of liberty as non-negotiable freedom from arbitrary government. As in England, such beliefs contributed to the emergence of a separate identity based on freedoms European and other nations simply did not have.

John Murrin's essay partially confirms this point as he describes the American Revolution as a counter-cyclical revolution. In Murrin's telling, the root cause of the American Revolution is found in the failure of the British Empire, after the French and Indian War, to convert "its gigantic triumph" over its imperial rivals into a successful post-war policy for North America. Up to the French and Indian War, the British Empire had evolved according to the pattern analyzed by Jack P. Greene in the introduction of this book: it allowed for a great degree of local autonomy and it sought (and received) the consent of local authorities. Despite obvious differences in social practices and cultural norms, by mid-eighteenth century "the colonists gloried in their British identity" (p. 72). What went wrong then? The British Empire embarked on a more aggressive course of integrating its parts into a legal, administrative and economic whole, to which the colonists reacted by extolling not what they had in common but what separated them from the mother country. Murrin analyzes three major crises of confidence which led to the conviction that the British had abandoned government by consent for good. From growing integration to growing disaffection, the American Revolution was then a settler revolt. The state that followed was built on the existing institutions, which were in good working condition thanks to the great autonomy colonists had enjoyed up to the change in imperial policies. The experiments in republicanism, analyzed by Murrin in the last pages of his essay, rejected British constitutionalism even as the states preserved much of the structure designed by the metropolis. While the American state emerged relatively rapidly from the revolution, the nation emerged only gradually around the notion of American exceptionalism as formulated by Jefferson and reappraised by Lincoln. However, the debate between Federalists and Jeffersonians showed that not all Americans were averse to integrative policies, if such policies originated from the sovereign American government, itself based on popular sovereignty and hence on consent.

France is another story altogether. Certain events of the pre-revolution, such as the revolt of the parlements, might fit the pattern of conflict between central government and various local and corporate authorities. But, once in motion, the French Revolution had much higher ambitions than reaffirming and then redesigning local/corporate rights; it actually aimed at obliterating previous arrangements in order to regenerate the entire society. If, as Murrin showed in his essay, American institutions became stronger after the revolution, in France all pre-revolutionary institutions, the parlements included, were deemed irrelevant and abolished by the Revolution. William H. Sewell analyzes the semantic ambiguity contained in the very expression "national constitution": the National Assembly established itself as the voice of the sovereign nation and, at the same time, the instrument that forged the nation. The work of the National Assembly, and later of the Legislative Assembly and National Convention, was meant to create a new nation from scratch by elaborating "a new framework of institutions, laws, modes of behavior and cultural assumptions that would henceforth be the hallmarks of a fully constituted nation" (p. 97). The great originality of the French Revolution was to conceive the "nation form," the term Sewell uses here, as a form that can and ought to be willed as an act of supreme rejection of any historical continuity. The French revolutionaries aspired to universal heights and were thus very far from the nineteenth-century idea of the nation as the organic product of

a particular culture and history. De-legitimizing previous institutions, reshaping the territory, and restructuring time itself, all aimed at creating a new state and a new nation, new institutions of government along with new forms of solidarity and new allegiances to new values. Sewell concludes that, despite inspiring revolutionary discourses all over the world, the French Revolution could not be replicated without consistent transformation, that is, without taking into account local historical and cultural realities. This statement implies that the nineteenth-century historical nation based on primordial sentiments won the day. The French revolutionaries' modular a-historical nation based on ideas might not have been capable of replication precisely because it did not break with the past as thoroughly as its creators thought.

Finally, Eric Van Young, in a very dense essay, reveals the complexities of the Mexican Revolution, presented here as the misfit in what the author terms the Eurocentric periodization of the Age of Revolutions. The actors of the Mexican struggle for independence were divided into socio-ethnic groups, with different cultural assumptions and widely different expectations. The Creole elites, more attuned to the European ideologies and already able to draw inspiration from two revolutionary models—the American and the French—employed the language of popular sovereignty, state legitimacy, representative institutions and separation of powers. Such concepts remained, according to Van Young, foreign to the Indian and mixed race rebels who embraced community identity and a mix of localized Catholicism and messianic monarchism. While occasional unity was possible because of virulent anti-Spaniard sentiment, the rebellion meant different things to different groups, differences analyzed here in three moments ranging from Creole nationalism to popular violence. The question arises, in keeping with the theme of the volume, if a state, or a nation or indeed a nation-state, emerged in Mexico out of this socio-ethnic cauldron subjected to divergent influences. Van Young's answer seems to be “yes, but...” The Creole elites embraced the vision of a liberal nation-state not very different from the French and American version, but such a project marginalized the village dwelling Indians for whom not the state but rather the community mattered. After independence from Spain was achieved, awareness of the wide disparities among the citizens of the new state came sharply into focus and shaped the rest of the Mexican nineteenth century. The ethnic complexities of Mexico and the particularities of breaking away from the Spanish empire certainly set the Mexican Revolution apart. However, this reviewer found Van Young's repeated claims that the Mexican insurrection was a clear misfit in a supposedly neat and Eurocentric pattern of trans-Atlantic revolution somehow overemphasized. By Van Young's own admission, at least part of Mexico's population participated in the trans-Atlantic movement of ideas of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Two main conclusions are to be reached at the end of this thoughtful volume. First, despite a certain pattern of center/periphery dynamic in each case, ultimately each revolution was different. Each had its progression and its goals; each depended on local social realities and political cultures; each affirmed its own exceptionalism and so did the idea of the “nation” the revolutionaries brandished in each case. Second, despite these differences, all the revolutions discussed had in common the language of freedom, liberties, and rights. These fine essays invite us to further consider to what extent notions taken to be universal depend on the historical context in which they are used. The very need to reflect on what the nation means, rather than a fully formed nation, was the major revolutionary legacy in each case. It is ironic that, for all their intense emotions and stirring rhetoric, the debates that followed look quaintly passé nowadays. The current major political projects of the Atlantic world aim at constructing supranational structures that by necessity diminish the importance of national sovereignties and consider nationalism a regressive rather than a progressive force. This volume will be a valuable contribution to any discussion of the dynamic interplay between the ramifications of historical attempts at nation building and the current march towards globalization.

LIST OF ESSAYS

- Jack P. Greene, “State Formation, Resistance and the Creation of Revolutionary Traditions in the Early Modern Era”
- Lois G. Schworer, “Law, Liberty and Jury ‘Ideology’: English Transatlantic Revolutionary Traditions”
- John M. Murrin, “1776: The Countercyclical Revolution”
- William H. Sewell, Jr., “The French Revolution and the Emergence of the Nation Form”
- Eric Van Young, “‘To Throw Off a Tyrannical Government’: Atlantic Revolutionary Traditions and Popular Insurgency in Mexico, 1800-1821”
- Peter S. Onuf, “Nations, Revolutions, and the End of History”

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