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Jeremy J. Whiteman, *Reform, Revolution and French Global Policy, 1787-1791*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003. vi + 259 pp. Bibliography and index. \$89.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-7546-0672-4.

Review by Jeff Horn, Manhattan College.

The interaction of France, its colonies, and the rest of the world has received considerable reconsideration in recent years. Jeremy J. Whiteman seeks to contribute to that reconsideration using “global policy” as his conceptual framework to explore the somewhat tired problematic of whether the deputies of the Constituent Assembly actually broke away from the political principles of the ancien régime in favor of “enlightened’ and rational principles” (p. 245). Making use of the approach, tools, and sources of an intellectual historian of French diplomatic activity, Whiteman concludes that “. . . French global policy may also be considered to comprise a significant element of continuity in the period 1787-1791” (p. 249).

The problem of this book appears to stem from Whiteman’s dissatisfaction with the studies of the diplomatic history of the period raised by Bailey Stone, Orville Murphy, and Gary Savage among others.[1] Whiteman would like to provide the “direct archival or primary source research” that Stone did not undertake to support his argument “that the Revolution was at least partly inspired and shaped by a desire to restore France’s status as a leading international power” (pp. 8-9). Savage and, especially, Murphy have examined the formation and impact of public opinion regarding diplomatic issues; Whiteman’s study attempts to go beyond these accounts by “including not only foreign policy, but also the ‘Atlantic’ sphere of maritime, commercial and colonial policy.” His goal is to take a multi-faceted approach to understanding the Revolution and its origins (p. 8) by focusing on “the work and understandings of the policy-makers themselves, rather than public opinion” as part of his focus on political economy rather than political culture (p. 10).

The book is organized chronologically with sections on the Old Regime and the National Constituent Assembly. Part one traces “France Resurgent: from the Peace of 1783 to the Assembly of Notables,” “The Dutch Crisis and the ‘Implosion’ of Vergennes’ Diplomatic System,” and “The Contraction of French Global Power, 1788-1789.” These chapters capably delineate the well-known contours of the differing policy perspectives of the comte de Vergennes, Louis XVI’s most influential Foreign Minister and the influential Minister of the Navy, the duc de Castries. He then explores how these divergent views on how France should act affected what actions France did undertake in a number of critical situations including India, the Dutch crisis, the Eastern War featuring Russia and Austria against the Ottomans, and whether to intervene in Cochinchina. He also examines such vital issues as Vergennes’ raft of commercial treaties, most notably the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty, its implementation and its important diplomatic repercussions, the proposal for a French navigation act, military policy, and the refurbishing of Cherbourg harbor. Particularly welcome from this Australian historian is the survey of French policy in India (pp. 28-32) and Cochinchina (pp. 91-96). Whiteman also sheds new light on Vergennes’ successor as Foreign Minister, Armand-Marc, comte de Montmorin de Saint-Herem who emerges as a significant policy-maker rather than a caretaker.

Part two has chapters devoted to “The ‘Revolutionising’ of French Foreign Policy,” “Trade and the Regeneration of the French Economy,” “The Question of the Colonies,” “Defending a ‘Regenerated’ France,” before concluding with an examination of the “Continuities and Discontinuities in French Global Policy, 1787-1791.” The issues given particular attention here are the Belgian revolt, the Nootka Sound Affair that pitted Spain against England in the Pacific and its attendant impact on the *Pacte de*

famille, and the constitutional debate over the right to declare war, tariffs, slavery, the East India Company, and the comte de Mirabeau's growing influence on French colonial and diplomatic policies. By far the most interesting and satisfying sections explore France's policies in India, in the Indian Ocean and in Cochinchina (pp. 191-213). Whiteman depicts a France so hamstrung by fiscal considerations that it could not take advantage of a number of potentially lucrative or strategically significant opportunities. Montmorin emerges again as a pivotal figure in global policy-making and Whiteman also traces how Mirabeau came not just to ally with Montmorin on diplomatic and colonial issues, but to dominate the relationship (pp. 225-238).

Whiteman has a thin archival and secondary source basis for this work. His primary sources are derived almost exclusively from the Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, the *Archives parlementaires*, printed pamphlets and memoirs. His reliance on a single source to reconstruct debates and issues where meaningful complementary sources exist is sometimes startling (see pp. 120-132 for an example). In his stated, but largely unfulfilled attempt to explore issues of political economy and the origins of liberalism (pp. 8-9), Whiteman might have consulted the numerous reports of the Chambers of Commerce, intendants of commerce, and agricultural societies that impacted strongly on French policy-making. Such perspectives would have given his study a much firmer grounding in the contemporary debate on how to apply Physiocratic ideas, how they meshed with the views of Adam Smith, and their ultimate contributions to the development of French liberalism. While he has made excellent use of diplomatic dispatches, Whiteman could have supplemented his findings on a host of issues by investigating the reports of merchants and consulting the accounts published in local newspapers.

In terms of secondary sources, there are vast relevant literatures that have been left out of this study, notably, but not exclusively in French. To take as an example an area vital to French global policy where I am far from expert, regarding the closely-linked issues of slavery, the West Indies, and French activists like the *Société des Amis des Noirs*, Whiteman does not appear to have consulted the important recent works of Yves Bénéoit, Marcel Dorigny, Laurent Dubois, Sue Peabody, and Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, just to name a few.^[2] Whiteman also has a dismaying tendency to cite the opinions of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century diplomatic historians such as Frédéric Masson, Oscar Browning, and John Holland Rose, when searching for others who share his perspective without mentioning how venerable these interpretations are (for examples, see pp. 50-51, 56-57, and 230). Finally, Whiteman's reading of contemporary scholars like Lynn Hunt leaves much to be desired. For example, he claims that in *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution*, Hunt has "discount[ed] material-structural analyses altogether" (p. 7), seemingly ignoring the entire second part of the book, entitled "the Sociology of Politics."^[3] When combined with simplistic analyses of the workings of bodies like the *Conseil d'état* and the National Assembly that are almost entirely bereft of the profoundly useful biographical and political literatures of the subject (see pp. 95-96, 116-120, and 157-168 for examples), such an approach does not inspire confidence in Whiteman's conclusions about the various influences on the making of state policies. Such problems also reinforce the strong impression that this is a doctoral dissertation turned a little too hastily into a book.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Whiteman's book does make a serious and sustained effort to explore France's policies not only domestically and within Europe, but also around the world. By exploring such issues as internal trade, military reform, European balance of power politics, and whether to intervene in Cochinchina in close proximity, Whiteman does illuminate the interaction of diverse influences on French policy-makers. This book also clearly presents the policy positions of a number of important figures from the late ancien régime and the early years of the Revolution whose similar views are not always readily apparent. Whiteman has also succeeded in one of his primary goals—he conclusively demonstrates the fundamental continuity of French global policy from 1787 to 1791.

Reform, Revolution and French Global Policy, 1787-1791 is most effective in evoking the ideas of policy-makers. As an intellectual history of diplomacy and other state policies with a strong global orientation,

Whiteman's approach has some useful insights. For those interested in an introduction to France's policies in the Indian Ocean and Pacific during this era, Whiteman's work is extremely valuable. Borrow it from the library though, because only a few will find this book worth its exceptionally hefty price.

NOTES [1] Bailey Stone, *The Genesis of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Gary Savage, "Political Culture, Revolution and Foreign Policy in France, 1787-92" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cambridge U.K.: 1996), and "Favier's Heirs": The French Revolution and the *Sécret du Roi*," *Historical Journal*, 41:1 (1998), pp. 225-258; and Orville Murphy, *The Diplomatic Retreat of France and Public Opinion on the Eve of the French Revolution* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of American Press, 1998).

[2] Among the numerous recent French projects devoted to these issues begin with Marcel Dorigny, ed., *Léger-Félicité Sonthonax : la première abolition de l'esclavage : la Révolution française et la Révolution de Saint-Domingue* (Saint-Denis: Société française d'outre mer, 1997); and Yves Bénoit and Marcel Dorigny, eds., *Grégoire et la cause des Noirs (1789-1831) : combats et projets* (Saint-Denis: Société française d'outre-mer, 2000). In English, see Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Slave Emancipation during the French Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), but available in French as *Les Esclaves de la République : L'histoire oubliée de la première émanicipation 1789-1794* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2000); Sue Peabody, *"There Are No Slaves in France": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, *Regenerating the World: The Abbé Grégoire, the French Revolution, and the Making of Modern Universalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) based on her 1998 Stanford University doctoral dissertation.

[3] Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 123-213.

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