Provincializing Global History: Money, Ideas, and Things in the Languedoc, 1680-1830. *By James Livesay*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020. 224 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Hardcover, $45.00. ISBN 978-0-3002-3716-0.
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Reviewed by Gregory Smaldone

This important book offers the latest explanation of European origins of industrial capitalism and globalization without resorting to narratives of European exceptionalism. Following the "glocal" turn, James Livesay analyzes globalization through a localized study of the French province of Languedoc. He contends that understanding globalization requires explaining how new innovations escaped the historical pattern of capture by rent-seekers while recognizing how these new technologies became "culturally embedded in everyday life" (p. 6). He argues that, far from an elite-driven phenomenon, the "cultural revolution" that allowed the Languedoc to grow in the globally oriented industrial world was driven by "subaltern" forms of knowledge and reason (p. 5). Livesay demonstrates this by examining the history of public debt, scientific study, and agrarian improvement. Though the culture of improvement originally was "thin," by the nineteenth century, thanks to the French Revolution's universalizing reforms, the knowledge culture of rational economic improvement and market-oriented production had become a quotidian reality. Livesay's ability to seamlessly traverse different historical subfields is one of the book's greatest strengths. It allows him to leverage an impressively diverse array of sources to write a detailed local history whose broader argument speaks to the largest questions of global history.

Chapter 1 analyzes eighteenth-century public debt and economic development. Livesay shows how provincial-level institutions borrowed money from ordinary and elite locals to invest in infrastructure and political favor. Elite creditors gained more from allowing regional institutions to improve local economic activity than they would have had they engaged in rent-seeking (i.e., exploiting opportunities for unearned profits). By looking at public debt "as a social institution," Livesay shows how the financial system created "new resources for collective action" (p. 22). French people's collective use of institutional borrowing to stimulate local economic development relied on a universal idea of "public debt" to create a common vocabulary to facilitate coordinated action. Herein lies one of Livesay's main projects: rescuing the baby of universals from the bathwater of European cultural imperialism that scholars such as Dipesh Chakrabarty (*Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* [2000]) charge is

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inherent in earlier narratives of industrialization. As Livesay puts it, "the most influential coordinating ideas in modern life are universals. . . . [T] he condition of possibility of global experience is the communicability of experience . . . [which] requires actors to have concepts at hand that translate between multiple environments" (p. 15).

Chapters 2 and 3 move from public finance to scientific research, wherein Linnean taxonomy and other universal truth-claims created a common vocabulary for elite and "subaltern" agrarian reformers. The democratization of science is most evident in botany and agrarian reform. Amateur botanists and ordinary farmers were welcomed by academic elites as practical experts whose participation in agricultural reform was critical to economic growth. Though universities established social hierarchies, the relationship between social and intellectual authority became fraught, as evidenced by Antoine Banal, the official gardener of the University of Montpellier. The more technically sophisticated he was at his trade, the less secure his position became, showing the contested nature of bringing "subaltern" knowledge into elite institutions. Livesay concludes these chapters by arguing that the investment by the monarchy and local elites in creating a culture of reason to facilitate economic growth was made possible by a vocabulary of universal truth-claims, but that elites' embrace of "subaltern" knowledge led to a flattening of social hierarchies.

Chapter 4 moves from the Old Regime to the French Revolution, which is the critical turning point. The culture of reason was "thin"—that is, not broadly disseminated—and its gains unevenly distributed. Widespread adoption of agricultural improvement needed a legal environment that ensured that farmers, not rent-seekers, reaped the gains of their investment. The use of the new swing plow and wasteland reclamation projects only became commonplace after the French Revolution eliminated personal and provincial privileges, prompting sustained globally oriented economic growth. The revolution's ability to foster an environment of economic growth rested on both the abolition of privilege and the universal idea of property rights, which allowed economic actors to operate within a unified legal framework.

Livesay's narrative impressively goes from the Old Regime through the French Revolution and into the nineteenth century, a temporal scope few French historians are willing to attempt. The book, however, belongs as much to the new body of work by Kenneth Pomeranz (*The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* [2000]) and other historians studying the origins of globalization as it does to French history. It is thus regrettable that in a brief 167-page book (whose brevity in no way compromises its theoretical sophistication or empirical rigor), Livesay did not devote space to guide non-French historians through the confusing landscape

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of eighteenth-century France. There are even French quotes untranslated in the text. Though non-French historians will be able to follow Livesay's larger argument, such additions are warranted given the wide audience who would benefit from this innovative work.

One problem with the book is Livesay's use of the term "subaltern." While "subaltern" can be defined broadly as non-elites, Livesay's explicit citation of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's now classic article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) leads the reader to believe that Livesay is using her definition. Spivak has gone on record imploring scholars to avoid using "subaltern" as "a classy word for oppressed, for Other," maintaining that "subaltern" refers only to those with "limited or no access to the cultural imperialism" ("Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* [1992]). Yet Livesay uses the term in a general sense, associating it variously with "ordinary people," "amateurs," the "popular," "subordinate," and "artisanal" (pp. 18, 87, 103, 117). Engaging with Spivak should entail explicitly establishing a working definition of "subaltern," even if that definition differs from Spivak's. Doing so would not have undermined the importance or coherence of his argument, for the actors he describes as "subaltern" remain largely excluded from works studying the origins of globalization.

Livesay's embrace of popular knowledge and search for centers of learning and growth outside of Paris is a welcome and useful intervention. He engages deeply with the specialists whose topics are part of his larger narrative and expertly guides the reader from one field of study to the next. Global historians and metropolitan French historians alike will benefit enormously from this extensively researched and thought-provoking work.

Gregory Smaldone is a PhD candidate at Johns Hopkins University studying the intersections of financial capitalism and slavery in the pre-Revolutionary Caribbean.

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Taking Flight: The Foundations of American Commercial Aviation, 1918–1938. By *M. Houston Johnson V*. Centennial of Flight Series, no. 21. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2019. x + 287 pp. Photographs, bibliography, index. Cloth, $45.00. ISBN: 978-1-62349-721-7.

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Reviewed by Richard Byers

M. Houston Johnson's new work, *Taking Flight: The Foundations of American Commercial Aviation, 1918–1938*, is a welcome addition to

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