The Political Economy of "Deficit Consciousness" in the French Revolution: The Ideological Uses of Atlantic Commerce, From 1787 to Thermidor

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The Atlantic Economy in the Era of 18th-Century Revolutions

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In the historical narrative of Franco-American eighteenth century relations, the American debt to France may be seen as exposing the fundamental differences of the political culture of the two Atlantic revolutions. The process of repaying the debt, based on loans granted between 1776 and 1782 to help the American cause against "*le perfide Albion*," made evident, *a posteriori*, that the two nations were on a collision course from the founding of the American republic. The French Revolution, grounded in legal, corporate, religious and natural rights traditions, was far removed from the ideological origins of the American Revolution with its roots in civic humanism and the "invented tradition" of the freeborn Englishman. Ultimately, no discourse celebrating Atlantic Enlightenment solidarity could smooth over the differing motivations and conflicting interests of American Federalists and French Jacobins.

On the broadest level of ideologies and discourses, further aggravating the divergences between America and France was the creation of the *ancien régime* by French revolutionaries to designate the society they were to dismantle. Paradoxically, the rupture in 1789 with an *ancien régime* that had helped the American cause in 1776 rendered cosmopolitan Enlightenment solidarities an elusive ideal in the Atlantic world. After all, the U.S. debt was owed by the formerly confederated states of America to the annihilated *ancien régime* of France. Did not the act of Revolution imply the repudiation of the international obligations to the previously failed regimes, as Alexander Hamilton argued? However, once the Constituent Assembly decided in July 1789 that it would honor the royal debt as a national obligation, the relinquishing of the U.S. debt was never a serious option. In sharp contrast to today's administration, the American Federalist government privileged the Jeffersonian argument on the durability of international treaties, alliances, and engagements drawn up between *nations* and not mere *governments*.

In the French historiography of the Revolution, the question of the American debt is seen as intimately linked with the internal dynamics of the French Revolution. Whether the focus is on the factional and ideological rivalries between Montagnards and the Girondins, the European war and the Vendée rebellion, or the refusal to comprehend United States federalism on its own terms, the American debt to France was one of many prisms through which French revolutionary politics stood outside the Anglo-American radical tradition. According to French historians, rarely in agreement over issues arising from the Revolution, the decline and collapse of the Franco-American alliance was a part of the larger diplomatic isolation of Revolutionary France. Whether due to factional, circumstantial, or ideological causes, France and America were simply doomed to be driven apart. The divorce of the Atlantic revolution was final with the coda of the Jay Treaty in 1795, the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 and the Quasi-War in 1799, and the epilogue of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. "Was it bad commercial relations that chilled diplomatic relations or the other way around?" asked the Atlantic historian Jacques Godechot in underscoring the depth of the inter-related crises across the Atlantic in the Federalist period.[1]

This paper will demonstrate that far from a being a symbolic issue, a mere pretext for an inevitable rupture, the US debt to France had a far greater role in undermining both commercial and diplomatic relations in the Atlantic world. At the origin of the crisis was a deficit consciousness that became particularly acute after 2 March, 1787, when the *contrôleur général des finances* Charles Alexandre de Calonne, announced to the assembly of notables the desperate state of French financing and the staggering amount of the French public debt: about four billion livres. The annual deficit was estimated at 100 million livres. With half of the annual budget

[1] Jacques Godechot, Les Relations économiques entre les États-Unis et la France de 1778 à 1789, French Historical Studies, 1 :1 (1958): 26-39. An example of a particularly Gallo-centric point of view: G. Solovieff, Les relations franco-américaines de 1779 à 1810, *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 1983 : 114-124.

already devoted to debt servicing in 1787, a figure that had grown from close to 40% of the annual budget in 1764, the margin of maneuver for the reformist crown was quite small.[2] Calonne proposed to apply the tax burden to privileged landed elites who had been previously exempted, all the while giving them greater advisory powers through the founding of provincial assemblies. As a corollary issue, the perception of the American debt changed profoundly. For six months had passed since the September 1786 time limit for the beginning of the reimbursement of the 7 million dollar debt that the Americans had accumulated in loans since 1776 – a deadline that passed without mention in the correspondence of the French diplomatic corps.[3]

Even without the added layer of symbolic and material complications represented by the U.S. financial obligations, the French royal debt had deep ramifications for defense, administration, and confidence in the security of the national wealth. It also inspired a debate that opened an unexpected opportunity for those determined to reform the system that created the debt. With the restructuring of finances would emerge the project of transforming society as a whole. In particular, Calonne's announcement of the French near bankruptcy exposed the structural weaknesses of a fiscal system based on a complex network of privileges and corporate bodies that supplied low-cost credit to the state. The depth of the problems posed by the national

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[2] David Weir, "Tontines, Public Finance, and Revolution in France and England, 1688-1789," *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 49 (1989): 95-124: 101-2. James Riley, French Public Finances, 1727-1768," *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 59 (1987): 209-243.

[3] The deadline went unnoticed in the Archives des Affaires Étrangers, Correspondance Diplomatique, États-Unis (hereafter, AECPE-U, CD), Supplément, 20 (9) : « Finances : Liquidation de la dette americaine, 1783-1797 ».

debt reached into the very foundations of a*ncien régime* society, with its layers of venal offices and corporate privileges that had become transformed into complex systems of public finance.[4] In the months that followed, the French state's fiscal crisis became a passionate object of discussion. On October 17 1787, Arthur Young famously noted that the national debt was foremost among favored topics of discussion and asked whether a revolution would result: "One opinion pervaded the whole company, that they are on the eve of some great revolution in the government: that every thing points to it: the confusion in the finances great; with a deficit impossible to provide for without the states-general of the kingdom...but bankruptcy is a topic: the curious question on which is, would a bankruptcy occasion a civil war, and a total overthrow of the government?"

At the same time, a series of brochures and pamphlets urged the reform of French finances as well as greater equity in the distribution of the tax burden. The debate on a possible default on royal debts revived a standard trope of economic commentators no longer enthralled by the national cause of military commitments, as during the Seven Years War and the War of Independence. Calonne's announcement buried, for once and for all, the most compelling ideological justifications for an oppressive fiscal policy: national defense and international grandeur. Thus, the pre-Revolutionary and early Revolutionary years from 1787 to 1791 were marked by ambitious projects for the reform and rationalization of French finances. It also helped to hasten the downfall of the *ancien régime*. As Michael Kwass has concluded, the

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[4] Michael Sonenscher, "The Nation's Debt and the Birth of the Modern Republic: the French Fiscal Deficit and the Politics of the Revolution of 1789," *History of Political Thought* (1997), vol. 18 (1): 44-103 & vol.18 (2): 267-325: I: 65-67. Michel Morineau, "Budgets de l'état et gestion des finances royales en France au XVIII siècle," *Revue Historique* 264 (1980), 289-336. William Doyle, *Venality. The Sale of Offices in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford & New York: Clarendon Press Oxford, 1996) 69, 121, 309.

outbreak of the French Revolution was motivated in part by debates and policies for greater equity in fiscal matters. In practice, the reforms of certain taxes meant that the privileged echelons of French society were increasingly subject to taxation. The "aristocratic revolt' of the early Revolution may have thus been partially provoked by the inclusion of the nobility in the "kingdom of taxpayers" envisioned by the reform monarchy.[5]

The cry for a measure of justice in larger fiscal matters played into the notion that America had been ungrateful, duplicitous, or opportunistic in matters relating to the debt. The "memory" of the extravagance of the American debt flowed into the thesis that the intervention of France in the War of Independence had ruined the French state. This idea circulated far and wide in the early years of the French Revolution. Among royalist circles, for example, it became common currency. The Minister of the Navy, Bertrand de Molleville, noted that Louis XVI in 1792 was strongly persuaded that the French money spent in America's War of Independence had led directly to the collapse of the monarchy. A project to intervene in British India was vehemently rejected by the king because it reminded him of events across the Atlantic: "I have never stopped thinking of the *affaire de l'Amérique* without regret. They took advantage of my youth in those days; to this day, we are still paying the price. The lesson is too powerful to

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[5] During the Revolution, the earliest published discussion to call attention to this change is seemingly the translation of an analysis of the Boston merchant who was later commissioned to treat the outstanding debt after Thermidor on 25 January, 1795: James Swan, *Causes au se sont opposés aux progrès du commerce entre la France et les Etats-Unis* (Paris, 1790). On Swan's treatment of the debt, see Albert Hall Bowman Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality. Franco-American Diplomacy During the Federalist Era* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1978): 228. On the debt's impact on Franco-American relations: Tanguy de la Bossiere, *Mémoire sur la situation commerciale de la France avec les États-Unis de l'Amérique depuis l'année 1775, jusqu'à et compris 1795* (Paris, 1796). On the wider impact of the fiscal reforms of the Crown: Michael Kwass, *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne, 2000): 61-65.

forget." As we will see, the rise of protectionist and expansionist Jacobin policies was also grounded in the memory of the *affaire de l'Amérique*.[6]

The treatment of the U.S. debt to France indeed suggests great leniency of the French as America's creditor during and after the War of Independence. As disclosed by the voluminous correspondence of the Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, the American cause received 34 million livres in loans, or around 7 million dollars, as well as 12 million livres, over 2 million dollars, in gifts and various delays in interest payments. In 1787, that sum of 46 million livres, 9 million dollars, contributed by France is the equivalent in today's purchasing power of 173 billion dollars ($172,896,750.00). It represented about 20% of the total receipts of the French state in 1787, according to the still convincing calculation of Michel Marion.[7]

The mere quantification of this debt, moreover, does not adequately convey its weight. A full *compte rendu* of the expense to the French state would have to take into account factors that were impossible to recompense. For the lax conditions surrounding the disbursal of loans made a definitive account elusive. Typically made in four to five installments per year with *dons gratuits*, or free contributions, mixed pell-mell with other transactions attached to vaguely-stated conditions for reimbursement that were only settled by contract signed at Versailles in July 1782 (whose signature was accompanied by another loan) and ratified by Congress in January 1783. Certain issues had not been settled by the 1782 Versailles treaty: what amount of responsibility

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[6] John Hardman and Munro Price, eds. *Louis XVI and the Comte de Vergennes: Correspondence 1774-1787*. (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998), 43.

[7] The calculations on the debt in this article are principally derived from the meticulous reconstruction of: Alphonse Aulard, « La dette Américaine envers la France, » *La Revue de Paris*, III. Part 1, May 15, 1925, 319-338; part 2: June 1, 1925, 524-550 : part 1, 332-333. Aulard's results have been supplemented by a re-examination of his source material, the papers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: AECPE-U (CD) « Finance: Liquidation…..1783-1797, » *op. cit.* And AECPE-U (CD), Supplément, 26 (15) : « Mémoires sur les colonies anglaises, l'organisation des Etats-Unis, leurs relations avec la France, 1772-1794. » Marcel Marion, *Histoire financière de la France depuis 1715 (Paris: Arthur Rousseau,* 1919), vols. 1 and 2.

should be recognized by the Americans to pay for the 15% fees and interest skimmed off by the Royal *fermiers-généraux* who directly loaned a million livres to the Americans in March, 1777? (The tax farms were given a privileged market for American tobacco, lasting until a corruption charge leveled against the American exporter, William Morris, brought an end to the arrangements in 1785.) Should other expenditures, besides that of the military, be factored into the final bill? For example, the geo-political strategies of France toward America were a part of a larger mercantile struggle against Spain and England. Against these commercial and military rivals the Foreign Affairs Minister Vergennes founded and widely distributed a newspaper, *Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique* (1776-9) as a propaganda organ during the revolutionary war. – in view of its elaborate lay-out, its detailed dispatches about la *Guerre d'Independence*, and its widespread diffusion, this was surely a costly venture.[8]

Indirectly, the American debt to France added weight to the arguments for the imposition of universal taxes applied at all subjects of the kingdom. In the context of the increases in taxation upon French subjects between 1783 and 1786 (that followed a similar increase between 1760 and 1763), the American wars were borne with great difficulty by the average Frenchman. The vingtième, or the 5% tax, which most nobles and office holders were exempted from, were tripled to become in practice a 15% tax on all income in these periods of time. The egregious lack of equity in the distribution of the tax burden created momentum for what L'averdy, the

[8] For a rare contemporary warning of the exorbitant expense of the American war, see: Ann Robert Jacques Turgot, *Mémoire sur les colonies américaines et sur leurs relations politiques avec leurs métropoles et sur la manière dont la France et l'Europe ont dû envisager la suite de l'independence des Etats-Unis d'Amérique* (Paris, 1791) Bibliothèque Nationale de France, (hereafter, BNF) LB39-4815. On the chauvinistic response that led to Vergenne's adventurous foreign policy after France's defeat the Seven Years War: Edmond Dziembowski, *Un nouveau patriotisme français, 1750-1770. La France face à la puissance anglaise à l'époque de la Guerre de Sept Ans*. (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1998).

liberal Finance Minister of Louis XV described as "the principle goal, and the most worthwhile, the distribution of taxation as equal, and therefore, as little onerous as possible."[9]

By the time Calonne publicized the French state's imminent bankruptcy, the obligations and commitments for repayments, with 5% interest for the majority of the loan, were already past due. As the total receipts of the United States Treasury for 1785 totaled $375,000, and as the Congress lacked the funds in 1786 to pay its diplomatic corps abroad, there was scant hope for immediate collection.[10] Yet, despite this contentious issue, one might characterize the state of French-US relations just before the proclaimed fiscal cataclysm as quite favorable to the young republic. A few Lumières in France disputed the direction of the young republic in the 1780s, such as the Americans' choice of a bicameral legislature, the organization of a supposedly "aristocratic" society of Cincinnatus, or the climactic degeneration of animal life and people of the New World. For the most part, however, these absorbed the attention of a relatively small anti-colonial lobby – men on the margins of the French Enlightenment such as the Dutchman De Pauw, the anti-physiocratic abbé Raynal, and the radical abbé Mably. R.R. Palmer over forty years ago eloquently summarized the glowing image of the United States among European elite opinion of the late Enlightenment: [11]

Whether fantastically idealized or seen in a factual way, whether as mirage or as reality, America made Europe seem unsatisfactory to many people of the middle and lower classes, and to those

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[9] Kwass, Privilege and the Politics of Taxation*, 38, 45-47.* For a broader interpretation of the impact of taxation in the eighteenth-century: David Stasavage, *Public Debt and the Bith of the Democratic State* (Cambridge & N.Y.: 2003)*: 94-95.*

[10] Aulard, *op. cit.*, 327.

[11] On the wider impact of this anti-colonial lobby: Allan Potofsky, "French Lumières and American Enlightenment During The Atlantic Revolution," *Revue Française d'Etudes Américaines,* n° 93, juin*,* 2002: 247-263. The classic studies of this anthropological discourse relating to the new world are: Durand Echeverria, *Mirage in the West. A History of the French Image of American Society to 1815* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957). And Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977).

of the upper classes who wished them well. It made a good many Europeans feel sorry for themselves, and induced a kind of spiritual flight from the Old Regime.[12]

A measure of Franco-American relations on the eve of the French Revolution was the evolution of discussion on Atlantic commerce. A leitmotif of Enlightenment commercial discourse was the civilizing influences of commercial exchanges in a vast market of regenerated citizens. One influential source of the widely held belief that the American Revolution facilitated Atlantic commerce was Brissot de Warville's and Etienne Clavière's *Société gallo-américaine*, whose charter of January 1787 sought to draw up "a commercial treaty founded on the interests of the two nations." In May through December 1788, Brissot traveled through the United States to invest in land in several states using the money of a consortium of bankers, all the while using his political connections to meet with the leaders of the young republic. Clavière even expressed his intention to move permanently to America. In fact, the future Girondins probably used the *Société gallo-américaine* as a front for some shady real-estate dealings, as Rochefoucauld-Liancourt observed a few years later. (Brissot became involved with the Sciota Land Company, which in 1790 deceived Parisian royalists fleeing the Revolution into buying worthless receipts for non-existent property in southern Ohio. Those ruined royalists who stayed in the United States created the settlement that later became Gallipolis, the City of the Gauls.) Despite the project's discomforting indulgence for speculation, the book that resulted from Brissot's and Clavière's collaboration articulated a vibrant Enlightenment cosmopolitanism. Clavière had even insisted that a clear statement condemning *Anglophobie* be included in the

[12] R.R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution. Vol I: The Challenge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959): 282.

club's bylaws: he was wary that *Américanophilie* become mere geo-political manoeuvring by other means.[13]

Focusing on the theory while rarely descending to the level of the practice of Atlantic commerce, the founding document of the *Société gallo-américaine*, with the anodyne title, *De la France et des États-Unis ou de l'importance de la Révolution de l'Amérique pour le bonheur de la France*, described America as a physiocratic paradise. There, the fruits of agriculture would fully complement the "sterile" wealth of European nations that depend on "the work of manufactures." With republican Americans developing an increasing taste for luxury, a division of trade between agricultural and manufactured products would be in the very nature of things economic. While fully inspired by *Américanophile* impulses, Brissot's and Clavière's discourse was also rooted in French economic interests and in the stereotype of the supposed Rousseauist "primitivism" of the Americans.[14]

> We must thus submit to the force of things, which inevitably lead the free Americans to foreign commerce. All this is reduced to two words: they have needs, & Europe has manufactures. The United States have several of these (manufactures) but the majority of them are linked to the labor of the earth, which makes use of the leisure time that agriculture provides, and which the Europeans can not compete with……As they have primary foodstuff in abundance, we must

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[13] Jean-Pierre Brissot de Warville et Etienne Clavière, *France et des États-Unis, ou l'importance de la Révolution de l'Amérique pour le bonheur de la France,* Marcel Dorigny, ed. (Paris : Editions du C.T.H.S., 1996.) Originally published in 1787. A concise and brilliant synthesis of *Américanophilie* in the 1780s and of the history of the Société is Dorigny's preface of this edition: "La libre Amérique selon Brissot et Clavière. Modèle politique, utopie libérale et réalisme économique:" 7-29. For more details on Brissot's two trips to America: Brissot, *Voyages aux Etats-Unis*, (*Paris,* 1791). On the by-laws and related correspondence relating to the *Société*: Claude Perroud, *J. P. Brissot, correspondance et papiers* (Paris, 1912): 105-136: for Clavière's Anglophile objections to an exclusively American bias: 108. For a more skeptical contemporary view of French real estate adventures in the new world: François-Alexandre-Frédéric La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Voyage dans les Etats-Unis d'Amérique, fait en 1795, 1796 et 1797*, (Paris Dupont, An VII (1798)). Sickened by his compatriots' behaviour upon losing money in America, Liancourt commented : "On ne rencontre pas aujourd'hui un Français sans avoir à subir le récit de ses pertes, de ses malheurs, de son opinion et des haines qui en résultent :" vol. 1, p. 36.

[14] Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic : Political Economy in Jeffersonian America.* NY: Norton, 1980: 110-111.

advise them never to create manufactures, or, to speak more precisely, they shall never be built (il ne s'en élevera point).[15]

In a phrase that might have been lifted from Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, translated in 1786, the authors predicted: ″the free Americains will forever renounce the drudgery (*l'état pénible*) of manufactures." Brissot's and Clavière's celebration to the virtues of the pure and simple life of the American countryside, "where man is endlessly in the presence of nature….where he is endlessly revitalized by the salubrious air and by his healthful labor" is also distinctly evocative of the expressive style and argumentation of one of the founding "American" members of the *Société gallo-américaine*, Saint-Jean de Crèvecoeur. The exuberant *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain* had been translated in 1784. As did Crèvecoeur, Brissot's and Clavière's viewed America's national identity as rooted in the farmer's struggle to tame the wilderness. But unlike the lyrical author of the *Letters*, a rustic vision of America was also an opportunity for Atlantic commerce to enrich the corrupt, luxury-ridden, and wealthy manufacturing societies as represented most notably by France.[16]

A definitive rupture with Enlightenment–era discussions of Atlantic commerce followed Calonne's announcement on the French national debt in 1787. While the "pro-American" circle of the *Société Gallo-Americaine* would have many an occasion to collaborate in the *Cercle Social*, the anti-slavery *Amis des Noirs* also founded by Brissot and Clavière, and later, the *Société de 1789* among other clubs, their preoccupations became much less cosmopolitan. Hence, in October 1788, as representatives of the *Société Gallo-Americaine*, Brissot and Clavière quietly drew up an elaborately-detailed contract with two bankers from New York to obtain the

[15] Brissot & Clavière: 56.
[16] Ibid.: 57.

reimbursement of the U.S. debt in return for a substantial fee. The matter was only dropped with the outbreak of the French Revolution.[17]

"Américanophilie" vs. the Balance of Trade in the Early French Revolution

Other pro-American *Lumières* who frequented these same societies and clubs, most notably Mirabeau, Condorcet, Destutt de Tracy, Mirabeau, la Rochefoucauld-d'Enville and his more famous cousin, la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, Claude Fauchet, and Jean Nicolas Démeunier, clearly represented the voices of a movement in favor of *Américanophilie* in the early Revolution.[18] Perhaps the most exalted of all had been the future Girondin and former abbé Fauchet, who had made a vivid impression with *La Religion nationale* (1789). Fauchet analyzed the revolutionary epoch in terms of stages of history, by which the American and French Revolutions completed the conditions for an egalitarian millennium. More sober in its conception, Condorcet held in *De l'influence de la Révolution d'Amérique sur l'Europe* (1786) that the new political model for French republicanism must be American or not at all. American independence had been a crucial step in the "perfectibilité de l'espèce humaine (32)." The tenor of these commentaries share the premise of *la Société Gallo-Américaine*, that of the preparatory nature of the American Revolution. The argument is distinctly stadial: American independence represented a first stage in the perfectibility of the human species that was only to be "surpassed" and completed in France.[19]

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[17] Perroud, *J. P. Brissot*: 104-5. Aulard: 526.

[18] Joyce Appleby. "America as a Model for the Radical French Reformers of 1789," *William and Mary Quarterly* 33rd series, 28 (April 1971): 267-286.

[19] The will to "go beyond" the American experience is discussed in the context of the constitutional debates in France by Marcel Gauchet, *La Révolution des droits de l'homme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989) : chapter 2, « *Surpasser l'Amérique*, » 39-59.

As generally representative of the political current that would later be called Orleanism and as liberal monarchists, these men were not always uncritical advocates of a radically pro-American revolutionary policy. Démeunier, for example, was extremely well placed to link the catastrophic situation of public finances in France to the U.S. debt. The author of a four-volume study on the United States, published in 1786 and drawn from his massive contribution to the Pancoucke's *Encyclopédie methodique*, Démeunier wrote a critical analysis of the assignats in early 1790. He cogently argued that the recovery of international debts and attacking the unfavorable balance of trade with nations such as the United States were preferable to the creation of the revolutionary currency.[20]

The loosely-associated *Américanophile* "group" organized the first momentous event that called for an appraisal of the impact of an American Enlightenment upon the French Revolution: the death of Benjamin Franklin. As unofficial ambassador and, later, as the "Minister Plenipotentiary" between 1776 and 1785, Franklin had cultivated close relations with la Rochefoucauld-d'Enville, the translator of the state constitutions, as well as Turgot and the Foreign Affairs Minister Vergennes, among many others. The announcement of Franklin's death was made on June 11, 1790, in the Constituent Assembly by the *Américanophile* Mirabeau, whose credentials as a specialist on matters American derived principally from a critical book,

[20] Démeunier, *Opinions sur le projet de rembourser, en Assignats-monnaie, les dix-neuf cents millions de la dette qu'on appelle exigible* (Paris, 1790). *L'Amérique indépendante ou les différentes constitutions des treize provinces qui se sont érigées en république sous le nom d'États-Unis d'Amérique, (*3 volumes, Paris, 1790*).* The latter work is a re-publication of his long article on the United States for Pancoucke's *Encyclopédie Méthodique.* On Démeunier's voluminous writings about America, see Paul B. Cheney*, "The History and the Science of Commerce in the Century of the Enlightenment: France, 1713-1789,"* Ph.D Thesis, Columbia University, Department of History*,, 2002,* chapter VI*, "Civil Society and Etatisme"*.

written in 1784, about the Society of Cincinnati that was subsequently translated into English, German and Dutch.[21]

Franklin's French funeral orations were a rare collective profession of cosmopolitan Enlightenment thought in French revolutionary circles. Many of the orations were published and, for the most part, they focus on Franklin as inventor and statesman who best represented the practical aspects of the American Enlightenment. Yet, while these professions of faith are often read as vibrant testimony, in particular, to the author of *le Bonhomme Richard* and, more generally, to Franco-American friendship, they also indicate that a few of the *Americanophile* actors of the French Revolution began to be concerned about Atlantic relationships by the Spring of 1790.[22]

The funeral oration by Condorcet, *Eloge de M. Franklin, lu à la séance publique de l'académie des Sciences*, delivered in November 1790 and published as a pamphlet the following year, stood out among the many eulogies to Franklin for its broad and rich conceptualization of the role of the Lumière-legislator on the two sides of the Atlantic. But Condorcet's *Eloge* quickly reverses course and also becomes a critique of an anti-colonial Enlightenment arguments that had viewed the primitiveness of the New World as a barrier to – rather than as an economic opportunity for – Franco-American relations. Condorcet mocks this notion of a permanently backward New World:

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[21] Honoré Gabriel Riquetti Mirabeau. *Considérations sur l'ordre de la Cincinnatus ou Imitation d'un Pamphlet Anglo-Américain*. London, 1784. BNF 8-PB-1295

[22] Parts of his autobiography's manuscript were circulated in secret among his French friends, and would be published in Paris in the summer or 1791 as, *Mémoires de la Vie Privée de Benjamin Franklin, Ecrits par lui-même, et adressés a son fils*. On the Franklin funeral orations: Claude Fohlen, *Benjamin Franklin* (Paris : Payot Biographie, 2000), chapter 13 : « Le destin de Franklin en France, » p. 351-372, especially, p. 353-358. Durand Echeverria, *Mirage in the West, op. cit.*: 170-172. David Hill, "A Missing Chapter in Franco-American History", *American Historical Review*, XXI (1916), 709-719.

(The Europeans) could not believe that there were men who had deepened the principles of society in the forests of the new world, and who by their very earliest efforts gave lessons to Europe. Without a doubt, we must not conclude that the Americans surpass us in the Enlightenment: but men get along easily where a gentle equality protects them from the sophisms of interest and vanity; the truth is easy to find for a rising people without prejudices, and it is above all against the systematic errors of corruption and of habit that old nations need all the resources of instruction, and of all the forces of genius.

Warning that the contempt for the Americans was in itself proof of the corruption of the Europeans, Condorcet used the funeral oration to criticize what he viewed as a growing tendency toward arrogance and condescension. Only the true *Américanophiles* among the Lumières would be the carriers of a genuinely universal ideal. As in 1776 all is not lost after 1789, for "above all, America can count on its most zealous and faithful friends, who are weak in every country, and most often without apparent power, but strong in their noble collaboration and strengthened in their opinion by the authority of reason and talent."[23]

As if attempting to confirm the authority of Condorcet's critique of European "sophistry of interest and vanity," several voices in the Foreign Affairs ministry in the early years of the Revolution began to complain of American commercial treason. For beyond the influential but limited circles of Parisian liberal nobles and landed elites, the commercial and diplomatic relations with the young American republic were becoming more complex. Within the French bureaucracy, the fear that American commerce was falling back under the influence of the English empire began to preoccupy the Americanist specialists of the French Consulates, transferred from the Ministry of the Navy and Colonies to that of Foreign Affairs at the beginning of the Revolution. As Peter Hill has demonstrated, the abrupt decline in French exports to America, most particularly in the period of 1787 to 1795, absorbed the attention of consular officers. The combination of renewed English presence in the ports of the Eastern

seaboard and the Antilles, and an increasingly unfavorable balance of trade leading to the dreaded drain of specie – a cash outflow of over 18 million livres in the last three years of the *ancien régime* – led to a "who is losing the Americas" debate. Moreover, the obstacles to increased French exports to the Americas seemed insurmountable. As British merchants regained the confidence of American English-speaking colleagues, willing to extend increasing amounts of credit to their former adversaries, as American sales to France of tobacco, indigo, rice, and flour increased, and the need for expensive French luxury goods declined, the French consular officials under the direction of the first revolutionary *chargé d'affaires* in America, Louis-Guillaume Otto, expressed growing alarm. Otto's mercantilist analysis, focusing on the mistake of allowing American ships unlimited access to export essential foodstuffs, military items, and lumber to the ports of the French Antilles after 1783, became a leitmotif in the complaints of consular officers.[24]

A gathering commercial crisis was not averted when Jefferson, in collaboration with William Short, quietly obtained the beginning of repayment in November 1790. The first reimbursement was received in France with such discretion that a 1792 report by the deputy from Paris, Montesquieu, to the Committee of Finances of the Constituent was the first public declaration of the reception of two payments of 3.6 million livres. By January 1796 almost the entire uncontested amount of the debt was liquidated, with disagreements settled partially at the Convention of Môrtefontaine of October 1800 that settled issues arising from the Quasi-War. Thanks to the energetic member of the American French diplomatic corps, Barbé-Marbois, other technical problems were resolved through the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, although other

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[23] Condorcet, *Eloge de M. Franklin, lu à la séance publique de l'académie des Sciences, le 13 Novembre 1790* (Paris, 1791) : BNF X-18877. 23 and 27

[24] Peter Hill, *French Perceptions of the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Association, 1988): 46-47.

outstanding issues were only settled in 1815 twenty years after the initial start of the repayment of the American debt.[25]

A quick résumé of the settlement of the U.S. debt to France, however, hardly does justice to the many difficulties encountered. The debt question inflamed many other issues, commercial and diplomatic, and became a principal subject of concert to the French in the larger policy questions regarding relations with the Americans. As Démeunier had predicted, the new revolutionary currency, the assignats, launched as the national currency in September 1790 as an ambitious effort to expunge the national debt, began losing value in November and December 1790. The worth of the U.S. loan was quickly depreciating. Despite Jefferson's assurances to the contrary, French officials fretted about the implications for Atlantic commerce and for the loan of the steady devaluation of assignats.[26] Clavière, Finance Minister in the Girondin Government, reported on 10 September 1792 that the Americans had already paid about 30 million livres (about 5.9 million dollars) to the French treasury. By Hamilton's own unfavorable exchange rate, sent in a letter to the French in June 1792, nearly 6.5 million livres or about 1.25 million dollars had already been lost due to the decline in the value of the assignats.[27]

With the declaration of war against Austria in April 1792, leading to hostilities against England in February 1793, a different emphasis would be placed in portrayals of the ungrateful Americans. The balance of trade question, coupled with the growing English success in American commercial affairs, meant that the flow of specie was moving out of France, in the

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[25] Aulard: 532-549.

[26] " ……I am authorized to assure you, that the government of the United States have no idea of paying their debt in a depreciated medium, and that in the final liquidation of the payments, which shall have been made, due regard will be had to an equitable allowance for the circumstance of depreciation." September 1791. Letter to Jean-Baptist Ternant, French minister to the United States.

[27] AECPE-U (CD) « Finance : Liquidation…..1783-1797, » *op. cit.*: fols. 147-152 (Clavière) and 136-137 (Hamilton's contested exchange rate of 1 livre = 18.15 cents)

direction of the American port cities, and then to the British Empire. French trade with the Americas was objectively aiding its greatest military and mercantile enemy.

A commercial specialist and future Bonapartist economist charged with calculating the French balance of trade under the Foreign Affairs Ministry first made this deft analysis in late 1791. In apocalyptic tones, Ambroise-Marie Arnould argued that the Americans "procure from France a (favorable) balance in silver with which they propel English industry. That is the nec plus ultra of a form of commerce that had inspired hopes leading to the sacrifice of several hundreds of millions of livres, and several generations of men."[28] His comment and analysis of the unintended consequences of an altruistic French "sacrifice" -- destabilizing the Revolutionary economy fifteen years later -- were so compelling that the same phrase was used as the frontispiece of the commercial specialist Tanguy de la Bossiere's 1795 critique of the Jay Treaty. Arnould's elegant argument, that resonated in royalist circles as well as among Jacobins, would be taken up repeatedly in the 1790s by the individuals who helped carve out American commercial policies for France. For his analysis best captured the deepest misgivings of adherents of *la thèse royale* – that statist intervention was the basis of economic progress. Turning Adam Smith on his head, Arnould emphasized the paradoxes of laissez-faire, of unfettered Atlantic commerce, in order to show that free trade had undermined France's significant mercantile presence in the Americas by providing Great Britain with precious specie.[29]

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[28] *De la Balance du commerce & des Relations commerciales extérieures de la France*, 4 volumes, (Paris, 1791) : vol 1: 233. Chapter eight of Arnould's sweeping study, devoted to a rich periodization of Franco-American commerce from the 1770s to the Revolution, became a standard reference for Américanists throughout the revolutionary decade: volume 1: 217-239.

[29] De la Bossiere, *Memoire sur la situation commerciale de la France avec les États-Unis*, *op. cit*. Other works demonstrating Arnould's influence in adopting the same chronology: Aristarque Didot, *Précis sur la Révolution et le caractère francais, adressé aux citoyens républicains des*

A direct result of the balance of trade debate would be myriad attempts to receive the entire repayment immediately and through payment in kind. The Interior Minister Roland made requests for immediate shipments of salted beef, grain, flour, and even lumber at the end of 1792.[30] The Genêt mission began with the ambition to secure supplies in the spring of 1793, along with the objective of renegotiating the Treaty of Amity and Commerce of 1778 and fomenting an uprising against Spanish possessions. [31] In the heightened categories of French deficit consciousness, the vital need for American products for the war effort thus flowed into the problem of rapidly depreciating loans. These twin problems then became assimilated to an even more urgent matter, that of the desperate situation of émigrés fleeing the French Revolution and the exiles fleeing the slave rebellions of Saint-Domingue.

The Émigrés and the U.S. Debt

Between the outbreak of the French Revolution and Thermidor, about 150,000 émigrés, some 30,000 (20%) of all French émigrés crossed the Atlantic to the Caribbean Basin or to the

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Etats-Unis d'Amérique (Paris, 1793). And Joseph Fauchet, *Coup d'œil sur la Situation des Affaires entre la France et les États-Unis* (Paris, 1798).

[30] AECPE-U (CD) « Finance : Liquidation de la dette américaine, 1783-1797, » *op. cit.*: rapport du Comité de sûreté public, 2 janvier 1793 : fols 139-142..

[31] Edmond Charles Genêt. *Sur la liquidation et le remboursement de la dette Américaine*. Paris, 1793: BNF LG6-742: This brochure consists of many of Genêt's correspondence from May 1793 -September 1793. In particular, he addresses an audacious request for immediate settlement of the debt to Jefferson, on 22 May: urging that the Secretary of State creates « sur-le-champ un grand mouvement au commerce de la France avec l'Amérique, en tirant désormais des États-Unis la plus grande partie des subsistances et des approvisionnements nécessaires pour les armées, les flottes, et les colonies de la République Française." He demands to liquidate the debt "avec vos propres denrées, sans exporter, sans exporter votre numéraire, sans recourir aux opérations onéreuses des banquiers. C'est vous à fournir en même temps le moyen de payer vos dettes et d'enrichir vos concitoyens; c'est enfin augmenter la valeur de vos productions et par consequent vos terres, en établissant une concurrence necessaire entre nous et une nation qui s'est, pour ainsi dire, réserver avec beaucoup de sacrifices le monopole de vos propres denrées. »

United States. The number of French exiles in America, moreover, grew to include about 15,000 Creoles and French fleeing the slave rebellions and factional strife in Saint-Domingue between August, 1791 and the founding of the Haitian Republic in 1804 – with the summer of 1793, the peak year in the flight from slave revolts. Thus, in sum, 45,000 French nationals found themselves on American shores during the long revolutionary decade.[32]

These individuals arrived at diverse moments of the Revolution, and, while many were privileged, quite a few also belonged to the Third Estate. The French émigrés who took the risk to cross the Atlantic generally were motivated by self-consciously "patriotic" engagements: they had chosen to embrace the American republic, in particular, after the declaration of American neutrality in April 1793. Many had informally frequented the *Américanophile* circles in the early Revolution, including la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, Talleyrand-Périgord, Démeunier, de Noailles, Beaumetz, and Volney. The United States was *the* only nonaligned alternative to Jacobinism and royalism for many French liberal nobles and landowning elites. Most stayed in the U.S. into the latter years of the Directory, fearful of falling under the threat of the death penalty in France as stipulated by the decree of 28 March 1793. Many of these American émigrés only returned after fleeing the repressive climate of the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts and Quasi-War. Their memoirs and published correspondence, for the most part published in the

[32] R. Darrell Meadows, " Engineering Exile/Social Networks and the French Atlantic Community, 1789-1809, " *French Historical Studies* 23 °1 (2000), p. 67-102. Donald Greer, *The Incidence of Emigration During the French Revolution*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1951), p. 91-92. On the broader context of the counter-revolution and the émigrés: Jean Vidalenc, *Les Émigrés français (1789-1825)*, (Caen, Association des publications de la Faculté des arts et lettres de l'Université de Caen, 1963) : 35-56.

early nineteenth century, often linger on their disillusionment with the young American republic.[33]

The French and Creole émigrés and exiles became embroiled in the debate over the U.S. debt to France. With few means at their disposal, the French revolutionary diplomats Ternant, Genêt, and Joseph Fauchet spent much of their tenure from 1791 to 1795 attempting to find help for the besieged consular officers and planter class in Saint-Domingue as well as to provide relief to destitute émigrés who arrived in Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, and particularly, Charleston. No doubt, the bad press that resulted from the sight of the impoverished French in major American port cities motivated the ministers' efforts to offer assistance to their compatriots. Also, the cause of the liberal émigrés was a sympathetic one to the officers stationed in the French consulates, such as Barbé-Marbois, for they were often of the same liberal land-owning milieu. Genêt's deep involvement in the cause of exiles from Saint-Domingue stemmed from his alarm that refugees were organizing a private militia in order to attack the insurgents. He reported on October 3, 1793, that 600 former plantation owners were set to sail back to the island to attempt to seize the port of Jérémie.[34]

In July 1791, $40,000 was paid to Ternant on behalf of the French governor of Saint-Domingue, to be deducted from the debt payments. Until the independence of Haiti in 1804, perhaps up to $750,000 in all was given to help the governor, officials, or the colonists of the island. A few of these measures were rather symbolic in nature. In February 1794, Congress recognized the significance of the massive arrival of influential French citizens, merchants,

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[33] Allan Potofsky, "Émigrés et Réfugiés de la Révolution française aux États-Unis", *Réfugiés/exilés aux États-Unis, 1776-2000*, Catherine Collomp et Mario Menendez, eds. (Paris : CNRS, 2003): 33-50.

[34] AECPE-U (CD) 39 : Genêt's letter from New York, describing comités de secours publics in Baltimore and Philadelphia, and outlining his fears of the imminent departure of refugees to battle: fol. 53-57.

aristocrats, and landed elites, by voting for the derisive sum of $15,000 to help the impoverished exiles. Ten states created a list of 2,500 "refugees in distress" and put up $10,000 for their assistance.[35] For the most part, as reported by Genêt and in the newspaper of the émigrés of Philadelphia, the *Courrier de la France et des Colonies*, printed by Moreau Saint-Mery, the charitable donations and other assistance to fleeing Creole and French émigrés came within the francophone community itself.[36] The more fortunate former inhabitants of Saint-Domingue tapped into dense networks of credit, centered in South Carolina, that were offered by their former clients or business collaborators.[37]

As Alphonse Aulard concluded in his 1925 study, the earnestness of the Americans in repaying the debt was most evident in these payments to the Philadelphia legation. According to Joseph Fauchet's estimate, approximately 10 million livres were paid by the Americans to the various ministers in 1792 and 1793 to be disbursed as relief funds. Only Genêt's provocative tenure, from April to August 1793, represented a hiatus in such payments. But as the U.S. debt was being reduced by such means, the political representation of the debt in France increasingly became a source of contention between rival Jacobin factions who struggled for control over the domestic and international commercial policies of the Republic.[38]

George Washington's much-discussed Neutrality Proclamation toward European belligerent powers aggravated Franco-American political, diplomatic, and commercial conflict on April 22 1793. Neutrality, while hailed by most contemporaries and by historians as

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[35] Francis Sergent Childs, *French Refugee Life in the United States, 1790-1800. An American Chapter of the French Revolution* (Baltimore, The John Hopkins Press, 1940): 88-89 ; Margerie Wiener, *The French Exiles, 1789-1815* (New York, William Morrow and Co., 1966): 92.
[36] BNF 4-LC12-72, On private assistance to the destitute French in the *Courrier*: January-Febrary, 1796 (n°18, 27-34, 36-44, 47).
[37] Meadows, *op. cit.*: 92. *Allan Potofsky, "La Révolution Transatlantique des Emigrés. Des Réseaux aux institutions"*. Dix Huitième Siècle *33 (2001): 247-263.*
[38] Aulard, *op. cit.*:540. Fauchet, *Coup d'œil*, *op. cit.*

inherently wise, had an unintentional consequence in France: it helped to discredit the foremost advocates of free exchange between Great Britain, the United States, and France.[39] The loosely-organized "*Américanophile*" camp of the French Revolution was embodied at that time by the Girondins: the founders of the *Société Gallo-Américaine*, Brissot and Clavière had reached the peak of their powers in the Spring of 1792 as, respectively, the powerful foreign affairs "counsellor" and Finance Minister. After September 1792, the freshly arrived deputy from Pas-de-Calais, Thomas Paine, became closely associated with the Girondins. Through contacts with the Foreign Affairs Minister Lebrun, as well as Madame Roland and her husband -- the twice nominated and twice deposed Minister of Interior Roland – Thomas Paine had advised the Girondins on questions concerning Atlantic trade.[40]

Domestically and internationally, the Girondin ministers held contradictory positions, opposing economic controls in its official discourse, while imposing draconian measures for the distribution of subsistence items in the context of war. Before the Maximum, the Girondins passed a December 1792 a law that applied the death penalty to any person that obstructed the free circulation of grain. On international affairs, the Girondins simultaneously applied a program of free trade, especially in the Atlantic, of preventive war against European monarchies as well as a merciless campaign against émigrés. By the time the news of the Neutrality Proclamation arrived in France, the war was leading to the June 1793 fall of the Girondin

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[39] Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality*, Chapter 2: "The Gironde and American Neutrality:" 39-55.

[40] Stanley Eltkins and Eric McKitrick. *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800*, (NY and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993): 322-329, 336-341. One of the finest historical treatments of the Girondins remains: J. Bénétruy, *L'Atelier de Mirabeau, quatre proscrits genevois ans la tourmente révolutionnaire* (Geneva: Société d'Histoire et d'archéologie de Genève, 1962).

Ministry, followed by the arrests of the principle *Brissotins* in July 1793. The majority of Girondins were condemned and executed during the following year.[41]

Protectionism, Laissez-Faire and the Debt Question During the Terror

In the period of the Terror, the *Américanophile* current in France was further undermined by the virulent condemnation of the treatment of the U.S. debt to France. On both sides, the elaborate negotiations over the conditions of repayment, the engagement of shady secondary figures with opaque financial connections as intermediaries, the refusal of the Americans to repay in desperately lacking foodstuffs, meant that the debt became closely associated with corruption. Further complicating commercial relations was an issue completely exterior to the debt, the enactment of the Maximum Laws on 4 May and 29 September 1793, featuring the strict control of wages and prices. Even before the Maximum was amended in November 1793 to exclude most forms of international commerce, the new policies had muddled marine policies and trapped American shipments in an elaborate set of regulations applied with excess vigor by French officials. In this context, the end of Atlantic solidarity between the "sister republics" was inscribed in a combination of domestic political rivalry, a deeply politicized misunderstanding of the role of the debt, and the desperate circumstances of France at war.

In particular, the polemic that opposed the Girondin Minister of Finance Clavière and the commercial specialist responsible for his downfall in the spring and summer of 1793 brings to light the greater contours and deeper implications of this debate. Gaspard Joseph Armand Ducher (1744-1804), a barrister in the Paris Parlement in the *Ancien Régime*, was an analyst of

[41] « Brissot, » and « Gironde/Girondins » in *Dictionnaire historique de la Révolution française* (Paris : PUF, 1989), Albert Soboul, et. al. eds: 153-155, 503-507.

American mercantile and naval policies who played an active role in carving out the Atlantic commercial policy of revolutionary France, in particular, the relationship between the metropole and the French colonies. Ducher had been posted in the miniscule French consulates of Portsmouth, New Hampshire and Wilmington, North Carolina during the period 1783 to 1790, before being briefly promoted to New York. A particularly contentious figure, he was disliked by Moustier, the last Foreign Affairs Minister of the *ancien régime*, who recommended he be recalled in 1786. From the oblivion of his obscure outposts, to which he had been assigned as a result of his lack of discipline and dubious habit of bitterly denouncing colleagues, Ducher wrote desperate pleas to be transferred: he was relegated to the most rudimentary counting of the comings and goings of a yearly handful of French ships. Ducher's return to Paris was marked by the publication in November 1790 of a detailed analysis of the commercial laws of the thirteen states, no doubt, the fruit of his boredom. He completed no less than seven brochures, studies and memoirs over the next three years on the commercial practices and the maritime and trading laws of the United States. His combination of exalted republicanism and cold materialism, backed with a keen grasp of economic data, and completed with an apocalyptic cynicism, led to an association with Robespierre.[42]

Ducher became an active collaborator on maritime and commercial issues for the *Moniteur* in 1792 and would be one of the principal authors of the *Acte de Navigation* of March, 1793 securing monopolistic rights for the nation over the colonies. Ducher's American biographer argues that the mercantilist Navigation Act, only fully implemented under Napoleon, was plagiarized from shipping codes passed by the first U.S. Federal Congress. Regardless of

[42] Ducher, *Analyse des Loix Commerciales, Avec Le Tarif des Droits sur les Bâtiments & les Marchandises dans les Treize États-Unis de* l'Amérique (Paris, 1790). Roman D'amat, et Roger Limouzin-Lamothe, eds. *Dictionnaire de Biographie Française.* Paris: Libraire Letouzey et Ané, *1967:1230*. Peter Hill, *French Perceptions, op. cit.*: 4, 17-20.

his lack of scruples, Ducher arrived in his most influential position on the *Bureau Diplomatique et Commercial de la Commission des Douanes* for the Convention from May 1793 until 1796. His sudden disappearance from public life (and the utter vanishing of his paper trail) thereafter may have been a form of disgrace following the souring of relations between France and the United States.[43]

Ducher was a partisan of the protectionist Montagnards, and was deeply opposed to the policies of the Girondin Finance Minister Clavière on many fiscal and economic issues. His first *casus belli* had been Clavière's implementation of the plan to make the *assignats* France's national currency. In the period of the Year II, policy debates were framed in terms of ad hominum attacks on the "factional" interests of one's opponents, not in terms of the substantive issues of economic policy.

Ducher's attack on Clavière in early 1793 accused the Minister of Finances of corruption in he form of tampering with the American debt to France. In a detailed and elaborate plot, Clavière was accused of using a New York banker, Colonel Smith, to divert funds from a partial American payment. In the interest of Pitt and the British cause, Smith had skimmed off a percentage of the money, using Dutch banks for its *blanchissement* partially for the private gain of Clavière, and ultimately to use the U.S. debt to help the anti-French alliance. "Up to what point will France be treated by the banks and financiers of London and Amsterdam as a minor is by a Jew?" he fulminated. Ducher's accusation of corruption against Clavière was based on existing documentation in the archives of the ministry of foreign affairs. In fact, the mysterious Colonel Smith was hired by Clavière to use U.S moneys paid to the Philadelphia legation to procure arms – including 20,000 rifles -- and grain for the French military in early 1793.

[43] Frederick L. Nussbaum, *Commercial policy in the French Revolution. A Study of the Career of G. J. A. Ducher* (NY: AMS Press, 1970).

Clavière himself wrote the report alerting the government that Colonel Smith, his commission in his pocket, had shortly thereafter disappeared without a trace in England.[44]

Ducher's brochure was published by order of the Convention in October and became a part of the litany of charges against the Girondin minister who would commit suicide in prison in December 1793. Ultimately, the campaign against Clavière also helped to bring down Genêt. In November, Robespierre read directly from the brochure to denounce Genêt as a counter-revolutionary in active collaboration with the Girondins.

Beyond the circumstances of Ducher's rise to prominence, his long-term project had been to create an exclusive zone of exchange between the two Atlantic republics. In rupture with the *Américanophile* attachment of the Lumières and the Girondins to laissez-faire principles, Ducher lobbied for a navigation act to create a monopoly in the American market, in exchange for a privileged trading status for American merchants in France and her colonies. On the occasion of the founding of the French Republic in September 1792, Ducher celebrated the avant-garde role in commercial matters reserved for citizens of the two Atlantic republics: "That the sovereignty of the peoples be guaranteed in the two hemispheres, by the two premier peoples of the world, and Europe will be free (4)." He urged the creation, as he entitled his brochure, of a *Nouvelle Alliance à Proposer Entre les Républiques Française et Américaine.* In this utopian project, Ducher laid down the principles of a constitutional pact between France and the United States that would resemble that between the thirteen states of the union:

The new general constitution of the United States guarantees that each state of the union may have a republican form of government, protection against all foreign invasion, and domestic

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[44] Ducher, *Acte de Navigation avec ses Rapports au Commerce, aux Finances, à la Nouvelle Diplomatie des Français*, Paris, 1793. BNF LE38-419: 14-15. Clavière, *AECPE-U (CD)* Supplément, 20 (9), *op. cit.* : "Mémoires à Colonel Smith", (S.D., but mid-1793 from content) :fols. 168-170

insurrection. If the French and American republics swear to the same type of guarantee, all tyrants would be annihilated.[45]

The regeneration of the two nations through commercial ties would be possible through such "a national pact to guarantee territorial integrity, independence, republicanism, & commerce." (6).

In the form of a revolutionary catechism, Ducher hammered home the argument that the interest of the United States would be served in an alliance with its natural partner.

What is the nation that can consume the greatest quantity of United States production, either in Europe or in the West Indies? France.
With which nation would the Americans draw the greatest profits from navigation or freight? France.
What nation would furnish the best market for the foodstuffs or merchandise that the Americans do not grow or manufacture? France.
More than any other nation, the United States therefore must be commercially tied to France.[46]

But while Ducher never wavered in his commitment to forge closer commercial ties between the two republics, the means he privileged to win over the United States to the French cause consisted of a peculiar combination of high republican solidarity and low threats.

War and terror would turn Ducher's attention increasingly away from pronouncements of republican Atlantic solidarity and toward the American debt to France. In a vitriolic polemic, *La France, créancière des Etats-Unis d'Amérique*, published in January 1793, Ducher used his extensive knowledge of the American economy to calculate precisely what each state should contribute to efface the debt to France. South Carolina, was seen as profiting from the arrival of hundreds of destitute Creole planters fleeing Saint-Domingue. It therefore "owed" the most to

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[45] *Nouvelle Alliance* : 4. On a similar, earlier project by Turgot to create a « constitution » to bind the colonies to France, see his *Mémoire sur la manière dont la France et l'Espagne devaient envisager les suites de a querelle entre la Grande Bretagne et ses colonies* (Paris, 1776). For a contextual discussion of this project, see Paul Cheney, *"*Les Économistes Français et L'Image de l'Amérique. L'Essor du Commerce Transatlantique et l'Effondrement du 'Gouvernement Féodal.*'" Dix Huitième Siècle, 33 (2001), 231-245 : 244-245.*

[46] *Nouvelle alliance*: 6

France. In this illusory scheme to recover the debt from the United States, each state would be "obliged" (the means are not specified) to participate by paying in kind, chiefly in agricultural products, and according to its population and percentage to overall American production. In exchange, monopolistic navigation acts would be passed between the two republics that would create a narrow corridor of exchange between France and her colonies and the United States, to the exclusion of all other European nations.[47]

Here we see that as the question of the American debt became assimilated to that of France's own, the discourse of political economy regarding a world of republican commerce between free citizens across the Atlantic took an increasingly dark turn. Atlantic commerce was narrowly focused on the creation of a Franco-American alliance to exclude Great Britain. For Ducher, the extinguishing of the debt was increasingly a primal cause to an even greater end. The defense of Republican liberty entailed exclusive exchanges between America and France and their colonies. Nations ruled by "tyrants" were to be expressly forbidden from profiting from Atlantic commerce. Such a prohibition

> is the greatest means of union and prosperity for the French and American republicans. These two daughters of freedom, who share the same sovereign, that of the rights of man and equality, must forbid all indirect importation which will make them dependent on foreigners. Through laws that serve their separate and common interests, they must take away from foreigners all profits drawn from commerce and navigation with one of the two branches of this new (republican) family."[48]

The eventual crisis over the betrayal represented by the Jay Treaty emerges in outlined form. Ducher argued for the predominance of an Atlantic "family" of French and American merchants and traders over all royalist "foreigners." The odd xenophobia of Ducher's discourse

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[47] *La France, créancière*: 11. He took up the same themes of republican « families » in: *De la Dette Publique en France, en Angleterre, Dans les Etats-Unis de l'Amérique. (*Paris, sans date, 1792 from the content): BNF RP-9767.

[48] *Ibid. :* 46-47.

wielded republican categories of "the rights of man and equality" in favor of a naked struggle against British domination and mercantilist monopoly to create a new form of revolutionary Atlantic commerce: the very same anti-British alliance that existed during the War for Independence. The explicit nostalgia of Ducher, representing a powerful protectionist block in the heart of the *Bureau Diplomatique et Commercial de la Commission des Douanes*, was to revive the ancient rivalries of the War of Independence.

In a valiant attempt to defend himself against the charges of corruption, the former *Américanophile* Clavière published a brochure in the summer of 1793, just after his fall from the Ministry of Finance and publication of the decree of 2 June that ordered him put under house arrest. This plea for his life coupled a repudiation of the charges against him with a condemnation of the mercantilist strategies advocated by Ducher to recover the balance of the American debt:

> (W)hat good are the fiscal laws that Ducher preaches in his writings? Does he ignore the fact that prohibitive laws from one nation to another constitute a state of rivalry and of silent war which soon leads to arms; that these laws are always corrupting; that they soon become for people who are refined and adept a sort of privilege that is followed by a multitude of abuses, independent of the scandalous wealth that they favor?[49]

Clavière's critique of Ducher and the navigation act attempted to turn the question of Franco-American relationships back to the canonical categories of protectionism and laissez-faire. Having put into place the assignats and the first Maximum that controlled wages and prices in May 1793 a mere month before his arrest, Clavière's policies were, in fact, far removed from his universalist advocacy of free exchange among Atlantic trading partners. In discourse, if not in practice, Clavière never fully relinquished the ideal of the *Société gallo-américaine*: the

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[49] *Éclaircissements sur ce qui me concerne dans un écrit imprimé par ordre de la Convention nationale, le septième jour du second mois de l'an deux de la République française une et*

privileged role of commercial ties between nations. Thus, protectionism or "prohibitive laws from one nation to another" can only lead to war and are "always corrupting." Between the practice of étatisme and the theory of liberalism, between the policies of the minister and the ideological critique of protectionist prohibitive laws that create privileges and "a multitude of abuses," the deeper problem of formulating a coherent revolutionary economic policy in the Year II of the revolution was never truly solved.

Clavière, the *Américanophile*, and Ducher, the *Américanist*, represent the decline of Atlantic republican solidarity from an Enlightenment cosmopolitan ideal to a source of revolutionary factionalism. But they also embody a larger continuity in the debate over commerce in the Americas. Despite the universalist discourse insisting that Atlantic trade would benefit all nations, the American question revolved around the essential dependency of the young republic upon French civilization for its "completion." The image of the young republic that emerged from the discourse on commerce is a nation in dire need of economic tutelage. Whether an agrarian paradise ripe to supply the foodstuffs of manufacturing civilizations (and an occasion to speculate in real estate); a liberal preparatory stage for the French Revolution; or an opportunity to establish a new form of monopoly mercantile exchange with France – French commercial ideologies from the end of the *ancien régime* to the Terror rendered the United States a vast economic experiment for the *Lumières* and revolutionaries to remake the world for the greater national interest of France. At bottom, the Atlantic as an economic space for universal "reciprocity" in exchanges was a thinly veiled argument for French geo-political grandeur in the Americas at the expense of Great Britain. Condorcet's oration, cited above, warning his compatriots in 1790 that "against the systematic errors of corruption and of habit,

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indivisible, et publié sous le titre: Des Deux Hémisphères par A.G.J. Ducher. (Paris, 1793). BNF LB 41-3444 : 43.

old nations need all the resources of instruction, and of all the forces of genius," was a rare and unique reference to America as a full and equal member of the Enlightenment project.

It was hardly surprising then that the lingering question of the U.S. debt took the entire question of the American image away from the diminishing ranks of the *Américanophile* camp in the 1790s and handed it to the *Américanists*, the specialist in economic affairs, many of whom like Ducher and Barbé-Marbois had passed through American or St-Domingue consulates and later worked in the Convention's mercantilist *Bureau Diplomatique et Commercial de la Commission des Douanes*.[50] As a result of this transfer from visionaries to deeply politicized "specialists," the revolutionary idea of America was never a flourishing one. (An exception was a glowing speech delivered by Robespierre before the Convention in November 1793, where he favorably compared the American people to the Republican citizens of Geneva – but all the more in order to condemn Genêt's compromised mission.)

The consciousness of the debt and the enduring fiscal crisis in France merged into a potent critical synthesis whose seduction gained by its historically specific references: first, the American wars had ruined the *ancien-régime* economy and, then, commerce in the Americas led to the enrichment of Great Britain at the (very literal) expense of France. Never mind that in 1794 and 1795, the year the Jay Treaty was published, imports from the United States grew dramatically in volume, boosted by American commitment to neutrality. By then, critical perspectives toward America had undermined the discourse on Atlantic republican solidarity, already seriously eroded in the opaque debt repayment process of delay, renegotiation, recalculation (based on a new currency), interest-rate fluctuations, and manipulation of the

[50] On the organization of the revolutionary foreign affairs' offices : Frédérick Masson*, Le département des affaires étrangères pendant la révolution, 1787-1804* (Paris, 1877).

schedule for reimbursement, whether in the form of foodstuffs, aid to the émigrés and exiles, to the Philadelphia or St-Domingue legation, or directly to the French treasury.[51]

Emerging from this baroque course of action on the debt was an image of an "*Amerique redevable*," an America that was deeply morally and economically indebted to France. By the time thousands of former émigrés returned to France from their American exile under the menace of expulsion in the terms of the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts, the disillusionment expressed in memoirs about their travels in the United States was a generalized sentiment in French public opinion, primed for the *guerre larvée* against American shipping. In a repudiation of a member of the *Société Gallo-Américaine*, Crèvecoeur, the philosophe Volney would laconically summarize his own American voyage in these terms: "Here, we are a little bit far away from the happiness sung by the American Farmer." The ideals of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism in the Atlantic were not to be fulfilled at the end of the eighteenth century.[52]

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[51] Peter Hill, Prologue to the Quasi-War: Stresses in Franco-American Commercial Relations 1793-1796, *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 49, no. 1 March 1977 Supplement: 1039-1069: 1040-1041.

[52] C.-F. Volney, *Tableau du climat et du sol des États-Unis d'Amérique. Suivi d'éclaircissement sur la Floride, sur la colonie française au Scioto, sur quelques colonies Canadiennes et sur les Sauvages*, 2 volumes, Paris, 1803, v. 2: 391.