***The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution*. By Julius S. Scott.** London: Verso, 2018. ISBN 978-1-78873-247-5. 272 pp. $34.95 hardcover, $24.95 paperback.

Review by Ronald Angelo Johnson

Rarely have so many scholars owed as much to one historical study as they do to *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution*. When Julius Scott completed his doctoral dissertation at Duke University in 1986, his research spurred some of the most influential works on the Age of Atlantic Revolutions over the subsequent three decades. Thirty-two years after Scott's doctoral defense, the work was formally published for the first time; reading the book now, one can see glimpses of the classic works produced upon its foundation, including books by Ada Ferrer, Jane Landers, Matthew J. Smith, Rebecca Scott, and Jean Hébrard.[1] This study links life in British-, French-, and Spanish-controlled territories of the Caribbean and South America through the Haitian Revolution. In each of the five chapters of captivating storytelling, the author weaves the region's disparate languages and societal practices into a cohesive narrative of collective strides toward freedom, involving peoples of different ethnic groups. His analysis of ruling practices blurs the lines of demarcation between the colonized territories to identify "Afro-America," a region in constant protest against European economic oppression and cultural subjugation. The book emphasizes the cosmopolitan environments of Caribbean port cities to illuminate the interconnectedness among peoples under the control of the planter class across the territories. According to Scott, "Larger cities like Kingston, Cap Français, and Havana could properly be termed capitals of Afro-America. . . . [T]he growing coastal cities nurtured the most complex patterns of mobility and presented the most vexing problems of control for all the colonial powers" (15). As imperial gains expanded the economic importance of urban areas, the hustle and bustle of port cities provided safe haven for fugitive freedom seekers and attracted upwardly mobile free people of color for generations.

Chapter 1 introduces readers to ventures toward greater liberty across the eighteenth century. European slaveholders, governors, and merchants believed themselves to be the "masters" of Afro-America. Yet an unquenchable desire for freedom showed itself in the ingenuity and grit of the region's marginalized inhabitants. The ubiquitous presence of involuntary bondage and its inhumane effects on the lives of the enslaved permeate Scott's narrative. Still, the hope and promise of lives beyond slavery are never far from the book's primary subjects. Musicians, maroons, and marauders, they all understood their value as human citizens. The

cruelties and injustices inflicted upon these populations could not dampen their spirit striving to be free. Scott focuses the reader's attention on the constant drive toward freedom demonstrated by individuals as well as groups. Prior to 1986, much of the historical scholarship published in North America about the Haitian Revolution and about European enslavement of Black people in the Atlantic World gave preference to the English-language writings of elitist, European intellectuals. *The Common Wind* employs the resourcefulness of marginalized peoples across the Caribbean as the historical lens through which to bring into view the injustices of the Atlantic trade system based on stolen lives and labor. Scott observes, "The activities of runaway slave communities in Jamaica did not go unnoticed in nearby Cuba, underscoring the fact that the histories of the maroon societies in the two islands in the eighteenth century were closely intertwined" (11). Across the rest of the book, the author does not segregate the Caribbean into different sectors and does not present a collection of loosely related case studies. Instead, he treats the Caribbean as the Caribbean, a cooperative system of lives and commerce linked together across different islands and territories.

One of Scott's greatest contributions to the historical profession remains his revelation of "the common wind," the regional network of communication that existed in varying forms from Caracas, Venezuela, to Charleston, South Carolina. He reminds readers, "The books, newspapers, and letters which arrived with the ships were not the only avenues for the flow of information and news in Afro-America" (76). The author encourages scholars to seek out and closely analyze the mundane interactions of enslaved and free people of color, including women of commerce, coastal pilots, and transatlantic sailors. As he describes, "The stream of merchant seamen who frequented island taverns and grogshops while their ships were in port provided a constant, if considerably delayed, source of news on the French Revolution for Caribbean towns" (114). These individuals passed along news and aided others, including fugitive freedom seekers, lower-class white inhabitants, deserters, smugglers, and pirates to evade and erode the security mechanisms of the region's plantation-based slave societies. Members of itinerant communities, "the masterless people of the West Indies" (1), left behind little written correspondence. Twentieth-century historians explained writing about enslaved people predominantly from the enslavers' perspective because Black people produced few records. Scott's trailblazing work empowered scholars to think more creatively about analyzing "orally transmitted accounts [such as] scraps of news, conflicting interpretations, elusive facts, and shifting rumors" from varying

sources throughout Afro-America to tell the stories of the underrepresented historical subjects (77). To explain how nonliterate peoples knew about world events in faraway places, Scott suggests, "In cultures where people depended upon direct human contact for information, news spread quickly and became part of a shared public discourse" (77). In multiple ways, *The Common Wind* offers an equalizing effect across historical studies.

The rich narrative of disparate peoples and expansive commerce does not mask the central importance of the Haitian Revolution to understanding life in Afro-America. In a stroke of organizational brilliance, Scott reserves a full discussion of the Revolution itself until chapter 5 and the epilogue. In doing so, he underscores that the desire for freedom across the Caribbean did not originate in 1789 or 1791. The kindling for liberation throughout Afro-America had existed and strengthened across the region since the beginning of European colonization. By the end of the eighteenth century, "sweeping across linguistic, geographic, and imperial boundaries, the tempest created by the black revolutionaries of Saint-Domingue and communicated by mobile people in other slave societies would prove a major turning point in the history of the Americas" (xvii). This statement may now seem benign. But in 1986, the Haitian Revolution remained on the intellectual periphery of studies in Atlantic revolutions. Scott's research led others to pursue more determinedly the origins and impact of the Black liberation struggle. The book discusses actions authorities took to stop the spread of news about the revolution. "Tight security measures, however, only heightened interest and anticipation. . . . '[T]he common wind' which bound together the societies of Afro-America proved even more active. In the late 1780s and early 1790s, the currents of revolution touched all areas of the Caribbean" (113, 118). As far north as Charleston, the free man of color Denmark Vesey read newspaper clippings about the Haitian Revolution and the Black march toward emancipation and independence to prospective insurrectionists.

This book represents the dynamic evolution of historical methods and perspectives in Atlantic World scholarship. A review of the footnotes and bibliography reveals the debt owed to earlier scholars who contributed rigorous study to the Black Atlantic World, including Gabriel Debien, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Eleazar Córdova-Bello, and Rayford Logan.[2] The publishing trajectory of many scholars within the present generation—I among them—owes much to the pioneering research of Julius Scott. *The Common Wind* is a seminal book, one that will propel future scholars to advance research methodologies toward further discoveries regarding Black life across the Atlantic World.

Notes

[1] See Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Matthew J. Smith, *Liberty, Fraternity, Exile: Haiti and Jamaica after Emancipation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[2] See Gabriel Debien, *Plantations et esclaves à Saint-Domingue* (Dakar: Publications de la Section d'Histoire, 1962); Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); Eleazar Córdova-Bello, *La Independencia de Haití y su influencia en Hispanoamérica* (Caracas: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1964); Rayford Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776–1891* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941).

***Baron de Vastey and the Origins of Black Atlantic Humanism.* By Marlene L. Daut.** New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. ISBN 978-1-137-47969-3. 244 pp. $24.99/21.39€ e-book, $34.99/29.11€ paperback.

Review by Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken

An absorbing and riveting read, Marlene Daut's *Baron de Vastey and the Origins of Black Atlantic Humanism* is a scholarly feat. Organized around the question of what is at stake in reading, misreading, and rereading Vastey's life, *then* and *now*, Daut's sharp agility in distilling complex temporalities and geographies into well-argued, judicious writing allows us as scholars and pedagogues to take into consideration multiple perspectives. The book is methodologically exemplary in its comprehensive historical analysis of Vastey's life and notably his relationship to Henry Christophe (1767–1820) as Christophe ruled first as President of the State of Haiti (1807–1811) and then as King of Haiti (1811–1820). Vastey was "the most prolific secretary of early nineteenth-century Haiti's King Henry Christophe I" and the author of many publications, notably "a scathing indictment of colonial slavery entitled, *Le Système colonial dévoilé* (1814)" (xv). He was also at the time "an international public figure" (xv), with his works translated into multiple languages, and Daut argues that his books "became the signs and symbols of the promises of black sovereignty in the Atlantic World" (68).

Daut's historical and also literary analyses of Vastey meticulously and courageously traverse the complexities of what it means to confront not