A Global History of Runaways. Workers, Mobility, and Capitalism 1600–
1850. Ed. by Marcus Rediker, Titas Chakraborty, and Matthias van
Rossum. University of California Press, Oakland (CA) 2019. viii, 261 pp.
Maps. Ill. $95.00; £78.00. (Paper, E-book: $34.95; £29.00).

This volume intriguingly explores running away in the regions of the Atlantic and the Indian
Ocean. Its remit is not only geographically large, but also includes a wide range of workers:
sailors; soldiers; indentured servants; convicts; and the enslaved. All of these categories of
workers were significant in the establishment of European empires and the rise of capitalism
from the sixteenth century onwards. As Leo Lucassen and Lex Heerma van Voss point out
in the Introduction, capitalism required "that workers from Europe, the Americas, Asia, and
Africa be mobilized in ways that were novel, cooperative, and systemic" (p. 2). The workers
numbered in the millions and were subject to severe levels of coercion and constraint. Their
response was often to resist, frequently by absconding.

In many cases, workers ran away because of dissatisfaction with their working conditions.
In the case of Bengal in the early eighteenth century, as Titas Chakraborty suggests,
European soldiers and sailors deserted to gain better wages and working conditions. This
was true for the enslaved as well. Writing about the Leeward Archipelago in the
Caribbean, James Dator notes that the enslaved ran away seeking better treatment, but
also to reconnect with kin. The enslaved in the United States often absconded because of
their fear of being sold and especially of being sent to the Deep South. Jesse Olsavsky sug-
gests that runaway slaves in the United States were also responding to the violence and
exploitation they experienced. In Australia, convicts absconded because of harsh treatment,
but also, as Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and Michael Quinlan point out, because of poor
rations and inadequate clothing.

Knowledge was crucial in any attempt to run away. In eighteenth-century Louisiana, as
Yevan Terrien suggests, soldiers who deserted used knowledge of the local geography to
their advantage. In addition, they knew that Spanish and English settlements such as
Texas, Florida, and the Caribbean offered potential havens for them. In the Leeward
Islands of the Caribbean, the enslaved were not only able to use the sea to run away, but
also knew where to escape: imperial boundaries in islands such as Saint Kitts opened up pos-
sibilities for desertion. Knowledge was important for the enslaved in New Orleans as well:
Mary Niall Mitchell notes that running away was easier if the enslaved possessed a number of
languages and also had an understanding of the geography of the city. Urban runaways were
more likely to succeed if they possessed marketable skills so that they could support
themselves.

Running away had significant consequences, not just for the runaways themselves, but
also for their wider societies. Discussing deserters in the early modern Portuguese empire,
Timothy Coates notes that attacks from runaways helped to destroy the sugar industry of
São Tomé. Convicts on the Danish island of Saint Thomas ran away in significant numbers
and as Johan Heinsen suggests, their resistance had a "decisive impact on the Danish expan-
sionist project" (p. 54). Even when caught, runaways were not always punished. In
eighteenth-century Louisiana, French officials frequently pardoned soldiers who deserted:
"accommodation was the rule on the margins of the French empire, where runaways showed
that the monarch was less absolute than in his home kingdom" (p. 110). Ultimately, and
partly because of the desertion of so many soldiers, French imperial ambitions were crippled

in Louisiana. In Bengal, the soldiers who ran away – often to rival European companies – had the effect of driving wages higher.

Many runaways absconded on their own, but others did so collectively. In the Cape of Good Hope, the enslaved ran away, often with the assistance of other slaves and workers. As Nicole Ulrich points out, "desertion was embedded in social connections forged between labourers" (p. 122). This could include Maroons in the Cape of Good Hope, but also in the United States: the Maroons there sometimes helped the enslaved to hide before they fled to the North. Free black men and women assisted the enslaved to escape, as did sailors on trading vessels who turned a blind eye to slaves who stowed away on their ships. Similarly, members of the free working class in New Orleans worked alongside the enslaved who had escaped from their masters. For Mitchell, city Maroons occupied a borderland space: they could merge into the urban population of the free and the enslaved and often hide under the noses of their owners.

Inevitably, there are problems in trying to deal in one volume with the desertion of the enslaved, the indentured, convicts, soldiers, and sailors. Soldiers and sailors, for example, had a very different perspective than the enslaved, yet their common experiences often transcended their differences. Moreover, there is much in this volume that is new and often revealing. For example, Matthias van Rossum overturns the view of a revolutionary Atlantic and a peaceful Indian Ocean world: he shows that a great number of employees – between fifteen and thirty per cent in 1760 – absconded from the Dutch East India Company. Anita Rupprecht underscores not only the enormous number of liberated Africans who arrived in the Americas – over 180,000 – but also what she terms "the global landscape of colonial apprenticeship". For these apprentices, running away was a central site of struggle: they saw themselves as being treated far worse than the enslaved.

Linking these categories of workers, then, highlights their common responses to oppression and coercion. These workers shared a desire for autonomy and for control of their lives, and this volume provides abundant evidence of their shared worlds. It is to be warmly welcomed and should encourage further research in this fascinating area.

Gad Heuman

Department of History, University of Warwick
Humanities Building, University Road,
Coventry, CV4 7AL, United Kingdom
E-mail: g.j.heuman@warwick.ac.uk

RØGE, PERNILLE. Economistes and the Reinvention of Empire. France in the Americas and Africa, c.1750–1802. [New Studies in European History.] Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019. xv, 296 pp. Maps. £75.00. (E-book: $80.00).

The Seven Years' War was the first war that involved four continents, and it marked a watershed in modern history. It ended France's ambitions as a colonial power in North America and India, reduced Spain to a second-rate colonial power, and catapulted Britain to maritime hegemony. According to Jürgen Osterhammel, the Seven Years' War inaugurated a time of