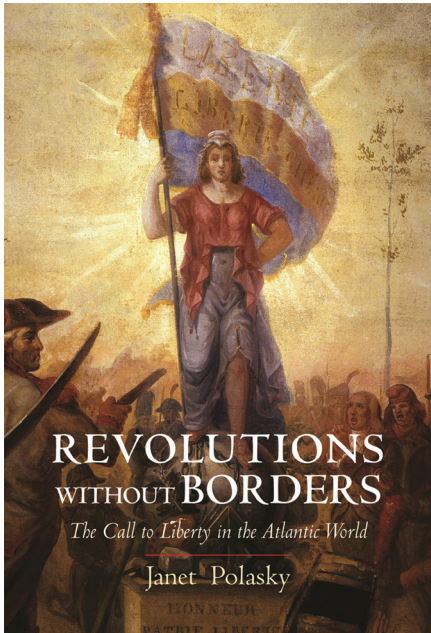


Note

Janet Polasky. *Revolutions without Borders: The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2015. 371 pp. ISBN 978-0-300-20894-8.



Janet Polasky's *Revolutions without Borders. The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World* is an ambitious book. Many a comparative or transnational study has been written about the age of revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, but usually such books are multi-author volumes (often conference proceedings) in which experts each deal with their own revolution, the notable exception being R.R. Palmer's *Age of the Democratic Revolution*. As brilliant as it is, Palmer's sixty-year old book is outdated and students can no longer be expected to work their way through its eleven hundred pages. More recent English-language introductions to the age of revolution, such as Wim Klooster's *Revolutions in the Atlantic World* (2009) mostly deal with what have become the usual suspects: the American, French, and Haitian revolutions.

Polasky truly takes the reader around the revolutionary world in one concise monograph. Her book is not organized geographically but thematically. Every chapter revolves around a specific sets of written documents, such as pamphlets, journals and memoirs, but also rumors and family correspondence. Polasky accounts for this setup stating that '[b]esides telling a good story, [the book] demonstrates how historians use sources' (14). This seems a bit of an ad hoc argument for what is in itself an understandable attempt to limit her material. *Revolutions without Borders* largely follows a chronological order, from its first chapter on the pamphlets of the American Revolution to the ninth on French diplomats abroad during the revolutionary wars on the eve of the nineteenth century. Polasky tells the story of revolutionary key moments in Switzerland, Ireland, Poland, and

Saint Domingue, among other places. She presents the reader with bits and pieces of good old political history, but these are subtly interwoven in a series of essays about very well-known (Thomas Paine, Jacques Brissot) but often also lesser-known travelers in the age of revolution: Dutch Patriots in exile, diplomats' wives away from their husbands, black Loyalists on the run.

Polasky, who wrote her dissertation on the revolution in the Southern Netherlands almost four decades ago, devotes considerable attention to the revolutionary low countries. She begins her book with the Dutch satirist Gerrit Paape, who lived revolutions in three different countries. She discusses the Dutch Patriot Era through Joan Derk van der Capellen and the revolution in the Belgian provinces through Henri van der Noot. The Batavian Revolution that starts in the Dutch Republic in 1795 is only mentioned briefly, but Polasky writes at length about Dutch female authors such as Belle van Zuylen and the writing duo Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken. These examples show that the theme of revolutionaries traveling across borders is not rigidly observed throughout the book: Van der Capellen translated the work of Price and Van der Noot was called a 'Belgian George Washington' (42) but neither are known to us as travelers; Van Zuylen spent much of her life outside of the Netherlands, but she was hardly a revolutionary; and Wolff en Deken did go into French exile after the Dutch counterrevolution of 1787, but Polasky is not so much interested in this episode as in Wolff's domestic life as a pastor's wife in Beverwijk. Ultimately, then, the leitmotiv of the book, just like the fact that each chapter is discussing a certain type of sources, seems secondary to Polasky's greater ambition, largely left implicit, of an inclusive history of the revolutionary era that also values the experiences of counter-revolutionaries, women, and people from supposedly peripheral centers of revolution. In this ambition, one of many, she splendidly succeeds.

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