many continuities with earlier intellectual traditions. For instance, Neil Safier's "The Marvelous and the Mundane in Eighteenth-Century Amazonia" traces the journey of a Portuguese *oidor* named Francisco Ribero de Sampaio through the Brazilian Amazon in the late eighteenth century. Although Sampaio was sent to make a modern investigation of the local Indians, Safier finds him uninterested in empirical methods and direct observation. Instead, Sampaio was obsessed with compiling relevant information from travel accounts, natural histories, and philosophical works. This humanist technique of information gathering demonstrates that even in the eighteenth century, the baroque still influenced Iberian epistemologies.

However, the most obvious and compelling example of "Baroque" survivals in early modern Iberian scientific culture was its continuing fascination with monsters, freaks, and accidents of nature. Louise Benat offers an engaging study of the imperial politics of monsters, where she demonstrates that before the age of discovery, the monstrous was easily accepted since so much of the world remained unknown. By the age of colonisation, science had trumped wonder, and monsters were willed out of existence because they were "politically incorrect". Likewise, the essay on "Lo Monstruoso en Nueva España" takes a more quotidian approach that reminds us that despite their ouster from imperial politics, monsters were still very much a part of everyday life—even in Enlightenment periodicals like the *Gaceta de México*. The fact that the very arbiters of the Enlightenment in Spanish America regularly reported on monsters, freaks, and their provenances, reminds the reader that even in the midst of the Bourbon program for progress, modernity, and rational science, many aspects of the Baroque mindset were alive and well.

Founding Fathers and Revolutionary Heirs

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Madison Smartt Bell, *Toussaint L'Ouverture?: A Biography*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2007. xii + 340 pp. ISBN: 978-0-375-42337-6 (hbk.). $27.00.

R. William Weisberger, Dennis P. Hupchick, and David L. Anderson, eds., *Profiles of Revolutionaries on Both Sides of the Atlantic, 1700-1850*. Social Science Monographs. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007. vi + 338 pp. ISBN: 0-88033-970-5 (hbk.). $40.00.

Gordon S. Wood, *Revolutionary Characters: What Made the Founders Different*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006. xiv + 322 pp. ISBN: 978-0-14-311208-2 (pbk.). $25.95.

Craig Nelson, *Thomas Paine: Enlightenment, Revolution, and the Birth of Modern Nations*. London and New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006. xviii + 398 pp. ISBN: 978-0-14-311238-9 (pbk.). $27.95.

Consider the following thumbnail sketch of a late-eighteenth-century revolutionary in the Atlantic world. He is a charismatic military leader fighting a larger, better-equipped enemy, who survives several reverses to secure eventual victory for his side. He is a slaveholder who comes to oppose slavery. He owns substantial property and takes a lively interest in business ventures but is careful not to seem money-grubbing. An honoured leader of his people, he is increasingly criticised for autocratic tendencies. He is a Freemason. And he is highly self-conscious about his place in society and history and is ever-attentive to his self-presentation and public image.

Most Americans know that George Washington fits this profile. Few would recognise that so does Toussaint L'Ouverture. And therein lies a tale. It is a tale that these books—biogra-

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phies of Thomas Paine and Toussaint L'Ouverture, one collection of essays on the American founders, and another on a number of revolutionary leaders from the Americas to Europe—help us understand as we reflect on common elements and divergent responses in the experiences of several leaders in the Age of Revolutions.

We can begin with Gordon Wood's *Revolutionary Characters*, a collection of essays on eight American founders, including the odd man out, Aaron Burr. These are framed by opening and concluding essays on the founders' relationship to the Enlightenment and then to modern public opinion and the expansion of print and the political public. These essays are revised versions of pieces published elsewhere and they take up several issues examined in some of Wood's larger works, notably *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* and *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*. These are graceful and illuminating essays, and they direct our attention to several common themes in the lives of the revolutionaries and the world they helped change. To begin with, despite some significant differences in their personal histories, they were roughly similar in their social position, which was not that of a traditional political elite born and bred to rule. As Wood notes, as "political leaders they constituted a peculiar sort of elite, a self-created aristocracy largely based on merit and talent..." (Wood, 11). This is most obvious in the cases of men such as Hamilton, that "bastard brat of a Scotch peddler", and Paine and Franklin and Adams, all men who rose to influence by dint of ferocious combinations of talent, energy, ambition, and determination, all men who could respond nimbly to well-timed offers of patronage and to opportunities they saw or seized. But even Jefferson and Washington were, Wood notes, first-generation gentlemen; most of them marked the first generation in their families to attend college, and Washington always remained a bit defensive and self-conscious about his lack of education. The one great exception to this pattern, the one founder who seemed by birth, breeding, education, worldliness, and social ease to belong to the elite was Aaron Burr. But he squandered his birthright by his libertine ways, and the chronic whiff of financial desperation that enveloped him, together with his blatant self-interestedness, opportunism, and slipperiness. Washington and Adams and Franklin worked hard to become gentlemen and they took seriously all that was required of them in that position. Burr flaunted the privileges but shirked the responsibilities of his status—indeed, he seemed to sneer at the high-minded aspirations of his cohort. In doing so, he betrayed not only his class but the liberal, disinterested ideals of the revolutionary leaders.

And these liberal, disinterested ideals, Wood makes clear, defined this group of leaders more powerfully than any other elements. Their views and their aspirations were rooted in what it meant to be a "gentleman" in the Age of Enlightenment. It is a measure of how removed we are from the intellectual world of the eighteenth century that it requires some effort to excavate—and perhaps rehabilitate—the term "gentleman". For the revolutionary leaders, to be a gentleman carried moral and political meaning far more than it designated social status—although that was never irrelevant. "It meant", Wood writes,

> being reasonable, tolerant, honest, virtuous, and "candid", an important eighteenth-century characteristic that connoted being unbiased and just as well as frank and sincere. Being a gentleman was the prerequisite to becoming a political leader. It signified being cosmopolitan, standing on elevated ground in order to have a larger view of human affairs, and being free of the prejudices, parochialism, and religious enthusiasm of the vulgar and the barbaric. It meant, in short, having all those characteristics that we today sum up in the idea of a liberal arts education (Wood, 15).

These gentlemen were pre-eminently men of ideas, engaged and passionate citizens of the Republic of Letters. It is not surprising that so many of them were drawn to Freemasonry, with its emphases on enlightenment, improvement, brotherhood, and universalism. As R.

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William Weisberger notes in his introduction to *Profiles of Revolutionaries in Atlantic History, 1700-1850,* connections between revolution and Freemasonry appear not only in British North America and Haiti, but among the Brissotins in France, the leaders of independence movements in South America, and the Decembrists of Russia. In fact, a memorable witness to the appeal of Freemasonry is the character of Pierre in *War and Peace,* whose efforts to find enlightenment and purpose in Freemasonry are of a piece with his plans to improve the lot of the peasantry and his study of manuals on more efficient and innovative agricultural techniques. Like Pierre, these revolutionaries wanted to apply their ideas to reform the world according to rational, scientific, liberal principles, and to create a kind of "international republican politics" (Wood, 211). They wanted to spread, in Craig Nelson's words, the "religion of light" throughout the world, banishing prejudice, superstition, and selfishness in favour of progress, freedom, and reason (Nelson, 24).

Among such thinkers, no one was more passionate or more hopeful than Thomas Paine, as both Wood's essay and Nelson's smart, lively, and often moving biography demonstrate. Both authors note the ways in which Paine was closely linked to the American founders but seemed, always, just a bit out of place among them, both at the time and in historical memory. He never succeeded in wearing lightly the airs of gentility and he completely lacked—sometimes with disastrous consequences—any political agility or ability (or willingness) to temper utopianism with pragmatism. Yet no one served the cause of the Republic of Letters so fervently or effectively as Paine. Wood calls him America's "first public intellectual", and both he and Nelson succeed in restoring Paine to a deserved, central place in late-eighteenth-century politics and thought. A skilful participant in and beneficiary of the expansion of print media in this period, Paine wrote with incisiveness and urgency, blazing his way through pamphlets and treatises. His writing expressed often radical ideas and abstract principles but they were also high-energy calls to political action—a combination Nelson captures nicely in calling *Common Sense* a "self-help book, the help being for those who could never imagine life without a monarch" (Nelson, 84). In this, too, Paine was joined to the more familiar founders who were emphatically *doers* as well as thinkers. Wood notes the distinctiveness of this union of the abstract and the practical and considers it one of the essential qualities that sets this group apart in American history: "Somehow for a brief moment ideas and power, intellectualism and politics, came together—indeed were one with each other—in a way never again duplicated in American history" (Wood, 10).

Paine and the rest of the founders displayed another quality that set them apart: their high degree of self-consciousness about their status as civilised gentlemen in the provinces, their role in society, and their place in history. (Here, too, Burr is the exception that proves the rule.) Much of their character and their ambition were rooted in their acute awareness of their standing as provincials, the great distance between the crudity of American society and the sophistication of England. As William Livingston observed, America was "just emerging from the rude unpolished condition of an Infant country..." (in Wood, 20). One result of this heightened self-awareness was to sharpen their interest in enlightened ideas and society. As Wood notes, "all the talk of acquiring the enlightened attributes of a gentleman had a special appeal for all the outlying underdeveloped provinces of the greater British world, Scotland as well as North America" (Wood, 20). It resulted, too, as Bernard Bailyn has argued and (as Wood also notes), in the appearance of highly creative, original, and imaginative political thinking, a greater willingness "to create the world anew", among both Scots and Americans.[1]

All of the American founders in one way or another expressed their sense of the historical opportunity they faced and their obligation, as public figures, to bring their historical moment to fruition. Here again was a signal contribution of Paine; he turned the American Revolution "into a world-historical event and the harbinger of world citizenship and world peace", Wood writes. "Other Americans conceived of the revolution in these grandiose universalist terms, but no one was able to say it as he did" (Wood, 212). Paine's *Letter to the Abbe Raynal* cap-

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tures the depth of this conviction that the American Revolution would change the world in fundamental ways:

> Our style and manner of thinking have undergone a revolution more extraordinary than the political revolution of the country. We see with other eyes; we hear with other ears; and think with other thoughts, than those we formerly used. We can look back on our own prejudices, as if they had been the prejudices of other people. We now see and know they were prejudices and nothing else; and relieved from their shackles, enjoy a freedom of mind, we felt not before (in Nelson, 162).

The immediate aftermath of the American Revolution seemed to justify such universalist dreams. As David Armitage notes in *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History*, the "ultimate success of the Americans' claim to independence encouraged others to follow their example, not only in claiming statehood as an escape from empire, but also declaring independence as the mark of sovereignty". Furthermore, the "American Declaration also provided the primary model for the first great wave of declarations of independence that swept the trans-Atlantic world in the first half of the nineteenth century". But there soon came a sharp reminder that the American model would prove inadequate to some cases. As Armitage indicates, the Haitian declaration was a telling exception to the pattern of countries, such as many in South America, emulating the American example. The first draft of the Haitian declaration, it is true, did imitate the American document but was rejected as too mild. In language far from mild, the writer of the revised version, Louis Boisrond-Tonnerre, explained why. "'To draw up the act of independence", he wrote, "we need the skin of a white man for parchment, his skull for an inkwell, his blood for ink, and a bayonet for a pen'."[2]

The Haitian revolution had moved too far beyond the modest goals of its origins to equivocate at the moment of independence. Begun as a colonial rebellion against France by privileged white and mulatto colonists, with slaves in the northern part of the island rebelling not to end slavery but to reform it and improve its conditions, and with L'Ouverture's own conversion from royalism to republicanism occurring well along in the movement, the radicalism of the Haitian revolution took time to emerge. But by 1 January 1804, when Dessalines issued the declaration—months after L'Ouverture's death in a French prison—Haiti had completed the first successful slave revolt in the hemisphere and established the first free black republic. Its achievement, far from vindicating the American founders' hopes, made many of them queasy. In fact, the United States only recognised Haitian independence in 1862, long after France itself had done so.[3] To Thomas Jefferson and many others, the Haitian success was a slaveholder's nightmare, not an Enlightenment dream.

American uneasiness with the Haitian Revolution brings us face-to-face with the glaring problem of slavery in the American Revolution and the founders' responses to it—as well as our responses to them and to the failure of the revolution to eliminate slavery. Wood notes that all of "the revolutionary leaders became aware of the excruciating contradiction between their revolution on behalf of liberty and American slavery" (Wood, 38). But they responded in divergent ways. Hamilton, who had grown up amidst West Indian slavery, strongly opposed it and worked for antislavery initiatives in New York—alongside Aaron Burr, as it happens. Jefferson's many tortured reflections on the subject are well known and bulk large in any historical bill of indictment against him. Neither he nor Madison followed Washington in freeing their slaves; and Washington's position evolved only slowly, gradually, and privately. One of Benjamin Franklin's first acts upon retirement was to acquire slaves, a visible display of his newly established rank and his newly acquired freedom from labour. Yet, as William Pencak discusses in his essay on Franklin in *Profiles of Revolutionaries*, Franklin petitioned Congress to abolish slavery just before his death in 1790, and his last work was an antislavery tract (Pencak, in Weisberger, Hupchick, and Anderson, 66). And it is of course no surprise to find Thomas Paine outraged and fervent in his opposition. In *African Slavery in America* (1775)

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he asked, "Is the barbarous enslaving [of] our inoffensive neighbours, and treating them like wild beasts subdued by force, reconcilable with divine precepts? Is this doing to them as we would desire they should do to us? If they could carry off and enslave some thousands of us, would we think it just?—One would almost wish they could for once; it might convince more than reason, or the Bible" (in Nelson, 65). Wood suggests that it was the founders' own misguided optimism—or wishful thinking—that allowed them to defer the question of slavery, persuaded that it was headed toward gradual extinction (Wood, 27). Perhaps so. But while that explanation may be intellectually persuasive, it is bound to be morally unsatisfying for Americans reflecting on the origins of their nation.

The problem of slavery is at the heart of another broad and vexing issue about these Atlantic revolutionaries, the strange career of their legacies, and it arises most acutely in the American case. Toussaint L'Ouverture, to be sure, remains an enigmatic and complex figure, a screen on which to project different views of the Haitian revolt. He is remembered, as Madison Smartt Bell suggests in his informative, sparely narrated biography, as either a liberator, or the first in a line of Haitian dictators, or both. But the importance of a successful slave revolt, and the establishment of an independent black republic, speaks for itself. L'Ouverture—and the French—recognised that the promise of the Haitian Revolution went far beyond one man. As L'Ouverture said, as he boarded the boat that would take him to his French prison cell, "In overthrowing me, you have only cut down the trunk of the tree of liberty of the Blacks in Saint Domingue: it will spring back from the roots, for they are numerous and deep" (in Bell, 265).

The American revolutionaries, by contrast, had a much more troubled view of their legacy and largely felt that they had failed. John Adams, never the sunniest temperament, wrote to Benjamin Rush in 1812 that for over fifty years he had felt that he "constantly lived in an enemies Country" (Wood, 202). But even the ever-optimistic, naively sanguine Thomas Jefferson wrote gloomily on the subject: "All, all dead, and ourselves left alone amidst a new generation whom we know not, and who knows not us...I regret that I am now to die in the belief that the useless sacrifice of themselves by the generation of 1776...is to be thrown away by the unwise and unworthy passions of their sons...I have sometimes asked myself whether my country is the better for my having lived at all" (in Nelson, 337).

Wood argues that the founders' laments arose not from failure but from the very success of the Revolution, from expanding democratic and egalitarian impulses that the revolutionaries had unleashed but afterwards could not control or trust. But some of the same ambivalence, the same difficulty in making sense of the Revolution and its legacy, underpins modern Americans' unusual and somewhat troubling relationship to the framers. As Wood notes in opening his collection: "No other major nation honors its past historical characters...in quite the manner we Americans do" (Wood, 3). From historical re-enactments to actors giving speeches and press conferences in the personae of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, on one side, to fits of debunking and wholesale rejection of the framers as elite racists, on the other—from filiopietism to hero-worship to castigation, there is something downright odd in Americans' continuing interest and emotional investment in the framers. Perhaps Americans find it too difficult to come to terms with the full complexity of the Revolution and its leaders, its achievements as well as its ambiguities and limitations. But surely a politically responsible, as well as intellectually tenable, course would be to abandon the costumery and apologetics and denunciations, and focus instead on the Atlantic revolutionaries' ideas and aspirations. Craig Nelson offers a sensible and shrewd conclusion to the question of how and why, and in what useful ways, we should attend to the revolutionaries: "[I]t could be said that the most significant reason to read the works of Thomas Paine today is an act of fealty, for anyone living in a modern nation will already know by heart every one of his ideas and innovations, as they have been so completely adopted by modern government and society as to seem as though never needing invention...Yet, for anyone needing to be reminded of core Enlightenment beliefs—that government can only be empowered by its

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citizens; that such citizens are born with certain natural rights; that none are born superior to any other; that all will be treated equally before the law; and that the state has a duty to help the neediest of its people—reading Paine offers a political and spiritual inspiration, one that has driven men and women to achieve greatness across history" (Nelson, 338-39).

Notes

1 Bernard Bailyn, *To Begin the World Anew* (New York: Knopf, 2003).
2 David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 113, 114-15. See review in this issue of *Itinerario*.
3 Armitage, *Declaration of Independence,* 117.

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