The Haitian Revolution and Neocolonialism: The Role of History in a Rhetoric of Return

Presented to the Faculty of the
History and Philosophy Departments of
Colorado College

In partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of the
Bachelor of Arts

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Preface

In February, 2017, the United Nations announced that it is evaluating the presence of the military wing of its peace keeping mission currently operating in Haiti. Originally sent in 2004 "to ensure … the continued promotion and protection of human rights and the establishment of a State based on the rule of law…,"[1] the mission's purpose has been to impose order on the political and social instability affecting Haitian society. Concerns about an overly political military and the failure of democratic institutions mandated the intervention, which technically re-extended an initial UN peacekeeping mission carried out from 1993-1996.

The 2004 intervention occurred just days before the resignation of Haiti's president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. President Aristide had requested the intervention in the face of increasing political violence in Haiti, but the intervention ultimately culminated in his resignation. The circumstances of the resignation were the subject of heightened international controversy. President Aristide, after "resigning," was flown to the Central African Republic aboard a U.S. military aircraft accompanied by armed American military personnel, without being informed of his destination. What the United States has insisted was a voluntary resignation Aristide maintains was a *coup d'état,* a truly remarkable state of affairs given that the United States intervened less than ten years before to restore him to power following his deposal in 1994 by the Haitian military. Aristide's formal calls in 2003 for France to pay Haiti $21 billion dollars, according to Aristide the 2003 equivalent of the 90 million gold francs Haiti paid to France in 1825, added to the situation's controversies. Though Aristide enjoyed widespread popular support and several international observers in Haiti viewed his election as legitimate, the mandate for intervention nevertheless cited democratic concerns.[2] Aristide's political opponents

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[1] United Nations Security Council, 4961st Session, Resolution 1542 (2004).
[2] Anthony Fenton, *Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Majority*. (Red Pub, 2005),.

did attempt to organize a boycott of the election, and estimates for the voter turnout remain disputed, with the government officially claiming 68% participation, while local political opposition said it was only a meagre 10%.[3]

The precedent for military occupation in Haiti was first set in 1915, when U.S. Marines invaded the country and established their own government for the nation. Since then, Haiti has been occupied for a total of 35 years by either U.S. or U.N. forces. Tellingly, the headline of a New York Times article on the ousting from March 1, 2004, "THE ARISTIDE RESIGNATION: EXILE; HAITI PRESIDENT FORCED OUT; MARINES SENT TO KEEP ORDER," is strikingly reminiscent of headlines from the 19 yearlong U.S. Occupation of Haiti begun in 1915: "HAITI IN THROES; PRESIDENT FLEES: Oreste and Wife on German Warship--Marines Have Been Landed from United States Cruiser Montana."[4] In an address to the American Bar Association in 1923, Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes described the 1915 occupation as in the "interest of peace and order," noting that "since the Republic of Haiti gained its independence it has been the scene of almost continuous revolution." Hughes notes that the United States is not pursuing a policy of domination but only preserving order, and that U.S. forces would be "glad to leave" as soon as there is "reasonable assurance that the Haitians will be able to maintain an independent government competent to keep order and discharge its international obligations."[5] Hughes claims that U.S. intervention was aiding "Haitian people to free themselves from the hopeless condition which continued revolutions and a policy of despotic militarism had produced. "[6] The rhetoric justifying this intervention was thus predicated

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18-24.

[3] Yasmine Shamsie and Andrew S. Thompson, eds. *Haiti: Hope for a Fragile State*. (Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 2006), 103.

[4] The Atlanta Constitution (1881-1945); Atlanta, Ga. [Atlanta, Ga] 28 Jan 1914: 1.

[5] Charles Evans Hughes, "Observations on the Monroe Doctrine," American *Bar Association Journal* 9, no. 9 (1923): 565.

[6] Ibid., 564.

on notions of humanitarianism or civilization. In the narrative Hughes presents, he isolates responsibility for Haiti's instability in the country's corrupt and militaristic politics. In this view, the failure of Haitian democracy is a domestic issue which threatens the international order and requires intervention.

Following the founding of Haiti in 1804, France, the United States, and other imperial powers created a state of economic dependency for the country, which in turn generated continued civil unrest. The international order which the United States claimed Haitian political instability threatened is thus implicated in the condition of instability in Haitian politics throughout the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. For Hughes, the "despotic militarism" reflects only upon a corrupt Haitian political class without reference to the hostile international system. Hughes' address is an example of how neocolonial perspectives decontextualize the past and elide responsibility for the present. This amnesiac quality in neocolonial perspectives enables the maintenance of a position of moral authority among imperial powers over former colonies.

The parallels between the 1915 and the 1994/2003 occupations are many, and illustrates the way neocolonialism isolates the past from the present. A 1994 op-ed written by then Senator John Kerry, titled "Make Haiti's Thugs Tremble," illustrates this amnesiac quality clearly. He says,

> Some will argue that the last time we went into Haiti, we stayed 19 years. But that invasion was in 1915 -- *an age of colonialism that has long since been repudiated*. In 1994, we would be going to wrest the nation from the grip of a tiny elite and return it to the vast majority of Haitians. *The difference between occupation and liberation is dramatic*. We would be restoring a stolen democracy, human dignity and hope to a country's brutalized masses.[7]

[7] John Kerry, "Make Haiti's Thugs Tremble," *The New York Times* (Washington, D.C.), May 16, 1994.

Though Kerry says we are long past "the age of colonialism," his articulation of intervention nevertheless reinstates colonial hierarchies. The United States is in the position to return Haiti's "stolen democracy" to its people, to save Haiti from itself. The metropolis, in the past France and today the U.S. through the U.N., knows what is best for the colony, and thus decides its fate. In this way, colonial relationships are restored in a process of repetition by differentiation, but the differentiation is semantic rather than functional.

European colonization in the 18th and 19th centuries was earnestly understood by its perpetrators as an expansion of Civilization and universal principles, conceived of along a temporal axis tending towards "progress" from states of "backwardness." However, in the self-ascription of universality and the corresponding monopolization of the idea of "progress," and subsequently history, European values achieved a supremacy over competing cultural dispositions and foreclosed spaces from which alternatives could have been articulated. Where during colonial times Europeans saw slavery as the civilizational salvation of the African race, following independence and abolition in Haiti, the physical domination of the master-slave relationship is supplanted by an intellectual hierarchy between enlightened civilization and backwards ignorance. The essential justification for colonial relationships in the past, Civilization, is replaced by a notion of Humanitarianism that fulfills the same purpose. The extent to which colonial hierarchies have been discursively maintained despite the outcome of Haitian independence illustrates that the violence of colonialism is far more than only physical.

Following the Haitian Revolution's success, France negotiated agreements with England, the United States, and the Vatican, among other nations, to withhold official recognition of Haiti pending France's reimposition of imperial authority. The situation of diplomatic isolation France generated for Haiti reflects the possessiveness France felt towards its former colony despite

Haitian independence. The relationship changed in 1825 when an indemnity agreement was negotiated between Haiti and France that imposed a state of economic dependency in lieu of the direct political domination of colonialism, such that, by 1910, 90% of Haitian government expenditure went towards the payment of debts associated with the indemnity. The 1825 indemnity agreement between France and Haiti stipulated that the Haitian government pay France 90 million gold francs in exchange for damages to "property" sustained during the revolution. In addition to charging the nation for the recognition of the independence the people had fought to win, the indemnity was issued in the form of a royal decree rather than as a diplomatic communique between sovereign nations, and even referred to the nation by its former colonial name, belittling Haiti as it sought to appear legitimate in the eyes of the world.[8] The very form of the indemnity agreement represents an intermediate step between colonialism and neocolonialism. As an agreement, the Haitian government gave its consent in the negotiation, but the indemnity was issued as a royal decree, illustrating that a perceived hierarchy between metropole and colony survived the existence of the formal colonial relationship between France and Haiti.

While neocolonial perspectives of Haiti disown any responsibility for the political instability caused by imposed conditions of economic dependency, as Hughes and Kerry both illustrate, France's response to Haiti's request for reparations shows how history has been weaponized. In 2004, France set up a commission to evaluate the validity of Aristide's reparations request. The report the commission produced is a very curious document, and Beckett observes that "the manner in which the commission" argues "shares much in common

[8] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti: State against Nation*. NYU Press, 1990. 65

with how slavery and the Haitian Revolution were discussed in the eighteenth century [sic]."[9] Though it is an intentional reckoning with responsibility and justice in the history of Franco-Haitian relations, the way causation is expressed in weighing responsibility is oddly circular. The document deals with the history of the Haitian state, offering a narrative of 19th century Haiti:

> Independence, in itself, is not enough to create a nation. Indeed, the privileged class of the Creoles, those who were born in the colony of Santo Domingo, appropriated the former colonial state as such, and, passing from dominated to dominant, has never ceased to subjugate the vast majority of Haitians, the majority of whom were born in Africa. This division, bossale (African-born) and creole (colony-born), survived the servile society, and continued for two centuries so that the cultural factor has obliterated the national factor. In Haiti, more than anywhere else, the State has preceded the nation… However, this coastal, militarized, enchanted and westernized state, taking the still warm place of the White Master, has established such relations of exploitation and exclusion with the "African" rural mass of the interior… that, instead of accompanying the material and mental development of the nation, it systematically countered it.[10]

Lamenting the opposition which developed between the Haitian state apparatus and broader civil society in the 19th century, the document argues that accession to the terms of the reparations would perpetuate the predatory state creoles appropriated from the "White Master." The argument pivots to France's past efforts to aid development in the country, saying Haiti has received more aid than any other state with little to show. These efforts for development fail in the long term, however, because of "the megalomaniac inefficiency, logorrhea, corruption, impunity, [and] intimidation" characteristic of the "well-known romantic extravagances in the region, which the semi-imperial mid-humanitarian interventions sometimes only aggravate at the end of the day."[11]

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[9] Greg Beckett, "The Ontology of Freedom: The Unthinkable Miracle of Haiti." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 19, no. 2 (2013): 67.

[10] Comité Debray. "Rapport au ministre des Affaires étrangères M. Dominique de Villepin du comité indépendant de réflexion et de propositions sur les relations Franco-Haïtiennes." (2004): 22-23. Translations are my own.

[11] Ibid., 26-27.

Where the U.S. and its allies intervene on humanitarian grounds, the French also construct a humanitarian argument, except for nonintervention. The Haitian government's request asked for reparations on two grounds: first, for the crimes of slavery, and secondly, for the 1825 indemnity. The 2004 commission established by the French ultimately found that the reparation request lacked "legal and moral standing" on both levels. Paying the reparations would bring little relief, the report argues, because of the problematic relationship of the state to the people of the nation. The report also cites the psychological consequences that result from "enabling" Haiti's dependency:

> It must be clear in any case that we put our proposals in a logic of solidarity and not reimbursement. In the name of *a moral obligation* and not a fantastic bank account debtor. We will therefore say yes to the *duty of memory*, which is *not repentance but recognition*, and no to restoration, for it is the future that we must begin to build…. Returning to the *old relationship of assistantship*, a truncated relationship without reciprocity, is harmful because it is disempowering. Haitians *are not entitled* to consider the international community as a source of unlimited donations without its own contributions. A faithful collaboration between adults would be made impossible by what might be called *victimization*. This Janus, whose two faces, the resigned and the paranoiac, ultimately make one, come to expect everything from the stranger, because "sé Blan ki déside" (it is the white who decides… For it is the same alienation, the fruit of a bitter past or lack of self-confidence, which sometimes commends and sometimes demonizes. The Whites land! The Savior, one day begged, and the Evil One, the next day denounced. The sought-after Protective Wing becomes, as soon as it is obtained, the Asphyxiating Shadow-it is often the same…. It is difficult to gain access to the "active understanding" required of goodwill, just between interference and indifference, when whites have reason to fear that they will be reproached for intervening or not intervening. To do, and not to do. Double-bind inhibiting, one will agree.[12]

The conclusion the commission reaches is ironic because it recognizes the effect of the power disparity of the past and present, but rejects accountability for Haiti's contemporary challenges out of a fear of perpetuating Western and creole hegemony into the future. Blaming the "privileged class of creoles" for assuming the position of the "White Master" places the responsibility for the challenges of decolonization solely on the shoulders of Haiti's political

[12] Ibid., 15-16.

class. If reparations were paid, the argument runs, the dependency of Haiti would be perpetuated. These findings are telling of how the maintenance of moral authority has obfuscated the material consequences of colonialism and neocolonialism. "Victimization" is contrary to a higher "moral obligation" France has to Haiti, and, in this "logic of solidarity," Haiti is the one indebted to France "because it is ultimately French cultural values and the French language that allow Haiti to participate in the international community." [13] If there is guilt to be found in the past, it is in a vacuously defined "state" which preyed on the Haitian masses as the slave master of the past did. The crime at issue, rather than slavery and colonial domination itself, becomes the failure of Haitian society to transcend this past.

Where the French locate goodwill somewhere "between interference and indifference," the U.S. and its allies instead charted a course of armed intervention. Returning to Aristide's deposal in 2004, some N.G.O.'s claimed that U.S. intelligence contacted right-wing paramilitary organizations that played a key role in the wave of violence witnessed in Haiti in 2004. Since this violence was part of the justification of the U.N. intervention, these NGO's in Haiti allege that the U.S. acted to destabilize the political situation in Haiti to depose a president potentially hostile to international business interests. Accusers maintain that there was a coordinated effort to undermine Aristide's government by means of "an economic embargo that would cripple the hemisphere's poorest nation, a full-scale disinformation campaign waged by Haitian elite-owned and international corporate media, and concerted diplomatic efforts directed at guaranteeing that regime change would be both acceptable to the international community and believable to a confused public." In parallel, Canada led an effort in the U.N. to reform international law to permit intervention in "failing and failed states." The reform effort, titled "Responsibility to

[13] Beckett. "The Ontology of Freedom: The Unthinkable Miracle of Haiti." 68.

Protect," left several issues unclear, such as who decides what a "failed state" is, whether how the state "failed" matters, and what "protection" looks like.[14] The U.S. and its allies thus worked to change the legal conditions which justify intervention, and then covertly generated those conditions in Haiti. In this way, colonial powers have remained judge, jury, and executioner of the fate of so-called failed states even if they can be implicated in their failure.

The presence of a minority of vocal dissidents was a significant aspect of the mandate for the 2004 intervention. Though the political divisiveness and corresponding instability which have historically hampered the viability of the Haitian state are implicated in the continuing practices of neocolonialism and economic imperialism following the Haitian Revolution, the story is not one of foreign intervention alone. Just as the Debray Commission implicated Haitian creole elites in its present political woes, critics of U.S. involvement in Aristide's deposal argue that they had the assistance of "Haitian elites" in undermining the legitimacy of Aristide's election.[15] Indeed, without recourse to internal actors, the intervention would have lost what little pretense there was for intervention to begin with, and their cooperation in Aristide's deposal reflects long standing divisions within the Haitian political community. Aristide's political party, the *Fanmi lavalas,* marketed itself to the poor Haitian masses, historically an underrepresented demographic in government, and the involvement of elites in his overthrow echoes a long fraught relationship between the poor majority and an elite minority. Historically, the "Haitian elites" have been identified with the "mulattos" of Haiti, and divisions between them and the darker-skinned majority of the country go back to colonial days. Often educated in France, the "mulattos" virtually monopolized the government in the 19th century, informed their rule with European ideas, and sometimes abused the state coffers for personal gain.

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[14]Fenton. *Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Majority.* 23
[15] Ibid., 23.

Aristide's second deposal in 2004 coincided with the bicentennial of Haiti's founding, and the timing of his deposal is reflective of Haiti's trajectory from the "Pearl of the Antilles" to poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. However, to understand how the history of neocolonialism in Haiti developed and its consequences today, attention must be paid to the colonial conditions from which the state emerged, and to the revolutionary community which brought it to life. As the first ever national revolution against the system of colonial slavery, the Haitian Revolution remains an entirely singular historical event that highlighted the contradictions of European universalism while simultaneously appropriating and realizing notions of human freedom championed in the abstract but circumscribed in practice. Despite the radical expression of human freedom that the Haitian Revolution represented, western powers and the Haitian elite nevertheless continued to view Haiti and its people as civilizationally deficient. Though the institution of slavery was abandoned, a constructed notion of universality lent western values a continued preeminence that exercised their own domination over the country. In this paper, I will explore the relationship of the composition of the initial revolutionary community to the ensuing character of the Haitian state in the 19th and early 20th century. The make-up of the revolutionary coalition and the contingences on which their alignment depended sheds important light on historical political divisions still alive in Haiti today. Beginning with the circumstance of colonial domination, I hope to illustrate the consequences of evolving expressions of Western hegemony in the transition from colony to revolution to nation.

1. The Haitian Revolution's Beginning

a. Colonial Saint Domingue:

Christopher Columbus discovered the island of Hispaniola in 1498, and the first city founded in the eastern half, Santo Domingo, is distinguished as the oldest remaining city in the Americas. The ensuing sixteenth century witnessed the death of the island's indigenous population of 500,000 to 750,000,[16] falling to 60,000 in only the first fifteen years of Spanish colonization.[17]

In the 16th century French pirates established themselves on Tortuga, an island immediately off the northwestern coast of Hispaniola. They made their living looting Spanish galleons, and eventually extended into western Hispaniola.[18] The pirate colony was made into an official colony of the French empire with the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, and the new colony of Saint Domingue occupied a central place in the 18th century world economy, becoming the world's largest producer of sugar and coffee, and, subsequently, the largest consumer of African slaves.[19] So named the "Pearl of the Antilles," French Saint Domingue was by far the most profitable colony of its time, and the colony and its related slave trade drove the French economy. Around ⅓ to ⅖ of all French commerce was tied, directly or indirectly, to the slave trade and its related products in the 18th-century, with Saint Domingue's production constituting a significant portion.[20] The colony produced 60% of all the worlds coffee, and, at one point, the value of the island's production exceeded that of all thirteen American colonies combined.[21]

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[16] Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*. (Macmillan, 2012), 18.
[17] Cyril Lionel Robert James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. (UK: Penguin UK, 2001), 3. James reports the upper end of the indigenous population as perhaps a million
[18] Carolyn E. Fick. *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*. (Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1990), 18.
[19] Beckett. "The Ontology of Freedom: The Unthinkable Miracle of Haiti." 55. (find p #)
[20] Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 4 (2000): 828.
[21] Jean- Bertrand Aristide and Nick Nesbitt. *The Haitian Revolution.* (London: Verso, 2008), xiii.

Some have even argued that the boon of wealth created by the slave-based economy enabled the generation of a liberally minded and politically assertive middle class: “[A] Sad irony of human history, the fortunes created at Bordeaux, at Nantes by the slave-trade gave to the bourgeoisie that pride which needed liberty and contributed to human emancipation.”[22]

In any case, the integrality of colonial Saint Domingue to the French economy and global commerce more broadly is difficult to understate. In the year of 1763, production in French Saint Domingue accelerated markedly and initiated profound demographic changes. The Treaty of Paris was signed in 1763, ending the Seven Years’ War begun in 1756 and with it the Royal Navy’s harassment of French shipping. From this year up to 1789, a thirteen year span, the slave population grew from 206,000 to 465,000, a 2.25x increase, [23] with the slave population increasing ten-fold over the entire 18th century.[24] A slave mortality rate of around 50% within the first eight years of servitude required the constant resupply of the colony with African slaves,[25] and, by the eve of revolution, there were 10 slaves per free person. *Affranchis,* free people of color, including some freed African slaves but mostly free-born persons of mixed descent, constituted half of the free population of Saint Domingue, with the other half white.[26] Herein lies an important difference between the institutions of slavery as practiced in the United States and colonial Saint Domingue: whereas the former was racialized along strictly binary terms, the practice of the latter cross-cut racial and phenotypical categories.

The *affranchi* population, like the slave population, boomed in the 20 years prior to the beginning of revolution, increasing 4.5x from 6000 in 1770, to 27,500 in 1789, and, in the same

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[22] Jean Jaurès, "Histoire socialiste de la Révolution française. TI La Constituante." (1923): 122.
[23] Carolyn E Fick, "The Haitian Revolution in an Atlantic Context," *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society*, vol. 19. (Michigan State University Press, 1994), 113.
[24] Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," 827.
[25] Fick, *The Making of Haiti,* 26.
[26] Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 18

year, *affranchis* owned ⅓ of the colony's plantation property, ¼ of its slaves, and ¼ of its real estate.[27] Former slaves who earned their freedom could own slaves themselves, and especially successful *affranchis* would sometimes lead the lifestyle of the plantation aristocrat. Many *affranchis* had contempt for the African born slaves, a color prejudice inherited from the French and born of differences in status. The *affranchis,* as an intermediary caste, were thus not quite excluded and not quite included in the society of colonial Saint Domingue. Getachew argues that it is precisely this "doubling of inclusion and exclusion that made possible domination." Thought to carry the "imprints of slavery," the freedom of *affranchis* was unstable, "as the opprobrium of their [racial] origins undermined their emancipation."[28] Given the population ratios on the island, the maintenance of slavery depended on the *affranchis'* complicity, and Saint Domingue's colonial militia and police forces were largely drawn from their ranks. Additionally, the slave economy provided potentially lucrative economic opportunity for *affranchis,* and some were very successful.

Though the *affranchis* were legally guaranteed all the rights of citizenship in the first half of the 18th century, their increasing affluence and growing presence provoked hostility from the white population, which itself was divided into two groups. The first, the *grand-blancs,* consisted of the plantation owners, urban administrators, and militia officers; the second, the *petit-blancs,* consisted of merchants and plantation managers working on an owner's behalf. Divisions between the two festered, as the latter resented the former's affluence as well as the increasing ascension of *affranchis* into positions of power. These resentments eventuated into new social regulations meant to appease discontented *petit-blancs* by reinforcing the social inferiority of the

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[27] Fick, *The Making of Haiti,* 19.
[28] Adam Getachew, "Universalism After the Post-Colonial Turn: Interpreting the Haitian Revolution." *Political Theory* 44, no. 6 (2016): 830.

affranchis, an example of which was a prohibition on the wearing of shoes by any person of color.[29] Tellingly, unsuccessful *petit-blancs* were sometimes referred to as *faux-blancs* or *negre-blancs,* illustrating a kind of conflation of class and color that still informs socioeconomic conceptions in Haiti.[30] Regardless, the growing animosity between the segments of white society came to have significant consequences at the outbreak of the French Revolution, and James rightly calls it "the first great division" on the path to colonial revolution.[31]

Complementing the general prejudices between *affranchis* and slaves were tensions between creole (born in the colony) and bossale (born in Africa) slaves. The extent to which bossale slaves integrated into colonial life varied considerably, though they certainly faced more challenges than creole slaves in acculturating to life in the colony. Many bossale slaves retained a sense of their national or ethnic identities from before the Middle Passage, part of a matrix of identity imported from Africa and reconfigured in reference to colonial experience.[32] Naturally, many slaves sought an alternative to the system of colonial exploitation, and slave marronage became a mode of resistance embodying "the reverse side of assimilation," and represented "the possibility of existing outside of the colonial system."[33] Primary source documents report the activities of various maroon bands throughout the 18th century, and, in the Spanish half of the island, authorities even negotiated a formal treaty with a maroon community.[34] Colonial authorities in French Saint Domingue almost reached a similar agreement with a maroon

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[29] David Geggus, "The Haitian Revolution." *The Modern Caribbean* (1989): 22-23.
[30] Carolyn E Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*, (Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1990), 18.
[31] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 36.
[32] Leslie G. Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti*, (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2000). xiii-xv.
[33] Catherine A. Reinhardt, *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean*, (Berghahn Books, 2006), 59.
[34] David Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History*. (Hackett Publishing, 2014), 82.

community that had survived for over a century beyond the reach of the plantation regime.[35] The increase in the slave population in the decades before revolution made maroon communities increasingly difficult to maintain, however, as development extended into the formerly remote areas to which maroons fled. In this sense, marronage represented an outlet for dissent against the slave system, permitting a space for an alternative to exploitation that was not armed resistance against the system of slavery. David Geggus observes that "areas where maroon bands were said to be present on the eve of the Revolution were not those where the slave revolt broke out, and in fact were generally those parts of Saint Domingue where the slave regime was to suffer least."[36] Nevertheless, the appeal of the alternative to society that maroon communities represented continued to be a challenge in the translation of colony to nation, and the practice of marronage did not cease following independence.

b. The French Revolution and Revolutionary Stirrings in Saint Domingue:

When Revolution erupted in France in 1789, colonial authorities became unsure of their relationship with the chaotic metropolis. Some saw the chance for greater autonomy for the colony and free trade in lieu of France's official monopoly over colonial commerce. Others were concerned with how the radical claims of the French Revolution would play out in the context of slave society, in which the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity could be understood as dangerous. Most remained unconcerned by this blatant contradiction.

Frustrated *affranchis* saw in the French Revolution the chance to improve their social status which had been legally eroded in the decades leading up to Revolution. Vincent Ogé, a

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[35] Reinhardt, *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean*, 63.
[36] David Geggus, "Marronage, Voodoo, and the Saint Domingue Slave Revolt of 1791," *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society* 15 (1992): 25.

rich *affranchi* who had been educated in France, invoked the ideals spelled out in *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* in a letter he sent to the President of the Colonial Assembly of Saint Domingue in October of 1790. It is worth quoting at length (emphasis added):

> A prejudice, too long maintained, is about to fall… I require you to promulgate throughout the colony the instructions of the National Assembly of the 8th of March, which gives without distinction, to all free citizens, the right of admission to all offices and functions… *I shall not call the plantations to rise; that means would be unworthy of me...* When I solicited from the National Assembly a decree which I obtained in favour of the American colonists, formerly known under *the injurious epithet of mulattos*, *I did not include in my claims the condition of the negroes who live in servitude*. You and our adversaries have misrepresented my steps in order to bring me into discredit with honorable men. No, no, gentlemen! We have put forth *a claim only on behalf of a class of freemen*, who, for two centuries, have been under the yoke of oppression… Before employing my means, I make use of mildness; but if, contrary to my expectation, you do not satisfy my demand, I am not answerable for the disorder into which my just vengeance may carry me.[37]

The March 8th decree of the National Assembly affirmed the continuation of slavery in the colonies, but provided for the founding of Colonial Assemblies, to whom Ogé addresses himself. At issue were the social restrictions imposed upon anyone of African descent by colonial authorities, which, in addition to restricting what clothes could be worn, prohibited *affranchis* from serving in the colony's assembly and working in certain occupations.[38] The quote illustrates that Ogé's notion of the rights of citizenship, like most of his contemporaries, remained compatible with the institution of slavery. His education in Europe and identification with the French nation indicates that, even as a man of African descent, he consented to the West's civilizational imperative and argued from within the terms of its discourse. As he says, "I shall not call the plantations to rise; that means would be unworthy of me...," but restricts his claim to "American colonists, formerly known under the "injurious epithet of *mulattos*.'" Underlying this

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[37] Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History*. 63.

[38] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution,* 40.

argument for equality was the minimization of the African descent of *affranchis,* in whose name Ogé appeals; "a claim only on behalf of a class of freemen," and not those "negroes who live under the condition of servitude."

Ogé's simultaneous objection to the use of "mulatto" as an epithet, emphasis on the slaves' "negro" identity, and recourse to European ideas and decorum foreshadows Haiti's fraught relationship with the question of color in politics since independence. The line he drew between the "class of freemen" for whom he appeals, and those in the "condition of servitude" whom he excludes, illustrates an appeal constructed in reference to contemporary ideas of natural liberty. The language of other *affracnhi* petitions to the Colonial Assembly are similar. A petition from *affranchis* in November, 1789, reminded the assembly of their role in upholding slavery, observing that slaves "would no doubt resist if they were assured of our neutrality," and complained that the whites behave like "tyrants" towards the free people of color: "Too confident of our obedience, our fathers [the whites] claim over us an outrageous and despotic power. They go so far as to deform the precious right to freedom bestowed on us by our magnaminous sovereigns. These fathers treat us like slaves…" The petition goes on to "beseech" the Assembly to grant *affranchis* "the liberties and privileges" of French citizenship… "following our assent and the sanction of our fathers." It also requests that "it be expressly forbidden to call us freedmen…." and that "all insulting terms of address will forever cease, and we should be known solely by our names and surnames… and be treated as any other citizen."[39]

Underlying the philosophies of natural rights that Ogé and his peers reference were racist ontologies that viewed the different races as more or less capable, creating racialized hierarchies in reference to notions of civilization. The invocation of ontologies of natural freedom and the

[39] Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History,* 62.

minimization of racial identity shows a self-conscious awareness of the racialism underlying Western political discourse. The 59th article of *Le Code Noir,* the expansive document nominally regulating the conditions of slavery in the French Empire, contains rhetoric reflected in Ogé's appeal: " Let us grant to the *affranchis* the rights, privileges, and immunities that are enjoyed by all *persons born free*; let us wish that the merit of their *earned liberty* produce in them…*similar effects* as in *persons and other subjects with natural liberty*."[40] The *Code Noir*'s differentiation between "natural liberty" and "earned liberty" illustrates that an ontological distinction between the races justified and mandated the domination inherent in colonizing missions despite the emerging naturalization of human freedom in political philosophy. The discursive framework from which Ogé and his peers operated and their legalistic approach to the problem of racial discrimination are thus embroiled in the connotative meaning of race which underlay philosophies of natural rights. Ogé's disassociation with the slaves of Saint Domingue shows the ambivalent position many *affranchis* understood themselves as in. Differentiating themselves from the slaves, the *affranchis* remained differentiated from the class of European men as a necessary intermediary between the ignorant slave and enlightened colonist.

In 1790, Ogé led a violent rebellion against colonial authorities, fighting what some consider the first battle of the Haitian Revolution. His four-hundred-man force was overwhelmingly outnumbered, and he was publicly broken on the wheel to discourage similar insurrectionary attempts.[41] Perhaps if the *affranchi* class had been placated, revolution in Saint Domingue would have played out much differently. As noted above, *affranchis* owned ¼ of the colony's slaves and ⅓ of the plantations, and the extent of their economic participation and

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[40] Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods,* 23.
[41] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution,* 74.

semantic acceptance of slavery demonstrates some degree of complicity in slavery's economy. Despite shared economic interests, colonial authorities nevertheless maintained the codified racial discrimination for the sake of their own racial solidarity, and the revolutionary movement which eventually emerged ultimately coalesced against the racial hostility of white society towards blackness rather than out of an initial racial solidarity among the African and mixed populations. Indeed, there was a prominent case of a man, obviously of mixed descent, who successfully argued that his non-European relation was indigenous, repudiating any African heritage in order to avoid the prejudices enforced by the law.[42] Though African racial solidarity had begun to be articulated by the end of the revolution, the reasons for its initial absence and even repudiation continued to appear in the new Haitian state, complicating what has been a reoccurring struggle for unity and national coherence.

The death of Ogé provoked unrest throughout the colony, and reception of this news in France divided the National Assembly. Since some were uncomfortable with the contradictions inherent in maintaining slavery in the colonies while enshrining egalitarian ideals in France, it was unclear what the relationship of the colonies to the metropolis should be. Antoine Barnave, an influential member of the National Assembly, describes the colonial regime and sums up the reluctance of some of those opposed to abolition:

> This regime is absurd, but it is established and one cannot handle it roughly without unloosing the greatest disorder. This regime is oppressive, but it gives livelihood to several million Frenchmen. This regime is barbarous, but a still greater barbarism will be the result if you interfere with it without the necessary knowledge. [43]

Ultimately, because of their distracted indifference and sharp disagreements, the assembly failed to act decisively in any direction, deciding instead to grant the colony greater autonomy to

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[42] David Geggus, "The Naming of Haiti," *NWIG: New West Indian* Guide 71, no. 1/2 (1997): 46.
[43] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution,* 80.

resolve its own issues. The increased autonomy only provoked greater conflict among the whites in Saint Domingue, as different parties each vied for control of the colony. The royalist government and conservative colonists, on the one hand, faced opposition from members of a local Jacobin club, "the Patriots," and disgruntled *affranchis* alike.[44] The fighting between the two often involved the arming of the parties' respective slaves, experiences which undoubtedly added impetus to the slaves' own moves towards revolution.

The state of civil war among the free segments of colonial Saint Domingue that preceded and paralleled the beginnings of the slaves' revolution did not dwell on the question of slavery. Tensions within the white segments of colonial society had boiled over in response to the revolution in France. *Grand-blancs* argued for ever greater autonomy from France as a result of its instability, while those sympathetic to the revolution and disaffected *petit-blancs* feared the tyranny of the planter class's unmitigated rule. Both sides courted *affranchi* support, which provoked the prejudices of their respective members, creating further internal divisions within the opposing royalist and revolutionary camps. The failure of either side to fully integrate the *affranchi* class into their respective causes made certain the downfall of colonial Saint Domingue. While nominal concessions were made and assurances promised, the deep-seated racism of colonial white society continuously reared its head and alienated those *affranchis* who may have been willing to fight for the preservation of slavery. Though this period was punctuated with increasingly large and frequent slave insurrections, most of colonial society had no apprehensions about the long-term stability of slavery in Saint Domingue.

In the earliest slave insurrections, the slaves only appealed for extra days to cultivate personal plots of land given to them by the owners to provide for their subsistence, and for the

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[44] Ibid., 67.

curbing of excessively cruel punishments.[45] These movements were all crushed and their leaders hung, but discontent persisted as the French Revolution progressed. Whether the slaves were privy to revolutionary politics is arguable. James contends that the slaves became increasingly aware of developments in France, and argues that they understood it in personally relevant terms: "…the white slaves in France had risen, and killed their masters, and were now enjoying the fruits of the earth. It was gravely inaccurate in fact, but they had caught the spirit of the thing. Liberty. Equality. Fraternity."[46] Though the influence of the French Revolution appears significant and has often been emphasized in historical accounts, it alone was probably not sufficient to provoke the slave uprising. Indeed, the influence of revolutionary ideals was probably much more significant among the *affranchis* than the slaves. The fact that *affranchi* petitioners often invoked French Revolutionary ideals in pressing their claims, whereas slaves' demands are often couched in the language of royalism, is illustrative of this point.[47] Nevertheless, continuing developments in France reverberated across the colonial empire, and while the shadow cast by the French Revolution on colonial developments is significant, the relationship between French Revolutionary ideology and slave revolution remains unclear.

In any case, the demographic shifts which occurred in the decades prior to the revolution had as profound consequences for its outcome as did the often-attributed influence of French Revolutionary discourse. As mentioned earlier, the slave population increased by 2.25x in the thirteen years before revolution. In addition to such a significant increase, the geographic source of the slaves also proved highly consequential for the ensuing military struggle. The expansion in the slave population occurred as civil war was raging in the Kingdom of the Kongo, the site from

[45] Trouillot, *Haiti: State against Nation*, 39.
[46] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution,* 81.
[47] Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History,* 82.

which many slaves were sourced. Prisoners of war were sold into slavery, and the slave ships brought vast numbers of African warriors to the shores of Saint Domingue. Since around ⅔ of the colony's slaves in 1789 were born in Africa, with 40% of this number originating from the Kongo, a significant portion of this number likely had martial experience which would prove invaluable when the time for war came.[48] Though they lacked training in the use of modern weapons and the organizational discipline of the Napoleonic army they would eventually face, their martial experience fighting in the jungles of the Kongo was likely more relevant to the conditions of Saint Domingue than the training of the French.

c. African Cultural Influences

The role attributed to African cultural influences in the Haitian revolution has tended to privilege vodou, but its role in slave revolution in colonial Saint Domingue has often been uncritically assessed. A moment which has garnered significant attention from historians is the Bois Caiman ceremony, though its details are scant and accounts have been disputed.[49] On the evening of August 22nd, 1791, a man named Boukman, according to some accounts a vodou priest and to others just a remarkable slave and early leader of revolution, conducted a ritual sacrifice of a pig that symbolically initiated the beginning of mass slave revolution. The role of vodou in the initial organization of the revolutionaries is an important, though controversial aspect of the history of the Haitian Revolution. James goes as far as to say unequivocally that "voodoo was the medium of the conspiracy," but offers little evidence.[50] Though it is tempting to locate resistance in an element of slave culture little understood by outsiders, a more

[48] John K. Thornton, "" I Am the Subject of the King of Congo": African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution." *Journal of World History* (1993): 183-85.
[49] Geggus, "Marronage, Voodoo, and the Saint Domingue Slave Revolt of 1791," 27.
[50] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution,* 81-86.

compromising understanding locates vodou within a constellation of causal factors. Geggus understands it as the "sacralization" of "a political development already brought to maturity:"

> The conspirators of 1791 were obeying other imperatives than just the voices of the *mysteres*. This is not to underestimate the importance of oath-taking and divination in such contexts…, but as Haitian peasants continue to observe, "Konplo pi fo passe wanga" (Literally: "Conspiracy is stronger than a magic charm.")[51]

Though vodou must have been an important source of resilience and solidarity for those faced with a mortal struggle, its heterogeneity and sourcing from several African religious traditions challenges the idea that vodou scaffolded the organization of revolution.

Vodou is a religion which has drawn influence from several African religious traditions, as well as Christianity, and this variety of influences lent itself to diversity in practice and belief. The geographical origin of the slave community becomes relevant here, and Dr. David Geggus, an historian of the Haitian Revolution, has explored the demographics of the slaves immediately before revolution in his essay, "Sugar and Coffee Cultivation in Saint Domingue and the Shaping of the Slave Labor Force." The essay presents a survey of a population of around 9,000 slaves across the colony, in which thirty-one different African "nations" were identified as sites of origin. If Geggus' limited sample size is somewhat representative of broader colonial society, then, extrapolating from his numbers, it can be roughly approximated that around 40% of slaves were Congolese, while the remaining 60% or so were sourced from around thirty different nations.[52] Given the diversity of the African cultural heritage of the slaves, there is no reason to assume vodou patterns of worship were immediately compatible across the colony. A parallel example is the evolution of Haitian Kreyol, which developed subject to the same influences and

[51] Geggus, "Marronage, Voodoo, and the Saint Domingue Slave Revolt of 1791", 32.
[52] David Geggus, *Sugar and Coffee Cultivation in Saint Domingue and the Shaping of the Slave Labor Force*. 1989. It should be noted that within particular plantations, there could be relative ethnic or tribal homogeneity, but, on the whole, diversity prevailed.

was only orthographically standardized in 1980.[53] Though the process of linguistic standardization is much different than the development of religions, it nevertheless illustrates the remarkable diversity informing the emergence of fundamental parts of Haitian society. While still remarkably diverse, Vodou practice, like the Kreyol language, has evolved considerably since the time of revolution, and Geggus arues that, as a category, the term implies "implies a nonexistent homogeneity in Haitian folk religion, whose adepts rarely employ the term."[54]

Furthermore, much of the revolutionary leadership, mostly creoles and *affranchis,* repudiated vodou and preferred Catholicism instead, illustrating the competing influences bearing on Saint Domingue society. Wealthy *affranchis* were often educated in Europe and adopted essentially European outlooks on the world, and even some creole slaves were socialized to European values. The difference between *affranchi* and slave, as well as between bossale (African-born) slaves and creole counterparts, gave the emerging revolution a fractured character. The priorities important to an *affranchi* were much different those of the bossale slave, and the bossale slave had hopes and desires much different than the creole slave. Different metrics of identity resonated among these different groups, with bossales retaining a sense of national identity from before their dislocation.

The material realities of colonial Saint Domingue reinforced the consequences of these diverging cultural dispositions on the development of the revolution. Each region of Saint Domingue was relatively autonomous and tended to be organized around a local port city, a consequence of a rough geography and the related preference for travel and communication by sea. The infrastructural reinforcement of regional divisions allowed for significant local

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[53] Bambi B. Schieffelin, and Rachelle Charlier Doucet. "The "Real" Haitian Creole: Ideology, Metalinguistics, and Orthographic Choice." *American Ethnologist* 21, no. 1 (1994): 177-179.
[54] Geggus, "Marronage, Voodoo, and the Saint Domingue Slave Revolt of 1791," 30.

autonomy, and different groups achieved preeminence within different regions. The north was the domain of the large white planters, the west that of an urban bourgeoisie, and the south that of wealthy mulatto landholders (though this is only the roughest of descriptions and these groups cross-cut regional boundaries). The first mass movements began in the north, where most plantation-based slaves lived and where the Bois Caiman ceremony is said to have taken place. An illustration of the ambiguous position of the *affranchi* population is the fact that the revolution was more successfully suppressed in the south and west than in the north, where *affranchis* had been disarmed.[55] Nevertheless, in the face of the intransigent racism of white society, *affranchis* eventually realized that the only way to end the discrimination they suffered was to end the slave system which engendered and perpetuated it.

The Colonial Assembly's rejection of the petitions for the end of legalized discrimination against *affranchis* led a force of *affranchis* to besiege Port Republicain (present-day Port-au-Prince) in November, 1791, and issue a proclamation calling all the free people of color to fight for the "fatherland" in order to "tear up by its deepest roots this tree of prejudice."[56] Both sides mobilized their slaves. A speech made to the colonial assembly by envoys from the south describes how white masters armed their slaves in order to stop the "criminal progress" of *affranchi* forces: "…our loyal slaves, indignant at seeing the brigands get the upper hand, and angry at seeing their masters in danger, asked insistently for our guns, and we allowed them to take them….we have heard since … that [the *affranchis*] were furiously annoyed at seeing our slaves march with us."[57] The confused allegiances of the early revolution often saw slaves fight on behalf of their masters, and the characteristics of the conflict reflected regional differences

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[55] David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National independence in Haiti*. (Rutgers Univ. Press, 1996), 28.
[56] Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History,* 70-71.
[57] Ibid., 93-94.

within Saint Domingue. Conflict in the south and west was fought on different terms than the mass slave insurrections of the north. The north pitted slaves against masters, where the south and west pitted *affranchis* against white society. James observes that "in the advanced North the slaves were leading the Mulattoes, in the backward West the Mulattoes were leading the slaves."[58] The centripetal effect of these regional differences affected the unfolding of the Saint Domingue revolution and the nation that was to emerge.

2. The Character of the Haitian Revolution

a. Revolution and Counter Revolution: The Politics of Revolution in Saint Domingue

In the fall of 1792, two colonial commissioners, Léger-Félicité Sonthonax and Étienne Polverel, were dispatched from France. While they alone probably would not have enacted abolition unilaterally, developments eventually forced them to issue a decree of abolition on August 29th, 1793. The commissioners had been dispatched to resolve the conflict between *affranchis* and colonial planters, which had been backgrounded by growing slave rebellions across the colony. When they arrived in September of 1792, they found relative peace between the *affranchis* and white colonists, who, after reaching an accord, had begun to successfully suppress slave insurgents. However, by October, news of the August 10th storming of the Tulieres had reached the colony and reignited royalist and revolutionary partisans alike. *Affranchis* rallied to the side of the revolutionary commissioners, and colonial royalists were subsequently defeated and deported. Sonthonax accorded *affranchis* equal legal status, winning new allies but also alienating *petit-blancs* and the few white planters who may have once been sympathetic to the French Revolution.[59]

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[58] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution,* 102.
[59] Geggus, "The Haitian Revolution," 34.

International developments further threatened France's hold over its colonial possession. Following Spain's declaration of war against France in May, 1792, authorities in Spanish Santo Domingo offered freedom and reward to slave insurrectionists in exchange for allegiance to the Spanish crown. The French Republic's declaration of war against England in 1793 invited an English invasion of the colony in addition to that of the Spanish.[60] Despite the expulsion of the royalists, the control of colonial authority grew more precarious as it was faced by opposition movements reminiscent of, but very different from, the European counterrevolution.

The "counterrevolutionary" movements in Saint Domingue reflected all the material and political fissures within colonial society. On one side of the "counterrevolution" in Saint Domingue were some monarchically inclined insurrectionary slaves and *affranchis,* backed by the Spanish crown. On the other side, wealthy colonial planters, suspicious of Republican authority and desirous of greater autonomy from the metropolis were joined by some wealthy *affranchis,* both of whom opposed the commissioners' desperate offers of amnesty and emancipation in negotiations with rebelling slaves; some of these men aligned with the English.[61] Between these two counterrevolutionary movements, the lower class whites who had been sympathetic to the Revolution in France were growing resentful of the commissioners' integration of *affranchis* into positions of authority. Geggus notes that the curious alchemy of alliances developed differently depending on regional circumstances: "In parts of the West, white and colored planters combined to fight urban white radicals. In the South, they divided along color rather than class lines, while in the North free coloreds joined the slave rebels."[62] The concurrent animosities among the elements of colonial society thus did not function primarily

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[60] Geggus, David, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History,* 106.
[61] Carolyn E. Fick, "The Haitian Revolution and the Limits of Freedom: Defining Citizenship in the Revolutionary Era," *Social History* 32, no. 4 (2007): 397-98.
[62] Geggus, "The Haitian Revolution," 30.

along class, color, racial, or political lines, but instead developed as amalgams of these four regionally alloyed identities when opportunity and circumstance allowed.

The evolving political identity of Toussaint Louverture, the man who led the Saint Domingue revolutionaries for most of the conflict, is emblematic of the intersecting political vocabularies at play in the revolutionary movement. Toussaint Louverture defies easy categorization within the groups of colonial Saints Domingue. As a creole and former slave of some standing, his life experience put him at the boundaries between slave and *affranchi* culture. James describes Toussaint's use of seemingly incompatible political vocabularies as "riding two horses at once": "He uses the prestige of the King… [and] the watchwords of the French revolution, of which royalty was the sworn enemy. Neither would help his aims so he was using both."[63] The coalitions which formed exhibited all the latent contradictions of the time, and the political vocabulary of the various leaders often conflated French revolutionary ideals with a little understood monarchism that appealed to many slaves. Professor John Thornton, an historian of Africa and a specialist in studying the eighteenth century Kingdom of the Kongo, has argued that African political traditions informed the revolutionary movement in Saint Domingue as much as French Revolutionary ideals.[64] Given that more than 2/3 of Saint Domingue's slaves had been born in Africa by 1789, with around 40% of which originating from the Kingdom of the Kongo, the significance of African political ideology takes on special importance. The political traditions informing the aspirations of the revolutionary community thus appear rather diverse, and attempts were made to reconcile the divergent political impulses.

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[63] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution,* 126.
[64] Thornton, "" I Am the Subject of the King of Congo": African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution," 186.

A correspondence between two slave insurgent leaders, in which a French-aligned insurgent leader responds to an invitation from a Spanish-aligned leader to switch to the Spanish side, illustrates the kind of tangled political vocabulary in play:

> "…. We are ready to fight for a king, but only if France (whose sons we are) recognizes Louis ***XVII*** [son of the late Louis XVI]. Therefore we cannot accept your proposals. Spain is trying to maintain slavery, not to free slaves. For this reason, we stay under the protection of the French Republic, as the representative of the king whom you mention. We have always recognized the respect, submission, and obedience that we owed to a sovereign when one existed, but there is no sovereign, and his rights have now been transferred to the French Republic." [65]

The dilemma faced by these two leaders, whom Toussaint later executed over suspicions of disloyalty in 1799, illustrates how indefinite allegiances were and the tenuousness of what those allegiances meant. The personality of the leader, Thornton notes, takers on special emphasis in the African political tradition, forming "a charter for the proper governance of the state." What westerners have often criticized as authoritarianism in Haitian politics, as well as the lack of institutional resilience, may instead point back to a different kind of philosophy of rule where legitimacy rests in the personality of the leader rather than in the institutions mediating political rule. For this and other reasons, Thornton cautions that "analysis based on an understanding of European ideology has difficulty comprehending this dynamic because its idiom was substantially different from that of Europe," and this difference of political idiom is a necessary consideration in understanding the dynamics relating the groups within revolutionary Saint Domingue.[66]

Traditionally the monarchism of some slaves had been explained as an attempt at the restoration of African society in response to the colonial predicament, but Thornton challenges

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[65] Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History,* 111.
[66] Thornton, "" I Am the Subject of the King of Congo": African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution," 186.

this perspective. Instead, he emphasizes African political ideology's "positive movement toward a better society," rather than understanding it merely as "an archaic throwback to obsolete political forms." Much like the political spectrum between monarchism and republicanism in France, African political ideology had its own conception of legitimate rule along a spectrum from absolute to limited monarchy.[67] The prevailing unintelligibility between the European and African political "idioms," to borrow Thornton's term, remained less problematic in the face of a common enemy, but articulating a positive movement towards a new society following the end of conflict proved challenging.

Deborah Jenson, in her essay "The African Character of the Haitian Revolution," describes how the identities of creole slaves and *affranchis* were distinct from those of African born slaves, primarily in terms of the social categories to which each understood themselves as belonging. Jenson describes a word, "nationner," meaning essentially "to nation," that described a process of collectivization practiced among the African-born slaves of Saint Domingue. While these communities provided a sense of social belonging to dislocated slaves, this was predicated on delimiting and defining the boundaries between insiders and outsiders. Jenson describes several cases where, following revolution, autonomously operating bands of African-born slaves came into conflict with the new state, some of which explicitly opposed to its rule. Consequently, she argues, "there is no reason to assume that African collectivities in the revolution and independence were politically compatible or that their strategies for mobility were uniform."[68]

The early slave revolution in Saint Domingue is as blurry as it is because the terms by which slaves, *affranchis,* and colonists understood the sides of the conflict cannot be coherently

[67] Ibid., 186.
[68] Deborah Jenson, "Jean-Jacques Dessalines and the African Character of the Haitian Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (2012): 618-624.

reconciled. The vocabularies of the different groups implicate ideologies which meant something far different depending on who was speaking. Royalism in Europe hoped for a return to tradition and a preservation of hierarchies, and while royalism in Saint Domingue could mean this for certain colonists, the way royalism was mobilized by the insurgents and the reasons for its appeal was coterminous with the end of slavery and the dissolution of racial and color hierarchies. In addition to the prevalence of monarchism in the African tradition, understanding themselves as "children of the King" introduces the symbolic intimacy of the domestic in relating themselves to the community of France, which may explain both the hostility of white royalists to the abolitionary cause and the appeal of the King for the slaves.[69] There was also a documented rumor among slave groups that the King had ordered the end of slavery, but the colonists contradicted his will, a notion which reinforced their faith in monarchy more generally. Perhaps equality under abstract ideals guaranteed in a constitution did not have the same sort of concrete significance as equality under the sovereignty of a benevolent king. In any case, the incompatible metrics of political legitimacy and the unintelligibility that Thornton observes between African and European political idioms complicated the establishment of a coherent political community.

Though the acting French colonial administrators had documented abolitionary sentiments, the August, 1793 act of abolition proved first and foremost an effort to consolidate Revolutionary France's control over a colony which was slipping from its grasp. The French position was incredibly tenuous; concessions to *affranchis* and insurrectionary slaves had alienated white colonists, while the piecemeal nature of the concessions earned the distrust of the two former groups. As a result, the proclamation of abolition did little at first, serving mostly to alienate the remaining loyal planters from the French cause while proving ineffective at winning

[69] Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History,* 111.

over rebelling slaves who remained suspicious of French authority in any form. Some propertied *affranchis* and white planters in the south and west rallied to the side of the English with their slaves, while rebelling slaves and certain pro-royalist colonists fought together under the banner of the Spanish in the north and east.

The leadership of the revolution began to crystallize as a result of the events of 1792-1793. During this period of confused allegiances and contradictory coalitions, the most significant leader of the revolution, Toussaint Louverture, took the penultimate step towards his ascension to the highest rank of leadership. Accounts of his early life have been contested, but James claims that Louverture was the grandson of an African chieftain whose father had been captured and sold into slavery. As a slave, Louverture had the name of Toussaint Breda, and James says that he achieved a desirable position as "steward of the livestock," a post "usually reserved for persons of a different upbringing, education and class".[70] For James, Louverture's experience as a leader on the plantation proved important for his future leadership in the revolution. However, in light of new archival evidence, others have recently argued that Toussaint was a freedman by the time of revolution, who owned his own slaves and had achieved upper-class status.[71] The recent revelations about his experience of both sides of slavery sheds new light on the character of his rule. Contemporarily renowned for his even-handedness and charisma among all sorts of people, Toussaint showed the kind of flexible diplomacy needed to unite a stratified colonial society.

The British invasion of Saint Domingue in 1793 resulted in the occupation of Port Republicain in the summer of 1794, as well as parts of the southwestern peninsula. The British

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[70] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution.* 91.
[71] Stewart King, "Toussaint L'Ouverture Before 1791: Free Planter and Slave-holder." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 3/4 (1997): 66-71.

occupation lasted more than five years, but remained largely unsuccessful as a conquering force, especially after Toussaint declared for France. The campaign against the British was led by Andre Rigaud, an *affranchi* leader of the south who was to become Toussaint's chief rival, in addition to Toussaint and his army. From 1797-1798, Rigaud confronted the British in the southern port town of Jeremie, while Toussaint and his forces laid siege to Port Republicain. The cost of the occupation for the British was incredibly high, and James notes that it stands as "the severest defeat that has befallen a British expeditionary force between the days of Elizabeth and the Great War."[72] 15,000 of the British force of 25,000 would die in Saint Domingue, more men than would be lost by the British at Waterloo. [73] In March of 1798, the British negotiated peace with Toussaint acting as the representative of French Saint Domingue.

While the campaign against the British was successful, Toussaint complained that his campaign was consistently setback by *affranchi* sympathizers. Toussaint himself describes how several recurring reverses befell his forces

> only owing to the perfidy of the men of colour (*affranchis*) of this district. Never have I experienced so many treasons... The ungrateful wretches have replied by seeking to deliver me to our enemies.[74]

Throughout the Haitian Revolution, cooperation among, let alone sovereignty over, the groups fighting the revolution was a struggle to achieve. The ascension to colonial leadership of a man popularly known as an ex-slave provoked hostility from members of the *ancien-libres,* those *affranchis* whose status before the insurrection lent itself to contempt for the former slaves now rising in the ranks. Like the *petits-blancs* before them*, affranchis* met the reconfiguration of long-standing social hierarchies with unease. This latent tension first manifested itself in

[72] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution,* 146.
[73] Geggus, "The Haitian Revolution," 39.
[74] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution,* 165.

duplicity in the campaign against the British before culminating in open conflict between leaders of the African slaves and the creolized *affranchis.*

Affranchis, as both victims and beneficiaries of the system of colonial slavery and its underlying discourse, wavered the most of any group during the revolution. Not quite belonging to the community of revolutionary slaves, often European educated but racially differentiated, they were caught between competing centripetal and centrifugal forces. James contends that the emerging issue "was no question of colour, but crudely a question of class, for those blacks who were formerly free stuck to the Mulattoes. Perhaps of some substance and standing in the old regime, they looked upon the ex-slaves as essentially persons to be governed."[75] Despite James' distinction, when class and color are conflated to the extent that they were and still are, the meanings evoked in color and class categories become one and the same.

b. "The War of Knives," "The Constitution of the French Colony of Saint Domingue," and Toussaint the Governor:

The relationship between *affranchis,* Republican authority, and the system of slavery in the colony contains certain contradictions that explains the contested position in which *affranchis* found themselves. While French Revolutionary ideals allowed *affranchis* increased leverage in forwarding claims with colonial authorities, the values of the French Revolution remained circumscribed and embroiled in the racist discourses underlying concepts of "Civilization" and their corresponding values. The *affranchis* resorted to their status as citizens in order to elide the prejudices their race invoked, but commitment to the rights of citizenship did not necessitate hostility to slavery. For example, an *affranchi* could invoke the values of liberty, equality, and

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[75] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 166.

fraternity in arguing for equal status with white colonists while at the same time possessing slaves and endorsing slavery. Their initial resistance did not connote the repudiation of slavery or even of colonialism necessarily, but rather was articulated against the French system of racial categorization which legally aligned *affranchis* with slaves based on their shared African descent. In this respect, France's abolition of slavery in consequence of its increasingly precarious hold on Saint Domingue did not presuppose the support of *affranchis* as a class. Geggus sums up their position most concisely when he observes that "the Republic had guaranteed their civil rights but then took away their property and offended their prejudices."[76]

The defeat of the British represented, for the moment, the end of external threats to Saint Domingue, but the issue remained of who would lead the colony for France. The two contenders were Toussaint, whose strength was concentrated in the predominantly African North and West, and Rigaud, who was based out of the *affranchi* controlled South. This struggle for authority culminated in The War of Knives (*Le Guerre des Couteaux*), the first civil conflict between the *affranchis* and the former slaves for control of political institutions.

Though not much has been said about The War of Knives in accounts of the Haitian Revolution, it remains a defining moment for the future of the Haitian State. The conflict pitted the two future rulers of the Empire of Haiti and the Kingdom of Haiti, Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henry Christophe under Toussaint, against the two first leaders of the Haitian Republic, Alexandré Petion and Jean-Pierre Boyer under Rigaud. Though the conflict between the contending parties was largely fought along color lines, the armies of the two sides were mostly made up of former slaves. Geggus argues that it was "in essence a regional power struggle," noting that *affranchis* who had fought under Toussaint for years switched sides to fight alongside

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[76] Geggus, David. "The Haitian Revolution," 42.

fellow *affranchis*.[77] James blames the instigation of the conflict on the interventions of hostile French officials. Through the duplicitous provocation of both sides, James argues, Toussaint and Rigaud were led to believe that each had the support of France in assuming the leadership of the colony, concluding that the issue of color in the conflict was entirely imposed rather than internally generated. Though Toussant had the responsible official deported, conflict between him and Rigaud escalated because of the provocations, first through the promulgation of hostile proclamations before developing into armed conflict.[78] The prominence of color divisions in the conflict is unquestionable, though the extent of its influence on the initiative of combatants remains uncertain. Both Toussaint and Rigaud were accused of hating the other on the basis of color prejudice, claims which both of them repudiated, but the color issue nevertheless emerged as a focal point in the conflict.

With the decline of white society in the colony, the privileged position which the *affranchis* had traditionally enjoyed over the slaves was increasingly tenuous. Carolyn Fick argues that the changes in revolutionary Saint Domingue placed the *affranchis* in the middle of competing forces:

> [they] were caught between the white colonists, who no longer exercised political power of any consequence, but who were still fairly strong because of their wealth and their commercial ties … and the newly freed blacks, who were dominant in the North and a good part of the West, and who were rapidly aspiring to political power…. The mass of black laborers, because of class affinities and racial identity, would… almost invariably give decisive weight to the side of the emergent black elite against the mulattoes in any conflict of significant political scope. More than superficially a race war… [it was] a struggle between two opposing interests or parties, between the former *affranchis,* who were massively mulatto, and the former slaves, who were massively black, as to which group would eventually determine the political and economic orientation of the new society, and in whose interests.[79]

[77] Ibid., 41.
[78] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. 226.
[79] Fick, *The making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*, 200.

For Fick, The War of Knives represents the first iteration of tensions between black and mulatto as a result of the reorganization of society, with the color lines more correlative than causal. A Haitian historian of the late 19th and early 20th century, Horace Pauléus Sannon, whom James and Fick both cite, argues similarly that the appearance of a conflict fought along color lines is deceptive, that *affranchis* were more sensitive to political developments because of their class rather than of their color, and that the color question was invoked only as a way of maintaining unity within each coalition:

> There was always also more of a political tradition among the men of colour, and a peculiar disposition, often noticed, which tended to make them particularly susceptible to all the hopes or anxieties which grew out of public events. It is this mental attitude which caused the struggle between the military chiefs to assume all the tendencies of a war of colour…. Toussaint L'Ouverture did not detest the Mulattoes any more than Rigaud hated the blacks. And if each of them defended himself badly from the contrary sentiments which they attributed to each other in this respect, it was because they needed, each of them, the united force of a party in a conflict where the parties were confounded with the classes and the classes with the colours.[80]

The color question in Haiti has often been explained by observers as evolving out of class divisions, generally rooting the prejudice primarily to differences in status and secondarily to an aesthetic inherited from the French. Even if this is true, that the color divisions as they manifested were more the result of colonial inheritances than they were of a native color prejudice, the meaning ascribed to color in the colonial circumstance outlived the colonial regime to the extent these prejudices were internalized. Further, though Rigaud and Toussaint may have earnestly repudiated the charges of color prejudice, it is clear that these divisions offered ample political currency for the mobilization of their respective followers.

In his book, *State Against Nation,* Michel-Rolph Trouillot observes that political meaning tends to operate through symbolic association rather than through any sort of rational logic or

[80] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 230-31.

"intellectual exercise in classification."[81] While a regional divide may very well have been the material cause of the conflict, as Geggus posits,[82] the color division provided the heuristic through which the conflict was understood by outsiders, insiders, and posterity alike. Indeed, a 19th century British visitor to the nation observed the "ill-concealed hatred" between blacks and mulattoes, and believed that "the independence of the country is at stake upon this question."[83] The divisiveness of the color question and its continued relevance to the revolutionary community even after independence represents one of the earliest iterations of the neocolonial predicament in Haitian history.

The outbreak of war witnessed early victories for Rigaud and his *affranchi* coalition, but the tides turned as the mass of his forces, ex-slaves themselves, ceased fighting as the lines of the conflict became evident. Rigaud and his two subordinates, Petion and Boyer, fled to France when it became clear that victory belonged to Toussaint, but this exile would be short-lived. The three years following the exile of Rigaud and his sympathizers represent the peak of Toussaint's rule. After consolidating his authority Toussaint instituted labor codes to maintain the plantations and revive pre-revolutionary levels of production. If earning freedom meant armed revolution against the violence of colonial slavery, preserving that freedom required maintaining significant features of the system just repudiated. The former slaves, now called "cultivators," were thus compelled to work on particular plantations, observing "with exactness, submission, and obedience, their duty in the same manner as soldiers" and that failure to do so would result in the kind of punishment given to "soldiers deviating from their duty."[84] So called "militarized agriculture," this regime of compulsory labor was enacted by Toussaint as a necessary measure

[81] Trouillot, *Haiti: State against Nation*, 136
[82] Geggus, "The Haitian Revolution," 39-42.
[83] Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National independence in Haiti*, 8.
[84] Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History,* 154.

to preserve his hard-fought gains. James notes one of the mottos Toussaint hoped to popularize: "The guarantee of the liberty of the blacks is the prosperity of agriculture."[85]

The dictatorial rule of Toussaint Louverture set precedents followed during the reign of many successors, the most significant of which were an authoritarian executive and the subordination of individual liberty to collective sovereignty. Regardless of Toussaint's own republican inclinations, in his "Constitution of the French Colony of Saint Domingue," Toussaint was made governor for life while at the same time establishing that every successor would be constrained by a five-year term. However, Toussaint's first three successors, Dessalines, Christophe, and Petion, still managed to appoint themselves head of state for life.

The Constitution promulgated under the Governorship of Toussaint attempted to reconcile certain tensions within colonial society. He guaranteed the rights of property for white plantation owners in parallel to his regime of compulsory labor. Among the more shocking clauses in the constitution is the provision allowing for the state to purchase laborers deemed "essential to the revival and expansion of agriculture," i.e. Africans from slave ships.[86] Though revolution eventuated in the abolition of slavery, the colony could not extricate itself from the trade networks that once made Saint Domingue "the Pearl of the Antilles," and these global pressures continued to affect the country in the absence of foreign political control.

The clause permitting the purchase of Africans from slave ships, together with the regime of militarized agriculture also laid out in the constitution, simultaneously illustrates the irreconcilable ruptures and continuities of post-abolitionary Saint Domingue with the slave society which proceeded it. Though the conditions of the "cultivators" under the regime of militarized agriculture was certainly less onerous than the conditions of slavery, as they were

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[85] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 186.
[86] Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History,* 162.

compensated with a share of the production, the compulsory aspects as well as the demandingness of plantation production proved uncomfortably familiar to some newly liberated slaves. James argues that it was not the regime of compulsory labor that was objected to, but rather the issue was "working for the white masters."[87] Louverture's guarantee of the rights of property for white plantation owners was an unpopular measure that invited criticism from his own subordinates. Toussaint's colonial constitution also made Catholicism the only religion to be "publicly professed," over and against the popular practice of vodou. For many *affranchis* as well as Toussaint, vodou represented an element of slave culture to be dispensed with in favor of reinforcing tenets of French society in the colony. The conciliatory attitude which underlay Toussaint's efforts to maintain property rights for certain white colonists, as well as his desire to cultivate French values, did not sit well with those revolutionaries who had taken up arms against French masters. The maintenance of these incongruences eventually culminated in a rebellion against the new colonial order laid out in Toussaint's constitution.

Toussaint's second-in-command at the time of the promulgation of his constitution, General Hyacinthe Moïse, became the most active opponent of some features of Toussaint's system. General Moïse complained that Toussaint "thinks he is King of San Domingo!": "Whatever my old uncle may do, I cannot bring myself to be the executioner of my colour. It is always in the interests of the metropolis that he scolds me; but these interests are those of the whites, and I shall only love them when they have given me back the eye that they made me lose in battle." [88] The conflict, rooted ultimately in opposing visions for the future, portended future tensions over the destiny of the revolutionary community that came to comprise the Haitian nation. Whether the new community was going to remain in the fold of European civilization as

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[87] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 275.
[88] Ibid., 267 -277.

a colony of France or reject it to chart its own course was undecided, and Toussaint's colonial constitution showed that he hoped to chart the former path. Moïse advocated for the redistribution of the large land-holdings of white proprietors, but Toussaint, committed to the model of plantation production, prevented the parceling out of plantation estates. A rebellion was thus fomented in the North against white masters and the maintenance of plantation estates, and while Moïse's role was not directly evident, his position of authority made him at least passively complicit, if not the active agitator. Toussaint, Dessalines, and Christophe, leaders of the slave rebellion, mobilized to crush an insurrection of discontented "cultivators" that had once belonged to their ranks, and Moïse was subsequently executed.[89]

The politics of revolutionary movements tend to be fickle, and the curbing of the early radicalism through an appeal to pragmatism is a stage common to many revolutions. James in part explains the divergence of Toussaint and Moïse as a result of an irreconcilable approach to the color question in society: "Toussaint favored the whites against the Mulattoes. Moïse sought to build an alliance between the blacks and the Mulattoes against the French."[90] The execution of Moïse, whom James calls "the soul of the insurrection," stands as Toussaint's fatal error in his attempt to translate colonial Saint Domingue into a viable, post-abolitionary French colony. The symbolism of color in the affair lent itself to the view that Toussaint was siding with the whites against the interests of the blacks, and the long-enduring faith of his followers was irreparably shaken. The compromise Toussaint attempted to negotiate between the revolutionary groups required the subordination of certain priorities to others, and the cohesion of the community was subsequently maintainable only by force.

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[89] Ibid., 276.
[90] Ibid., 277-78.

While the move from revolution back to a state of normalcy in the colony faced challenges within, the colony's move towards increased autonomy provoked concern in France, where revolution there had also taken its own conservative turn. In the years of Toussaint's rise to authority, France witnessed the ascendancy of Napoleon Bonaparte. International threats to France began to wane as the War of the Second Coalition wrapped up, and Napoleon thus turned his attention to Saint Domingue, an important source of wealth for France which had recently failed to live up to its name of "the Pearl of the Antilles." Despite Toussaint's best efforts to maintain the plantation model, new trade agreements with the United States as well as the destruction of the revolutionary period precipitated a sharp decline in the colony's resourcing of the metropolis. The mercurial political atmosphere of revolutionary France began to favor the reinstitution of slavery in the colonies, while some colonies had refused to enact emancipation altogether despite the imperial decree of 1794.

In 1801, Napoleon Bonaparte initiated the effort to reinstitute imperial control over Saint Domingue which had become increasingly autonomous under the governorship of Toussaint. Instructions given to General Emmanuel Leclerc, the leader of the expeditionary force dispatched by Napoleon, illustrates that deception was integral to the execution of the government's plans. The expedition was intended to operate over three phases: the first phase, consisting of fifteen to twenty days, provided for the expedition to organize and occupy strategic positions, and "reassure those of good intentions"; "the second phase is that during which, with the two armies prepared, we will pursue the rebels without mercy…;" "The third phase is that in

which Toussaint, Moyse, and Dessalines will no longer exist…"[91] Napoleon is reported to have said to Leclerc, "Rid us of these gilded negroes and we will have nothing more to wish for."[92]

While compromising the leadership of the colony was a central goal of the expedition, the means prescribed depended on how the expedition was received in the colony. If it were welcomed, Toussaint, Dessalines, and Moïse were to be sent to France and treated honorably so as to not incite any resistance; if resistance flared, they were to be hunted down and shot. A primary goal was to cripple the leadership, and to this end all black leaders "above the rank of captain" were to be deported. Among the expeditionary force were those adversaries exiled during the War of Knives, Rigaud, Petion, and Boyer. Their fate was also contingent on how the expedition was received: If no opposition was encountered, they were to be deported to Madagascar, but, "if there was fighting to be done… then they would be allowed to shed their share of the blood."[93] The French thus relied on the consent of their colonial allies in order to undermine any challenge to the authority of the metropolis, resorting to violence only if consent to their authority could not be achieved.

Some leaders in Saint Domingue sought to welcome Leclerc while others remained suspicious. In February, 1801, the expedition arrived on the coasts of the colony, and as landings began and positions were taken, allegiances remained unclear. In certain areas, the revolutionaries resisted, and in others, the French were peacefully received. General Christophe, a key subordinate of Toussaint, had himself almost allowed Leclerc's forces to peacefully land, and, between the wavering resistance and uncertain receptions, the army and the people did not know where things stood. The *ancien-libres,* those who had their freedom before revolution, did

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[91] Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents*. (Macmillan, 2006), 176.
[92] Dubois, *The Aftershocks of History,* 23.
[93] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 293-294.

not see the necessity of resistance and feared the turmoil and property destruction that further conflict would bring. Through cooption and conquest, the colony's leadership was thus divided and undermined. However, despite achieving control over most colonial institutions, popular resistance continued and Dessalines, Christophe, and Toussaint had yet to be captured.[94] The war now became a battle of attrition. Toussaint had lost the bulk of his army, but the mountains of Saint Domingue gave refuge to the resistance as they once did to the maroons.

Slowly, however, Toussaint's most high-ranking subordinates, Christophe and Dessalines, eventually submitted. Christophe had been the intermediary through whom Toussaint negotiated with Leclerc, and in April 1802, after more than a year of resistance, Christophe was dispatched to meet with Leclerc to discuss terms of peace. In these negotiations, Leclerc assured Christophe of his good-intentions, after which Christophe and his soldiers, along with their artillery, submitted to the French. Leclerc then made an offer of amnesty to Toussaint, allowing him to retain his rank, and Dessalines and the rest of the leadership followed soon after. [95] The peace was rather unexpected by both sides, and Toussaint returned to private life to manage his plantation. James argues that, despite the standing peace, Dessalines continued to secretly agitate for independence from the French. Part of his program involved turning the French on Toussaint, which he did by ingratiating himself to Leclerc and sowing doubts about Toussaint's intentions.[96]

Toussaint and his family were arrested on June 7th, 1802. James reports the last words he spoke in Saint Domingue as he was embarking for his exile: "In overthrowing me, you have cut down in San Domingo only the trunk of the tree of liberty. It will spring up again by the roots for

[94] Ibid., 326-332.
[95] Ibid., 333.
[96] Philippe R. Girard, "Jean-Jacques Dessalines and the Atlantic System: A Reappraisal," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (2012): 549-582.

they are numerous and deep."[97] Toussaint would meet his end in the Fort-de-Joux prison near the French-Swiss border on April 7th, 1803, dying as a result of the poor living conditions. Despite his betrayal by France, Toussaint continued to petition Napoleon, ensuring him of his unyielding faithfulness to France and the French Revolution.[98] Toussaint is a tragic figure for James, for "attempting the impossible—the impossible that was for him the only reality that mattered." Liberty and equality for the blacks was irreconcilable with the existing terms of colonial exploitation, and yet, James holds, abandoning French civilization was equally problematic. He eulogizes Toussaint for attempting this compromise:

> Toussaint was a whole man. The man into which the French Revolution had made him demanded that the relation with the France of liberty, equality, fraternity and the abolition of slavery without a debate, should be maintained. What revolutionary France signified was … the highest stage of social existence that he could imagine. It was not only the framework of his mind. No one else was so conscious of *its practical necessity in the social backwardness and primitive conditions of life around him*. Being the man he was, by nature, and by a range and intensity of new experiences such as is given to few, that is the way he saw the world in which he lived. His *unrealistic attitude to the former masters*, at home and abroad, sprang not from any abstract humanitarianism or loyalty, but from a recognition that *they alone had what San Domingo society needed*.

James portrays Toussaint's choice as between the necessary values of civilization, iterated in the French Revolution and maintainable only through continued connection with France and Europe, and the threat France and Europe posed to the sovereignty and liberty of the people of Saint Domingue. [99] The tragedy was that "civilization" was and is the exclusive production of the West, making it at once the simultaneous source of salvation and exploitation.

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[97] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 334.
[98] Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History,* 192.
[99] Ibid., 290.

c. Independence, Dessalines, and the Empire of Haiti:

If Dessalines could see so clearly and simply, it was because the ties to French civilisation were the slenderest. He saw what was under his nose so well because he saw no further. Toussaint's failure was the failure of enlightenment, not of darkness.[100]

C.L.R James— *The Black Jacobins*

The plans for the Saint Domingue Expedition proved overly optimistic, and the French consistently underestimated the enemy whom they faced. In May of 1802, Napoleon issued a decree reinstating slavery in Martinique. News reached Saint Domingue that August, and the resistance which had never truly been quelled grew again. General Leclerc's situation grew more desperate in the fall of 1802. In mid-October, Dessalines and Christophe turned on the French once again, but only after widespread rebellions. Petion and Boyer, the future first and second leader of the Haitian Republic, also turned on the French after having campaigned with Leclerc against Toussaint, Dessalines, and Christophe. Rigaud had been deported by Leclerc in keeping with his plans, and news of this betrayal most likely informed their decision. In consequence, the former adversaries from the War of Knives aligned for the first time.

Leclerc, upon his death from Yellow Fever in November, 1802, was succeeded by General Vicomte de Rochambeau, and the rest of the revolutionary struggle was "unparalleled in brutality," as Joan Dayan observes in her visceral book on the Haitian past, *Haiti, History, and the Gods.* In the book, Dayan quotes King Christophe's "Manifesto of the King," in which the king describes Rochambeau's "new machine of destruction," a gas chamber which suffocated using sulphur smoke. Dogs were starved and set upon blacks in front of audiences in arenas.[101] A French officer fighting in the final months reported that "drowning is the usual way of putting to death black prisoners. I've been told that, on several occasions, thousands were drowned at the

[100] Ibid., 288.
[101] Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*. (Univ. of California Press, 1996), 157.

same time… Humanity is a casualty here." His report goes on to list cruelties too numerous to recount here.[102]

Dessalines captured Le Cap in November 1803, causing Rochambeau's capitulation, and his 1804 Declaration of Independence spelled out the first vision for the nation of Haiti. The document's most immediate concern is expressing hatred for the French and iterating threats for vengeance, qualified by concern "that a missionary spirit does not destroy our work; let us allow our neighbors to breathe in peace… let us not, as revolutionary firebrands, declare ourselves the lawgivers of the Caribbean…. they have no vengeance to claim from the authority that protects them." Conscious of the need for good relations, Dessalines tempers his condemnation of everything French in order to assure neighboring imperial powers that Haiti was no threat. The document concludes by noting that the generals gathered for the ceremony "have all sworn to posterity, to the universe, to forever renounce France, and to die rather than to live under its domination."[103]

Four months after the proclamation of independence, Dessalines ordered the massacre of remaining French colonists. Around three thousand men, women, and children were killed. In a proclamation titled "Liberty or Death," Dessalines offers some explanation of his motives:

> Yes, we have rendered to these true cannibals war for war, crime for crime, outrage for outrage; Yes, I have saved my country – I have avenged America. The avowal I make of it in the face of earth and heaven, constitutes my pride and my glory. – Of what consequence to me is the opinion which contemporary and future generations will pronounce upon my conduct?[104]

For Dessalines, the massacre was of symbolic necessity, a step that needed to be taken in order to consummate the repudiation of the French. Regardless of the judgment of history, which

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[102] Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History,* 178.
[103] Dubois and Garrigus. *Slave revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents*. 190.
[104] Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History,* 181.

Dessalines anticipates but disregards, the dramatic rupture with everything French was meant to silence French influences and forever foreclose the potential for any kind of domination, political, economic, or cultural.

Crowned Emperor Dessalines I on May 20, 1805, he has remained a controversial figure for posterity. Thomas Madiou, a Haitian historian of the 19th century, considered him a "thunderbolt of arbitrariness," and contemporary European commentators considered him "barbaric." [105] Even James tends to emphasize his brutishness against Toussaint's "enlightenment." A former slave who became first ruler of the new nation, the direction Dessalines set for the country was quickly reversed. As a black and former slave, he had witnessed the privileges enjoyed by *ancien-libres* and hoped to challenge former inequities, proclaiming that the "sons of colonists" are now equal with "my poor blacks," while also warning the *ancien-libres* that "we have *all* fought against the whites. The goods that we have won in spilling our blood belong to every one of us. I intend that it be shared fairly."[106]

Often characterized as arbitrary or barbaric, Dessalines perhaps represents more the forceful iteration of that which had been repressed under French rule, as well as under Toussaint's iteration of Republicanism. The protection of property Toussaint accorded to the remaining white colonists was matched by Dessalines' constitutional provision prohibiting the ownership of property by any white foreigner. Where Toussaint's Constitution made Catholicism the only "publicly professed" religion, Dessalines was a known practitioner of voodoo, established freedom of worship, and provided for no state sanctioned religion in his constitution; while Toussaint negatively prohibited discrimination on the basis of color, Dessalines' constitution provided that all "the Haytians shall hence forward be known only by the generic

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[105] Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, 21.
[106] Ibid., 19.

appellation of Blacks," consolidating society to a single racial category rather than just prohibiting racial discrimination among implicitly defined color based castes.[107] Indeed, Dessalines went as far as to forbid the use of any phenotypical epithets among the members of his staff.[108] Dessalines hoped to positively define and unite the new community, while Toussaint hoped to negate the differences which had divided it. Intent on dissolving the privileges and prejudices endowed by the French, Dessalines moved towards making a new society independent of French influence. Tousssaint, "convinced that a population of slaves recently landed from Africa could not attain to civilisation by "going it alone," dramatically diverged in this respect from the man who succeeded him.[109]

Two separate impulses are in play here regarding the role of European civilizational values in informing the political dispositions in Haitian politics. For Dessalines, the winning of Haiti and its revolutionary politics are inherently in opposition to the European world. While he pragmatically endeavored to maintain positive relations with imperial powers other than France,[110] he nevertheless saw Haiti as standing alone. Toussaint, for his part, maintained faith in the idea that a colonial Saint Domingue of free persons, belonging to the community of the French nation, could be realized. For him, freedom for the people of Saint Domingue would represent the final achievement of the French Revolution. Where Dessalines understood the process of revolution as the self-definition of a new community, Toussaint understood it as the extension of French identity to an already existing proto-French citizenry. Toussaint's affinity and Dessalines disdain are not contradictory, however, but both point back to the initial fracturedness of the revolutionary community, and the divisions between creole and bossale,

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[107] Dubois and Garrigus, *Slave revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents*, 193.
[108] Troillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation,* 46.
[109] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 289-90.
[110] Girard, "Jean-Jacques Dessalines and the Atlantic System: A Reappraisal," 549-552.

ancien-libres and *nouveau-libres,* mulatto and black. In this sense, the continued resonance of pre-revolutionary metrics of identity lent themselves to persistent divisions within the new national community that Toussaint hoped to erase and Dessalines hoped to overwrite.

Dessalines' rule came to an end as the result of an assassination orchestrated by Alexandre Petion, one of the mulatto generals exiled with Rigaud and who returned with Leclerc. Dessalines, a man forced into slavery who died an emperor, remains one of the most interesting and controversial figures in Haitian history. The formidable challenges he faced in uniting the revolutionary community were too great, and, after his death, subsequent Constitutions dropped the clause consolidating all Haitians to a single racial category. Dessalines is remembered as a founding father of Haiti, and the national anthem "La Dessalinienne" commemorates his name. The defiance which Dessalines represented has earned him veneration in the vodou pantheon, where he has been deified as "Ogou Dessalines," a fusion of the god of war, "Ogou," with the memory of Dessalines' character.[111] Dayan attributes Dessalines' precarious political position to the diverging interests within the post-revolutionary community: "Caught between competing social forces…, [Dessalines] was unable to count on support from either the Haitian oligarchy or the masses of laborers, and his regime rapidly unraveled."[112] A victim of the growing rift between an emerging political elite and the revolutionary masses, Dessalines undertook "an impossible reform of the mentality of the ruling classes" in articulating his vision for the nation.[113] Trouillot observes that "most *ancien-libres* were against Dessalines," and, due to their "greater familiarity with western customs and values," Dessalines' tolerance regarding issues such as freedom of religion were "anathema to those who thought they had a natural monopoly

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[111] Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, 53-54.
[112] Ibid., 49.
[113] Ibid., 27.

on civilization."[114] His "adamant refusal to be coerced into spectacles of civility"[115] tarnished his image among contemporaries and peers, contributing to his downfall, but his defiance against France, his public embrace of vodou, and his effort to unite the people of the new Haitian nation behind a shared sense of racial identity in the face of pervasive racism was a powerful act of resistance against the system of colonial exploitation and African slavery.

The Haitian Revolution began in fits and starts, and allegiances were continuously divided among the various leaders, the men who after the revolution came to occupy the institutions of the Haitian state. Some fought on the side of the royalists, others for the Jacobins; some sided with the Spanish, others with the English, and still others with the French. These conflicting and ever-shifting allegiances often placed the future leaders of the Haitian state on opposite sides of the battlefield. This disunity, at best, and adversarialism, at worst, of the leadership during the revolutionary years significantly shaped the contested politics of 19th century Haiti.

The lack of a unified sense of purpose among the groups fighting the revolution explains this, and the coalition which made the final push towards independence ultimately held incompatible visions for the state. Getachew observes that the Haitian Declaration of Independence, "unlike its American and French counterparts," was "announced after the fact," and, subsequently, revolutionary purpose could only be negotiated retrospectively:

> In the Haitian case, the declaration confirms and seeks to legitimate what has already been achieved, but in the American case it precedes the War of Independence. Thus, while the revolution culminated in the abolition of slavery and the independence of Haiti, these aims were not announced beforehand and they were not even fully anticipated by the actors themselves. [116]

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[114] Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation,* 46.
[115] Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods,* 20.
[116] Getachew, "Universalism After the Post-Colonial Turn: Interpreting the Haitian Revolution," 840-41.

The translation of the revolutionary community into a coherent national community was thus not presupposed by the revolution's success, as the multiplicity of the interests of revolutionary participants remained irreconcilable. Never wholly united in the beginning, the latent tensions in the revolutionary coalition became manifest following independence.

3. From Colony to Nation

a. One Nation, Many States: Haiti through the 19th Century

After Dessalines' death in 1806, the state fractured along the same lines which had periodically divided the revolutionary community. General Christophe and an emerging black military elite founded a kingdom in the northern part of the country, while former *affranchis* under Petion's leadership maintained a republic in the south. Up until 1820, the year of King Christophe's death, Haiti was divided into a black kingdom in the north and a mulatto republic in the south. In 1822, the country was reunited under President Boyer, who also brought eastern Santo Domingo under Haitian control in the following years.

As an agricultural powerhouse, colonial Saint Domingue derived its wealth from the land through the ultimate exploitation of labor, enslavement. Though slavery had been abolished, the land and agriculture were still understood as the most viable avenue of economic development. From the leadership's viewpoint, the land needed careful management and the structured operation of labor for the realization of its fullest productive potential. The maintenance of a large standing military because of continuing fear of renewed French conquest meant the state also needed significant revenue, and this need was reflected in the government's approach to labor.[117] Under Toussaint Louverture and Dessalines, labor regulations were promulgated

[117] Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 44-46.

mandating the continued labor of former slaves on the plantations. Carolyn Fick terms the political mediation between the new found liberty and the desire for plantation production as a "plantation citizenship." Beginning with the abolitionary decree issued by French colonial administrators, subsequent emancipatory declarations constituted "a series of work codes that would be promulgated throughout the post-emancipation era to define the duties and circumscribe the rights of Saint Domingue's former slaves. For the plantation labourers, the rights of citizenship are exercised on the plantation and within the confines of the plantation economy..."[118]

The government's early efforts to maintain the plantation regime perhaps represents the first act alienating the people from official authority. The issue of land carried a symbolic dimension for the former slaves, and Trouillot argues that "the acquisition of family land and the laborers' right to the product of the labor on such land were the terms under which freedom was first formulated in the history of the nation." Under slavery, the only modicum of liberty slaves had was the cultivation of personal plots of land, and, as mentioned earlier, the first slave insurrections asked only for extra days to engage in personal cultivation rather than an end to slavery.[119] In consequence, there was little willingness among the *nouveau-libres* slaves to engage in sharecropping on plantations following independence. The brutalities though which the slave system operated gave the plantation regime a justified nefariousness in the eyes of the slaves: "Take away the compulsions of slavery, and the motives for anyone to do the intensive labor required for cash crops like sugar or coffee quickly disappear... The African population was very resistant to acquiring European-style needs… If one could not turn them into

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[118] Fick, "The Haitian Revolution and the Limits of Freedom: Defining Citizenship in the Revolutionary Era," 401.
[119] Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation,* 39-40.

consumers, one could not make them work without force…"[120] The drop-in sugar production twenty years into independence illustrates the dramatic reconfiguration of agricultural production that occurred. In 1804, Haiti produced 47.6 million pounds of sugar. By 1825, this figure had dropped to a meagre 2,020 pounds.[121]

Since independence, the plantation-model has never been successfully revived in Haiti. The last government sponsored effort came in 1825, with the institution of the Rural Code under the government of President Boyer. Like the past "work codes," Boyer's law criminalized idleness and provided that agricultural workers remain tied to a plantation, barring them from engaging in other kinds of commerce.[122] Though Boyer's code functionally failed to fulfill its purpose, it remains symbolic of the divide between urban and rural that emerged in 19th century Haiti along the same lines that had once divded *affranchis* and slaves. As a law, the rural code applied only to non-urban areas, demonstrating that the rights and obligations of citizens were not equivalent across urban and rural spheres. Just as *affranchi*'s rights of citizenship had been impinged upon by Colonial Authorities before the revolution, the rights of the Haitian rural peasantry were similarly circumscribed under Boyer's code.

The transition from colonial mercantilism to integration within a global capitalist system was a process fraught with consequence for the future orientation of Haitian society. In light of the failure to maintain the plantation system by force, the Haitian government developed a new approach to generating state revenue. What they created is what Trouillot calls a "republic for merchants," which erected a division between the rural masses of Haiti, and an urban elite and their attendant middle class. As the plantation model and sugar production declined, new taxes

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[120] Madison S. Bell, "Toussaint Between Two Worlds." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 11, no. 2 (2005): 12-13.
[121] Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation,* 50.
[122] Ibid., 48-50.

on coffee were instituted to fill the state coffers. The targeting of coffee is significant because, following abolition, coffee cultivation became the source of livelihood for Haiti's rural majority. In 1810, 75% of government revenue was derived from taxes on coffee, and in 1887, 100% of government revenue came from coffee. One Haitian politician observed "that in Haiti, the most productive, the most useful class is surely the peasantry. After all, is it not this class alone that pays taxes? Is it not they who bear all the nation's costs?"[123]

The gradual siphoning of wealth from the country over the course of the 19th century simultaneously provoked continuing internal unrest, which in turn triggered interventions by foreign powers on behalf of their resident merchants. Over the course of the 19th century, Haitian waters were violated over twenty times by the intrusion of foreign governments extorting agreements from Haiti on behalf of their citizens.[124] Extraction reached its breaking point in the politically tumultuous years before 1915, eventually culminating with the Marine invasion of Haiti's shores and U.S. bankers' invasion of the Haitian national treasury.

b. The Revolutionary Past in the Politics of 19th Century Haiti

In April 1804, Dessalines made an official declaration to the people of Haiti about his hopes for the national community. Dessalines, with a remarkable sense of forethought, urges that the community cannot become divided along color lines as it had been in the past: "Blacks and coloreds, you whom the refined duplicity of Europeans sought so long to divide, who today make up … but one family, have no doubt that your perfect reconciliation needed to be sealed with the blood of our executioners…. [Unity] is the secret of being invincible." [125] Dessalines

[123] Ibid., 59, 63.
[124] Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation,* 57.
[125] Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History,* 181.

recognized that the divide and conquer strategy that upheld the colonial regime and to which the revolutionary community had been vulnerable remained a threat following independence. His attempt at the racial consolidation of the national community reflects these concerns, but the gravity of European intellectualism maintained a decentering pull on the Haitian political elite in spite of his warnings.

In 1915, the Haitian politician Philippe Soudré Dartiguenave was appointed President under the government constituted by U.S. Marines. Trouillot reports an anecdote in which the President, "weeping alone in front of a bust of Dessalines—a symbol of unyielding nationalism—started to rail against the Marines and "their National City Bank." Speaking of the nationalist hero, the most foreign-controlled of all Haitian chiefs of state said through his tears: "He alone was right.""[126]

Despite Dessalines' warning, the political factions which emerged in Haitian politics over the course of the 19th century, as their names illustrate, tended to turn on the question of color. In this period a *mûlatrisme* political philosophy came into conflict with a "*noiriste* theory of power," but each harken back to the initial fissures within the revolutionary community. Trouillot explains the two philosophies:

> Whereas *noirisme* tends to make explicit references to skin color, *mulâtrisme* avoids them at all cost. After independence, light-skinned politicians systematically denied the existence of color prejudice… To be sure, they first tried, in vain, to associate Saint-Domingue mulattoes with the leadership of the Haitian revolution; but once that strategy failed, *mulâtrisme* capitalized on the illusion of competence… "Le pouvoir aux plus capables" ("Power to the most competent").[127]

Necessarily underlying the *mûlatrisme* view of political legitimacy was the construction and elaboration of a "mulatto myth" of the Haitian past. David Nicholls explored the dynamics of

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[126] Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation,* 31.
[127] Ibid., 46.

this legend of the past, and he argues that "mulatto historians in the mid-nineteenth century developed" a view of the Haitian past "calculated to strengthen the position of the ruling class and to legitimate its ascendancy."[128] Integral to this view is the notion that "the ignorant blacks" had been "instruments of [the whites] policy," while "the true patriots, the mulattoes, had resisted the advances of the foe."[129]

In this fashion, past colonial hierarchies were resurrected and maintained under new terms in consequence of the divisions between *ancien-libres* and *nouveau-libres*. Beginning with Ogé's disassociation from those "negroes in the condition of servitude," *ancien-libres* continued to privilege their European lineage at the expense of any African heritage. As Reinhardt incisively sums up,

> "their identification with their white racial heritage and their sense of filiation to the French led free coloreds to eventually fall victim to yet another kind of domination through the very achievement of their political rights… Embracing the ideology of their liberators, who imposed the erasure of oppression and violence from their collective memory, free coloreds fully assumed and even promoted the forgetting of their past. In exchange for the Republic's universalistic ideals of liberty, freedom, and equality, the memory of their persistent and successful struggle for equality was suppressed."[130]

The "mulatto legend of the past" and the privileging of European heritage represent two sides of the same coin. Inherent to the "mulatto legend of the past" is a sense of the inferiority of African cultural practice, and this legend took the initiative for revolution away from the slaves and ascribed it primarily to the *affranchis.* The relationship with European culture gave the *affranchis* their "love of liberty" that they then passed down to the blacks.[131] In this schema, European culture becomes the only possible iteration of "civilization" at the expense of potential cultural

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[128] David Nicholls, "A Work of Combat: Mulatto Historians and the Haitian Past, 1847-1867," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 16, no. 1 (1974): 16.
[129] Ibid., 23.
[130] Reinhardt, *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean*, 108.
[131] Nicholls, "A Work of Combat: Mulatto Historians and the Haitian Past, 1847-1867," 29.

alternatives. Though *affranchis* and the *ancien-libres* after them objected to racial discrimination against Africans as a race, they nevertheless demonstrated a preference for the understood universalism of European ideals over "crude" and "uncivilized" African cultural practices.

The emergence of liberalism in the 18th and 19th century as a political force is remarkable for the extent to which it accommodated existing colonial hierarchies, and, in some instances, justified their continuation. Professor Uday S. Mehta of the City University of New York has explored how liberalism's nominal inclusivity plays out in practical application in her insightful essay, "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion." In the essay, she explores how liberalism's theoretical pretensions to inclusion and universality often result in real-world outcomes of exclusion and marginalization. Taking John Locke's *Treatises* as a case-study, Mehta demonstrates how the universal basis of liberalism reflected in philosophies of natural rights are immediately qualified by "a thicker set of social credentials that constitute the real bases of political inclusion," which operates in "reference to the "manifest" political incompetence of those to be excluded and justified by a plethora of anthropological descriptions that serve to buttress the claim of incompetence."[132] The delegitimization of non-European cultural practices in 19th century Haiti reflects the process Mehta describes. Vodou was understood by the political elite as the very "antithesis" of civilization, and decrying the lack of "development" among the Haitian people was a common refrain of the political elite.[133]

For all the claims to universalism inherent in contemporary philosophies of natural right and its ensuing liberalism, the application of these rights in practice nevertheless carry cultural baggage particular to Europe. As Derrida expresses in his characteristically circular fashion, western culture is obsessed with universalizing its particularities:

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[132] Uday S. Mehta, "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion," *Politics & Society* 18, no. 4 (1990): 429.
[133] Laurent Dubois, "Vodou and History." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 01 (2001): 92.

> "What is metaphysics? A white mythology which assembles and reflects Western culture: the white man takes his own mythology (that is, Indo-European mythology), his *logos*—that is, the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form of that which it is still his inescapable desire to call Reason.
>
> What is white mythology? It is metaphysics which has effaced in itself that fabulous scene which brought it into being, and which yet remains, active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible drawing covered over in the palimpsest."[134]

That "metaphysics" which remains "active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible drawing covered over in the palimpsest," describes the process by which neocolonialism perpetuated the form of colonial hierarchies under new rhetorical tautologies. The metaphor of a palimpsest is powerful here, in that the essential structure of colonialism remains while a westernized humanism provides an overwritten veneer of moral justification.

The mulatto legend of the past thus justified the ascendancy of the *ancien-libres* into the political elite, and their claim to rule was based on the principle, "Le pouvoir aux plus capables."[135] This faith in a notion of competence was thought an objective measure of deciding who gets to rule, but, in reality, there was a pervasive conflation of European culture with supposedly universal notions of rationality. The notion of "competency" in this context is thus not a neutral choice of values. 'Civilization,' that concept which the West invented to distinguish its superiority and justify its domination, is an ideal which subsumes alternative socio-cultural practices under its antithesis, "savagery" or "barbarity," foreclosing the potential for viable

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[134] Jacques Derrida, quoted from, Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, and Sybil Kein. *Light, Bright, Damn Near White: Race, the Politics of Genealogy, and the Strange Case of Susie Guillory*. ProQuest Information and Learning, 2005. 252.

[135] Nicholls, "A Work of Combat: Mulatto Historians and the Haitian Past, 1847-1867," 126.

alternatives. The dialectical development of the concepts of "civilization" and "barbarity," which initially mandated the material expansion of western society and justified African slavery, continued to exercise an influence over the former colonized, the ideological corollary of the material act of colonization.

The values the Haitian political elite articulated in Haitian constitutions over the course of the 19th century reflect the consequences of European cultural hegemony and its coercive civilizational imperative. Drawn largely from the ranks of those who were free before the independence movement, most early leaders of the Haitian state endeavored to cultivate a national culture made in the image of France and Europe. In the 19th century since 1804, Haitian constitutions enshrined the French language as the official language of Haiti despite the vast majority of the people's lack of fluency, and, since 1806, established Catholicism as the sole official religion with periodic state-sanctioned suppression of vodou, the religion of the majority. Michel Leris explains this phenomenon in Hegelian terms, as "the consequence of the replacement of the repressed [African] spirit in the consciousness of the slave by an authority symbol representing the Master, a symbol implanted in the subsoil of the collective group and charged with maintaining order in it as a garrison controls a conquered city."[136] In this way, the physical barriers overcome in the revolutionary struggle were sustained in the continued preeminence of western thought and values, as well as in the continuing psychological consequences of colonial subjugation and racism.

The very fact that there are competing versions of the Haitian past indicates the fragmented nature of views of the Haitian past. A strained relationship with the colonial and revolutionary past has enabled the continued ascendancy of Western culture, as the "mulatto

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[136] Michel Leris, "Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haïti," *Les Temps Modernes*, February 1950. 1346.

legend" demonstrates. Li-Chun Hsiao has written about the challenges of negotiating "postcolonial trauma" and the resulting social inertia which results, observing that colonial pasts often remain in a sort of historical limbo: "Nonhistory" is, as it were, an empty place produced by a violent discontinuation, a traumatic dislocation, that foregrounds the limit of the representation of the historical narrative as continuum. Precipitously discontinued, the traumatic event keeps returning to and encircling the same (empty) place in history, as if attempting to fill the gap."[137] The mixed history of creole society, with sons of colonists and former slaves merging into a new, single community, posed fundamental challenges in the collectivization of these previously stratified groups. Mediating a common and shared history was fraught by two essentially irreconcilable notions of the past, which relates more broadly with the role of power in the production of history.

For Hsiao, the polar expressions of Haitian history in the 19th and early 20th centuries, represented by the *noiriste* and *mulatre* view of history, is expressive of the traumatic aspect of that history:

> Since trauma cannot be subjected to conscious, voluntary recollection, the traumatic event can only return or be invoked in its variegated, symptomatic forms, transformed or rendered unintelligible, except for the palpable power it holds over the traumatized subject. Remembering trauma, therefore, can never be an act of retrieving or reconstructing the traumatic event because the traumatic event itself is marked by an inherent latency or unintelligibility. Hence there exists an irreducible impossibility with regard to representation…. For the Caribbeans… 'the past is lost but omnipresent'; that is, they have 'forgotten without forgetting.'

The traumas of the colonial system in Saint Domingue were not equal between the groups that came to compose the Haitian nation. Following independence, the *nouveau-libres* were marginalized by those *ancien-libres* who had been integral to the maintenance of slavery in the

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[137] Mehta, "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion," 72.

first place. Reckoning with this moral culpability would have strained the community's coherence and undermined the political claims of the *ancien-libres.* The politicization of history in Haitian politics is symptomatic of these issues.

Catherine A. Reinhardt explores the issue of memory and history in the Caribbean in her book *Claims to Memory.* The structure of the book is based on the notion that memories of slavery are irreconcilably fractured, where particular memories operate within different "realms of memory," each with their own peculiarities and privileges, silences and remembrances. In her introduction, she describes the process by which memory acts within defined communities:

> A group within a given society can reconstruct its past at any given moment by relying on the social memory of the group at large. However, society can only survive if there is sufficient unity among the different groups and individuals that comprise it. In order to achieve this unity, society erases from its memory those recollections that might separate groups and individuals too far from one another.[138]

The peculiarity of the Haitian case is that its national past was not just reconstructed in the way Reinhart describes; it was in large part invented. The name of Haiti, derived from the word for "mountainous island" in the language of the native Taino people, mobilized the distant past of indigenous residents who had almost entirely perished by the time of African slavery in Hispaniola, and certainly by the time of revolution. David Geggus observes that locating national origins in an indigenous past was an attempt to reconcile tensions between the creolized and African populations of young Haiti.[139] Laying claim to an ancient but largely blank past in order to define and limit a community which had no natural coherence at its inception was also a way of reaching beyond the immediate past of slavery, an institution the experience of which defined all the citizens of the new nation of Haiti, albeit in the irreconcilable, fragmentary way described

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[138] Reinhardt, *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean*, 9-10.
[139] Geggus, "The Naming of Haiti," 45-47.

by Reinhardt. While no Haitian leader has ever suggested the return of slavery following independence, the specter of slavery's memory nevertheless did not haunt all Haitian's equally. The increase in marronage after independence illustrates how contested revolutionary experiences and slavery's past were, in which newly liberated slaves fled post-revolutionary Saint Domingue's plantations and abandoned its society.[140] Further, the intentional erasure of the *affranchis* role in suppressing the slave revolution iterated in the "mulatto legend" underscores the tensions bearing on the national community.

The contested site of slavery's memory, combined with the Eurocentrism of the *mulâtre* class explains in part the continuing stratification in Haitian society. Trouillot argues there was a hierarchy of contempt between the West and Haiti, and between Haitian leaders and the Haitian people, noting "Haitian leaders showed contempt for the masses" as "European and U.S. leaders showed contempt for all Haitians, leaders and masses alike..."[141] The story of how the stratified colonial society of Saint Domingue evolved into a nation divided along color lines, but nevertheless united against slavery and racism, exposes the dynamics of neocolonialism that have affected Haiti to this day. Despite the abolition of slavery and repudiation of colonialism achieved by the revolution, the extent to which colonial hierarchies were replicated and repeated under new rhetorical tautologies after Haiti won its sovereignty sheds light on the forces leading to the state's 20th and 21st century dilemmas. A reason for the efficacy of neocolonial tautologies rests in the contingent circumstances of revolution, during which the people of Saint Domingue came together against slavery and foreign aggression without a broader shared purpose. In consequence, moving from the repudiation of a common enemy to the positive articulation of a

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[140] Robert Fatton, "The Haitian Authoritarian "Habitus" and the Contradictory Legacy of 1804." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 10, no. 1 (2004): 34.
[141] Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation*, 50.

new society was a challenge in the beginning of Haitian political history. From this beginning and as a result of continuing foreign belligerence, competing hopes for the state have continued to play out against each other.

c. The Past in the Present: Neocolonialism and the Univocality of History

The initial differences between the two sides of the revolution, the *ancien-libres* and the *nouveau-libres,* have continued to reiterate themselves since the declaration of independence, and President Aristide's deposal in 2004 is the most recent consequence of how these differences have continued to play out. As mentioned in the preface, President Aristide, who considers himself a champion of the black masses, has written about what he calls "mental slavery" in Haitian history. The prognosis he offers of neocolonialism and its internal actors presents a rather Manichean view of Haitian history, in which a small class in Haitian politics has preyed upon the society as a whole:

> The psychological obsessions and inferiority complexes of internal colonization prevented the colonized from understanding that a transfer of class does not mean a change of self or identity. Such mental slaves, then as now, live in a near permanent state of identity crisis. As feelings of inferiority weaken their sense of identity, they constantly look to the white master with whom they identify…. More than 200 years later, Haitian identity is still split, with the great mass of the Haitian people on one side, and a small elite who remain identified with colonizers on the other. In 2004, Toussaint's descendants experienced the destructive power of this split. White neocolonial forces, allied with today's Haitian mental slaves, vowed to use violence to disrupt and prevent the bicentennial commemoration of the very events around which Haitian mass national identity was formed.[142]

Even after 200 years of independence, the Haitian political community has remained fractured along the same fissures that obstructed the revolutionary community's eventual coalescence. Though Aristide's commentary should be taken with a grain of salt, given his political stake in

[142] Jean-Bertrand Aristide and Nick Nesbitt. *The Haitian Revolution*. (London: Verso, 2008), xiv-xix

the situation about which he wrote, his perspective as a participant nevertheless offers insight into a historical feature of Haitian political society.

As a historian, Michel Rolph Trouillot has taken a more measured approach towards the past. Without extending sympathy to the past ruling classes, he nevertheless acknowledges their ambivalence about situations of exploitation. He argues that the "mental slaves" Aristide indicts are not deliberately plotting to exploit the Haitian people, as the example of the weeping President Dartiguenave illustrates. The two oppositional positions which developed in 19th century Haitian politics, the *mulâtre* and the *noiriste*, rested respectively on a contested interpretation of the nation's past and the role imperial powers played. At issue are two conceptions of the West at odds with each other, the West of the Enlightenment and the West of colonialism. The discourse of the European enlightenment and the West's claim to civilization and progress is at odds with the legacy of colonialism and its corresponding brutalities, such that the West paradoxically represents the model for future progress as well as the cause of exploitation. Unable to challenge colonial legacies except from a discourse created in the West, articulating a vision for the future was fraught by a strained relationship with a past that had different implications for *anien-libres* and *nouveau-libres*.

Trouillot has explored the role of power in the mediation of the Haitian past, describing two processes by which the Haitian past has been historically mediated: "formulas of erasure," which "erase directly the fact of a revolution," and "formulas of banalization," which "tend to empty the Singular events of the revolution of their revolutionary content" in his book, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History.*[143] Trouillot roots these two formulas to the "unthinkability" of the Haitian Revolution, meaning the inability of contemporaries to have

[143] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 94-96.

anticipated or understood a mass slave revolution producing a new state. This "unthinkability" was the product of the ontological racism that so prominently structured contemporary world views, such that the Haitian Revolution could only be understood through the lens of "ready-made categories" which "were incompatible with the idea of a slave revolution." As a result, integrating the Haitian Revolution into the annals of history has been obfuscated by the inability of both contemporaries and posterity to understand the revolution "on its own terms."[144]

Trouillot argues that the contemporary "unthinkability" of the revolution as it occurred has lent itself to paternalizing views of the Haitian state and people which are continuous with the racist ontologies of the past. However, as Aristide argues, this "unthinkability" also conditioned the political visions of the emerging Haitian political elite. Often educated in Europe, *ancien-libres* and the *affranchis* before them were similarly affected by certain European sensibilities and prejudices. Dayan argues that there is a linguistic component to this state of affairs, arguing that "no declaration of independence, spoken in French or Haitian Creole, could sever the bonds between the former colony and its 'Mother Country.' The violence was consecrated in the language of those who had been annihilated. We should not underrate the horror of this ventriloquy: the implications of a liberation that cannot be glorified except in the language of the former master."[145] As Dayan notes, Haitian liberation is defined against European colonial exploitation in the language of the colonizers, but it is a liberation which ultimately affirms Enlightenment values and perpetuates the moral authority of the West, thus condemning Haiti to live in the image of a "civilized" Europe.

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[144] Ibid., 73.
[145] Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods,* 4.

"The silencing of the Haitian Revolution is only a chapter within a narrative of global domination. It is part of the history of the West and it is likely to persist, even in attenuated form, as long as the history of the West is not retold in ways that bring forward the perspective of the world."[146]

Michel-Rolph Trouillot—*Silencing the Past*

In 1998, the government of France held official celebrations in commemoration of the 1848 abolition of slavery in the French empire. The celebrations provoked controversy, especially in Haiti, because they largely elided the fact that it commemorated the second abolition of slavery in the French empire; the 1794 abolition of slavery throughout the French empire, in consequence of the revolutionary events occurring in Saint Domingue, were largely overlooked. In addition to this erasure, Reinhardt observes that the celebrations "honored contributions of French individuals to the exclusion of Caribbean initiatives," such that the slave revolutionaries of Saint Domingue become less significant than the European Enlightenment in assessments of the history of slavery and abolition.[147] The 1998 celebrations of slavery, like the Debray commission of 2004, are both iterations of the strained relationship with a traumatic colonial past that has been exacerbated by the form of historical practice. The emerging univocality of slavery's history, Reinhardt observes, is

> "one of the most terrifying consequences of colonization. The hegemonic perspective of colonial history does not allow Caribbean nations to understand their past, since it erases their participation in historical events… *The basis for forming a collective memory is jeopardized, as events are remembered from the perspective of those who dominated historic occurrences*. The people cannot identify with this imposed story of the past and end up struggling with what Glissant calls their 'non-history'."[148]

The importance of perspective and status in negotiating history took on special significance in the Haitian case. The "mulatto legend" of Haitian history which emerged in the 19th century, in

[146] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 107.
[147] Reinhardt, *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean*, 4-5.
[148]Reinhardt, *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean*, 88-89.

addition to attributing the revolutionary initiative to the *affranchis,* also minimized the perception of slaves' contributions to the revolutionary struggle. Positing the historical dependency of the slaves on the *affranchis* lent itself to the continued exclusion of *nouveau-libres* from the seats of political power, and a divided sense of the Haitian past.

The Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea has also explored the implications of colonial pasts on postcolonial presents in his book, *The Latin American Mind.* Zea relates the colonial past of Latin America to conceptions of Latin American identity, exploring the as-yet unsuccessful efforts of Latin Americans to attempt to overcome the oppressiveness of Spanish legacies. Using Hegel's dialectical philosophy of history, in which the New World has no history of its own but only echoes the "historical museum of the Old World," as his point of departure, Zea concludes that Latin America has yet to develop its own history from its past, and remains "a dependency of European history," stuck in "a present which does not choose to become history."[149] Rather than assimilating past experiences in the dialectical process described by Hegel, in which the totality of past experiences informs the "becoming" of the Spirit of History, Latin Americans have instead "amputated" their past. Since summation will not do Zea justice, he will be quoted here at length:

> The Latin American rebelled against his past, and hence against the responsibilities it implied. He attempted to make an immediate break with that past. He denied it, by attempting to begin a new history, as if nothing had been accomplished previously….The past or the future was the dilemma which faced them. In order to attain an ideal future, it was necessary to renounce the past irrevocably. The Hispanic-American past was but the absolute negation of its own ideals. The new ideals were an absolute contradiction of the inheritance of the past. The new civilization was an absolute denial of colonial Spain. It was necessary to choose one or the other; it was necessary to renounce the future or the past….

[149] Leopoldo Zea, *The Latin-American Mind.* Translated by James H. Abbott and Lowell Dunham. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963. 1-6.

The ideals on which Dessalines founded the Haitian nation represented "an absolute contradiction of the inheritance of the past," a denial of the conditions of colonialism under France. A quote from Dessalines evokes the problems inherent in the "amputation of the past" that Zea describes. Dessalines said: "…the French name still haunts this land. Everything revives the memories of the cruelties of this barbarous people: our laws, our habits, our towns, *everything still carries the stamp of the French*…. let this be our cry: "*Anathema to the French name! Eternal hatred of France*!""[150] Ironically, the declaration was issued in French, as were all subsequent official announcements by the government until the 1980's. The ideal Haitian future Dessalines envisioned for the Haitian people represented an absolute denial of colonial France, but a denial that proved untenable.

French influence in Haiti has not been entirely contested however, and the approach of Dessalines contrasted sharply with his predecessor, Toussaint Louverture. Toussaint's constitution also contains language which connotes a "denial" of the colonial past, but in a direction different from Dessalines: "There can exist no slaves in this territory, where servitude is forever abolished and all men are born, live, and die *free and French*."[151] These quotes from Toussaint's Constitution and Dessalines' Declaration shows how radically the vision for the future diverged between two contemporary founders of the nation, from a community within the French *fraternite* to a nation defined explicitly against the French name, one revoking the past crimes of the French for the sake of a vision of a shared future, the other disregarding the future in order to repay the crimes of the past. While Dessalines asks "Of what consequence to me is the opinion which contemporary and future generations will pronounce upon my conduct?" in

[150] Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History*, 181-82.
[151] Ibid., 161-62.

the proclamation that followed his massacre of remaining French colonists, [152] Toussaint died in a French prison continuing to petition Napoleon for his release, assuring him of his fidelity to France and counting on his "justice and equity."[153] Tousssaint believed that "a population of slaves recently landed from Africa could not attain civilisation by going it alone," while Dessalines feared that this very concept of "civilization" would enable continuing French domination.[154]

For too long, the appeal of Enlightenment values in principal has overshadowed the duplicity of Enlightenment Europe in practice. Evoking these long latent contradictions has become a necessary step in renegotiating the history of Haiti's past, and the history of colonization more generally. President Aristide proposes an interesting reversal of the history of colonization that challenges the hegemonic sway of Europeanized notions of civilization. He says, "1492 does not signify the discovery of a wild world. It is instead the unpleasant encounter of some wild colonialists with civilized slaves, sons and daughters of liberty who had to pay for their freedom with their blood."[155] Emphasizing the role of slaves in the realization of liberty and freedom over and against the contribution of Enlightenment philosophy is necessary in order to attribute historical agency to the people of Haiti, from whom it has been displaced. Indeed, the identification of discrete origins in the historiography of Haiti, whether in the "mulatto legend" or in accounts viewing the Haitian Revolution as a subsidiary of the French Revolution, is more generally problematic given the dynamics of an inherently decentralized slave revolution.

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[152] Jean-Bertrand Aristide and Nick Nesbitt. *The Haitian Revolution*. (London: Verso, 2008), 79-81.
[153] Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History*, 89-91.
[154] James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 289-90.
[155] Jean-Bertrand. "The Church in Haiti — Land of Resistance." *Caribbean Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (March 1991): 110.

Here, Foucault's powerful critique of historical origins offers the potential for new alternatives in the negotiation of history. Rather than privileging particular historical agents and imposing linearity on a contingent event, Foucault proposes an alternative:

> [the pursuit of the origin] is an "attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities . . . [T]his search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. This search is directed to "that which was already there" . . . However, if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is "something altogether different" behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in piecemeal fashion from alien forms."[156]

The genealogical exploration of an essence "fabricated in piecemeal fashion from alien forms," or even of no essence at all, allows for the singularity of revolution to be expressed in a way that a traditional search for origins obscures. A facile search for "that which was already there" inherently elides the role of disenfranchised slaves as historical actors, iterated in the attempt to create a "mulatto legend of the past." The revolution wasn't an expression of a new national community, at least not univocally; nor was it initially a unilateral fight to end slavery. Though it accomplished both of these goals, and while each objective incentivized different groups within the revolutionary community, irreconcilable differences in priorities remained. The intentions among the groups composing the revolutionary community were multifarious and often divergent, and the convergence of their interests during the revolution was contingent on several unguaranteed developments. Tensions came to a head periodically, most notably during the War of Knives, the Death of Moise, and the kidnapping of Toussaint, but a looming enemy promising colonial subjugation and the return of slavery held the alliance together from without. The fragility of the ties binding the revolutionary community began to show after independence, but

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[156] Michel Foucault. *Aesthetics, method, and epistemology*. Vol. 2. The New Press, 1998. 371.

as the immediate fear of invasion began to wane, the centrifugal forces within the community became uncontained.

Though the disjointedness of the revolutionary coalition, especially the distance between leaders who fluidly shifted allegiances and the insurrectionists steadfastly committed to the cause of liberation, may at first seem to complicate explorations of the significance of the Haitian Revolution, above all else, it stands as a testament to the world-historical significance of this slave driven repudiation of colonialism. The Haitian Revolution engaged virtually the entire population, a proportion of popular participation far exceeding both the French and American Revolutions, and is distinguished as the only permanently successful slave revolution. When the revolutionary leadership sometimes wavered and self-interestedly calculated, the body of insurrectionists remained the steadfast engine of liberation. Far from minimizing the singularity of the Haitian Revolution, emphasizing the internal conflicts among revolutionary leadership serves to highlight the historical role of the masses in the first popularly fought anticolonial revolution. In this way, Haiti distinguished itself as the first state in history to enact universal emancipation, and after its founding it stood as a symbol of defiance against the cruelties and dehumanization of the system of slavery.

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