

H-France Review Vol. 15 (February 2015), No. 25

Pierre Serna, Antonio De Francesco, and Judith A. Miller, eds. *Republics at War, 1776-1840: Revolutions, Conflicts, and Geopolitics in Europe and the Atlantic World*. Hounds Mills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 312 pp. \$92.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-137-32881-6.

Review by Edward Kolla, Georgetown University.

The relationship between republics and war has been controversial since antiquity, as Pierre Serna notes in the Introduction to this volume (p. 1). It is not surprising, therefore, that war should figure prominently at the moment when modern republics started to appear in dramatic profusion at the end of the eighteenth century. The connection of war with the French and American (and other contemporary) revolutions has, in the case of the former, been an important subject of inquiry since the time of Von Ranke, if only to be eclipsed more recently by an emphasis on social history and renewed attention to domestic politics and political culture, before and after the bicentenary. One of the great virtues of this collection of essays, by authors from a variety of European and American universities, is to put the republican form of government at the center of investigation.

Serna, also one of the editors of the book along with Antonio De Francesco and Judith A. Miller, describes the work as aiming to provide “conceptual refinement” through “case studies in sharply contrasted geographical contexts” (p. 17). In the variety of these studies, the authors most certainly deliver. Not only is the reader treated to theaters of war that are relatively well-known in older scholarship (Italy) or the focus of more recent interest (the Atlantic world) but also less-studied areas (like Ireland). Serna then lists the three conclusions to be derived from this work. First, the revolutions of this moment carried the seeds of republicanism; second, these modern republics were founded through emancipation achieved violently through war; and finally, these were all wars of independence (pp. 17-18).

The essays in the first section contain the most expansive analysis. De Francesco opens with an investigation of “The American Origins of the French Revolutionary War” (p. 27). In a clever twist on the old thesis of transmission of revolutionary ideology from America to France, he seeks to answer the question of how Brissot prevailed in the debate about war with Robespierre. De Francesco’s answer is that the experience of the American War of Independence provided Brissot with the “polemical weapon” to win (p. 29). Virginie Martin looks at the “complex links between diplomacy and war during the First Republic” and especially the dissonance between political positions in Paris and “the reality” of diplomatic practices abroad to understand, first, why Parisian proposals for negotiation in 1792 and 1795 failed and, second, the ultimate political triumph of the military (pp. 47-48). In the third essay, Marc Belissa canvasses a variety of contemporary opinions as to whether a republic “whose ideological foundations challenged the basic principles of the social and international order” could coexist with monarchical Europe (pp. 65-66). He shows that, regardless of political opinion, from Jacobin to crypto-monarchist, all contemporaries perceived a link between war and not only the republican *form*, but also and more importantly, the *nature* of the republic, whether moderate or radical (p. 79). Rounding out the first section, Sylvie Kleinman examines the French invasion attempts in Ireland in 1796 and 1798 and the influence of Irish republican Theobald Wolfe Tone. Behind the traditional interpretation, which has

dismissed all of it as “heroic failure” (p. 84), Kleinman discovers that the Irish experience of the time was infused with the political culture of the Directory.

Section two focuses more explicitly on making war, especially staffing an army, and the repercussions for republics. Marie-Jeanne Rossignol examines the experience of slaves who either joined the American revolutionary army or fled to the British. Because of various (calculated) emancipation decrees by British imperial officials, the latter option was often viewed as the only one by which slaves could achieve or express freedom. Rossignol argues, however, that “slaves stretched the limits of who could benefit from liberty as part of the white struggle for independence” (p. 108), and she also examines the legacy for these freed blacks after fighting ended. Annie Crépin looks at the link between national defense and citizenship in France, which later became a fundamental part of its republican model (p. 131). She asserts that this connection developed as a process, and not part of a preconceived plan (p. 135). Katia Visconti uses the Italian legion as case study in “the vocation of arms that was restructured by Bonaparte’s triumph” at the end of the 1790s (p. 150). Finally, Frédéric Régent investigates the role played by war in the emancipation of slaves in the Caribbean (p. 166). He finds that French civil agents essentially “allowed abolition to develop,” but that it was subject to military imperative (p. 184).

The last group of essays brings together a number of thematic studies, the first of which, by co-editor Miller, examines the oeuvre of Gabriel Legouvé. That playwright criticized late revolutionary politics and republican war, which Miller argues “divided the family and city along gender lines, mobilizing them for combat and raising new anxieties about male violence” (p. 196). In a particularly strong essay, Bernard Gainot compares the experience of the short-lived Roman “sister republic” and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, which retained independence, to stake a middle ground between either French control or local autonomy in late-1790s Italy (pp. 211-12). Based on a study of General Macdonald’s army, he reveals contradictions between the political and strategic goals of France, and concludes that these were neither constitutional regimes nor straightforward military occupations, and that the similarities outweigh the differences between them (p. 220). Staying in Italy, Mario Tosti assesses the “ideological baggage” of French commissioners who accompanied the invading armies, and local cultural and institutional history in the conservative Papal States (p. 224). He finds that the most opposition to the French occurred in areas where Enlightenment reforms had had little impact on economics and politics (p. 225). The final essay by Pedro Rújula also has the most ambitious chronological scope and traces the “cycle” between revolution and counterrevolution, and the resulting war, in Spain from 1793-1840. He pays particular attention to three issues: first, the justifications used by authorities to promote war; second, social mobilization used to swell the ranks of the army; and, third, the identification between the Spanish monarchy and people (p. 241). All the while he also shows how religion was central to counterrevolutionary discourses (p. 244).

As a collective, but also often individually, these essays eschew the sorts of monolithic interpretations that unfortunately can characterize study of the French Revolution, and this is one of the greatest strengths of the volume. There is particularly insightful and nuanced analysis in the efforts of Crépin, who shows the contingent fusion of “army, nation, and republic” (p. 131), Gainot and Martin, who describe the contradictions between Parisian policy and military and diplomatic realities, and Tosti, in illustrating the variety of experiences for both French armies as well as those they occupied. In terms of chronological biases, there is an emphasis on the period of the Directory, not surprising given the contributions from Serna and Belissa, who have devoted great attention to that regime, and also justifiable given the historic tendency to understudy the Directory in comparison with the sexier Terror. One drawback, however, is that Thermidor is often treated as a solid break, and much of what came afterwards is overdetermined, causing continuities to be downplayed. Remembering Serna’s second of the three most valuable contributions of the work, revolution and emancipation, it is useful to remember that the declaration of the sovereign nation came four years *before* either the war or the republic. Finally, some of these essays lack the punch of freshly original research. Belissa’s analysis is a “modified and shortened review” (p. 79, note 2) of his book-length study *Représenter l’ordre européen*.^[1]

Such restatements of work already available in French might, however, benefit scholars who do not read that language, as these essays are some of the first translations into English of the research by these historians.

On a more conceptual level, I was surprised not to see more engagement with classical republicanism in this volume, which still (with a few exceptions) is something of a lacuna in study of the French Revolution.^[2] Serna mentions it early in his introduction, and it gets a nod here and there later on. Miller labels her playwright the “final breath of French classical culture” (p. 190) but engages with classical literature more than with political philosophy. De Francesco engages with philosophy a bit more robustly (p. 41). It is especially remarkable, given the preoccupation of classical republican thinkers with war, that these concerns did not figure more prominently, or that a work on this subject with several fine essays about the United States does not include the works of John Pocock in the bibliography.^[3] Still, on the United States, the fine analysis in this volume of French republican models in Europe would have benefited from a discussion of the way America’s federal republic provoked reflection on the international order, as for example the Onuf brothers and more recently Eliga Gould have described.^[4]

Nevertheless, for robust and nuanced analysis, accessible translations and condensations of the work of French historians, and timely reflection on a timeless conundrum, this book will appeal to scholars of European and Atlantic history, whether their interests be political or military, nationality or ideology, or race and republicanism.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Pierre Serna, “Introduction”

PART I: Calling for a 'Republican' War

Antonino De Francesco, “The American Origins of the French Revolutionary War”

Virginie Martin, “In Search of a Glorious Peace? Republican Diplomats at War, 1792–1799”

Marc Belissa, “Can a Powerful Republic Be Peaceful? The Debate of Year IV on the Place of France in the European Order”

Sylvie Kleinman, “Theobald Wolfe Tone's Mission to France 1796–1798”

PART II: Citizenship and “Republican” War

Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, “A 'Black Declaration of Independence'? War, Republic, and Race in the United States of America, 1775–1787”

Annie Crépin, “The Army of the Republic: New Warfare and a New Army”

Katia Visconti, “A Patriotic School: The Recruitment of the Italian Legion in France, 1799–1800”

Frédéric Régent, “From Individual to Collective Emancipation: War and the Republic in the Caribbean during the French Revolution”

PART III: Rejecting “Republican” War

Judith A. Miller, "Fratricide: Tragic Brothers, Masculine Violence and the Republic on the French Stage, 1799"

Bernard Gainot, "War and Citizenship: Central Italy, 1798–1799"

Mario Tosti, "The Strength of Weapons, the Strength of Opinions: Counter-Revolution in the Papal States, 1790–1799"

Pedro Rújula, "International War, National War, Civil War: Spain and Counterrevolution, 1793–1840"

NOTES

[1] Marc Belissa, *Repenser l'ordre européen (1795-1802)* (Paris: Kimé, 2006).

[2] Some of these exceptions being Dan Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the French Revolution* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Keith Michael Baker, "Transformations of Classical Republicanism in Eighteenth-Century France," *Journal of Modern History* 73 (2001): 32–53. There was also an excellent colloque international in Paris, "Républicanismes et droit naturel à l'époque moderne: Des humanistes aux révolutions des droits de l'homme et du citoyen," 5–6 June 2008, co-hosted by IHRF-Paris 1; ICT-Paris 7; CHISCO-Paris 10 and at which some of the contributors to this volume were present.

[3] See especially J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975, reprinted 2003) and "1776: the Revolution against Parliament," in *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980, reprinted 2014).

[4] Peter Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolutions, 1776-1814* (Madison, Wisc.: Madison House, 1993) and more recently Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

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