

White Jacobins/Black Jacobins: Bringing the Haitian and French Revolutions Together in the Classroom

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Historians of France are used to making difficult choices as they plan and revise their courses on the Revolution. The pre-Revolution, the post-Revolution, the economic, social, intellectual, cultural, and political perspectives, the new scholarship, the historiography, all compete for limited class time and student attention. Instructors struggle to deliver it all with their own personal mix of primary sources, survey texts, course packs, novels, film, CD-ROMs, and, now, the Internet. How could one possibly squeeze another revolution into the same semester?

Yet separating the struggles of French subjects from those of their Caribbean slaves increasingly appears artificial. Until very recently, Saint-Domingue/Haiti got little attention in the literature investigating or surveying the Revolution, including that focused on its impact in the Atlantic world. Haiti's invisibility has been most obvious in the work of French scholars, as François Arzalier has recently pointed out. Nevertheless, as Lynn Hunt notes, "there is no more telling ground for a consideration of the impact of revolutionary ideas or practices than the Caribbean colonies." This is especially true as historians begin to pay more attention to the rise of modern national identities, for the Revolution in Saint-Domingue/Haiti poses the question "Who is French?"¹

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¹ For a critique of the literature, see Francis Arzalier, "La Révolution haïtienne dans l'imaginaire français," in *La Révolution française et Haïti. Filiations, ruptures, nouvelles dimensions*, ed. Michel Hector (Port-au-Prince, Haïti, 1995), 2: 348–357. Lynn Hunt, "Forgetting and Remembering: The French Revolution Then and Now," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 1129; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995), 95–107. As these authors and others have noted, the classic accounts of the Atlantic Revolution written by students of revolutionary France forty years ago hardly mention Saint-Domingue. See, e.g., Jacques Godechot, *France and the Atlantic Revolution of the Eighteenth Century, 1770–1799* trans. Herbert H. Rowen (New York, 1965); R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1959–64), and, more recently, Peggy K. Liss, *Atlantic*

At a moment when academic theorists view nations as political and cultural constructions and news from Europe reminds us of Ernst Renan's 1882 observation that "the nations are not eternal," there are more reasons than ever to expose French history students to the revolutions that created Haiti. Latin America has long faced the meaninglessness of national sovereignty before the dictates of the global economy. Moreover, the social and cultural divisions these societies inherited from colonialism make the idea of the nation as an "imagined" rather than "natural" community more obvious than it is in Europe.²

As the first successful attempt by a non-European population to reject colonial rule, Haiti pioneered what *nationalism* might mean for the rest of the world. As Jacky Dahomay writes, "There is no place that expresses better than the Antilles the contingency of what a nation can be. The problems of aligning cultural identity, citizenship and nationality in the Antilles anticipate what will be more and more the new drama in world relations. Since our societies did not exist before the colonial project, and were created by the very system of slave plantations, their most original cultural products are found in an anti-plantation culture, therefore their opposition to all that speaks of the domination of a system, including of a State and of a Nation."³

The case of Saint-Domingue/Haiti also raises a related topic of great importance for U.S. students—the interaction of racial and national identities. If it was in the late-eighteenth century that "the nation" began to be the answer when people in the West asked "Who are we?" at the same time "race" became the answer to the question "Why are they different from us?"⁴ The story of the French Revolution, as told without Saint-Domingue, has been part of "the magic of forget-

Empires: The Network of Trade and Revolution, 1713–1826 (Baltimore, Md., 1983). This changed in the 1990s with publication of works like Joseph Klags and Michael Haltzel, eds., *The Global Ramifications of the French Revolution* (Washington, D.C., 1994), and Lester D. Langley, *The Americas in the Age of Revolution, 1750–1850* (New Haven, Conn., 1997). The issues of citizenship and freedom raised by the Revolution have had a greater attraction for scholars interested in slavery: e.g., Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* (London, 1988), and David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975).

² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991), Zygmunt Bauman, "Soil, Blood, and Identity," *Sociological Review* 40 (1992): 675–701, Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation?" trans. Martin Thom, in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York, 1990), 20, Doris Sommer, "Irresistible Romance: The Foundational Fictions of Latin America," in Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 71–98, Florencia Mallon, "The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History," *American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 1491–1515.

³ Jacky Dahomay, "Les Faiblesses du nationalisme antillais," *Chemins critiques: Société, sciences, arts, littérature* 3 (1993): 59, 62–64.

⁴ Michael Banton, *Racial Theories*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, 1998), 233.

fulness and selectivity, both deliberate and inadvertent" that underlies modern French identity⁵

Historians are now recognizing that Haitian events illuminate French choices and are devising teaching strategies to include them Pieter Judson at Swarthmore, for example, builds his "France since 1789 Revolution and Empire," around the tensions between the center and the periphery, ensuring that Haiti, Algeria, and Martinique are integral to course structure and do not appear to have been tacked on⁶ David Bell at Johns Hopkins, who is well known for his scholarship on French nationalism, adopts a different tactic, he offers two separate classes—"The French Revolution" and "France in America" The syllabi can be found on his remarkable and visually impressive Web pages⁷ Yet many other French historians who teach a popular course on the "Age of the French Revolution and Napoléon" share the dilemma Greg Brown at the University of Nevada–Las Vegas appears to have resolved How to insert the Haitian Revolution into a course that begins and ends in Paris, and in which global issues and the world after Waterloo must share space with the Old Regime and the Enlightenment⁸

This essay considers some possible approaches to revising that standard course to include Saint-Domingue The assumption is that few instructors will be able to add a new book to their reading list but that many could add to or change the reserve readings and rework a lecture or two Those who until now have sidestepped French colonial slavery and its aftermath do not need to acquire a new subspecialty to address these important themes Rather than supply a full review of recent literature, my goal here is to suggest accessible readings in English for both instructors and students and to offer some background information and pedagogical strategies With a few exceptions, I do not address events in Martinique and Guadeloupe, in order to leave more space to consider how the revolutionary era shaped the successes and failures of nineteenth-century Haitian nation building

⁵ Brackette F Williams, "A Class Act Anthropology and the Race to Nation across Ethnic Terrain," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18 (1989) 431, Nicholas Hudson, "From 'Nation' to 'Race' The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (1996) 248

⁶ Pieter Judson, "History 3 France since 1789," 6 Nov 1998, <http://www.cc.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/History/H30.html> (4 Sept., 1999)

⁷ David Bell, "David A. Bell," 14 May 1998, <http://jhunix.hcf.jhu.edu/~dabell> (4 Sept 1999) Also available at <http://davidbell.net>

⁸ Gregory S. Brown, "French Revolution," 30 May 1999, <http://www.unlv.edu/faculty/gbrown/hist462> (4 Sept 1999)

Prerevolutionary Saint-Domingue and France

Because the booming colonial trades and the wars they helped generate touched most households in eighteenth-century France, a survey of the Old Regime economy is a good place for students to hear about French slave plantations.⁹ In fact, readings about the entrepreneurial culture of French planters and merchants can launch a discussion of changing economic attitudes. Sugar estates, as Robin Blackburn argues, were an important stage in the transition from mercantile to industrial capitalism. Students may be surprised to learn that a late-eighteenth-century sugar plantation in Jamaica was worth two to three times as much as a “steam-driven, multistoried cotton mill” in England and had three to ten times as many workers as a large English farm. Moreover, those who assume that Britain was the most successful of the Caribbean plantation powers are inadvertently acknowledging how completely the Haitian Revolution erased what France had created. The French Antilles, especially Saint-Domingue, received a markedly higher level of investment than their British rivals. They were larger and more geographically diverse. Unlike many British islands, they produced large quantities of coffee, indigo, and cotton in addition to sugar. French planters and the merchant houses tied to them by planter debt spent more heavily than their British counterparts on crop-processing technology and irrigation and gained corresponding increases in productivity. British planters in Jamaica looked enviously at French profits, which the English claimed to be 8 or 12 percent a year, compared to their own 4 percent.¹⁰

This profitability had a devastating effect on the lives of the African men and women in Saint-Domingue. A course review of Old Regime French demography might touch upon Caribbean conditions, including the fact that half of all Africans stepping onto French colonial soil in chains would die within eight years from overwork, malnutrition, and disease. In the different crop rhythms and disease environments of North America, slaves could expect to live far longer.¹¹ The deadliness of work on the sugar plantations was partially due to time pressures built into prevailing methods of growing and processing sugar. Although canes might take a year or more to mature, once harvested they had to be crushed within forty-eight hours. Every plantation therefore

⁹ Pierre H. Boule, “Patterns of French Colonial Trade and the Seven Years’ War,” *Histoire sociale—Social History* 7 (1974): 52.

¹⁰ Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800* (London, 1997), 376, 434–35.

¹¹ Pierre Pluchon, *Histoire de la colonisation française* (Paris, 1991), 422; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York, 1993), 114.

needed its own grinding mill to produce the watery juice and its own boiling house where an expert team reduced the liquid in a series of progressively smaller cauldrons, halting the process at the precise moment of crystallization. The resulting sludge drained in pots for months, producing something between a dry white sugar loaf and wet, darker muscovado.¹²

Economies of scale and Europe's growing sweet tooth rewarded the largest operations, and planters saw little advantage in sparing their workers, especially during the harvest. A sugar plantation with 250 slaves was dubbed "medium size" on Saint-Domingue's Plaine du Nord, while few mainland plantations north of Charleston, South Carolina, had more than 100 workers in the eighteenth century. Saint-Domingue, like other Caribbean plantation colonies, never achieved positive population growth when slavery was in place.¹³

Students in the United States may be surprised to learn that "before 1820, perhaps two to three times as many enslaved Africans crossed the Atlantic as Europeans," or that the French Caribbean absorbed nearly a quarter of that traffic, while Britain's mainland colonies took only 6 percent. Robert's Stein's *French Slave Trade* is an accessible survey of the topic, but the most exciting development in the field is the publication, still too recent to be appraised for classroom use, of *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM*.¹⁴ A data set drawn from detailed research in the shipping records of Europe's slave-trading powers, this CD has the potential to be an important resource for students and instructors, as well as for scholars. With information on more than twenty-seven thousand voyages over four centuries—approximately two-thirds of all successful voyages—the database reveals as much about European merchants as about African captives. Although much of its pedagogical usefulness depends on the quality

¹² See Robert Louis Stein, *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, La., 1988).

¹³ Geggus notes that his research contradicts the common understanding of plantation size. Among the twenty sugar plantations he studied, the average number was 186 slaves. In a later, larger sample of sixty-five estates in the same province, he found an average of 182 slaves. However, 25 percent of Saint-Domingue's sugar slaves lived on plantations with more than 300 slaves. David P. Geggus, "Les Esclaves de la plaine du nord à la veille de la révolution française," *Revue de la société haïtienne d'histoire et de géographie* 42 (1984): 17; idem, "Sugar and Coffee Production and the Shaping of Slavery in Saint Domingue," in *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*, ed. Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan (Charlottesville, Va., 1993), 74–76; Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 31–33.

¹⁴ David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert S. Klein, eds., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge, 1999). The quote is taken from the first page of their jointly written introduction, "The Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1527–1867," available on-line (as an Adobe Acrobat file) from the Cambridge University Press Catalog, <http://object.cup.org/Chapters/0521629101C00.pdf> (6 Sept. 1999).

of the interface, the project promises to help advanced students pose and answer their own questions about French involvement in this commerce. The editors have aggregated key elements of the data to facilitate regional comparisons, and maps in the interface simplify interpretation of the results. Built on over thirty years of research, the database should help students grasp the vastness and complexity of this Atlantic trade and evaluate France's role as a major slave-trading power¹⁵

Economic structures and pressures are central to any understanding of Caribbean slavery. Once these have been sketched, the course could move to examining Saint-Domingue's relationship to Old Regime culture and society as a way to understand how contemporaries posed and answered the question "Who is French?" Setting aside the issue of slavery, it is possible to think of Saint-Domingue as a distant border province of France. Like those who lived in the Pyrenees, the free residents of Saint-Domingue were in constant contact with "others" in ways that heightened their sense of French identity, there were the Spanish across the mountains in Santo-Domingo, Dutch and English smugglers, and, of course, the African and creole slaves who outnumbered them at least ten to one by the end of the century¹⁶. Yet the ambivalence of their political and economic relationships with the metropole meant that many colonists also considered themselves *créole* or *américain*. It was a white colonial lawyer in 1788 who, as part of a proposal for political reform, first proposed that the name *Haiti* replace Saint-Domingue¹⁷.

A good time to examine these Europe-centered cultural questions is when discussing the Enlightenment and society. As recent publications have stressed, between 1763 and 1789 elite Saint-Domingue was as concerned with questions about citizenship, science, sociability, gender, religion, and reform as people in the metropole. One colonist's 1769 remark in the new colonial newspaper that "buccaneers have given way to ballet-masters" provides an excellent beginning for discussion of cultural transformation and the provincial Enlightenment¹⁸. Colonists' enthusiasm for balloon launchings, freemasonry, mesmerism, and theater (there were eleven theaters in the colony, the largest of which held over a thousand spectators), the emergence of a colonial press,

¹⁵ Eltis, et al, "Transatlantic Slave Trade," 4–5, 24

¹⁶ Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, Calif., 1989), David Bell, "Recent Works on Early Modern French National Identity," *Journal of Modern History* 68 (March 1996): 84–113. John D. Garrigus, "Blue and Brown: Contraband Indigo and the Rise of a Free Colored Planter Class in French Saint-Domingue," *Americas* 50 (1993): 233–63.

¹⁷ David P. Geggus, "The Naming of Haiti," *New West Indian Guide* 71 (1997), 54, Charles Frostun has done the most work on the desire of white colonists for independence or, at least, autonomy. See his *Les Révoltes blanches à Saint-Domingue aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1975).

¹⁸ Jean Fouchard, *Plaisirs de Saint-Domingue: Notes sur sa vie sociale, littéraire et artistique* (Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 1955), 53.

booksellers, private libraries, and literary societies, royal and private attempts to plan and beautify city spaces and improve roads and postal service—all impressed contemporaries with the colony's new urbanity. James McClellan, who takes the colony's scientific academy as his main subject, documents its attempts to apply Enlightenment science to colonial concerns. From meteorology, cartography, and astronomy to applied botany and other efforts to make colonial agriculture more profitable, elite Saint-Domingue was caught up in the age's enthusiasm for describing, defining, and improving the world.¹⁹

What is most striking about McClellan's account, however, is his failure to consider the Enlightenment's increasingly scientific understanding of race, which had a critical influence on the colony's revolutionary history. Because *race*, like *nation*, is a category many US students accept uncritically, discussion of the ways French politics, Enlightenment thought, and colonial society constructed racial groups sheds light on both twentieth-century ideas and revolutionary debates.

Students trying to understand how the French Revolution produced a slave revolt of such lasting power in the Caribbean also need to ask why the French transplanted to Saint-Domingue produced the largest and wealthiest free population of mixed descent in the Americas. In 1790, when free people of color were 2 percent of the free population of the United States, they constituted over 40 percent of Saint-Domingue's free population and included a small but self-confident number of prosperous merchants and planters.²⁰

Was this situation a function of the colony's buccaneer heritage and ample terrain? In neighboring Jamaica, free people of color were only a fourth of the free population, and plantation records reveal that about 10 percent of locally born slaves were mulattos. In Saint-Domingue only 5 percent of creole slaves had European ancestry. Observers noted that the manumission of mixed-race slave children was a strongly held custom in Saint-Domingue.²¹

One aid to understanding this phenomenon is the English-language literature on prerevolutionary French racial attitudes now emerging to complement the wide chronological range of William Cohen's *French Encounter with Africans*.²² A host of new restrictions on

¹⁹ James E. McClellan III, *Colonialism and Science: Saint Domingue in the Old Regime* (Baltimore, Md., 1992), 82, 87–88, 94, 99, 105–6.

²⁰ David Cohen and Jack P. Greene, eds., *Neither Slave Nor Free: The Freedmen of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World* (Baltimore, Md., 1972), 339; Garrigus, "Blue and Brown," 233.

²¹ Cohen and Greene, *Neither Slave Nor Free*, 338; Geggus, "Esclaves de la plaine du nord," 20; Blackburn, *Making of New World Slavery*, 412.

²² William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans, 1530–1880* (Bloomington, Ind., 1980); Sue Peabody, "There Are No Slaves in France" *The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien*

slaves and free blacks residing in metropolitan France after midcentury underline an important change in mentality. These regulations, which were far more drastic than those in Britain, were partly the result of changes in French political culture—including the growing use of slavery as a political metaphor—of anxieties about French national unity, and of the influence of returning colonial planters. They were also attempts to maintain order in a Paris that had far fewer black residents than slave-trading London. Just as important, however, was the impact of Enlightenment biology and philosophy on racial thought.²³ A useful new reader puts excerpts from Georges-Louis de Buffon, Carolus Linnaeus, Immanuel Kant, the *Encyclopédie*, and other texts directly into students' hands.²⁴

Not until 1764 were racial codes strictly applied in Saint-Domingue to wealthy families of mixed ancestry. While the historical literature abounds in statements like "A noted feature of colonial life in the eighteenth century was its strict racial hierarchy," this rigidity was mostly imposed after 1763.²⁵ The music and European career of Joseph Boulogne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, a free mulatto born in Guadeloupe and baptized in Saint-Domingue, illustrates for students the power of class and culture to rewrite eighteenth-century racial definitions.²⁶ The myth that African ancestry had always been "une tâche ineffaçable" in Saint-Domingue buttressed a new scientific view of race bolstered by elite concern over the sexual powers free brown women seemed to exert over white men. Racial science and the lines of descent inscribed in parish registers formed a newly unbreachable barrier between white and nonwhite and solidified the ranks of white colonists divided by class and by sexual competition for *mulâtresses*. The official decision that identity was an ethnic, not a civic matter—and could be charted with scientific precision—turned the wealthiest of reclassified families into determined advocates of racial reform as early as 1784.²⁷

Regime (Oxford, 1996), Pierre H. Boule 'In Defense of Slavery: Eighteenth-Century Opposition to Abolition and the Origins of Racist Ideology in France,' in *History from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology in Honour of George Rude*, ed. Frederick Krantz (Oxford, 1988), 219–46.

²³ Peabody, "There Are No Slaves"; Seymour Drescher, "The Ending of the Slave Trade and the Evolution of European Scientific Racism," in *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe*, ed. Joseph E. Inikori and Stanley L. Engerman (Durham, N.C., 1992), 263–396.

²⁴ Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, ed., *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (London, 1997).

²⁵ The quote about rigidity is from Shanti Marie Singham's otherwise excellent "'Betwixt Cattle and Men': Jews, Blacks, and Women, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man," in *The French Idea of Freedom: The Old Regime and the Declaration of Rights of 1789*, ed. Dale Van Kley (Stanford, Calif., 1994), 129.

²⁶ Joël-Marie Fauquet, Liner notes, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, *Concertos pour violon*, Jean-Jacques Kantorow, Orchestre de chambre Bernard Thomas (Paris, 1990), Compact disc ARN 68093.

²⁷ The change in racial definitions is argued in John D. Garrigus, "'Sons of the Same

Tightening the category *white* distanced African barbarism while it celebrated French civilization. The best primary source on this phenomenon available in English is a recent abridgement of the encyclopedic 1797 description of Saint-Domingue by Moreau de Saint-Méry.²⁸

The multiple cultural contexts created by sugar plantation slavery in the Caribbean raise further interesting questions for students about the meanings of national identities. The process of cultural formation in slave populations is laid out in a classic essay by Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, scholars with both a hemispheric perspective and a particular interest in the francophone Caribbean.²⁹ Providing a sketch of Haitian Vodou is another way to show students the rich cultural mixture evolving in Saint-Domingue. While this use is anachronistic—there is little evidence that Vodou had attained its modern form in the eighteenth century—the neo-African vitality of Haitian culture today can evoke the syncretism practiced by slaves two hundred years ago.³⁰ As long as students understand that they are looking at late-twentieth-century images, the catalog for the Fowler Museum's exhibition on *Sacred Arts of Vodou* is a useful resource. In addition to hundreds of color illustrations, one of the volume's articles is an excellent overview of the religion's colonial roots.³¹ Another recent and accessible work on Vodou's past and present, including some historical documents, is *Voodoo Search for the Spirit* by the Haitian sociologist Laennec Hurbon.³²

Father Gender, Race, and Citizenship in Saint-Domingue, 1760–1792, in *Visions and Revisions of Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Christine Adams, Jack R. Censer, and Lisa Jane Graham (University Park, Pa., 1997) 137–53, idem “Color, Class, and Identity on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution: Saint-Domingue's Free Colored Elite as *Colons Americains*,” *Slavery and Abolition* 17 (1996) 20–43. Students interested in comparisons with Anglo-American racism may want to read Barbara Jeanne Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America,” *New Left Review* 181 (1990) 95–118.

²⁸ M. L. E. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *A Civilization That Perished: The Last Years of White Colonial Rule in Haiti*, ed. and trans. Ivor D. Spencer (Lanham, Md., 1985). Primary texts and contemporary images will also be available on a Web site, Jack Censer, Lynn Hunt, Gregory S. Brown, and Jeffrey Horn, eds., “Liberty, Fraternity, Equality: Exploring the French Revolution,” forthcoming January 2001, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution>, and a companion CD-ROM, Censer et al., *Exploring the French Revolution: A Multi-Media Approach* (University Park, Pa., 2000). Available only in French are Justin Girod de Chantrains, *Voyage d'un Suisse dans différentes colonies d'Amérique*, ed. Pierre Pluchon (Paris, 1980), and Alexandre-Stanislas de Wimpffen, *Haiti au XVIII^e siècle: Richesse et esclavage dans une colonie française*, ed. Pierre Pluchon (Paris, 1994).

²⁹ Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston, 1992).

³⁰ David P. Geggus, “Haitian Vodou in the Eighteenth Century: Language, Culture, Resistance,” *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* 28 (1991) 21–51.

³¹ Sidney W. Mintz and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “The Social History of Haitian Vodou,” in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, ed. Donald J. Consentino (Los Angeles, 1995) 123–47.

³² Laennec Hurbon, *Voodoo Search for the Spirit* (New York, 1995). A classroom detour into this subject may produce someone who has seen the ‘zombie’ film *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988) by director Wes Craven, better known for his *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and *Scream* (1996). Though *Serpent's* portrayal of Haiti was widely criticized, the film was based on the anthropological fieldwork and book by Wade Davis, then a graduate student at Harvard. Although his

A slightly less anachronistic way to illustrate eighteenth-century French-African syncretism (and the lasting impact of French colonialism) is to expose students to Haitian Creole. Although a few "Creole" texts from the eighteenth century and the Revolution survive, linguists debate whether they prove the existence of a full-fledged language before the nineteenth century. Students with some facility in French might prefer to sample the modern sounds and spellings of Creole available on the Internet.³³ Some may be able to follow the language's combination of French vocabulary and African grammar, including the disappearance of gender, the position of articles after the verb, and the use of verb prefixes rather than suffixes to indicate tenses.³⁴

The theme of African cultures in French Saint-Domingue raises questions about the Haitian Revolution that many historians of early modern France may feel unprepared to answer. Nonetheless, students need to be aware of recent scholarship drawing attention to the ways African cultures on both sides of the Atlantic shaped the French Caribbean experience. In Haiti African ethnic labels have remained visible in popular culture down to the present day. In the eighteenth century the Haitian slave population was always more than half African-born, and this fraction rose dramatically just before the Revolution. At this time slaves in Martinique, and in the newly independent United States, were mostly creoles.³⁵

Because planters had definite ideas about the desirability of various African "nations," David Geggus and others have been able to trace these labels in plantation records to show that in the 1780s "Congo" slaves were especially concentrated in the new coffee plantations in Saint-Domingue's mountains. Slave-trade records confirm that Saint-Domingue was unusual in that it received a high percentage of all

claims to have recovered the ingredients Haitian sorcerers use for zombification are hotly disputed, Davis's publications cannot be as lightly dismissed as Craven's film adaptation. See Paul E. Brodwin, review of Wade Davis, *Passage to Darkness*, in *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 6 (1992): 141-43; Drexel G. Woodson, review of Davis, *Passage to Darkness*, in *Africa* 62 (1992): 151-54.

³³ The French-inflected pronunciation of announcers on the Voice of America Creole broadcasts recorded daily in Washington, D.C., will be easier for students of French to understand than the more popular accents heard on Radio Vision 2000, an Internet radio broadcast originating in Haiti. The Haitian embassy in Washington maintains a Web page with links to Creole-language Web sites. Embassy of Haiti, "Embassy of Haiti—Internet Resources Concerning Haiti," 5 Aug. 1999, <http://www.haiti.org/embassy/kreylink.htm> (4 Sept. 1999); Radio Vision 2000, "Radio Vision 2000," Sept. 15, 1999, <http://www.radiovision2000.com>, (4 Sept. 1999); Voice of America "Home Page," Jan. 7, 1999, <http://www.voagov/creole> (4 Sept. 1999).

³⁴ Léon-François Hoffmann, *Haiti: Couleurs, Croyance, Créole* (Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 1990), 203, notes that linguists debate whether these are characteristics of African languages like Ewe or Wolof, or whether Creole languages without a historical link to Africa share the same structures.

³⁵ David P. Geggus, "The Slaves and Free Coloreds of Martinique during the Age of the French and Haitian Revolutions: Three Moments of Resistance," in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, ed. Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman (Gainesville, Fla., 1996).

its new slaves from central Africa during the second half of the century³⁶ The Africanist John Thornton has written a pair of accessible articles suggesting that newly imported Africans brought to prerevolutionary Saint-Domingue ideas about royalism and military strategy learned from the political struggles and wars of the Congo basin³⁷

Stressing the vitality of the Caribbean's African and creole cultures, together with the murderous conditions of sugar slavery, is one way to help students understand the ongoing and frequently violent resistance to bondage that characterized eighteenth-century Caribbean societies The phenomenon of *petit* and *grand marronage*—slaves escaping temporarily or permanently to camps in the mountains—was another important, if debated factor in the Haitian Revolution The maroon has become a national symbol in Haiti, emphasizing the local rather than the French roots of the Haitian Revolution Even so, there is little historical evidence that maroons were important in the uprising of August 1791 Before that year the French had less trouble from slave rebels than the British in Jamaica or the Dutch in mainland Surinam³⁸

Revolution in France and Saint-Domingue/Haiti

Making the point that elite colonial cultures were part of the Old Regime world simplifies the presentation of revolutionary Saint-Domingue, though instructors may also want students to consider when the French Revolution in Saint-Domingue becomes the Haitian Revolution At what point were events no longer defined in Paris but in the Caribbean? Was it in August 1791, when the revolt on the great northern plain first established that slaves would be among the groups contesting the “regeneration” of the colony? Was it in the autumn of 1793, when French commissioner Léger Félicité Sonthonax formally ended slavery in the colony in order to win black soldiers for the Republic? Or was it in 1794, when Toussaint-Louverture abandoned his Spanish allies and brought his troops to the French side, giving Haiti its first endur-

³⁶ David P Geggus “The Demographic Composition of the French Caribbean Slave Trade, in *Proceedings of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Meetings of the French Colonial Historical Society*, ed Philip P Boucher (Lanham, Md 1990), 19, Eltis et al, “The Transatlantic Slave Trade, 1527–1867,” 32

³⁷ John K Thornton, “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution,” *Journal of Caribbean History* 25 (1991) 59–80, idem, “I am the Subject of the King of Congo” African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution, *Journal of World History* 4 (1993) 181–214

³⁸ Interested students can find translations of Moreau de Saint-Mery's description of Saint-Domingue's maroons in Richard Price, ed, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, 3d ed (Baltimore, Md, 1996), 135–40, on maroons and the outbreak of slave revolt, see David P Geggus, “Marronage, Voodoo, and the Saint-Domingue Slave Revolution of 1791,” *Proceedings of the Fifteenth Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society*, ed Patricia Galloway and Philip Boucher (Lanham, Md, 1992)

ing black hero³ Did colonial subjects become key actors in 1801 when Toussaint promulgated a constitution that made him, in effect, the autonomous ruler of Saint-Domingue² Or, finally, was it in 1802–3, when a French invasion to restore slavery gradually provoked a military and political coalition that declared independence on 1 January 1804²

Presenting a political and social contest at least as complex as that occurring in Europe within the limits of a conventional course on the French Revolution also requires choices of the kind instructors will have already made to structure their French material In the remainder of this essay I suggest five possible themes for presenting the Revolution and discuss their implications for Haiti Each theme attempts to answer the question “What should I emphasize in the Haitian context and what English-language readings can I assign for each of these approaches²”

The approach that treats the French Revolution in Saint-Domingue/Haiti as a question of human rights is supported by a recent anthology³⁹ Such a narrative could be divided into three key periods involving the very different struggles for white and free-colored fraternity in 1789–91, civil equality for slaves and other citizens in 1791–93, and, finally, liberty from forced cultivation for ex-slaves who labored in the sugar fields long after emancipation

The 1790–91 debate in the National Assembly about whether to end racial discrimination in the free population is well documented⁴⁰ Led partly by highly articulate members of the colonial free colored elite working with French abolitionists, this struggle integrates easily into discussions of citizenship for Jews, women, and other groups, gender especially was an important component of these men’s claims that they were Frenchmen, the brothers and sons of the colonists⁴¹ The subsequent war against slavery by rebel fieldworkers is what many consider to be the Haitian Revolution, and it is at the heart of most accounts of the period⁴²

The third and least-studied phase is the debate about whether ex-

³⁹ Lynn Hunt, ed., *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History* (Boston, 1996)

⁴⁰ David P. Geggus, “Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession during the Constituent Assembly,” *American Historical Review* 94 (1989): 1290–1309; Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 161–90

⁴¹ Robert Forster, “The French Revolution, People of Color, and Slavery,” in Klaitz and Haltzel, *Global Ramifications of the French Revolution*, 89–104

⁴² The best short summary is David P. Geggus, “The Haitian Revolution,” in *The Modern Caribbean*, ed. Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1989), 21–50. The classic account is C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York, 1963), updated in Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1990); Thomas O. Ott, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789–1804* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1973), is less reliable. Also important for the human rights theme is Robert Louis Stein, *Leger Felicite Sonthonax: The Lost Sentinel of the Republic* (Rutherford, N.J., 1985)

slaves would continue to labor against their will on the plantations. The period after 1793–94 demonstrates the pressures working against human rights. Because full application of revolutionary ideology would dismantle the world's most productive plantation system, French leaders and their Haitian successors hoped to defer this final liberty, as Laurent Dubois shows in a recent article on Guadeloupe.⁴³

Scholars inspired by C. L. R. James but unwilling to assign the full length of his classic text, or Carolyn Fick's excellent and similarly themed *The Making of Haiti*, may still wish to treat the French Revolution in Saint-Domingue as a popular uprising. Here an abridged treatment of events might focus on two periods. The first of these is the ignition of the August 1791 slave revolt, whose beginnings in a late-night religious ceremony and sacrifice at the "Bois Caïman" have been imagined by many writers.⁴⁴ Geggus provides a searching review of the best available evidence for this quasi-mythological event.⁴⁵

A popular revolt against the French eleven years later has received less literary attention but is arguably more important for Haiti's eventual rejection of French colonialism. It was guerrilla bands, many of them under African leaders, who began the war against the large French expeditionary force that arrived in 1802 and sent Toussaint to a European prison. The black and mulatto generals who would eventually declare Haitian independence first led the suppression of these rebels. Only when it became clear that Napoléon intended to restore slavery did these soldiers change sides. Jean-Baptiste Rochambeau's brutal campaign to retake the colony illustrates how imperial concerns, buttressed by racial stereotypes, had replaced the universal fraternity that once united, at least in theory, black, brown, and white republicans.⁴⁶

Those who take a Tocquevillian approach to the Revolution in France may follow a similar trajectory in Saint-Domingue/Haiti, with some important modifications. Although Haiti's nineteenth-century elites installed regimes that were thoroughly neocolonial in social and

⁴³ Laurent Dubois, "The Price of Liberty: Victor Hugues and the Administration of Freedom in Guadeloupe 1794–1798," *William and Mary Quarterly* 56 (April 1999): 363–92; Carolyn E. Fick, "The French Revolution in Saint Domingue: A Triumph or a Failure?" in *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*, ed. David Gaspar and David Geggus (Bloomington, Ind., 1997), 51–57; Robert Lacerte, "The Evolution of Land and Labor in the Haitian Revolution, 1791–1820," *Americas* 34 (1978): 449–59.

⁴⁴ Perhaps the best of these fictionalized accounts is Madison Smartt Bell's, his well-received historical novel about the Haitian Revolution, *All Souls' Rising* (New York, 1995), which shows an impressive amount of research mixed with some deliberate anachronisms.

⁴⁵ David P. Geggus, "The Bois Caïman Ceremony," *Journal of Caribbean History* 25 (1991): 41–57.

⁴⁶ Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 248–50.

cultural terms, they were too weak and disorganized to be described as heirs to the Bourbons. By the mid-nineteenth century, plantation workers had won autonomy from the state by seceding into the hills. The early reigns of Toussaint and Henri Christophe, however, demonstrate a Napoleonic attention to order and control, with results that royal governors might well have envied. In particular, Christophe's authoritarian rule from 1806 to 1820, with its elaborate court ritual, aristocratic hierarchy, and concern for "progress" and national defense, presents an image of the Revolution come full circle. Pending Geggus's biography of Toussaint, there is not much in English on these two figures, outside of popular accounts, to recommend to students. However, Michel-Rolph Trouillot provides some provocative accounts of elite neocolonialism.⁴⁷

Instructors whose course plans provide time to consider the legacy of the French Revolution for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may offer the Caribbean basin as an illustration of this theme. Here Geggus's reaction to Eugene Genovese's 1979 *From Rebellion to Revolution* has produced a valuable literature. Noting the many slave revolts that broke out in the Americas after 1789, Genovese proposed that the French Revolution had created a new era of ideological resistance to slavery. Geggus has countered this thesis with detailed, often revisionist research into late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century slave revolts throughout the Americas. He concludes that the French Revolution's greatest impact on many slave rebels was a reduction in local military strength, not the introduction of a new ideology.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, revolutionary ideology did have demonstrable effects on slave rebels in Curaçao, Louisiana, Venezuela, and Brazil, among other places.⁴⁹ Though the influence of Haiti's Alexandre Pétion on Bolívar's attitudes toward emancipation and republicanism has yet to find a detailed English-language treatment accessible to students, the relationship is

⁴⁷ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The Inconvenience of Freedom: Free People of Color and the Aftermath of Slavery in Dominica and Saint-Domingue/Haiti," in *The Meaning of Freedom: Economics, Politics, and Culture after Slavery*, ed. F. McGlynn and Seymour Drescher (Pittsburgh, Pa. 1992), idem, "The Three Faces of Sans Souci," in *Silencing the Past*, 31–69, idem, "Haiti's Nightmare and the Lessons of History," in *Haiti: Dangerous Crossroads*, ed. North American Congress on Latin America (Boston, 1995), 121–32.

⁴⁸ Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge, La., 1979), Geggus, "Slavery, War, and Revolution in the Greater Caribbean, 1789–1815," in Gaspar and Geggus, *Turbulent Time*, 1–50, idem, "The French and Haitian Revolutions and Resistance to Slavery in the Americas: An Overview," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 76 (1989): 107–24.

⁴⁹ For the repercussions of the French and Haitian revolutions in the Caribbean, see other contributors to Gaspar and Geggus, *Turbulent Time*.

worth including in a survey of the French Revolution's impact on the Americas⁵⁰

One of the reasons C. L. R. James's *Black Jacobins* remains a valuable text sixty years after it was first published is that his prose evokes what Haiti could mean for colonized peoples in the twentieth century.⁵¹ Students can gain further insights into the power of the revolutionary era for the modern Caribbean from the 1976 Cuban film *La última cena* (The Last Supper), directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Based on a Cuban slave revolt of the 1790s, the film features a "French" character, a mulatto sugar master who has fled the Revolution to work for an aristocratic absentee planter. During a rare visit to his estate during Holy Week, the pious Count unintentionally provokes slave unrest and then brutally represses it, swearing "This is not Saint-Domingue." By transforming the plantation's ferocious white overseer into a sacrificial Christ at the end of the film, Gutiérrez Alea suggests that social class, not race, is the true basis of the Cuban nation. In this film made with close attention to the details of life on a sugar plantation, the slaves and their driver all die for the sins of the master.

Finally, for those who narrate the Revolution as nation building, Haiti shows that the imperial project could not be eliminated by simply expelling the French. Despite unprecedented success in constructing a national identity and preserving its political independence in a hostile world, nineteenth-century Haiti remained divided by culture and class—categories coded in the words *mulatto* and *black*.⁵²

The difficulty of following this theme is that it begins, logically enough, just as the French Revolution ends. In the late 1790s partisans of the mulatto general André Rigaud and other mixed-blood leaders fought the followers of Toussaint-Louverture, with both sides claiming superior loyalty to the republic. Only in the desperate battles against Charles Leclerc and Rochambeau after the arrest of Toussaint in 1802, did these multiple factions realize they could trust each other more than they could trust Napoléon's generals. In an act symbolizing a political and racial reordering, Toussaint's successor, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, tore the white band from the tricolor late in 1803 and had the rest stitched together as the flag of a new nation born both of and against the French.⁵³

⁵⁰ Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 345

⁵¹ Idem, "The Black Jacobins and New World Slavery," in C. L. R. James *His Intellectual Legacies*, ed. Selwyn R. Cudjoe and William E. Cain (Amherst, Mass. 1995), 81–105

⁵² Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York, 1990), 109–10

⁵³ Hoffmann, *Haiti*, 79

As the date set for proclaiming independence drew near, Dessalines rejected the natural rights language his secretaries had written into a Jeffersonian declaration. Instead he directed another secretary, Félix Boisrond Tonnerre, to write and deliver a proclamation emphasizing the bloody struggle that had brought the nation together. Boisrond Tonnerre's prose appropriated for Haiti the history of the island's long-extirminated Taino natives. Saluting the revolutionary army as *indigenes*, even though many of those who had fought longest and most consistently against the French were born in Africa, Boisrond Tonnerre described the birth of the nation as the result of their determination to die rather than be reenslaved. The formulation drew on Rousseauian images of natural purity and identified the potentially divisive notion of "barbarity" with France. To sustain this late-blooming unity, Dessalines's 1805 constitution stipulated that all Haitians were "black" and that all such peoples—enslaved and oppressed people of color—would be welcomed.⁵⁴

Within two years Dessalines had been assassinated by men of property for threatening to examine the legality of recent land transfers. After 1807 Haiti was divided between Henri Christophe's authoritarian black kingdom in the north and Pétion's oligarchic republic to the south. The failure to achieve lasting national unity in itself may be instructive for undergraduate students of French history. The lack of even rudimentary schools for the population at large, due in part to Rome's refusal to recognize Haiti until 1860, perpetuated the division between neo-African "barbarism" and francophone "civilization." French remained the only official language until Creole was formally added in 1980. A similarly deep ambivalence about Vodou, including a tradition of eradication campaigns that continued even after the rise of an ethnographic and literary indigenist movement in the 1920s, accentuated these splits. Without summarizing nearly two hundred years of Haitian history, the course can suggest to undergraduate students of Revolutionary France that elements of those earlier conflicts have kept the first Latin American nation, chronologically, among the last to achieve social cohesion.⁵⁵

A few sources stand out for those interested in the postrevolutionary period. Alyssa Sepinwall has discussed the career of Abbé Grégoire as an emissary of French revolutionary civilization after Haitian independence. Nineteenth-century nationalist historiography and Haiti's racial divisions are among the themes considered in the late

⁵⁴ Thomas Madiou, *Histoire d'Haïti*, 8 vols. (Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 1989), 3: 145–51.

⁵⁵ Laënnec Hurbon, *Le Barbare imaginaire* (Paris, 1988), 91.

David Nicholls's *From Dessalines to Duvalier* And, finally, the recent appearance of an English-language anthology devoted to key primary and secondary texts from Haitian history is a sign of increasing U S interest in teaching students about this, France's other late-eighteenth-century revolution ⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, "Universalism in Abbe Gregoire's Thought, 1815–1827" *African Philosophy* 11 (1998) 35–55, David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier Race Colour and National Independence in Haiti* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1996) Charles Arthur and Michael Dash, eds, *A Haiti Anthology Libete* (Princeton, NJ, 1999)

