was no monster—she was a learned and engaged noblewoman motivated by her search for scientific truths and her love for her children” (116).

Sentimental Savants is engagingly written and well suited for educated general audiences as well as for students and specialists; it offers a great deal of contextual information (e.g., describing the expulsion of the Jesuits) and synthetic descriptions of other studies. The work suffers from some repetition; the author sometimes reproduces arguments that one has already encountered, including the same phrasings. Specialists also may not need the background information provided for those new to the field. Overall, however, Roberts's book is an important contribution to Enlightenment studies—the rare book that produces fresh insights while drawing on well-trod sources. The author sheds new light on the self-fashioning of French Enlightenment figures; her book helps us understand how their families were integral to their writings as well as to their self-representations.

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Cul de Sac: Patrimony, Capitalism, and Slavery in French Saint-Domingue.

By *Paul Cheney*.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pp. viii+264. \$40.00.

Paul Cheney has written one of the most important books on colonial and revolutionary Haiti (Saint-Domingue) of the past several decades. What distinguishes this subtle and creative work is its careful reconstruction of the rise and fall of a single Caribbean planter family between the 1770s and the 1830s. It is not quite a microhistory of plantation slavery, for the records that sustain this study do not seem to support a detailed reconstruction of slave society. Cheney does an excellent job assembling from the available evidence what we can learn about slave life and agricultural practices on the plantations of the Cul de Sac plain surrounding Port-au-Prince. As suggested by its subtitle, however, this book not only fills a gap in the literature of Haitian history but also aims to revise our understanding of early modern North Atlantic capitalism by demonstrating its reliance on unstable but persistent patrimonial alliances. In that objective, *Cul de Sac* succeeds magnificently, giving us a more revealing and finely drawn portrait of the economic and social relationships in which the Caribbean sugar plantation was embedded than we have previously known.

By looking at how “the international division of labor shaped daily life” on the plantation, writes Cheney, we can gain a better sense of “the relation between Saint-Domingue’s phenomenal wealth and its besetting weaknesses” (2). To illustrate the patterns of patrimonial capitalism at work—the collaborations and conflicts between the French monarchy and noble families who attempted to transpose their aristocratic privileges onto a Caribbean terrain—Cheney mines the family papers of Étienne-Louis Ferron de la Ferronnays, the Breton noble, member of the French colonial administration, and absentee owner of the major Cul de Sac plantation that figures in this book. These documents permit Cheney to raise the ground-level study of the colonial Haitian plantation to a level it has not seen since the pioneering studies of Gabriel Debien from the 1940s and 1950s.

The author skillfully weaves private letters together with recent studies of the early modern French state, aristocracy, and commercial revolution to produce a compelling portrait of the Antillean plantation complex. In doing so, he embraces the overlap between two meanings of the phrase “Cul de Sac”: the geographic setting of the Ferronnays plantation and the sense that, in the slave plantations of Saint-Domingue, French patri-

monial capitalism had arrived at a “dead end” (6). As Cheney puts it, “French Saint-Domingue looks less like proof of capitalism’s power of creative destruction than the long persistence of a crisis-prone social and economic system, not only through periods of turbulence but well beyond the climacteric that should have ended its existence” (6).

The book’s core chapters are devoted to explaining why the alliance between the royal state and metropolitan nobles turned out to be so turbulent in the colonial Haitian setting. Cheney ranges widely in answering this question, exploring the relevance of economic choices (the tension between the short-term demands of production and long-term incentives for investment) and cultural factors (the inevitable gap between Enlightenment-era notions of the humane treatment of slaves and cold calculations of interest). As one would expect in a work focused on the period from the 1770s to the early 1800s, war turns out to be another important part of the answer. In contrast to recent scholarship on “war capitalism” that sees war as an instrument of economic expansion, Cheney emphasizes the disruptive impact of international military conflict on the triangle trade. He shows how the threat or reality of war could affect such plantation-level decisions as whether to invest in new sugar processing technologies or buy more slaves. And he gives us a highly persuasive account of the soft underbelly of the post-1783 sugar boom in Saint-Domingue, already beginning to succumb to the risks of overcapitalization and bankruptcy even before the onset of the revolutionary crisis (129). Finally, Cheney grounds his analysis of the Ferronays family’s fate in a superb chapter on the breakdown of the stormy marriage between Étienne-Louis and his wife Marie-Elisabeth, which vividly demonstrates the extent to which colonial states “became captive to the logic of private inheritance dominant among elites” even as it shows that those elites were constantly at odds with each other (130, 132).

All of these chapters are rendered even more fascinating for being told largely from the perspective of Jean-Baptiste Corbier and his son, the nonnoble managers of the Ferronays plantation, whose correspondence with Étienne-Louis provides the bulk of the book’s source material. This reliance raises a question about the centrality of the patrimony concept in Cheney’s interpretation. As Cheney makes clear, nobles were hardly the only actors to exert a decisive influence over the Ferronays estate. In a sense, Corbier the commoner was the real lord of this fief. And many others, including merchants, bankers, and—during the revolutionary period especially—free people of color and slaves, played important roles in deciding the fate of the sugar plantation. A great deal of non-patrimonial capitalism was intermixed, and sometimes competed, with the strict patrimonial elements of this economy.

It is also not entirely clear how the emphasis on patrimonial capitalism as a Caribbean “dead end” relates to the Haitian Revolution. That event is treated in a pair of closing chapters that culminate with the Ferronays descendants pathetically attempting to stake their family’s claim to a portion of the 1825 indemnity that France compelled from Haiti. Cheney suggests that Haiti’s early nineteenth-century ruling elites inherited the culture of patrimonial capitalism in their determination to extract new forms of coerced labor from the freed slaves. But he shies away from making any large pronouncements about the meaning of the Haitian Revolution itself, which figures here mostly as an event in the Ferronays family history rather than a force in its own right. A laconic but poignant epilogue leaves the reader wanting to hear more about the significance of this story for the broad sweep of Haitian history. But no one can come away from this book with anything less than a sense of gratitude and awe for the great achievement that it represents.

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