



The Image of America in pre-revolutionary France (1763-1789): A New Look at Prize-Winning Contests in French Académies

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How did the image of the New World evolve in France from the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763 to the French Revolution in 1789? What was the intellectual and constitutional impact of the American revolution on pre-revolutionary French society? An original way to answer these two related questions is to look at prize-winning contests (*concours*) offered by the Académies. These contests were immensely popular in eighteenth-century France as several hundreds were organized, drawing thousands of memoirs over the course of the century. These essay contests bore on a wide range of topics in science, agriculture, history, law, medicine, commerce, gambling, fashion, and geography, as well as a myriad of regional issues, but also on the Atlantic World, slavery, the European «discovery» of the New World, the American revolution, colonization, and trade, particularly in the Académies of Pau, Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse, and Paris. *Eloges* competitions on major figures, historical or contemporaneous, related to New Worlds, such as Columbus, Franklin, Vergennes or Cook, were also held in the Académies of Marseille, Amiens, Cap François (on the island of Saint-Domingue), and Paris. Memoirs submitted to these contests, along with pamphlets, press articles, travel accounts, compilations of translated State Constitutions, and history books published on the American Revolution, offer a privileged view into a French—and to some extent European—collective reflection on the colonization of the New World and the birth of the American republic.

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