

*Print Culture and the
Haitian Revolution:
The Written and the Spoken Word*

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THE FIFTEEN-YEAR STRUGGLE that ended slavery and racial discrimination in French Saint Domingue and climaxed, in 1804, with the creation of independent Haiti was arguably the only one of four Atlantic revolutions of the period 1776 to 1824 that fully embodied the ideals of liberty, equality, and independence. Haiti's revolution, however, seems perhaps the furthest removed of the four conflicts from the print culture of the Enlightenment and from the liberal democratic ideology that it helped to develop. The emblematic event of the revolution was a slave uprising, not a declaration of independence or a constitution. The country's first head of state, like most of his subjects, was neither literate nor able to speak a European language.¹ Haiti's presses published few works during the first decade of independence, and five of its six constitutions of the period 1801–1816 were explicitly dictatorial.² Liberty in the Haitian

1. Born in Saint Domingue, Jean-Jacques Dessalines spoke only Haitian creole, which is technically not an Indo-European language, although most of its vocabulary derives from French.

2. The exception, the constitution of 1806, ended up being ignored by president Alexandre Pétion, who chose to rule without the Senate.

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Revolution came to be construed in the profound, but narrow, sense of freedom from slavery rather than as political rights.

Such a view of the Haitian Revolution, as the odd one out among liberal revolutions, is not inaccurate, but it is skewed by the tendency of recent scholarship to ignore the early stages of Saint Domingue's transformation—that part of the revolution that was largely internal to the colony's white population. The struggle for different degrees of political autonomy and economic liberalism 1789 to 1793 produced a substantial print archive but it has attracted remarkably few historians.

Although Saint Domingue had a weekly newspaper from 1764 onward, the revolution initiated a torrent of journalism that created thirty or more new periodicals between 1789 and 1803.³ The best known but still barely studied segment of this revolutionary journalism is, curiously, that of the printers and polemicists who fled the colony to Philadelphia in the mid-1790s. There, radicals and conservatives continued their battles for several years in a new, refugee press.⁴ It was also in the United States that the first histories of the revolution were published in 1794 and 1795.⁵ Their authors were, again, refugee colonists and they ranged from the radical (Chotard *ainé*) to the ultra-conservative (Mahy de Cormeré).⁶ The next two major histories published were also products of the refugee diaspora but appeared in

3. The claim of 'fifty or so' in Marie-Antoinette Menier, Gabriel Debien, 'Journaux de Saint-Domingue,' *Revue d'Histoire des Colonies* 127-28 (1949): 424-75, seems to result from counting slight changes of title.

4. Justin E. Cartera, *Bref Coup d'oeil sur les origines de la presse haitienne (1764-1850)*, (Port-au-Prince: Deschamps, 1986), 8; see Clarence S. Brigham, 'Cabon's History of Haiti Journalism,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 49 (1939): 121-205; Jean-Charles Benzaken, 'De Montauban au Cap Français: l'itinéraire du journaliste Gatereau pendant la Révolution française,' 126e Congrès national des sociétés historiques et scientifiques (Toulouse, 2001), thème 2, Structures politiques; introduction by Chris Bongie to Jean-Baptiste Picquenard, *Zofloru ou la bonne négresse: Anecdote coloniale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006).

5. When the revolution was barely a year old, there appeared in the colonial press a prospectus for a spectacularly premature three-volume history, entitled *Relation historique de la Révolution de Saint-Domingue*. See *Affiches Américaines* (Cap-Français), September 15, 1790. It was never published.

6. Guillaume-François Mahy de Cormeré, *Histoire de la Révolution de la Partie Française de St. Domingue* (Baltimore, 1794); Chotard *ainé*, *Précis de la Révolution de Saint-Domingue, depuis la fin de 1789, jusqu'au 18 juin 1794* (Philadelphia: Parent, 1795).

France: the *Histoire des désastres de Saint-Domingue* and *Réflexions sur la colonie de Saint-Domingue*. Hardly any historian of the Haitian Revolution has read even one of these substantial works and—to give an idea how neglected this material is—the latter two books, both anonymously authored, have been bizarrely misidentified for the past one hundred and fifty years in the world's major bibliographies and library catalogues, which attribute them to two quite improbable figures (the botanist Descourtilz and the administrator Barbé-Marbois). They were clearly written, however, by one and the same person, an obscure Dominguan coffee planter.⁷

But to return to the colonial press: one consequence of the scholarly neglect of the revolutionary newspapers is a general ignorance of the parliamentary debates that they reported in Saint Domingue's two colonial assemblies. Each of these assemblies produced a stillborn constitution—in 1790 and 1792. This is key material for assessing the political ideas and intellectual affiliations of Saint Domingue's white revolution, its backward linkages to the Enlightenment, and also its forward connection to Toussaint Louverture's much better known constitution of 1801.

Prominent among the radical printer-journalists, was one Jean Baillio, who worked for different colonial assemblies and radical clubs and published a newspaper and several pamphlets in Saint Domingue and France. Although he initially opposed racial integration and slave emancipation, he was one of the few white Frenchmen to adopt Haitian citizenship after independence. In 1810, however, he moved to Venezuela, where he set up (as Juan Baillío) that country's second printing press. He published Venezuela's first constitution and, later, after returning from Haiti with Simón Bolívar, the first slave emancipation laws.⁸

7. He appears to have been a member of the Rotureau family of Limbé parish.

8. Paul Verna, 'Tras las huellas de Juan Baillío, el impresor de la Independencia,' *Boletín Histórico* (Caracas) 10 (1966): 5-32; Verna, *Bolívar y los emigrados patriotas* (Caracas: INCE, 1983), 87-88.

These initial comments are intended to suggest two points. First, Saint Domingue's white settler revolution, sandwiched geographically and chronologically between those of North and South America, had a strong Atlantic dimension. Secondly, before that revolution can be adequately situated in that context, historians need to pay much more attention to its newspapers and parliamentary debates, its participant histories and constitutions.

But what of the *real* Haitian Revolution? What role did print culture play in the black revolution that quickly overshadowed, then obliterated, that of Saint Domingue's whites?

The free people of color, who made up an economically and demographically important middle sector in Saint Domingue society, were at least half as likely as white colonists to be able to sign their name.⁹ They produced no journalists or historians during the revolution, but they authored many pamphlets and other political texts, including the declaration of independence.¹⁰ The vast majority of slaves, in contrast, more than half of whom were Africans, was neither literate nor spoke a written language.¹¹ A few insurgents were described as carrying amulets that contained Arabic phrases written on folded paper, but Muslims formed a very small proportion of the Africans in Saint Domingue.¹²

9. John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 125. The claim that most free men of color could read, although most slaves could not, seems considerably exaggerated ([Jean-Félix] Carteau, *Soirées bermudiennes ou entretiens sur les événemens qui ont opéré la ruine de la partie française de l'île Saint-Domingue* [Bordeaux: Pellier-Lawalle, 1802], 76). Several studies show that, of those who used the services of a notary—an atypically wealthy subgroup—only about half could sign their name.

10. The *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire d'Haïti* (1804; Port-au-Prince: Editions des Antilles, 1991), a brief, polemical account of the campaign of 1802–3 by the declaration's author, Louis Félix Boisrond-Tonnerre, is the only text close to being a history.

11. Jean Fouchard's pioneering *Les marrons du syllabaire* (Port-au-Prince: Deschamps, 1953) is not very successful in its challenge to this viewpoint. With the exception of Hausa, written in an Arabic-derived script, there seems to be no hard evidence that West Africa produced indigenous scripts before 1800.

12. Correspondence March/April 1792, F3/97, Centre des Archives d'Outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence (hereafter CAOM); [Charles] Malenfant, *Des colonies et particulièrement de celle de Saint-Domingue* (Paris: Audibert, 1814), 212. On the slave population's ethnic composition, see D. Geggus, 'Sugar and Coffee Cultivation in Saint Domingue and the Shaping of the Slave Labor Force,' in *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*, ed. Ira Berlin, and Philip Morgan (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 73–98.

The lingua franca of the slave population and—one may guess, of the free nonwhite population—was *créole*. As Haitian creole could not be termed a written language until the mid-twentieth century, it is notable that in 1793 and 1802 government officials attempting to run the colony printed a series of proclamations in creole that were intended to be read out to the black population. They mostly concerned the regulation of plantation labor, before and after the ending of slavery, and included the act of emancipation.¹³

Curiously, although these proclamations are linguistically almost unique, more may have been printed in creole during the revolution than was written longhand. In the surviving manuscripts of the period creole was generally used just for brief excerpts of reported speech.¹⁴ When rebel slave leaders corresponded with one another—and a good deal of their correspondence has survived—it was always in French. Such letters were probably dictated in creole but were invariably written down, by a free colored or white secretary, in some approximation of standard French.

This near-absence of creole from the written and printed record impoverishes our knowledge of the Haitian Revolution. Before the declaration of independence was read out on January 1, 1804, we know that Jean-Jacques Dessalines made a speech, but we don't know much about what he said. Contemporaries of Toussaint Louverture described him as a gifted orator in creole, and in the Fon language of his ancestors, but we have no way of sensing those abilities except in his French letters, which were almost all collaborations between him and his white secretaries.

13. Two are reproduced in Jean Bernabé, 'Les proclamations en créole de Sonthonax et Bonaparte: graphie, histoire et glottopolitique,' in *De la Révolution française aux révolutions créoles et nègres*, ed. Michel Martin and Alain Yacou (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1989), 135–50.

14. However, a rare petition in creole by ex-slaves is included in *Arrêtés des différentes communes de la colonie de St. Domingue, adressées à l'Agent particulier du Directoire au Général en chef et à l'Administration municipale du Cap* (N.p., 1799), 19. It is cited by Malick Ghachem in 'The Colonial Vendée,' unpublished paper, John Carter Brown Library Conference, June 2004.

Spoken in unwritten languages, much of the voice of the black revolution is as irrecoverable as the talking drum messages that accompanied the outbreak of the slave uprising.

Nevertheless, both printed and written texts played a significant part in the slave revolution, but it is worth remembering that whether producing texts or reacting to them, preliterate Creole speakers had to rely on literate Francophone intermediaries. For the latter reason, it is difficult to accord too much importance to supposedly inspirational texts. In the fall of 1789, administrators in Saint Domingue complained of the circulation of antislavery books in the colony and feared that free people of color were sharing their contents with slaves. Similar complaints came from Martinique and Jamaica at the same time however.¹⁵ And news of the nascent abolitionism in England and France, as of the French Revolution, circulated independently of its texts. Slaves spoke with new arrivals from Europe and overheard the heated discussions of angry colonists.

A similar case is presented by the abbé Grégoire's incendiary pamphlet *Lettre aux citoyens de couleur*, which predicted an end to slavery and arrived in Saint Domingue the month before the August 1791 uprising.¹⁶ It was widely discussed by colonists and, when the revolt broke out, was blamed for causing the insurgents' mistaken belief that a royal emancipation decree was being covered up by the planters.¹⁷ Grégoire's pamphlet doubtless helped encourage such rumors, but these had a wide variety of sources (in recent political and legislative events) and had been circulating for years. Moreover, a prominent subset of these rumors—that slaves had been granted three free days per week—

15. David Geggus, 'Slavery, War, and Revolution in the Greater Caribbean, 1789-1815,' in *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*, ed. D. B. Gaspar and D. P. Geggus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 36, n.39.

16. Henri-Baptiste Grégoire, *Lettre aux citoyens de couleur et nègres libres de Saint-Domingue* (Paris: Imp. du Patriote François, 1791). His *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur ou sang-mêlés de St.-Domingue, et des autres isles françaises de l'Amérique* (Paris: Belin, 1789) was rather more inflammatory.

17. F3/196, f. 527, 859, CAOM; *Supplément au mémoire de M. de Blanchelande* (n.p., n.d.), 8; WO 1/58, f. 1-11, Public Record Office, London.

has proved difficult to connect with any publication, although it spread across the Caribbean and survived for decades.¹⁸

Finally, there is an oft-told story about the black freedman Toussaint Louverture. Toussaint, who may have secretly been the mastermind behind the slave uprising, supposedly had read, long before, in Raynal's *Histoire des deux mondes*, Diderot's passage that rhetorically called for a black Spartacus to arise in the Caribbean. This story originated in what might be called a press interview that Toussaint gave at the height of his power. It is perhaps a propaganda piece, intended to shape the black leader's image for the French public. Yet the story is also quite plausible, given the ubiquity of Raynal's book, especially as the account has Toussaint hearing about the passage several times before seeking out a copy to read.¹⁹ It seems unlikely, however, that this experience was a major influence in shaping the black leader's destiny.

Another story told in all histories of the Haitian Revolution concerns a secret meeting at which the slave revolt was planned. Supposedly reading aloud from newspapers, a light-skinned young man announced that the king had accorded three free days per week to the slaves.²⁰ The alleged presence of the printed text (glossed implausibly in many accounts as a 'forged gazette') is an important clue that at least this manifestation of the emancipation-decree rumor was not simply a matter of confusion but involved deliberate manipulation by the slaves' leaders. False rumors of various sorts had flourished since the start of the revolution, favored by slow transatlantic communications, illiteracy, and wishful thinking. False rumors of new decrees were in fact becoming something of a trend at that point, though mainly among the white community,

18. Geggus, 'Slavery, War, and Revolution in the Greater Caribbean, 1789-1815,' 7-11 n. 37, n.47, and n. 48.

19. *Le Moniteur* (Paris) (1799): 585 bis. Jean-Félix Carteau (*Soirées bermudiennes*, 76) claimed in 1802 he had seen the works of Raynal and Hilliard d'Auberteuil in the hands of some blacks who had secretly bought them from sailors, especially abolitionist Bordeaux sea captains.

20. The original source is 'Extraits des détails authentiques apportés par les 6 Crs. du Cap,' F3/197, CAOM.

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~
THE LIFE
OF
TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE,
LATE GENERAL IN CHIEF
AND GOVERNOR OF THE ISLAND OF SAINT DOMINGO;
WITH MANY PARTICULARS NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED;
TO WHICH IS SUBJOINED,
AN ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST OPERATIONS
OF THE FRENCH ARMY,
UNDER GENERAL LE CLERC.

480

2.50
50
3

218.60
12
230

480
230
250

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH,
BY N. HERBEMONT,
TACHER OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE, ON SULLIVAN'S
ISLAND.

CHARLESTON, PRINTED BY T. B. BOWEN.

1802.

Fig. 1. Dubroca's *La Vie de Toussaint-Louverture* was hastily translated into English by N. Herbemont, and published as *The Life of Toussaint Louverture, late General in Chief and Governor of the Island of Saint Domingo with Many Particulars Never Before Published* (Charleston [S. C.]: T. B. Bowen, 1802).

where they had fueled violent altercations between radicals and conservatives and between troops and their officers.²¹

It is not clear if forged documents were used to support any of these rumors, but one striking case of a false document used in the slave uprising is the so-called royalist commission of Toussaint Louverture. This was a handwritten warrant seemingly signed by a miscellany of white royalists, which authorized Toussaint to organize a slave uprising on behalf of the counterrevolution. To judge from a Spanish translation, which survives in Spain, this document was a naïve and clumsy fraud. Whether it was really used by Toussaint, or was part of a false claim made about him by some of his collaborators, remains a mystery.²² Yet there is good reason to believe that Toussaint had earlier propagated the rumor of a counterrevolutionary plot so as to divide his white opponents. The best documentary evidence for this royalist conspiracy, a captivity narrative published by a white radical named Gros, largely rests on its account of a supposed meeting that was not witnessed by Gros but merely described to him by Toussaint shortly before Gros's release.²³

In the recollections of one black insurgent, recorded decades later by a Haitian historian, Toussaint's royalist commission was a sort of passport that had allowed him to circulate freely.²⁴ Passports certainly were used in the rebel camps after the uprising broke out; one that survives bears a cryptic acronym and the phrases 'The iron rod is broken. Long live the king!'²⁵ These

21. The Port-au-Prince Regiment mutinied in March partly because of a rumored 'decree of December 17' that supposedly retracted the National Assembly's support for its colonel. In June/July, talk about a decree that made officers and soldiers equals created uproar at Môle Saint Nicolas.

22. David Geggus, 'Toussaint Louverture: avant et après le soulèvement de 1791,' in *Mémoire de révolution d'esclaves à Saint-Domingue*, ed. Franklin Midi (Montreal: CID-HICA, 2006), 113-29; a second, expanded edition is forthcoming.

23. David Geggus, 'Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution,' forthcoming in *Profiles of Revolutionaries on Both Sides of the Atlantic: 1750-1850*, ed. R. William Weisberger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), note 19.

24. Beaubrun Ardouin, *Études sur l'histoire d'Haïti* (1853-60; Port-au-Prince: Dalencour, 1958), 1:51.

25. See above, note 20.

safe-conduct passes, which doubtless grew out of the pass-system used by Saint Domingue slaveowners, seem to reflect a fetishization of the written word and 'ritualistic use of bureaucratic mannerisms,' such as later found in twentieth-century African protest movements and the passports of modern Haiti's secret societies.²⁶

Several of the themes just touched upon—falsified documents, rumor and written sources, the use of free colored scribes by illiterate slave leaders—are central to the key issue of uncovering the intentions of the black insurgents. For the first year of the slave uprising, historians working in the archives confront a diverse range of reports of what different groups of insurgents supposedly claimed to want. Some called for freedom, land, and the expulsion of the whites; others for only modest reforms, such as extra free days per week. Some mentioned the Rights of Man; others advocated restoring the king to his throne. While we might expect aspirations to have varied in a movement of many thousands, and to have been adjusted according to changing circumstances, it is troubling that it was usually white radical observers who depicted the slave insurrection as a tool of the counterrevolution and conservatives who saw in it the influence of radical ideology.

Representations of the black revolution are thus not only distorted by the usual ethnic and class biases of white observers, but filtered through the bitter conflicts of French Revolutionary politics. Documents generated by the slave rebels themselves are thus of great importance, but they, too, regrettably are not entirely free of these problems. There are three main examples to consider.

Two are proclamations, ostensibly by the slave leadership that their white recipients quickly had printed. They are in fact the only

26. Wyatt MacGaffey, John M. Janzen, *An Anthology of Kongo Religion: Primary Texts from Lower Zaïre* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1974), 13 (quotation), 136; Jean Kerboull, *Vaudou et pratiques magiques* (Paris: Belfond, 1977), photograph of modern passports between pages 32 and 33.

formal demands for a complete end to slavery that were made during the slave revolution. The first, which dates from the first month of the uprising, is often cited. It is a powerful text that summons the whites to pick up their jewelry and leave Saint Domingue to the slaves, whose sweat and blood have earned them title to the land. Because of the anonymous text's stylish prose, it has generally been assumed that the author was a white prisoner of the insurgents and probably the radical cleric Jacques Delahaye. The writer was in fact, another captive, an obscure French butcher named Claude Boisbrun. The text, though, was dictated to him by the free colored secretary of the sadistic slave leader Jeannot.²⁷ Long depicted as a unidimensional monster, Jeannot's military and political importance have gone unrecognized. Since he was also behind the 'Médecin-Général' letters traditionally attributed to Toussaint Louverture, this document provides another reason for learning more about his secretary, who seems to have been the free black Jean-Baptiste Godard.²⁸

The second of the insurgents' proclamations dates from July 1792. It was signed by the two main slave leaders, Jean-François and Georges Biassou, but exists only in printed versions. These were made by a radical sympathizer of the slaves in Paris, as well as by the document's supposed recipient, Colonel Cambefort, who headed the military campaign against the insurgents.²⁹ Whereas the first proclamation was mildly royalist in coloring, the second one is imbued with radical ideology. The language of the text has a suspiciously inauthentic look. Its combination of sophisticated vocabulary and rhetoric with simplistic errors of

27. See Delaval to Assemblée du Sud, September 29, 1791, 1ETA34, Archives départementales de la Loire-Inférieure, Nantes; deposition of Claude Boisbrun, F3/197, CAOM. The proclamation, written September 24, has long been misdated because of a transcription error.

28. See Geggus, 'Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution,' note 13.

29. [Joseph-Paul-Augustin de] Cambefort, *Quatrième partie du Mémoire justificatif* (Paris, 1793), 4-11. The proclamation has a third signatory, 'Belair'—not Charles Belair, as sometimes thought, but Gabriel Aimé Bellair, an officer of Biassou. The sympathizer was Claude Milscent, who published the piece in his newspaper *Le Créole Patriote*, February 9, 1793.

AN
I N Q U I R Y
INTO THE CAUSES
OF THE
INSURRECTION OF THE NEGROES
IN THE ISLAND
OF
ST. DOMINGO.

Fig. 2. A report and a speech read to the National Assembly, February 29, 1792, was published in Philadelphia later that year. *An Inquiry into the Causes of the Insurrection of the Negroes in the Island of St. Domingo* (London; reprint Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1792).

spelling and grammar makes it unlike any other surviving text from this milieu. It was probably a fraud, concocted by the royalist de Cambefort. He was then the target of increasingly frequent charges of counterrevolutionary influence on the slave revolt. The letter was thus a means of striking back at the radicals.

This cuts in half the documentary evidence of formal demands for abolishing slavery made by the insurgents, and it means that none came from the main leaders, Jean-François and Georges Bissou, who executed their rival Jeannot and are perhaps best known for the abortive peace negotiations they undertook in mid-December 1791. Facing the imminent arrival of troops from France, they offered to help force their followers back to work on the plantations in return for an improvement in working conditions and the freeing of just fifty slave leaders. The correspondence associated with these negotiations constitutes the third case of documentation generated by the slave rebels. This material raises a thicket of issues, but the two points I would like to highlight concern its authorship and the difference between the original manuscripts and the versions printed by the colonists.³⁰

The versions reported by the colonists have numerous inaccuracies but the most egregious distortion is the inclusion in the written overtures of a demand for freeing just fifty people.³¹ This demand was made, but orally and in secret. The colonists evidently put it in the newspaper to increase friction between the creole slave leaders and their mainly African followers. In this they succeeded explaining why the negotiations were broken off.

As for the authorship of these documents, they have a curiously hybrid, 'them and us' character. They were not just written by

30. The precise dating of the process remains problematic. Clearly erroneous is the placing of the overtures in October in John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Formation of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 333-34.

31. *Moniteur Colonial* (Cap Français) 35, December 19, 1791; Augustin Brulley and Pierre-François Page, *Courte réponse . . . au Précis de justification de Paul-Augustin de Cambefort* (Paris, 1793); J.A. Marie Albert, *Des véritables causes qui ont amené la ruine de la colonie de Saint-Domingue* (Paris: Dentu, 1815), 21-26. Most of the originals are in Dxxv/1/4, Archives Nationales, Paris.

free men of color on behalf of the slave generals, but by the free coloreds in the rebel camp, who were discreetly negotiating for themselves as well as for the slave leadership. The government had just offered amnesty to free men of color, but not to slaves, and free coloreds elsewhere in the colony had just won acceptance of their demand for political rights. This is what the most sophisticated passages in the overtures allude to and that has most impressed historians because of the precise references to recent legislation. Addressing the concerns of the free men in the rebel camp, they do not really support the contention of certain historians that the slave leaders demanded 'full political rights.'³²

We are a long way from the language of rights in these documents signed by Jean-François and Georges Biassou, which represent the insurgents as misguided victims of manipulation and their own royalist zeal. Demands for a limited reform of slavery, as Laurent Dubois observes, were not prominent in these overtures, and they took form only as the negotiations progressed, doubtless in response to pressure from the rank-and-file insurgents.³³ The slave leaders wanted not citizenship, but amnesty for their followers and freedom for themselves and their families to keep their booty and settle elsewhere. They had already put forward these demands in late November, when they were ignored, and Jean-François, with Toussaint, would repeat them the following summer.³⁴ They achieved their aim several years later, when Jean-François settled in Spain and Biassou in Florida. By then the French had abolished slavery, and the black revolution had come under the leadership of the freedman Toussaint Louverture.

32. Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery* (London: Verso, 1988), 194 (quotation); C.L.R. The Black Jacobins: *Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938; 3rd ed., London: Alison and Busby, 1980), 105-6.

33. Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 128.

34. Both of these approaches have been overlooked in the historical literature. See document 258, Dxxv/46/439, Archives Nationales; D. Geggus, 'Toussaint Louverture et l'abolition de l'esclavage à Saint-Domingue,' in *Les abolitions dans les Amériques*, ed. Liliane Chaleau (Fort de France: Société des Amis des Archives, 2001), 109-16.

If the print archive of the white revolution is large but little studied, that of the slave revolution of 1791–93 is small, superficially more familiar, but insufficiently problematized. Moreover, the written record gives voice solely to the slaves' leaders; to divine the aspirations of their followers we have only a few reports of their spoken words and their actions.

The closing stages of the Haitian Revolution have also given rise to a number of historical questions that involve issues of oral and written transmission. One concerns Napoleon Bonaparte's decision to attempt to restore slavery in Saint Domingue in 1802. Some historians think that decision was not taken until several months after an expeditionary force was sent to reassert metropolitan control and that the troops expected only to oust blacks from positions of power but not reenslave them. Others believe the decision was taken (secretly) long before, despite many government pronouncements to the contrary, and that at least the French commander, Leclerc, and perhaps his fellow officers, were aware of the policy they were meant to carry out.³⁵ As Bonaparte's written instructions to Leclerc clearly support the former position, proponents of the latter thesis argue that the government's true intentions must have been transmitted orally.³⁶ Since the instructions were secret, however, and already contained plenty of inflammatory material, it is not evident why such concealment should have been necessary. Leclerc's correspondence with Bonaparte offers no conclusive proof but, although ambiguous, on balance is suggestive of a prior oral understanding.³⁷

35. D. Geggus, 'French Imperialism and the Louisiana Purchase,' in *The Louisiana Purchase and Its Peoples: Perspectives from the New Orleans Conference*, ed. Paul Hoffman (Lafayette: University of Louisiana, 2004), 30; Thomas Ott, *The Haitian Revolution* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 184–85.

36. The instructions are printed in Gustav Roloff, *Die Kolonialpolitik Napoleons I* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1899), 244–54.

37. See Paul Roussier, ed., *Lettres du Général Leclerc, commandant en chef de l'armée de Saint-Domingue en 1802* (Paris: Société de l'Histoire de Colonies Françaises, 1937) 202, 206, 208. For the editor's (contrary) opinion, see p. 33.

"Horror of St. Domingo,"

ILLUSTRATION OF THE REVOLUTION OF HAYTI.

BY J. SAINT ARAUD,
Advocate, former Member of the Constituent
Assembly of France.

Translated originally by The Press and Public.

The History of the Revolution in Hayti will be published in four volumes. The first, which I offer to the public, embraces the period from 1793 to 1795, consists of the white colonies among themselves: revolutionary conventions, provincial and national assemblies, instructions of men of color, and of the blacks.

It is especially understood by France that St. Domingo, or Hayti, once belonged to France, left with the exception of a few men of learning, general ignorance prevailing in the spaces which included the loss, in France, of that fine country, the debris and shreds of her trans-marine possessions.

We shall further describe, particularly in this first volume, an investigation and statement as to what were the causes and who the authors of the ruin of that colony. The three other volumes will be published successively during the course of the year 1818. They will comprise:

Volume II—The period from 1795 to 1800; French civil convulsions, and the wars of Independence.

Volume III—The period from 1800 to 1818; Desaulniers, emperor; Christophe, King; Pétion, president.

Volume IV—The period from 1818 to 1820; J. F. Boyer, president; Restoration of 1821; the King, Boyer, Pétion, and other, presidents in succession; their downfall, or their death; revolution: Faustin Soulouque, president and emperor; Restoration of 1822; his downfall.

I have followed the treatment of nearly all the incidents narrated in this first volume from the official reports made to the National Convention of France, by Deputies Genere de Coulon. That same work is the most exact and most impartial of the contemporary accounts of those times of anarchy and confusion.

I have preferred, upon examination, to draw from that source rather than rely upon traditional nearly always erroneous, even when neither falsified nor distorted by partisan passion, or hate. The excellent work of my fellow-countryman and friend, Mr. B. Artaud—written on the History of Hayti—has been of great service to me. It is a remarkable work of accurate research.

J. SAINT ARAUD.

HISTORY.

We know that in the midst of the straggles of the Antilles, between Cuba, or Havana, Porto Rico and San Juan, there a large island discovered by Christopher Columbus, towards the end of the fifteenth century; that this daring navigator and his companions called it Hispaniola in memory of their country; and that, in the course of time, names bestowed upon the island the name of its neighbor—St. Domingo, or Santo Domingo.

The western part of the island was divided into two colonies, one of which belonged to France and the other to Spain; and they were commonly distinguished by the double appellation—the French part and the Spanish part of St. Domingo.

At the present time the island belongs neither to France nor to Spain; its actual possessors, negroes and mulattoes, have assumed, in its original title, that which the Indians, in their settlements, gave to it—Hayti. Rejected in 1803 under the same laws, these two parts formed one State, the Republic of Hayti, under the presidency of Gen. Bonaparte. In 1805, by the result of the disaster which followed the revolution which deposed that chief, a new separation was violently effected; the old French part organized the Republic of Hayti, and the old Spanish portion formed a second commonwealth—the Republic of Santo Domingo.

No natural division separates the French and Spanish parts; the separation is formed by the two acts of government, the difference of the institutions, and the rivalry of the former master. But should we the moment arrive of the present, of 1820, by its title, a sufficient motive for abolishing this division, as well as the geographical configuration of the island, and which is as legitimate as it is salutary in the prospect of the two young Republics?

This anomalous division is but a sad legacy of the atrociously ruin which fell upon the Haytiens should apply themselves to Hayti. Their independence has nearly nothing more to fear either from France or Spain; these two powers have scarcely recognized it; but not far from the shores of their island dwell numerous and warring neighbors, whose corrupting influence is more to be feared, perhaps, than the power of their arms. These dangerous neighbors have sustained numerous vicissitudes, but they are not less ambitious than conquest—and these neighbors are slaveholders. Civil strife has ever been the cause of the greatest misfortune and the ruin of nations. It is in vain and heroism that the weak find the strength necessary to resist their enemies.

If the French colonies had not been dissolved by civil dissensions, France, probably, would not have lost her finest colony; if the men of color and the blacks had not formed a union they would not have achieved liberty and independence. The events which we are about to narrate afford proof of these truths. Let Haytiens then profit by the teachings which flow from them; where will they find better? It is their history.

In 1580 the French part of St. Domingo was the richest and the most flourishing of all its colonies of France; it was the Queen of the Antilles. Its territory embracing a surface of about 5,000 square miles* was divided into three provinces, that of the North, that of the Centre, or the West, and that of the South.

The province of the North containing 140 square miles had for its capital the city of the Cape. It was the smallest and the richest of the three provinces; it comprised twenty-six parishes, distributed into three cantons—

That of the Centre, or the West, 1,125 square miles in extent, having Port-au-Prince for its capital, comprised six parishes, divided into four cantons—

And that of the South, of 3,500 square miles, capital the city of Cayenne, contained only eleven parishes, arranged in five cantons—

These three provinces contained about two-thirds of the island; the remainder comprising the Spanish part, 5,000 square miles. Many small islands surrounded the island of Hayti and are dependent on it such as la Tortue, the most important, la Grande, la Petite, those of la Baie, St. Catherine, la Vierge, a Vacher, and the Capriennes.

Hayti, in the language of its Aborigines, means mountainous land; and in reality it is surrounded in every direction by numerous ranges, the chief of which are Cibo, Soto, Rochouard, and Haiti. Nearly all these mountains are covered with a luxuriant vegetation, and between them the valleys and plains of extraordinary fertility.

The Seine, the Grand Yague, the Artibonite, the Nyssa, and the Grande, are in many places without freshening waters, frequently contribute to a facility to which the soil of Europe affords no comparison.

In order to form some idea of the prosperity of the French part of St. Domingo at the period of its possession by France, we must consult the official returns published in the beginning of the year 1785, by Mr. Barthelemy de Messine, at that time lieutenant of revenue in the Colony. It will be found that the

*The Spanish part contains 1,000 square miles.

Fig. 3. A page from a bound volume of newspaper clippings about Haiti compiled by the Reverend John Weiss and in the collections of the American Antiquarian Society. Included are accounts of Jean Armand Lacaste's *History of the Revolutions of Hayti* and other texts.

Another issue concerns the naming of Haiti, and why a population of African descent should choose an Amerindian place name that had fallen out of use three centuries earlier. Some romantic nationalists have related the choice to the supposed survival of an Amerindian population, or at least an Amerindian cultural influence, in Saint Domingue into the late colonial period. All the evidence suggests, however, that the Taino place name was preserved in scholarly and travel literature and that it was first suggested as a replacement for 'Saint Domingue' by a French writer in 1788. It may have been popularized among the colony's free people of color in 1800, when many of their leaders were exiled to France, where they could have encountered it in *Zoflora*, one of the first novels written about the Haitian Revolution. Free colored officers made up a large proportion of the thirty-seven men who signed the declaration of independence, in which the new country was first named on January 1, 1804.³⁸

Leslie Manigat has recently shown that that document was in fact the country's second declaration of independence.³⁹ An earlier text, dated November 29, 1803, and declared a fake by the country's first historian Thomas Madiou, turns out to have been genuine, although inconsequential. The January 1 document, penned by Paris-educated Louis Félix Boisrond-Tonnerre, is well known for its unorthodox French usage, in which the writer apparently expressed his disdain for the colonizer's language. It is well known, too, for openly inciting vengeance for past wrongs against the several thousand French who remained in the former colony. Since the declaration was a prelude to the massacres of February–April 1804 that systematically eliminated almost all of that population, it is surprising so many French chose to remain after it had been read out on the main square in Gonaïves on the

38. See D. Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), ch. 13.

39. Leslie Manigat, 'Une brève analyse-commentaire critique d'un document historique,' *Revue de la Société haïtienne d'histoire et de géographie*, 221 (2005):44–56.

first day of independence. Probably very few whites were present on that occasion to hear its call for revenge,⁴⁰ and its publication was presumably delayed until the massacres were completed.

40. One was Pierre Nicolas Mallet, the document's only white signatory, who was an early victim of the massacres. Gonaïves seems to have been a center of black power after the massacre there of some one hundred and fifty colonists in April 1794.

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