Erica R. Johnson, *Philanthropy and Race in the Haitian Revolution*. Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018. xii + 225 pp. (Cloth US$ 99.99)

In this book Erica R. Johnson seeks to complicate "the racial narrative of the Haitian Revolution" by putting the spotlight on a relatively small, neglected set of actors who took part, identifying them as white French "philanthropists." Even within the crowded field of Haitian Revolutionary studies, this is, as Johnson puts it, an "unconventional" topic (p. vii). Her main argument is that there were white philanthropists on Saint-Domingue who during the Revolution, in both word and deed, actively sought to better the situation of enslaved and free people of African descent. By highlighting the role they played, she tries to push against the idea that there was a strict racial divide between white and black. Racial ideologies were more "fluid" than historians have sometimes assumed.

Each of her six thematic chapters deals with a domain in which white philanthropists participated: the Catholic Church, educational institutions, intellectual institutions, the press, the military, and (representative) politics. One interesting case is the formation of the interracial *Société libre des sciences, des arts et belles lettres*. Founded in the aftermath of general emancipation by the prominent colored planter Julien Raimond and the white mining engineer Alexandre-Benjamin Giroud, this learned society sought to promote the equality of all races. Giroud corresponded with members of the Paris-based *Institut national des sciences et des arts* as well as the abolitionist society of Pennsylvania, speaking highly of the learned "citizens of three colors" (p. 81).

Or again, the white French General Étienne Laveaux, governor of Saint-Domingue between October 1793 and May 1796, who for some time was in close contact with Toussaint Louverture. Among other things, he established a public school in Le Cap to educate formerly enslaved Blacks who had served in the military and endeavored to move the French Commission of Public Safety to expand the number of public schools. Other examples include Catholic clerics, French military officers, and soldiers who collaborated across racial lines to further the cause of people of African descent. Taken together, Johnson's archival research shows that there was indeed more fluidity and less strict racial divides than historians have assumed.

In other ways the book is less convincing. Since "philanthropy" is such a central concept of her study, one would expect a more thorough discussion of the scope of the term and its overall utility as a historical category. She doesn't make it perfectly clear to whom the term *philanthrope* applies and why. Did all the historical actors that she discusses—clergymen, newspaper editors, and military officers, among others—identify themselves as philanthropists? The

difficulty is that the opponents of emancipation and abolition—in France, on Saint-Domingue, and elsewhere—used the term as an epithet to denounce the "lovers of humanity."

Moreover, there was no clearly delineated political "philanthropic" agenda in the late eighteenth century. The volatility and ambiguity of "philanthropic" ideas is quite crucial; the book would have benefited from a discussion of the eighteenth-century meanings of philanthropy that went into more depth than the mere two pages that Johnson gives it. One moment she seems to equate philanthropic ideals with the "the application of universal human rights" to all people irrespective of race (p. 2), and another she falls back on the more literal meaning and refers to philanthropists as "those who loved all of humankind," motivated by compassion for the unfortunate and the suffering (p. 3). And elsewhere she depicts philanthropy as the betterment of the position of the enslaved and free people of color.

Colonial Whites could indeed strive for the betterment of the situation of the enslaved but at the same time reject the abolition of slavery. Others could accept equal rights for free people of color but deny equal rights to the unfree population. It was also possible for Whites to advocate abolition but reject equal citizenship. In all these cases, examples of which appear throughout the book, "philanthropic" ideals did not translate into a defense of equal universal human rights. If so many deeply disputed positions can be united under its banner, how useful is the term "philanthropy"?

I therefore kept asking myself how we arrive at a better understanding of the motives and ideals (as well as contradictory positions) of these white historical actors by portraying them as furthering a "philanthropic" cause. But in the end, the whole notion of philanthropy may not be so essential to Johnson's argument. By highlighting the ideas and actions of a minority of colonial Whites who to some extent sought to improve the situation of Saint-Domingue's enslaved and free people of African descent, she adds an original perspective to a momentous revolution that defies simplistic, binary categorization.

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