

Land, Jeremy. *Colonial Ports, Global Trade, and the Roots of the American Revolution, 1700–1776*

Brill, 2023

xiv + 239 pp., figures, tables, index, appendixes

ISBN 9789004542693 (hardcover) US\$141.00; 9789004542709 (e-book)

Jeremy Land's book *Colonial Ports, Global Trade, and the Roots of the American Revolution, 1700–1776* presents evidence that the seaports of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia were extremely important points of commercial interests and were central in the genesis of American rebellion against Great Britain. Land's book is organized into six chapters focused on the three American northern ports, merchant and mercantile networks, trade and commodities, inter-colonial trade, trans-imperial trade, and his theory concerning the origins of American independence. His writing style is classic pedagogy: tell the audience what you plan to present, make your detailed presentation, and then carefully summarize to reinforce the important points.

The author presents a wealth of research concerning the commercial world of northern American merchants in the eighteenth century. Using mercantile accounts from the Massachusetts Historical Society and invoice books from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, as well as other sources, Land fills his book with many details. There is much evidence that trade and the multifaceted transatlantic economy led to the American Revolution, and this is the overriding focus of the book. The international and intra-colonial trade data displayed in Land's many tables make this an important contribution to the scholarly literature. The author examines the complex economic factors that presaged the governmental and military turmoil occurring around the world during this time, thus making the case that America was well-advised to contemplate economic and political independence. In doing so, Land presents a well-organized argument that British control of its North American colonies was an outmoded imperialist idea. Land also makes the case that scholars should think of Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia, as well as the smaller towns around them, as functioning as a big network of ports rather than just separate places. Newport, New London, Charleston, and Savannah are relegated to secondary but valuable roles. Although competitors, merchants in these three port cities often collaborated and, in turn, formed a multifarious commercial trade system with connected business structures that was largely independent from imperial Britain.

After the costly Seven Years' War (1756–1763), the British needed revenue and tried to enforce American colonial mercantilism but largely failed at the local merchant level. Smuggling and tax evasion flourished. Without

the enforcement of some customs (tax) laws the three cities did not have enough money, especially specie, so these port cities turned to increased trade outside the British Empire, such as the nearby Caribbean. Either directly or indirectly, imports from Southeast Asia including Chinese tea, porcelain, silks, plus Indian spices and textiles and other goods from all over the world, found their way into the hands of the region's merchants and ultimately American consumers. The value of this region's inter-colonial and trans-imperial trade soon exceeded that of the direct British trade. Land also addresses the question of whether globalization occurred prior to the nineteenth century. He concludes that it is unclear if the global economy of the eighteenth century was shaped by the limited commerce of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. All three cities, however, were connected to the global flow of goods of the world of the time. American merchants certainly participated in this worldwide flow and helped to shape and bend the broadly inclusive economy as much as this international trade shaped their development.

American merchants worked at finding transatlantic markets for their products, particularly in Portugal, Spain, and Amsterdam, but ran the risk of violating British trade laws by directly trading between colonies and other European nations. The merchants of these three port cities had resisted British mercantile policy long before the 1760s, so the local customs service did not really enforce the Navigation Acts. By 1763, the British added several unpopular customs acts, and American merchants increasingly questioned the value of continuing as part of the British Empire.

Land's scholarly research on the economic history of pre-Revolutionary War maritime commerce – which includes marine insurance, British politics, and the trade policy leading to the manifold reasons for the American Revolution – is impressive and thought-provoking. Despite the difficult challenges of collecting far-flung complex data, the author makes a convincing argument that British mismanagement of eighteenth-century northern American commerce was one of the vital factors in generating the American Revolution.

Jeremy Land's *Colonial Ports, Global Trade, and the Roots of the American Revolution* is a thought-provoking, erudite, very well-organized work. It should provide maritime historians and Revolutionary War historians with difficult-to-find data that is likely to cause them to reassess their view of the origins of the "shot heard round the world" – as it did with this reviewer.

Louis Arthur Norton
West Simsbury, Connecticut