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Wealth and Disaster: Atlantic Migration from a Pyrenean Town in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. By *Pierre Force*.

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016. Pp. xxii+230. \$45.00.

Pierre Force's monograph joins a growing number of recent studies that use the story of a single family (in this case, actually two families from the same town in southwestern France) to illuminate the connections that bound the early modern Atlantic world together in the era of slavery and revolution. Force cites Rebecca Scott and Jean Hébrard's widely praised *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (2012) as an inspiration for his own work; other recent publications that focus on families from the French Caribbean in this period include Jennifer L. Palmer, *Intimate Bonds: Family and Slavery in the French Atlantic* (2016) and Paul Cheney, *Cul de Sac: Patrimony, Capitalism, and Slavery in French Saint Domingue* (2017). Unfortunately, this narrowly focused work is less successful than these other recent publications in demonstrating the value of its microhistorical approach to its subject.

Force's particular interest is the way in which the distinctive structure of families from the French region of Navarre, today's Pyrénées Atlantique department, affected migration to the Caribbean in the last decades of the Old Regime and into the nineteenth century. In the small town of La Bastide Clairence, from which his subjects hailed, family strategies concentrated on keeping the "house" or holding intact from generation to generation. The eldest child inherited the family property, and siblings had to marry out or find other ways to support themselves. Force refers frequently to the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who came from the region and wrote about this family system, and the first member of one of the two clans he describes to migrate to the Caribbean, the Lamerenx family, was indeed a younger son. The original migrant of the second family, the Mouscardys, however, was an eldest child, and Force has to spend some time explaining why this case is relevant to his argument. That there was substantial migration to the Caribbean from southwestern France has been known for some time; a recent analysis of Toussaint Louverture's written French has suggested that he probably spoke with an accent picked up from his Aquitainian master. Force's sample of two families is too small, however, to establish family structure as the decisive factor in motivating this migration.

Force's two original migrants both established coffee plantations in the booming French colony of Saint Domingue. He traces the fate of their descendants during the Hai

tian Revolution, during which one member of the Lamerenx clan became an officer in the black army created by Toussaint Louverture, while a mixed race son of the Mouscardy patriarch ended up as an important figure in the postindependence regimes of Henri Christophe and Jean Pierre Boyer. Members of the Lamerenx family crossed and recrossed the Atlantic several times. A certain Charles Lamerenx had a particularly picaresque itinerary that took him from Saint Domingue to Cuba, to New Orleans, then to a brief career as a pirate, and finally back to France, where a clever lawyer enabled him to appeal to prerevolutionary law and oust his younger sister as “master” of the family property. Both families applied for and eventually received some compensation for the properties they had lost during the Revolution. A younger generation of Lamerenx relatives succumbed to the lure of the Caribbean, however, and eventually all descendants of the clan settled in Cuba.

Compared to the rich collection of personal correspondence that allows Paul Cheney to bring to life the protagonists of his family monograph, Force has had to make do with a limited range of sources. The documents at his disposition do not allow him much scope to explore the issues of slavery and race that dominate Scott and Hébrard’s volume or the gender dimension that comes out in Palmer’s research. *Wealth and Disaster* also lacks a central narrative line. Force ranges back and forth unsystematically through a period of more than half a century, and readers will have a hard time keeping the various members of the two families straight. Digressions such as the pages devoted to the background of Étienne Polverel, the revolutionary era official who implemented the abolition of slavery in Saint Domingue in 1793, are only tangentially related to the rest of the story. Force’s fascination with “the chaotic nature of these lives” (xii) comes through clearly, but the lessons we might take away from these experiences are less evident.

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