Saint-Domingue seien eine Konsequenz der Abschaffung der Sklaverei durch Sonthonax, obwohl es die revoltierenden Sklaven selbst waren, die sich unter den Schutz des spanischen Königs stellten. Das letzte Kapitel der Monographie sieht in Toussaints Regime einen "fiscal-military state", der auf der Ausbeutung der afrikanischstämmigen Bevölkerung fußte. Anders als in den Heroisierungen dieses dominikanischen Politikers erscheint Toussaint – ohne dass Covo diese These offen vertreten würde – als ein aggressiver und repressiver Herrscher, der die Leibeigenschaft förderte und Handelsmonopole vergab.

Anmerkungen

1 Pernille Røge, *Economistes and the Reinvention of Empire: France in the Americas and Africa, c.1750–1802* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

2 M. J. Sydenham, *The Girondins* (Athlone Press, 1961).

3 Oliver Gliech, *Saint-Domingue und die Französische Revolution: Das Ende der weißen Herrschaft in einer karibischen Plantagenwirtschaft* (Böhlau, 2011).

Leonard V. Smith, *French Colonialism: From the Ancien Régime to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 249 pp.

Reviewed by
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What is French imperial history? The scholarship on this topic is vast. It speaks to the chronological breadth and geographical reach of the French empire, from its mercantilist origins in the seventeenth century to the wars of decolonization in the twentieth. It speaks to the ongoing legacies of empire, both in the form of national boundaries and ongoing French political, military, and cultural involvement in its former colonies. For those French officials engaged in the administration of empire, either directly or indirectly, empire was an important source of material wealth. It was empire that fuelled the slave trade during the ancien régime and it was empire that provided West African diamonds, Malagasy graphite, and Indochinese rubber to the combatants of the Second World War.

But empire was not just about physical assets. It was no less important as a symbol and a guarantor of French global power and prestige. In 1944, French minister for foreign affairs Georges Bidault inextricably linked French greatness to empire: "Greater France has 110 million inhabitants and unlimited resources […] we have everything necessary to play, in the family of democratic countries, and be surrounded

by the respect and friendship of our allies, the role of a great nation."[1]

Leonard V. Smith's book speaks to all these themes. But the theme it speaks to most forcefully is power or more specifically imbalances of power: the military and political violence that were inherent to the logic of French imperial power and the shifts in power over time as anti-imperial nationalists began to challenge these structures. Smith writes, "empire is not difficult to define in the terminology of political science – asymmetrical contracting that preserves politically significant difference" (p. 3).

Smith's slim and eminently readable volume is part of Cambridge University Press's *New Approaches to European History* series. The aim of this series is to produce concise yet intellectually rich textbooks focusing on major themes in European history. In this regard, Smith's book has been hugely successful.

The book is organized chronologically across six main chapters, beginning with the rise of France's mercantilist empire in the seventeenth century and concluding with what one might term the legacies of empire, or as Smith describes it "empire after empire." This temporal arrangement is very effective for illustrating the shifts and continuities in the colonial empire over time and across terminology like empire, colony, and decolonization. At the same time, Smith does not suggest that the six chapters and the themes within them exist in isolation from each other. Far from it. Nineteenth-century concepts and justifications of empire, such as the *mission civilisatrice* are introduced in chapter three but Smith makes clear how this kind of discourse was integral to understandings of the colonial empire which persisted right up to the wars of decolonization in the twentieth century.

In the preface & acknowledgements and introduction, Smith outlines the chief methodological approach that the book takes. He describes the book as having a "decidedly 'political' focus" (p. xii). Smith explains that this focus on 'high politics' has been informed by the nature and intention of the book, which is to serve as a foundational narrative history, which students and instructors can use as a basis from which to expand into more nuanced topics and perspectives.

I must admit that I had some reservations about this seemingly top-down approach. However, I need not have. It is true that this book does not go into enormous depth or detail about the history and activities of anti-imperial nationalist groups or the imperial subjects who lived under French colonial rule. However, it is worth noting that this was not its aim or intention. Indeed, attempting to include detailed discussions of these aspects would have produced a very different book. What this book does do exceptionally well is use colonial policy making as a lens to interrogate the drivers and thinking around French colonialism. In doing so, it also lifts the curtain on the complex and inherently problematic nature of empire. It suggests to its reader a range of different avenues of exploration and it allows the reader scope to choose where they want to go next. There are numerous examples of how this is done throughout the text, however I will indicate just a few here.

Throughout the text, Smith unpacks the range of economic, strategic, and moral justifications that French policy makers deployed to attempt to legitimize the French

colonial empire. These debates, concerning the *raison d'être* of empire, were closely connected to other debates about how empire should be governed and the relationship between colonial territories and the French metropole (or hexagon). The concepts of assimilation and association and more specifically the tensions between them "structured both the colonial and the postcolonial history of the French empire" (p. 78). In Smith's text, these concepts, justifications and the debates around them are deployed to powerfully illustrate the extent to which power inequalities were at the heart of the French imperial system. At the same time, they highlight how discursive wrangling over empire and its future was not just the domain of French state actors. Over time, it increasingly became a realm in which anti-imperial voices challenged the imperial norm.

Even before assimilation and association were conceived in name they existed in practice. In chapter 1, Smith writes that the abolishment of slavery in the French empire in 1794 conferred citizenship on all colonial subjects, but in doing so reinforced gender divides. Former colonial subjects, now citizens, were drawn closer to the metropole but only men were granted (in name at least) equality across the colour line. Women were subject to the same gender subordination as their metropolitan counterparts. Debates over assimilation and association also spoke to a constant tension in imperial policy, which Smith highlights in chapter 4. Specifically, France relied on empire for resource extraction. But bringing empire closer to facilitate this economic extraction also brought imperial subjects closer to the metropole, raising questions over Frenchness that were rooted in race.

French reliance on its empire, as Smith illustrates, became particularly evident during the two great wars of the twentieth century. France, in Smith's words "needed the bodies of its imperial subjects" in the First World War (p. 111). However, as this book and others have illustrated, war heightened the seeming importance of empire as a guarantor of French power while simultaneously strengthening the number and power of anti-colonial movements everywhere.[2] Smith's writing around the character of anti-colonial nationalism is particularly impactful because it highlights the complex and multi-faceted ways in which discourses around the future of empire (or its demise) unfurled.

Chapter 4 explores some of the colonial and anti-colonial discourses around empire that were developing in the interwar period. It demonstrates how French officials began to lose control of this messaging as colonized elites began to develop (often in Paris itself) transnational networks of anti-colonial discourse. Martin Thomas has described a similar development after the Second World War as "transnational networks of shared interests."[3]

Rather than delineating a straightforward trajectory from anti-colonial nationalism to independence, however, Smith rightly emphasizes the uncertainties that surrounded the renegotiation of empire, particularly after the Second World War. I was reminded, in chapter 5, of the work of Fred Cooper, which similarly highlights the lack of clarity around terms like 'independence' and underscores debates around what the relationship between France and its colonies would look like.[4]

This unpacking, of the nuances of French colonialism and anti-colonialism, through debates concerning its very *raison d'être* to arguments over its future is a core strength across the book.

If I had to pick out any weaknesses, it would be to selfishly highlight areas that are particularly close to my own research. It would be unfair to ask for more discussion on the interconnections between French and British imperial history. This is, after all, a book on French colonialism. However, I would be inclined to steer clear of overly simplified descriptions of the Franco-British relationship as "frenemies" (pp. 67, 77). As a historian of Franco-British relations during the Second World War I also found myself wishing for more nuance through parts of chapter 4. While recognizing that this short text is meant as an introduction, even as an invitation to read further, I would suggest caution in two areas.

First, Charles de Gaulle's Free French movement was not "a government-in-exile in London" (p. 130). It was certainly fashioned to appear as such, in part to give it legitimacy and authority. However, the Vichy government in France remained the legal French government. British authorities were careful never to equate Free France to a legal French government even if they did suggest that it represented true French interests. Second, I would assert that British imperial forces did not seize and occupy French Madagascar with "speed and ease." The operations in Madagascar lasted several months and included heavy resistance from Vichy forces, largely comprised of Malagasy and Senegalese colonial troops. Minimizing these Franco-British imperial clashes obscures an important and complex aspect of the war that was being fought in and over French colonial territories.

My final thought is not a critique but a wish. As a volume aimed at students and which encourages them to use the book to further explore the history of French colonialism, I believe the text would benefit from the inclusion of a thematic reading list. While no list could be exhaustive, it could serve as a jumping off point, in the same way as the text itself.

Notes

1 "La plus grande France a 110 millions d'habitants et des ressources illimitées. Nous n'avons donc pas à nous sentir écrasées par un complexe d'infériorité (Très bien! Très bien!), qui nous pousserait à considérer notre pays comme un appendice, un complément à d'autres États, alors que nous possédons tout ce qu'il faut pour jouer dans la famille des pays démocratiques et entourés du respect et de l'amitié de tous nos allies, un rôle de grande nation" (own translation). *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Débats de l'Assemblée Consultative Provisoire*, Georges Bidault, November 21, 1944.

2 For more an anti-colonial nationalism after the First World War, see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford Univesity Press, 2007).

3 Martin Thomas, *Fight of Flight: Britain, France and their Roads from Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 74.

4 See, for instance, Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton University Press, 2014).