

# THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION



Haiti, Black Sovereignty and Power in  
the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World

KAREN SALT



# **The Unfinished Revolution**

Haiti, Black Sovereignty and Power  
in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World

Karen Salt

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# Introduction: Sovereignty and Power

Periodising modern black politics [...] will require fresh thinking about the importance of Haiti and its revolution for the development of [black] political thought and movements of resistance.

Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 17

Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* contains only a few lines about Haiti. In a text sharply concerned with articulating the after-effects of displacement and dislocation for people of African descent in the Atlantic world, Gilroy's turn to and away from Haiti is both startling and intentional. As seen in the lines above, while Gilroy's text might eschew a focus on national particularities, he clearly understands that any construction of black political thought must engage with Haiti, the nation and its revolutionary beginnings. Gilroy pushes for this recognition but turns his lens in *The Black Atlantic* to chronotopic rhythms and supranational connectivities—such as the dispersals and displacements of Atlantic racial slavery—that have shaped African Atlantic peoples.

Yet, the above goes further than merely calling for more scholarship on an understudied nation-state. Gilroy's assertion that *periodising modern black politics* requires *fresh thinking* about Haiti makes clear that politics for those within the black Atlantic resides not merely in transnational radical antislavery movements or circulating geographies of black resistance, but also in the presence and continued reality of black nation-states. This stress and opening stands out in a text that argues against reducing blackness to a reductive national identity. While a laudable and important call, the rest of *The Black Atlantic* leaves unaddressed Gilroy's demand for fresh thinking about a self-avowed nation-state that emerged from years of bloodied

struggle in 1804 as the first republic of people of African descent, the second republic in the Americas and the only nation successfully to emerge from a slave rebellion. As the epigraph above shows, understanding the political routes—and roots—of people of African descent in the Atlantic world means returning to nations—and specifically Haiti—in order to reassess black politics by placing Haiti at its centre. In the 25 years since Gilroy offered up this challenge, critics have responded with a variety of reassessments of Haiti and its revolution that illuminate the vitality of studies into black power, radical antislavery movements, resistance and Haitian history—and the *fresh thinking* still needed on black nation-states.

One vital example is the proliferation of scholarship on the Haitian Revolution and its national period.<sup>1</sup> Haitian revolutionary studies was once a research area limited to scholars of Haitian studies. Today, the topic appears within numerous scholarly fields. Literary critics, art historians, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, critical geographers and cultural and post-colonial critics (amongst others) based in the USA, Central and South America, the Caribbean, Europe and other parts of the world have offered deeply nuanced and provocative readings of the Haitian Revolution.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is an enormous and growing body of work. A good overview and starting point would be these texts: Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*, 1st ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), Colin [Joan] Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Penguin, 2001), David Patrick Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2002), Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), Nick Nesbitt, *Universal Emancipation: The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008) and, more recently, Jeremy Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Deborah Jenson, *Beyond the Slave Narrative: Sex, Politics, and Manuscripts in the Haitian Revolution* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), Philip Kaisery, *The Haitian Revolution in the Literary Imagination: Radical Horizons, Conservative Constraints* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), Julia Gaffield, *Haitian Connections in the Atlantic World: Recognition after Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015) and Marlene Daut, *Tropics of Haiti: Race and the Literary History of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> In addition to n. 1 and other texts within this chapter, see Alex Dupuy, *Haiti in the World Economy: Class, Race, and Underdevelopment since 1700* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), Jean Casimir, *La culture opprimée* (Delmas, Haïti: Lakay, 2001), Ashli

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A brief history of this seismic event follows. The Taíno lived throughout the Caribbean and in parts of Florida. Their lives flowed and ebbed not as some kind of pre-modern peoples but as lived entities who settled in complex towns, celebrated life, battled for power, expressed themselves through figurative and ceremonial art and were ruled by a mosaic of leaders. They fought with weapons and pharmacological know-how and traversed the unforgiving Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean on vessels that could carry scores.<sup>3</sup> The Taíno, along with others who made up the Arawak people, produced impressive cave art that still tantalises today.<sup>4</sup> They also discovered Europeans.

In the late 1400s, Arawak peoples encountered Spanish explorers and forces intent on “finding” and taking control of other territories. This “encounter story” is well told, even appearing as a poem in the USA to encourage young people studying the 1492 “ocean blue” voyage of Columbus to remember the “discoverer” of America.<sup>5</sup> The settlements that followed (including those in Central and South America) brought fortune to the burgeoning Spanish empire and devastation to the Arawak peoples. In the millions in the early part of the sixteenth century, their numbers would decline as encounters and clashes with a rising influx of Europeans brought enslavement, disease and death.<sup>6</sup> People from the African continent would be drawn into this space, not as friend or foe, but as product, labouring with their bodies and dying with their blood to fuel the profits of avaricious traders banking in things—including black people, sugar, coffee and gold.

Flash forward not quite 200 years. Aspects of the Atlantic world had been turned into a factory with plantation economies and the capturing and manufacturing of enslaved persons forming the core—through bio-power—of

White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), Anthony Bogues, *Empire of Liberty: Power, Desire and Freedom* (Hanover: New England University Press, 2010) and Ronald Johnson, *Diplomacy in Black and White: John Adams, Toussaint Louverture, and their Atlantic World Alliance* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014).

3 For more on the Taíno, see Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise and Decline of the People who Greeted Columbus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

4 For more on this, see this digital cave art project, <http://science.nationalgeographic.com/archaeology/gigapan/sanabe/> focused on the *Hoyo de Sanabe* cave in what is now known as the Dominican Republic.

5 For complicated and ahistorical reasons, Columbus Day in the USA celebrates Columbus’s arrival on Hispaniola—a territory unrelated to the USA.

6 For more on this period and the impact on African and indigenous communities, see Heather Miyano Kopelson, *Faithful Bodies: Performing Religion and Race in the Puritan Atlantic* (New York: New York University Press, 2014) and Cassander L. Smith, *Black Africans in the British Imagination: English Narratives of the Early Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016).

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this system.<sup>7</sup> On Hispaniola, the Spanish name for what we now call Haiti and the Dominican Republic, French and Spanish forces, and a fair number of pirates, settled and ignored each other. Although claimed in entirety by Spain, sections of Hispaniola were unruly and had been given over—at least implicitly—to French control. In 1679, after a long nine years' war between France and what was known as the Grand Alliance (a union that brought together European entities from the Holy Roman Empire, William III, and King Charles II of Spain) had erupted in battles in Europe and even North America, the forces signed a treaty that along with redrawing territorial control of Europe, put one-half of Spanish-controlled Hispaniola firmly into French hands.

By the 1770s, the little French colony of Saint-Domingue had become a wealth-producing behemoth, generating sugar and coffee profits that kept French investors and traders lavishly fed and clothed, primarily through a brutal and violent slave system in which bodies were used—often until death—to produce commodities. Such was the colony's wealth at the time that the system merely replaced one dead enslaved adult person of African descent with another adult person, principally from the west coast of Africa. And the cycle continued.

Amongst this brutality, though, were other communities—whites (of various financial means), freeborn blacks, maroons and persons of mixed-race backgrounds—each of which had complicated economic connections and political ideals that would drive their plans for advancement in the colony onto diverging paths. Within this churning world of complicity, greed, opportunism and intrigue, life for people of African descent—those enslaved, free to chart their own futures and those enchained in other ways to powerful “bodies”—demanded flexibility and inventiveness in order to plot out futures, especially political futures, of any kind. Although dissenters and agitators—such as Makandal—fought and rebelled, life on the colony reached a tipping point in the 1770s.<sup>8</sup>

The sweep of events leading up to and including the American Revolution put forth intriguing and important demands about anti-colonialism and political rights into the Atlantic world (but less unifying ideas about the

7 For more on these dynamics, see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), Michaeline A. Crichlow, *Globalization and the Post-Creole Imagination: Notes on Fleeing the Plantation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009) and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649–1849* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

8 There is a growing body of literature on pre-revolutionary Saint-Domingue. A vital text to begin the journey into this subject is John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

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rights of women and people of African descent in these processes).<sup>9</sup> In the mainland British American colonies, amidst the much-repeated stories of Paul Revere and George Washington, is another story in which hundreds of black fighters from the then French colony of Saint-Domingue, including scores of enslaved persons, participated in a combined alliance of American and French troops against the British at the 1779 Battle of Savannah: a participation only publicly commemorated in the USA in the late twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> Although much is now known about people of African descent within the British colonies who fought on the side of the Loyalists and the Patriots, scholars have a long way to go in order to re-situate the *Chasseurs volontaires* (volunteer infantrymen) from Saint-Domingue into this Atlantic political theatre—and I use theatre here as both a site where military events happen and a site where political performances occur and are thus shaped.<sup>11</sup>

In this space of charged possibilities, people of African descent listened and worked with (and against) external structures and institutions in order to forge a future political path that included them—no matter how constrained their lives and opportunities were at the present. An example of this? In a newspaper interview about the commemoration of the fighters from Saint-Domingue in the 1799 Battle of Savannah, Haitian historian Gerard Laurent argues that the men who returned from this encounter, such as the eventual Haitian Revolutionary leader and future King of Haiti, Henri Christophe, “came back with an ideal; an ideal of freedom and liberty was developed.”<sup>12</sup>

If the American Revolution nurtured seeds of liberty and stoked the fires of self-governance (however defined) and control already pulsing within the black Atlantic, the French Revolution lit it aflame. For some within Saint-Domingue, such as Vincent Ogé, the French Revolution settled the question of the political rights of mixed-race people. For Ogé and contemporaries, such as Jean-Baptiste Chavanne,<sup>13</sup> *The Declaration of the Rights of*

9 Readers interested in this should consult the excellent collection that brings the American Revolution, the US Declaration of Independence, the Haitian Revolution and the Haitian Declaration of Independence into conversation. See Julia Gaffield, ed., *The Haitian Declaration of Independence* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016).

10 The coverage in this piece is indicative of the media interest: Dan Sewell, “Haitians Want it Known that Haitian Heroes Aided American Revolution,” *Los Angeles Times* 18 December 1994. Accessed January 2010. [http://articles.latimes.com/1994-12-18/news/mn-10197\\_1\\_haitians-battle-army-junta](http://articles.latimes.com/1994-12-18/news/mn-10197_1_haitians-battle-army-junta).

11 For more on this, see n. 8 and Stewart R. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-revolutionary Saint Domingue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

12 Sewell, “Haitians Want it Known that Haitian Heroes Aided American Revolution.”

13 A mixed race sergeant in the militia who fought in Savannah and who was less

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*Man and Citizen* and the evolving debates and arguments in the National Assembly and within Paris on race, equality and slavery, some of which Ogé participated in, called into question the rights and citizenship of free people of colour and the governance structures needed to ensure equality for all. The colonial administration of Saint-Domingue did not support this radical supposition. They had even less love for the political machinations of free people of colour within Saint-Domingue that eventually drew Ogé from Paris where he was raising funds, amassing influence and politically networking.<sup>14</sup>

For many colonial officials in Saint-Domingue, any world view that expanded rights for people of African descent opened the door to the destruction of the colony and the loss of white control—although phrased a little less blatantly as a fight to maintain white supremacy in the colonies, even as the metropole exploded with the radical potential of redistributing power. Ogé and others who espoused this extension of rights and recognition to mixed-race peoples, as well as free blacks and even enslaved persons, could not imagine a future where France's colonies would not benefit from the turns towards equality swirling in Paris.<sup>15</sup> The confluence of antislavery efforts and racial reform sweeping through the city (and the wider Atlantic world) would draw the attention of engaged radicals and activists on both sides of the ocean and those moving through and within its waters and the Caribbean Sea.<sup>16</sup>

Upon leaving Paris, in a swirl of controversy and suspicion, Ogé travelled to Britain (meeting abolitionist and future Henri Christophe supporter, Thomas Clarkson). Since the mid-nineteenth century, historians have described these journeys as Ogé's transatlantic arming for his insurgency. Historian John Garrigus has spent time in new archives and has amassed convincing evidence that the narrative promulgated by later colonial interrogators of Ogé's radicalisation and stockpiling of weapons does not match up with the record. He did buy and sell items, but this movement of goods appears as part of a fortune-growing, debt-swapping

wealthy than and identified more closely with poor free blacks than with the colonial elite. His life is presented in more detail in John D. Garrigus, "Vincent Ogé, jeune (1757–91): Social Class and Free Colored Mobilization on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution," *Americas* 68, no. 1 (2011): 33–62.

14 For more on this, see n. 11.

15 For discussions of some of these rights, see John D. Garrigus, "Opportunist of Patriot? Julien Raimond (1744–1801) and the Haitian Revolution," *Slavery & Abolition* 28, no. 1 (2007): 1–21.

16 These types of circulating activities have been charted in this influential text: Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

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and military-fashioning self-invention that brought him into far more radical company.<sup>17</sup>

Whether motivated in part by self-interest or by an expansive notion of politics, Ogé paid for his convictions with his life. Although supported in various quarters of the fractured population in Saint-Domingue (of *petits blancs*, *grands blancs*, *affranchis*, enslaved persons and *gens de couleur*), his public demands for change did not dismantle white colonial control in Saint-Domingue or install more equitable governance models. Regardless, his political questioning still deserves further scrutiny. Garrigus has called for more work on Ogé and more critical evaluation of his role in relation to the events in the autumn of 1791. I concur with Garrigus, but sense in Ogé's manoeuvrings important articulations about the limits of black politics and sovereignty (more on this, below), even if Ogé would have phrased himself as a French citizen before he would have labelled himself as a man of African descent.

I remain interested in his political work, especially as it offers a compelling counter-narrative to the framings that emerge, later, once the Haitian Revolution spreads, gets organised and becomes a radical force for anti-colonialism. As Garrigus argues, Ogé may be a surprising radical (if that is the right word for his calculated opportunism) amongst the 100 to 200 mostly politically conservative free men of colour in his wealth bracket. Yet, in moving in opposition to a gradualist message of racial equality (such as that espoused by his friend and fellow agitator, Julien Raimond) and combating white colonial authority with words and blood, Ogé managed to stir multiple populations.

Upon his return to Saint-Domingue, free men of colour gathered and proclaimed their rights—including voting rights ambiguously conferred to them by the National Assembly—to the colonial authorities. They also seemed determined to launch an offensive. When the colonial forces confronted the assembled group, they were held off. Upon their return, the group fled, with Ogé amongst them, to Santo Domingo (the Spanish-controlled side of the island). Soon, they would give themselves up and be taken back to Saint-Domingue. Interrogated in secret, all were publicly tortured and executed.<sup>18</sup> At one time, this “revolt” was regarded as a central feature of the events still to unfold in 1791—the Bois Caïman ceremony, the fires, the deaths and the gathering and planning amongst the enslaved populations.<sup>19</sup> Although

<sup>17</sup> See Garrigus, “Vincent Ogé, jeune.”

<sup>18</sup> Garrigus, “Vincent Ogé, jeune.”

<sup>19</sup> The Bois Caïman ceremony represents a significant flashpoint in the historiography of the Haitian Revolution, with some scholars, such as historian Jeremy Popkin, warning that most of the knowledge about the ceremony comes from charged and

historians differ about the causes of this event, Ogé's death and political work had an impact on the colonial governance structure of Saint-Domingue that implemented changes that the enslaved rebels would soon face.

I will return to the autumn of 1791, as those events deserve unpacking. This will come. What is relevant here is less a case for the cause(s) of the revolution than the politics and governance structures that responded to and emerged from it. This future visioning of freedom and power, and the constraints that informed them, significantly impacted how and in what ways the new nation of Haiti would be designed. This book is interested in this vision and the ways that it would transform as the century advanced. Reacted against, played with, courted and strategically recognised, Haiti, as the first black republic of the Atlantic world, has received significant attention in the last 20 years within development circles (on its purported underdevelopment, poverty or failure as a state) and also within academic research into the nation's origins.<sup>20</sup> Yet, its actual sovereign existence remains uncharted.

One critical text, appearing just a few short years after Gilroy's field-shaping tome, shifted the interdisciplinary conversation surrounding Haiti and its revolution in unprecedented ways. Published in 1995, Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* calls attention to what he then perceived as the critical and cultural disregard toward Haiti and its revolution as both a non-place and a non-event that warranted little attention on its own and even less when placed within a comparative historical context.<sup>21</sup> In a text that explores power, the production of history and the careful exposition of power's roots, Trouillot's musings on the Haitian Revolution are both simple and extremely provocative. His argument

negative French narratives. Other critics, such as Carolyn Fick, see in the ceremony one of many instances of spiritual possession, ancestral connection and collective resistance. Rather than argue for the lack of specificity in the print record, these critics—and I would include Laurent Dubois in this group—argue that the ceremony lives in the traditions of the people. For more on the differing historiographical approaches to this event, see Popkin, Dubois, Fick and nn. 102–04.

20 In addition to nn. 1 and 2, see Robert Maguire, "The Limits of Haitian Sovereignty: Haiti through Clear Eyes," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 165–77, Alex Dupuy, *Haiti: From Revolutionary Slaves to Powerless Citizens; Essays on the Politics and Economics of Underdevelopment, 1804–2013* (London: Routledge, 2014) and Robert Maguire and Scott Freeman, eds., *Who Owns Haiti? People, Power, and Sovereignty* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2017).

21 In addition to Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, see Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (New York: Verso Books, 1995) for a provocative argument about non-places that, although focused on the twentieth century, could be applied to particular communities and regions, such as the Caribbean.

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combines assertions that “the Haitian Revolution thus entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened” with a careful exposition on power and framings of history within and beyond Haiti.<sup>22</sup> After canvassing scholarship, at the time, on the Age of Revolutions and within world history, Trouillot comes to the conclusion that Haiti remained a silent actor. For him, this is part of “what the West has told itself and others about itself.”<sup>23</sup> Troubled by this de-historicisation, Trouillot predicts that the silence regarding the Haitian Revolution will continue owing to the fact that racism and dispossession remain unaccounted for within world narratives. Unless this silence changes and “colonialism and racism seem important to world history,” the Haitian Revolution will remain unimportant to global events.<sup>24</sup>

In the 20 years since Trouillot’s slim volume appeared, critics have produced spirited responses that have investigated the cultural, political and racial implications of Haiti’s unthinkability, as well as challenged Trouillot’s framing trope of “silence” regarding Haiti. Literary critics, historians and social scientists (amongst other disciplinary investigators and interdisciplinary examiners) have built on, responded to and critiqued Trouillot’s work or moved the field on in important ways. A critical set of scholars from a variety of fields have provided nuanced examinations into Haiti’s culture(s), histories and origins, while situating the nation and its political and cultural workers within abolitionist movements; global enlightenment(s); Atlantic coloniality and empire; conglomerates of power and resistance; revolutionary currents; Atlantic modernity and global modernisms; French, Caribbean and francophone racialisms; postcolonial thought; race and literary archives; and radical anti-colonialism.<sup>25</sup>

22 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 73.

23 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 107.

24 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 98.

25 In addition to nn. 1, 2 and 7, see Claude M $\ddot{o}$ ise, *Constitutions et luttes de pouvoir en Haïti, 1804–1987* (Éditions du CIDIHCA, 1988), Myriam Chauncey, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Atlantic* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), Sean X. Goudie, *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), Valerie Kausen, *Migrant Revolutions: Haitian Literature, U.S. Imperialism, and Globalization* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), Chris Bongie, *The Scribal Politics of Post/Colonial Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), Matthew J. Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934–1957* (Chapel

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In texts, talks, films and other public history activities, these scholars and others have turned (and in some instances re-turned) to political and fictional texts, cultural artefacts, personal letters, memoirs, oral and textual narratives and the archival record (along with other documents) in order to showcase how very alive Haiti and its revolution was as a topic and a motivating idea in the Caribbean and the wider Atlantic world.<sup>26</sup> As multiple fields have rediscovered new archives, reread older source materials and expanded what counts as evidence, new theoretical lenses have supplanted (or merged with) older ones and enabled creative investigations into what David Armitage and Julia Gaffield describe as “the multidirectional flows of people, information, goods, ideas, political philosophies, cultural practices, and every other imaginable mode of social, economic, and political interaction.”<sup>27</sup>

Staggering in its growth, these new articulations of Haiti flourished around the bicentennial of Haiti’s independence in 2004 and have since ushered in a wide range of conferences, anthologies, books, articles, courses, documentaries, exhibitions and other material offerings that provide a compelling counter-narrative regarding the critical “silence” of the Haitian

Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), Millery Polyné, *From Douglass to Duvalier: U.S. African Americans, Haiti and Pan-Americanism, 1870–1964* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011), Alyssa Sepinwall, *Haitian History: New Perspectives* (New York; Routledge, 2012), Grégory Pierrot, “Writing Over Haiti: Black Avengers in Martin Delaney’s *Blake*,” *Studies in American Fiction* 41, no. 2 (2014): 175–99, Ada Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), James Alexander Dun, *Dangerous Neighbors: Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), Jeremy Matthew Glick, *The Black Radical Tragic: Performance, Aesthetics, and the Unfinished Haitian Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), Charles Forsdick and Christian Høgsbjerg, *Toussaint Louverture: A Black Jacobin in the Age of Revolutions* (London: Pluto Press, 2017) and Chantalle F. Verna, *Haiti and the Uses of America: Post-U.S. Occupation Promises, 1934–54* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

26 For examples of the range of these projects, see the 2014 exhibition held at the John Carter Brown Library, “The Other Revolution: Haiti, 1791–1804,” [www.brown.edu/Facilities/John\\_Carter\\_Brown\\_Library/exhibitions/haitian/index.html](http://www.brown.edu/Facilities/John_Carter_Brown_Library/exhibitions/haitian/index.html), the Digital Library of the Caribbean’s interactive portal, “Haiti: An Island Luminous,” <http://islandluminous.fiu.edu/index-english.html> and the oral history project begun after the January 2010 earthquake, the Haiti memory project: <http://haitimemoryproject.org/>. Other projects, perspectives and ideas have been critiqued for their focus on US literature, history and culture. For more on this, see Marlene Daut’s piece in *American Quarterly*: “Daring to Be Free/Dying to Be Free: Toward a Dialogic Haitian–U.S. Studies,” *American Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (2011): 375–89.

27 David Armitage and Julia Gaffield, “Introduction: The Haitian Declaration of Independence in an Atlantic Context,” in Gaffield, *The Haitian Declaration of Independence: Creation, Context, and Legacy*, 8.

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Revolution. Although offerings, such as the John Carter Brown Library's 2004 exhibition, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789–1804* (and its 2014 reworked version affiliated with an exhibition at the New York Historical Society, *The Other Revolution, Haiti, 1789–1804*), suggest that the Haitian Revolution has become an essential node within the vaunted “Age of Revolutions,” far more work remains before we can feel confident that we have provided “fresh thinking” about Haiti—the nation.<sup>28</sup>

In a recent review, literary historian Marlene Daut stresses that while the Haitian Revolution now occupies a scholarly position alongside the French and the American Revolutions, “in most of these studies Haiti seems to matter only insofar as it affected American lives, American slavery, American politics, American history, and American literature.”<sup>29</sup> With unshakable clarity, Daut calls for work that reflects Haiti as a “real, physical place,” and reminds critics (and pundits alike) that “Haitians, like all human beings, are and have always been the agents of their own destinies.”<sup>30</sup> If we read Daut alongside Gilroy, we sense the urgency of this challenge. Re-centring Haiti in the various scholarly conversations about power and justice means grappling with more than the variations of freedom and self-determination that emerged during the so-called Age of Revolutions.

The 12 January 2010 earthquake in Haiti that killed more than 200,000 people and displaced millions more into temporary and makeshift camps brought increasing attention to Haiti, and offered tangible proof that we—activists, critics and global citizens alike—need to do more to enlighten our discussions about Haiti and its history. Although few news reporters in the early days of the earthquake provided stories that captured the organising and communal caring that erupted throughout Haiti's capital and its environs (see Jonathan Katz's many offerings for examples of stellar on-the-ground reporting), many, many press outlets almost compulsively registered Haiti's poverty, with copy that often repeated, with near verbatim accuracy, that Haiti was the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere and a failed nation-state.<sup>31</sup> Reflecting on this media saturation a few years later, historian Laurent Dubois argues that this coverage of Haiti “often made the country sound like some place entirely outside the West—a primitive and incomprehensible territory—rather than as a place whose history has been

<sup>28</sup> See n. 24 for more.

<sup>29</sup> Daut, “Daring to Be Free/Dying to Be Free,” 375.

<sup>30</sup> Daut, “Daring to Be Free/Dying to Be Free,” 376.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Katz worked on the ground as an AP reporter in Haiti and was present when the earthquake struck. For more, see the book that he produced of this time: Jonathan Katz, *The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

deeply intertwined with that of Europe[, Latin America, the Caribbean] and the United States for two centuries.”<sup>32</sup> Performance artist, writer and black feminist anthropologist Gina Athena Ulysse gives this “incomprehension” a name: “the subhumanity trope.”

In a recent, rousing, oft-quoted essay written just after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Ulysse argues that Haitians have typically appeared in research as “fractures, as fragments—bodies without minds, heads without bodies, or roving spirits.”<sup>33</sup> Turning her eye to the representations in the media of Haiti and Haitians that appeared after the earthquake, Ulysse reads and critiques them for their stereotypical portrayals.<sup>34</sup> For Ulysse, these portrayals emerge from “the dominant idea” that “Haitians are irrational, devil-worshipping, progress-resistant, [and] uneducated.” These assumptions are not just a case of blatant primitivism and public disavowal. Too many entities, Ulysse laments, see “Haiti and Haitians [... as] a manifestation of blackness in its worst form.” Why? Its history and its politics. She continues: “The unruly enfant terrible of the Americas defied all European odds and created a disorder of things colonial” in the founding of its state.<sup>35</sup> This declaration of independence provided a legible and visible challenge to colonialism and to articulations of whiteness (in its many fluctuations and permutations) that represented blackness (variously defined) and statehood as anathema. The message: blackness and sovereignty don’t mix. This is not just a disavowal of Haiti’s origins. As Dubois, Ulysse and others have extolled, Haiti continues to be portrayed as a politically *wrong* and even abhorrent thing.<sup>36</sup>

Although the surge in scholarship on Haiti and the Haitian Revolution has shifted some popular perspectives regarding Haiti, much of this work has provided little evidence of Haiti’s relationship to and influence on black statehood and political thought across the last two centuries. Trouillot picks up on this political silence, amongst other oclusions, in *Silencing the Past*. In one searing passage, Trouillot makes this link plain, charting the ways that the ontological world view held by many whites and non-whites in Europe

32 Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012), 3.

33 Gina Athena Ulysse, “Why Haiti Needs New Narratives Now More than Ever,” in Mark Schuller and Pablo Morales, eds., *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti since the Earthquake* (Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2012), 241.

34 For more on this, see Dash, *Haiti and the United States*.

35 Ulysse, “Why Haiti Needs New Narratives Now More than Ever,” 242.

36 For more on this, see Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods*, Gina Athena Ulysse, *Why Haiti Needs New Narratives: A Post-Quake Chronicle*, trans. Nadève Ménard and Évelyne Trouillot (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2015) and Jana Brazil, *Riding With Death: Vodou Art and Urban Ecology in the Streets of Port-au-Prince* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017).

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and the Americas refused to include a vision of freedom for enslaved Africans and their progeny. He argues that it was not that freedom was imagined as impossible for enslaved Africans (and other people of African descent) as much as it was articulated as a state of being that slaves could never achieve. Even those who countered this world view with more radical and equitable articulations about people, politics, freedom and racial difference (and Trouillot acknowledges that there were some) struggled to imagine any world in which a slave uprising could ever lead to the formation of a black nation-state.<sup>37</sup> Unthinkable revolution? Yes. Unthinkable revolution leading to an independent state? Just as impossible—and potentially more dangerous. Ulysse makes this point plain in her *NACLA Report* essay, “Why Representations of Haiti Matter Now More than Ever.” In assessing the pejorative imaging of Haiti from its origins to the twenty-first century, Ulysse argues that it “had to become colonialism’s *bête noire* [literally translated as “black beast”] if the sanctity of whiteness were to remain unquestioned.”<sup>38</sup>

As a nation formed through rebellion, violence and anti-colonialism, Haiti would represent the least “normal” nation in the nineteenth-century Atlantic world as it outlawed slavery from the beginning and articulated, at least on paper, that all of its citizens were politically equal *and* black. In one of Haiti’s earliest constitutions, all Haitian citizens were legally defined as black, regardless of skin-pigmentation or prior racial categorisation. These political moves and assertions put the nation at odds with the nation-states in the Atlantic that surrounded it. As historian Julia Gaffield succinctly notes in *Haitian Connections in the Atlantic World*, “the basis of the economic system of the Atlantic world was under attack” after Haiti’s 12-year battle for freedoms, rights and opportunities drew a successful slave revolution and violent anti-colonial struggle into a concentrated fight for independence that would, improbably, defeat the French—while also seeing off challenges from English and Spanish forces who saw an opportunity to take the island by force.<sup>39</sup>

Although often cast as a ragtag, untrained cadre of blood-thirsty agitators, especially by antagonists in France, England and the USA, Haitian revolutionary leaders (and their representatives) spent considerable time influencing foreign officials, developing new strategic governance models (or building upon older colonial models) and working out how to perform sovereign politics amongst other sovereign nations, while black. For these and other

<sup>37</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 73.

<sup>38</sup> Gina Athena Ulysse, “Why Representations of Haiti Matter Now More than Ever,” *Why Haiti Needs New Narratives: A Post-Quake Chronicle*, trans. Nadève Ménard and Évelyne Trouillot (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2015), 28.

<sup>39</sup> Gaffield, *Haitian Connections in the Atlantic World*, 1.

reasons, Haiti was and remains, due to its history, a vastly important political entity.<sup>40</sup> As Malick Ghachem notes regarding Haiti's official declaration of anti-colonial freedom, "the mere existence of Haiti, the very fact of its new ruling class, and the act of the declaration itself—all of these were momentarily novel forces in the Atlantic World."<sup>41</sup>

In short, it was led by people of African descent who declared in their performance of power and rights that black people could be racialised as black *and* political. In *The Haitian Declaration of Independence: Creation, Context, and Legacy*, David Armitage, Julia Gaffield, Laurent Dubois and Erin Zavitz make clear that what could be read as a singular "Declaration of Haitian Independence" should rightfully be seen as "acts" of becoming that took multiple forms and were performed on varied stages. Through song, oral history and in print forms that circulated the Atlantic world, Haitian leaders and Haitian people signalled a refusal to unbecoming.<sup>42</sup> The new nation's very existence ran counter to pejorative assumptions and increasingly vitriolic racist imaginings that systematically rejected the ability of people of African descent to be creative, exhibit intelligence or even understand politics, much less engage in political behaviour and activities. In asserting their rights to sovereignty and working with various tools and circuits of power and production to communicate those rights, Haiti and its officials rewrote the rules about who could and could not be a sovereign body, as well as how that sovereignty would be performed. This book explores that terrain.

*The Unfinished Revolution: Haiti, Black Sovereignty and Power in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* chronicles the ways that Haiti's black

40 For more on this, see Malick W. Ghachem, "Law, Atlantic Revolutionary Exceptionalism, and the Haitian Declaration of Independence," in Gaffield, *The Haitian Declaration of Independence: Creation, Context, and Legacy*, 95–114.

41 Ghachem, "Law, Atlantic Revolutionary Exceptionalism, and the Haitian Declaration of Independence," 100.

42 This collection sprang from the 2013 conference "The Haitian Declaration of Independence in an Atlantic Context," hosted by the Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies that sought to move studies of Jefferson and the US Declaration of Independence into a wider early Atlantic world of revolutionary upheaval and freedom-making. This conference, and the book that grew out of it, would not have been possible without the passionate work of Julia Gaffield in uncovering one (and subsequently another) of the earliest Haitian-printed forms of the 1804 Declaration of Independence. See Gaffield, *The Haitian Declaration of Independence: Creation, Context, and Legacy*. For more on the importance of Gaffield's findings, see Gaffield and Armitage, "Introduction: The Haitian Declaration of Independence in an Atlantic Context," 1–22; on the significance of vodou and orality, Dubois, "Thinking Haitian Independence in Haitian Vodou," 201–18; and on performance and commemoration, Erin Zavitz, "Revolutionary Commemorations: Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Haitian Independence Day, 1804–1904," 219–37.

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sovereignty moved and morphed in the Atlantic world. Tethered, then, between a kind of “othered” space, Haitian officials would use whatever means were at their disposal to resist closure to and consumption of their independence and power, from letters, photographs, material objects, narratives, diplomatic missives, black and brown bodies, essays, newspaper articles to political performances on the world stage. What emerges from these oppositional, yet imploring demands is a sovereignty that celebrates, even as it rejects, its outlaw status.

In 1853, Benjamin C. Clark, Haitian Commercial Agent to the USA (more on him in later chapters), argues in *A Plea for Hayti* that Atlantic nation-states, specifically the USA and Britain, failed to recognise and adequately to engage diplomatically with Haiti not simply because the USA’s continued practice of Atlantic racial slavery was until the 1860s incompatible with the anti-slavery demands of the new Haitian nation-state. For Clark, at the heart of the antipathy toward Haiti was a deep resentment of its very existence. Haiti was not merely the product of a successful slave revolt: it was a black nation-state. And this identity made it an oddity within an Atlantic world that had no category for black political entities (in the form either of nations or citizens). Clark suggests that Haiti’s oddness was not just unthinkable: it was outside the bounds of custom and law. In a stirring passage, he stresses that the USA’s failure to engage with Haiti as a sovereign entity was at odds with its engagement with other independent Latin American countries. Clark argues that this differential diplomatic treatment was because “the horrors of St. Domingo were raked up and interposed, and it was contended that these Islanders having achieved their freedom by bloodshed, should forever be regarded as outlaws.”<sup>43</sup> And they were not just any outlaws. They were self-avowed black ones who dared to perform their power on a global stage amongst an ocean of white nation-states and their official and unofficial representatives.

Nineteenth-century Haiti’s outward-facing officials and their cognates from various economic industries and artistic sectors performed a form of racial power that utilised older and newly formed networks of influence to reposition and rearticulate Haiti’s presence in the Atlantic world as a black space steeped in political power. Neither organised nor always coherent, this image-making of sovereignty assembled often unstable figurations of control and characterisations of power that when read together formulate a *singular* black political body that represented (and continues to represent) a sovereignty formed *through* encounters with and amongst other sovereign

43 B. [Benjamin] C. Clark, *A Plea for Hayti, with a Glance at Her Relations With France, England and the United States for the Last Sixty Years* (Boston: Eastburn’s Press, 1853), unpaginated.

nation-states (more on this below). What has been gathered here in one text are the ways that a variety of agents and actants fought for, against, in tandem with and in praise of Haiti's black sovereignty. Through this examination, what emerges is not a fight for a specific cause but a series of jumbled and, at times, competing strategies for state control.

These strategies (and the encounters that gave birth to them) illuminate the ways in which Haitian officials, their designated political and cultural attendants and external others would use various geopolitical and economic openings within a changing and volatile Caribbean region to *configure* Haiti. Many nineteenth-century Haitian leaders engaged in Haiti's international work found their sovereignty consistently compromised by outside agents who treated the nation as an exception in need of external control. Sociologist Alex Dupuy, writing about power and class in twenty-first-century Haiti, provides a roadmap to these earlier sovereignty struggles in Haiti, suggesting that "if by sovereignty we mean the right and the ability of a people and their government to determine their agenda," then this right and ability is compromised and undermined "when the state is subordinated to the dictates of foreign governments and international financial institutions, and/or the interests of powerful private foreign and domestic actors who are not accountable to the people or their government."<sup>44</sup> Dupuy's short list roughly captures the various interests exhibited by foreign officials, government agencies and financial organisations in their more than 200-plus-year encounters with Haiti.

Although nineteenth-century Haitian officials would court, entrap, ensnare, play with and even manipulate the terms of many of the diplomatic and economic state-crafting of their times, other nations also played key roles in these dramas. Here is a short list of some of these political "acts": the USA engaged in trade embargoes against Haiti in the early 1800s in order to isolate the young nation; France levied a crippling indemnity in 1825 of 150 million francs that forced the former colony to pay its colonial masters for its independence; and US banks took over the nation at the end of the nineteenth century near the start of the US military's occupation of Haiti that lasted, in total, almost 20 long and violent years.<sup>45</sup> By the time the late twentieth-century structural adjustment programmes and internal coups brought Haiti under the protection (or, some would suggest, control) of the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (Mission des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en Haïti or MINUSTAH) force and auspices of the US

<sup>44</sup> Dupuy, *Haiti: From Revolutionary Slaves to Powerless Citizens*, 117.

<sup>45</sup> For more on this, see Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

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State Department, Haiti had lived through centuries of compromise and undermining—and responded to each episode with even more figurations of black sovereignty.

Some pundits, influenced by accounts in the media and international governance documents that frame Haiti as a failed state, may see my interrogation of sovereignty in Haiti as a naive dream that Haiti could instantiate its own political future. I can anticipate that many of these same people, critical of Haiti and the political aptitude of its leaders, will pick up this book and doubt if a failed state could ever be, or even had ever been, a sovereign one. This book responds to these and similar conjectures with a simple, but important, question: “What makes Haiti a failed state?” Some of those in the development world and within international relations circles point to Haiti’s poverty levels (perhaps reciting the mantra: Haiti is the poorest nation in the western hemisphere) or its lack of institutional infrastructures as examples of its failure. The issues of poverty and infrastructural collapse may be visible in Haiti, but other nations have significant poverty levels and little or no internally coordinated agencies or organisations. What makes Haiti so especially different, so critically difficult, that it merits a charge of failure at its roots or claims by the media of suffering from a “complex web of progress-resistant cultural influences”?<sup>46</sup>

This line of questioning is not about apportioning blame on others for the ways that various Haitian elites have amassed wealth and allocated resources within Haiti to the detriment of the masses. I raise the spectre of failure to make clear that in repeating Haiti’s purported failure and then reading that failure back into Haiti’s history, critics and supporters alike run the risk of never really understanding the routes that have brought various configurations of the nation into existence. In reading Haiti’s history as a narrative of declension, whose high point is the Haitian Revolution, critics (and even some supporters) repeat the very acts of erasure that many claim silenced the Haitian Revolution for so many years to those outside of Haitian studies.

We must do better by Haiti. We must challenge ourselves to witness Haiti’s history and see its many resistances to charges of “state failure” by its many presence(s) on the world stage. *The Unfinished Revolution* resists reifying the rhetoric of failure and instead lays bare the ways that its logics echo within criticism of Haiti’s history and its continued political existence. In drawing together a range of documents, actors, nations and entanglements, this book moves conversations about Haiti beyond the polarities that tend to constrain

<sup>46</sup> For more on progress resistant cultural logics, see David Brooks, “The Underlying Tragedy,” *New York Times* 14 January 2010. [www.nytimes.com/2010/01/15/opinion/15brooks.html?mcubz=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/15/opinion/15brooks.html?mcubz=2).

it—i.e., failed black nation on one side and idealised revolutionary spark of radical antislavery and anti-colonialism on the other.

It responds to historical anthropologist and Francophone political theorist Gary Wilder's call for scholars to offer "clear" speaking about Haiti that attempts to chart its existence without resorting to "overdetermined poles of abject failure and audacious triumph." Wilder stresses that circulating images of Haiti must be challenged if we—in the widest sense of community—ever hope to silence current articulations of Haiti as a "phantasmic object of fear and desire" that conjure fantastic notions of "political failure, social catastrophe, or natural disaster."<sup>47</sup> In many ways, this book charts the tensions that have emerged from Haiti's unfinished project of creating a black sovereign nation-state under these conditions.

In a 2010 talk delivered to the United Nations on the international day of remembrance for people brutalised by slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, political theorist and Africana studies scholar Anthony Bogues turns his lens to Haiti and its "archive of freedom." Bogues argues that in order for the wider public to reframe Haiti as a freedom land, the international community must recognise that Haiti's revolutionary beginnings contained not one rebellion, but two. The first violent insurrection rejected slavery; the second, occurring years later, drew together a concentrated military force determined to fight against a return to colonialism and imperial control. In the pages that follow, I posit that there was—and remains—a third, and unfinished, revolution in Haiti: sovereignty.

Although sovereignty has not emerged as a significant theme examined by scholars, Haitian politics, in general, has garnered critics' attention. Notably, researchers have produced exceptional new readings of Haiti's early constitutions (including Toussaint's pre-Haiti Constitution of 1801).<sup>48</sup> These new considerations sit alongside other examinations of diplomacy, such as texts by Ronald Johnson and Ashli White, that seek to understand

<sup>47</sup> For more from this conversation, see Gary Wilder, "Telling Histories: A Conversation with Laurent Dubois and Greg Grandin," *Radical History Review* 115 (Winter 2013): 11.

<sup>48</sup> In addition to nn. 1, 2, 7 and 24, see Michael J. Drexler and Ed White, *The Traumatic Colonel: The Founding Fathers, Slavery, and the Phantasmatic Aaron Burr* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), Philip Kaisery, "Hercules, the Hydra, and the 1801 Constitution of Toussaint Louverture," *Atlantic Studies* 12, no. 4 (2015): 393–411, Gaffield, *The Haitian Declaration of Independence: Creation, Context, and Legacy*, Philippe Girard, *Toussaint Louverture: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), Anne W. Gulick, *Literature, Law, and Rhetorical Performance in the Anticolonial Atlantic* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2016) and Lorelle Semley, *To Be Free and French: Citizenship in France's Atlantic Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

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the struggles of the burgeoning nation to set up and defend its right to existence.<sup>49</sup> These works are joined by a wide and varied body of texts that focus on Haiti's early political manifestations and its interactions with US literary history through examinations of such themes as the significance of the image and military acumen of Toussaint Louverture to black power in the Atlantic world and the writings of particular US authors who have written on or been influenced by Haitian culture and politics, such as Charles Brockden Brown, Herman Melville and Leonora Sansay, or the perspectives from some who spent considerable time in Haiti during the Haitian Revolution, including the British officer Marcus Rainsford.<sup>50</sup> Francophone Caribbeanists have also considered the political world of Haiti. These scholars have offered new methods and new source materials that have helped document how the various figurations of early Haiti were rooted/routed through Haitian literature and the cultural and political worlds in the Americas and the wider French empire.<sup>51</sup>

The above thematic sets of work have been influenced (in some instances, quite noticeably) by additional scholarship on Haiti crafted by social scientists, including the works of David Nicholls, J. Michael Dash, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Sidney Mintz, Alex Dupuy, Arthur Stinchcombe and Anthony Maingot, each of whom has painstakingly documented tensions around development and political economy with regards to Haiti and Haiti's place within geopolitical structures of power.<sup>52</sup> Aspects of these now classic texts can be found in newer pieces from interdisciplinary investigators, such as the work of Philip Kaisary, who moves within and between law, race and human rights, and Robbie Shilliam, who teases apart the entanglements between international politics, post-coloniality and global movements for

49 See Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* and Ronald Johnson, *Diplomacy in Black and White: John Adams, Toussaint Louverture, and their Atlantic World Alliance*.

50 For more on these, see nn. 1, 2, 7 and 24, in addition to Marcus Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti*, ed. Grégory Pierrot and Paul Youngquist (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013) and Gretchen Woertendyke, *Hemispheric Regionalism: Romance and the Geography of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

51 See various notes within this chapter on the works by Garraway, Jenson, Hodgson, Forsdick, Nesbitt, Bongie and Daut, amongst others.

52 In addition to the works mentioned within earlier notes, see Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), Anthony Maingot, *The United States and the Caribbean: Challenges of an Asymmetrical Relationship* (New York: Macmillan, 1994) and Arthur Stinchcombe, *Sugar Island Slavery in the Age of Enlightenment: The Political Economy of the Caribbean World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

decolonisation.<sup>53</sup> Both Shilliam and Kaisary, alongside Matthew Smith, have produced nuanced texts focused on the Haitian Revolution, the early Haitian republic and later Haitian history that interrogate issues of Caribbean exile, capitalism, liberty and race. Although, as mentioned, aspects of politics or “the political” play a role in the above-mentioned texts and in the wider work of some of the authors identified, sovereignty—as a formative construction—remains undertheorised.<sup>54</sup>

*The Unfinished Revolution* grapples, cautiously, with race and sovereignty. It builds upon the scholarly openings provided by many of the above texts and projects, even as it amasses and assesses a new archive of nineteenth-century and later materials that gesture toward the challenges, performances and articulations of nation-ness that contributed to (and may continue to shape) Haiti’s black sovereignty. Although focused primarily on the long nineteenth century, *The Unfinished Revolution* does venture into later periods in order to illuminate the continued significance of Haiti’s unfinished sovereign revolution to its current international battles—including those that focus on economic, political or cultural issues. As opposed to being a text about the past, I have been urged, by the material, to recognise that these are ongoing struggles and configurations that remain ever present in political dramas facing Haiti, today. I do not aim in these temporal moves to capture every manifestation of continued resistance or battles. What emerges are instances of forward shifts in the narrative that speak directly to particular instances, tropes or figurations that make clear that the unfinished nature of Haiti’s sovereignty will not be miraculously solved by some future form of political recognition. In weaving through time, I reconstruct the ways that these promises in the past have been laid out before—and have not come to fruition. Time here is not a panacea to political dispossession and challenge. In fact, what bubbles forth from the archive are the many

53 For more on this, see Kaisary, *The Haitian Revolution in the Literary Imagination: Radical Horizons, Conservative Constraints* and Robbie Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anticolonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2015).

54 There are critics who delve into this. Much of this work either criticises sovereignty as an ideal form of governance (something that limits the interactions of the masses) or as something that remains outside of the possibilities of Haiti in its current manifestation. This is the concern of Dupuy—Haiti’s powerlessness. *The Unfinished Revolution* takes seriously the criticisms of sovereignty, but uses sovereignty—especially as it is performed between sovereign nation-states—as a lens with which to read nineteenth-century International Relations between Haiti and other nation-states. For other views, see Linden Lewis, ed., *Caribbean Sovereignty, Development and Democracy in an Age of Globalization* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013). A notable and welcome critical focus on sovereignty and Haiti can be found in Maguire and Freeman, *Who Owns Haiti? People, Power, and Sovereignty*, that appeared as this manuscript was being finalised.

spirals of form, thought and resistance that move through and against the unfinished project of black sovereignty.<sup>55</sup>

In what immediately follows, I offer up an expanded discussion of black sovereignty that makes clear the contours of the term, as articulated within these pages, and its use and relevancy as a framing device. In order to define the limits and potentials of this term, I first explore blackness in relation to sovereignty before tackling the exciting (yet, racially limited) field/debates within sovereignty studies. This discussion is finally followed by a detailed description of the chapters and themes contained within the text.

### **Black is a Country: The Blackness of Black Sovereignty**

Although I use the term *black sovereignty* throughout the book, I do not deploy it lightly or use it without some trepidation. I recognise the vexed and problematic nature of reducing the complexities of sovereign power and the performances of it on the global stage into an amorphous (even as it may be generative and politically cohering), socially constructed racial category of distinction. For decades, critics have argued that blackness is “slippery,” often defying definition and eluding formal identification. As a result, it is often described as a signifying trope; a dynamic, conscious way of living; a forced conceptualisation; a mobilising idea; a social movement; a political demand; a creative impulse and (importantly) a socially constructed term that means (meant) none of the above.<sup>56</sup> The field of black studies is

55 I have been thinking about the ways that the unfinished project of black sovereignty might respond to the “irresolution” at play within the aesthetics of spiralism. My thoughts on this have been influenced by the work of Francophone literary and Africana studies scholar Kaiama L. Glover. For more on the cycles of time/space and world-imagining within spiralism, see Kaiama Glover, *Haiti Unbound: A Spiralist Challenge to the Postcolonial Canon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010).

56 The scholarship on this is vast. This note will not try and capture the entire historical production on these topics. Instead, I want to highlight texts that have influenced my thinking on these subjects. In addition to the texts in this chapter, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London: Routledge, 2003) and Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

enormous and constantly being reshaped by scholars around the globe who find within its generative space new forms of relationality and contestation. The deftness and nuance of performance artist and black queer theorist E. Patrick Johnson's work perhaps best captures the vitality (and interdisciplinarity) of critical approaches to the study of blackness. As Johnson notes in *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*, "black' culture" contains a "production of blackness" that involves a "mutual constructing/deconstructing, avowing/disavowing, and expanding/delimiting dynamic."<sup>57</sup> In essence, it is a complex and charged figuration.

Of course, we know that any assertions about blackness's essential qualities must be questioned. As scholars have argued for many decades within African diaspora studies, terms such as "black" may hold some set ideas and historical constructions even as they mutate others once black and blackness become global and situated within specific spaces and wielded by specific actors to describe specific entities—whether people, places or things. Deployed in different settings and at different times, these labels may enable, as well as constrain, certain conclusions about the performance of difference—and who can be configured within its sphere. As anyone who studies racialisation and racialisms in a global perspective knows, what constitutes hierarchies of being in one location does not have to be regarded the same way in another.<sup>58</sup> New forms of difference, even when marked against the same body, may enable someone never to see race in their daily lives or be marked as different by others primarily through frameworks informed by that body's immediate location. (Here I am thinking about friends from areas such as Bahia, in north-eastern Brazil, who see themselves one way and then travel to the USA or the United Kingdom and are marked differently by a new system of racialisation or difference.)

As we seek out ways to investigate the transnational vectors and cultural networks that mobilise blackness and the flows of blackness in particular ways, we must also develop methods that allow us to understand how specific political systems and institutions racialise, erase or even re-racialise specific bodies for political purposes. "Black" as a demarcation of a political body/nation, may operate in a similar manner. There is still more research needed in order fully to comprehend the ways that race and nation politically intersect at the international level and impact governance structures and relations between particular nation-states—especially nations such as Haiti, Abyssinia and Liberia—whose nineteenth-century exceptionalism marked

57 E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

58 For more on racialisms and neoliberalism and the state, see David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).

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them as different. Essayist and novelist Teju Cole makes clear the dilemma about the admiration (ostensibly on the part of white Americans and Europeans) of black exceptions: “In the presence of the admirable, some are breathless not with admiration but with rage. They object to the presence of the black body (an unarmed boy in a street, a man buying a toy, a dancer on the subway, a bystander) as much as they object to the presence of the black mind.” Cole frames these objections in ways similar to Trouillot’s silences, but notes something far more damning about the negation: it profits from “black labor and black innovation,” or what Cole describes as the “co-option of black life.”<sup>59</sup> Although this refrain is not the main impetus for this book, there is an echo of it within the history of enforced labour, co-opted lands or meandering credit and inflated geopoliticking in the region. While some nations may have disavowed Haiti, still others courted the nation for its resources—be those people or material things.

Rather than an exercise in arguing for Haiti’s legitimacy within histories of dispossession, this book situates Haiti’s unfinished revolution as an ongoing project that continually produces, even as it recasts, black political thought and nation-state action. It takes the form of a standard academic monograph, but this final product sits uneasily in this form. This discomfiture is a testimony less to the prematurity of the investigation than the contrapuntal aspects of the terms of discovery, the slipperiness of statecraft and the difficulties in finding a point of origin.

In writing this text, I found myself immersed in what critical race theorist and cultural theorist Jared Sexton describes, in his musings on the political geography of black lives, as moments thinking “about the unspeakable, perhaps unimaginable ways that black lives have been devalued,” where you—as the crafter of this tale—“have trouble determining when to start the story—or history or mythology or fable—or how far afield to draw your sphere of concern.”<sup>60</sup> This uncertainty adequately captures the dilemma of imagining and articulating Haiti’s black sovereignty as it has emerged within a consistently demeaning and delimiting political world quite often fuelled by racialisms and determinants of political impossibility for those of African descent. Balancing this searching *for* with a critique *of* the failings of the frames of race and international relations is a difficult—some would even argue impossible—task.

Yet, this work is more than just an act of recovery regarding Haiti’s political struggle. It is also a search for a framework that corresponds, in many ways, with writer, filmmaker and cultural critic Frank B. Wilderson

<sup>59</sup> Teju Cole, “Black Body,” *Known and Strange Things* (London: Faber & Faber, 2016), 14.

<sup>60</sup> Jared Sexton, “Unbearable Blackness,” *Cultural Critique* 90 (2015): 159.

III's call for a "conceptual framework, predicated not on the subject-effect of cultural performance but on the structure of political ontology, a framework that allows us to substitute a culture of politics for a politics of culture."<sup>61</sup> In order to recognise this framework, we—scholars, activists, critics and casual observers alike—must attune our instruments of knowing (spirit, critical thinking, rhythms, etc.) in order to bear witness to the power of black sovereignty and the stultifying aspects of negrophobia/black nullification that exist within *transnational* sovereignty's roots and make the ontological struggle of black sovereignty so compelling. Forcing sovereignty to grapple with blackness offers up the chance to study black sovereignty's many modes and practices: its power, and, to borrow from poet and cultural critic Fred Moten, its "thingliness, even as (absolute) nothingness, even as imprisonment in passage on the most open road of all, even as—to use and abuse a terribly beautiful phrase of [Frank] Wilderson's (2010: ix)—fantasy in the hold."<sup>62</sup>

Back in Haiti, though, blackness has had a long and contentious history as a demarcation of citizenship, an African ancestral-spiritual connector and as part of a movement (and a weapon in the hands of politicians such as François "Papa Doc" Duvalier) of power along class and colour lines—pivoting Haiti, at times, culturally between France and Africa. Cultural critic and critical legal scholar Colin Dayan notes how Haiti, "called variously 'Black France' by one nineteenth-century observer" and "a tropical dog-kennel and pestiferous jungle" by another, has always been "moved uneasily between the extremes of [black] idealization and [black] debasement."<sup>63</sup> Dayan continues by noting, "the business of *being Haitian* [as in the nation-state] was more complex" than these simple categories express.<sup>64</sup>

Dayan's observations nod to the entangled racialisation and colourisation that divided Haiti in its colonial form in the eighteenth century. It also firmly rejects philosopher and historian Ernest Renan's infamous suggestion that race matters only to historians interested in humanity and "has no applications, however, in politics."<sup>65</sup> Blackness mattered so much to Haiti's revolutionary leaders that the very first constitution of the young nation declared that all Haitian citizens would be marked/coded

61 Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 57.

62 Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 743, quoting Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*.

63 Colin Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 5.

64 Dayan. *Haiti, History and the Gods*, 5.

65 Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" trans. Martin Thom in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 15.

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as “black,” regardless of their previously applied, chosen or assumed racial category. While Haiti’s new leaders chose a name for the nation that forever linked it to its indigenous past (as “Ayiti” is a Taíno word that means mountainous land), they constitutionally cast their citizens as universally black, or what Doris Garraway describes as a “negative universalism.”<sup>66</sup> These black citizens, even with their internal divisions in terms of status and wealth, charged into the Atlantic world and challenged—with their very presence and continued existence—that black people, even those deemed inhuman and *unpolitical* by others, have the right to sovereignty. This book assembles a rich and unexamined archive of power and political practice that provides the contours and evidence of political theorist Siba Grovogui’s claim that “sovereignty takes form through multiple, complex, and differentiated institutions that congeal into formal and informal regimes of authority and practices” that look vastly different when coded black or seen through the lens of race.<sup>67</sup> As tempting as it might be to offer a list of patterns or definitive tropes, I have moved to resist the comfiture of the all-knowing intellectual. As a journey, what appears here is less the final word than an opening into a political terrain of discovery. There is, therefore, much to learn.

These racialised differences often erupted into challenges by foreign others to Haiti’s sovereignty that tended to carry within them certain thinly veiled racisms. The encounters often appeared within diplomatic and international circles, especially as nation-states discussed, negotiated, crafted or figured Haiti into their plans. Although external agents often played key roles in the narrativisation of Haiti as black and “other” in these encounters, Haitian politicians and their intermediaries did not sit by as silent actors in their

66 For more on this, see Doris L. Garraway, “‘Légitime Défense’: Universalism and Nationalism in the Discourse of the Haitian Revolution,” in Doris L. Garraway, ed., *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 63–88. This process was neither seamless nor adequate to the challenge at hand. As Jean Casimir notes, “facing a Western world extending and consolidating its global vision, Haiti and the divided Haitians stood, in their singularity hopelessly vulnerable. Their only shelter in the hostile world surrounding them, their only place of rational accountability and of forecasting the future, remained the peer community they had built outside a dependent, dominant, and, from their point of view, totally controllable system.” Jean Casimir, “The Sovereign People of Haiti during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” in Gaffield, *The Haitian Declaration of Independence: Creation, Context, and Legacy*, 197–98.

67 Siba Grovogui, “The Secret Lives of the ‘Sovereign’: Rethinking Sovereignty as International Morality,” in Douglas Howland and Luise White, eds., *The State of Sovereignty: Territories, Laws, Populations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 265.

own national/international dramatic story. Instead, many would insist on manipulating, curating, challenging or even assisting the terms used and the assumptions made during these negotiations—for their own political benefit and not necessarily those of the nation’s citizens. Recovering these narratives is important, but so too is understanding how this state-crafting has been and continues to be influenced by racial formations and the unfinished project that is Haiti’s revolutionary sovereignty.

The challenges encountered by Haiti’s founding band of agitators, activists, conspirators and freedom fighters still resonate today, as Haiti and its various leaders engage in battles and negotiations with (or, at times, abet) outside financiers, internal power brokers and international “keepers” of the peace over Haiti’s precarious labouring populace and the nation’s resources (including those found amongst its people and within its environment). Sociologist and Caribbeanist Mimi Sheller argues in an important essay on “Haitian Fear” that how and what we discuss about Haiti “will continue to have a significant impact on international relations and racial formations” in Haiti.<sup>68</sup> What Sheller sees as Haitian impacts, I see as more Atlantic and global concerns. Motivated, in part, by the racial projects that attempt to categorise and de-limit the political and sovereign work of Haiti and its politicians, this book charts how this state-work would be cast and performed by Haitians.

Although significant things have been done to Haiti by external others, critics must begin to understand the ways that Haitian officials utilised various conduits of power and influence to craft their version of black statehood in the midst of these external pressures and tensions. What emerges from this multi-directional flow of narratives, counter narratives and cultural diplomacy is a dialogue of power brokering that forms a layered and racially charged conversation about politics and sovereignty—and which entities can embody or be recognised, externally, as having or expressing those characteristics. This is more than just a simple discussion about exclusion.

Constitutional law scholar Hent Kalmo and intellectual historian Quentin Skinner assert, in a critique of sovereignty’s purported obsolescence (amongst other topics), that sovereignty remains an important ambiguous term worth exploring for the very reason that in “answering the question as to what sovereignty is,” critics also have to deal with an additional linked question that cannot be separated from the first—namely, “who is thought to be its proper bearer.”<sup>69</sup>

68 Mimi Sheller, “The ‘Haytian Fear’: Racial Projects and Competing Reactions to the First Black Republic,” *Research in Politics and Society* 6 (1999): 297.

69 Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner, “Introduction: A Concept in Fragments,” in

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Much of the recent political and development aid rhetoric regarding Haiti's "failed state" status hinges on the premise that Haiti bears no resemblance to a functioning sovereign state. Although some critics point to various causes for Haiti's perceived failures—such as foreign intervention, unequal power, corruption or political instability—this book asserts that any list of Haiti's perceived "problems" must include the challenges and manipulations amongst international bodies and nation-states over Haiti's sovereign existence. This is, as described above, an unfinished issue.

There are important reasons for revisiting Haiti's unfinished sovereign revolution and its sovereign practices. One, the arrival of the new nation of Haiti in the Atlantic world brought with it sweeping political changes—especially regarding the ideation of freedom, liberty and power—and who had the rights to have, demand and exhibit any of these conditions. This demand, startling and ground-breaking in the nineteenth century, shook the foundations of difference, possession, rights-taking and capital accumulation that many European empires relied upon to build their colonial machines. The arrival of Haiti, and its revolutionary beginnings, would have profound impacts on later rebellions, uprisings, power demands and even national movements across the globe.

While Haiti's revolution has been celebrated and remains a touchstone for various human rights campaigns because of its embodiment of anti-slavery and anti-colonialism, Haiti's sovereign arrival—and the impact of its continued political existence—remain unexamined. And we know that its representation mattered and continues to matter in twenty-first-century rhetorics of aid and humanitarianism. Haiti's name is invoked—especially in coverage in the media—as an anomaly. It may no longer be cast as a savage, violent country, but far too many identify it as a lawless, inept one.<sup>70</sup>

There is a second important reason to tread into this subject area. Haiti remains a nation caught between the tethers of neoliberalism and planetary sovereignty (although it could be argued that these terms describe similar motivations of control). More has to be done to disentangle these frames of relationality from old and new forms of racialisms (see Chapters 2 and 3 for more on these processes).<sup>71</sup> And, finally, Haiti's particular political situation provides substantive examples of the frames and possibilities of power and resistance for those engaged in global discussions and negotiations about

Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4–5.

<sup>70</sup> Numerous reports in the media after the January 2010 earthquake presented this perspective. For a taste of the coverage, scan the archived pages of CNN, BBC or the *New York Times*.

<sup>71</sup> See also Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*.

dispossession, rights and environmental impact, such as the many conversations and agitations regarding the future of Kiribati and its people.<sup>72</sup> Adding Haiti's environmental crises into these larger global considerations of contested and racialised zones, such as Nauru, should enable scholars, critics, scientists, community groups, environmentalists and planners to recognise how, as Sheller asserts, "interpretations, representations, and explanations of Haiti continue to serve ongoing 'efforts to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial [or colonial] lines.'" <sup>73</sup> What Sheller illuminates and *The Unfinished Revolution* begins to chart are the ways that these economic and political redistributions and reorganisations hinge on the destabilisation of sovereignty and the currency of racialisation or difference.

In offering up the term "black sovereignty," I recognise that I have set this text within a vexed area of scholarship regarding the black Atlantic, black politics and black nations in which blackness is neither easily nor often clearly defined in relation to territorially bounded political structures and institutions. (Of course, the same could be said for sovereignty and nationness, but let's work through one theoretical battle at a time.) Although I have briefly argued above why Haiti's sovereignty could be coded black, the question remains what is symbolised either about race or politics with or perhaps through this articulation. When we—as critics—configure blackness in association with political bodies, such as nation-states, public bodies or communities, does it describe shared experiences (such as Atlantic racial slavery or cultural connections to Africa); certain political imaginings and resistances (such as those espoused by Négritude, the African Blood Brotherhood or the Black Panthers); or is it merely the recognition of a majority or a minority population within a bounded territory (such as the "race" of the main population of Jamaica or the racio-cultural place-coding implied in the term "black America")? These questions are not just about numbers, majority or minority status, political ties and cultural memory. What people are called, how they organise themselves through or against these designations, and the ways that other groups recognise or categorise them influences how they may mobilise or construct themselves—and how others may frame their existence.

<sup>72</sup> For more on the complex environmental and political situation facing Kiribati, start with this popular article: Kenneth R. Weiss, "Kiribati's Dilemma: Before We Drown We May Die of Thirst," *Scientific American* 28 October 2015. Accessed January 2016. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/kiribati-s-dilemma-before-we-drown-we-may-die-of-thirst/>.

<sup>73</sup> Sheller, "The 'Haytian Fear': Racial Projects and Competing Reactions to the First Black Republic," 297.

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From a political standpoint, these categorisations and recognitions may carry even greater weight during intergovernmental encounters, delimiting, constraining or even opening certain pathways and articulations of rights, freedoms and liberation strategies during various sensitive debates, negotiations and diplomatic encounters. Black may not be a country, but, for those who experience life as an “outsider” within, it may be the closest thing to a coherency that they have, even as the connective potential of “blackness” gets reshaped by some political agents as a weapon of control or difference.<sup>74</sup>

As suggested above, identifying a nation as a black nation-state may productively trouble the ways that populations utilise racial codes of distinction (such as the vexed role of “colour” in Haiti, more broadly) and the ways that racialised codes of aggregation may be utilised by internal and external others for political purposes. An example? When pundits in the USA talk about “black America” are they cohering a range of perspectives, people, experiences and ideas into something that is aligned with, but yet separate from, the generic USA? Does “black America” identify a cultural group only lightly and tangentially affiliated with the political entity that is “America”? Or does “black America” signal some entity or thing that manages to live in the land and within the imagination, as a lived theory that can buffer the struggles of existence facing many people of African descent in the USA? On a more personal point: what happens when a black American who identifies as female lives and works in the United Kingdom and encounters diversity information that labels her as black “Other”? In other words: what is blackness and what does it do to political entities, territories and bodies (in the collective sense) as they move and encounter new forms of legal entanglements and political challenges?

Returning to Haiti with these questions illuminates additional tensions. What are the dangers in investigating black sovereignty as a strategy of international power in a country where colourism politics have divided governmental bodies and citizens since its beginnings—reaching its most tragic juxtapositioning in the twentieth century’s “*noirisme*” movement and the rise and destructive power of François Duvalier?<sup>75</sup>

While these and similar questions push at the structure and foundations of this book, and keep me up most nights, they are not this book’s main

<sup>74</sup> For more on this, see Michelle M. Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>75</sup> See David Nicholls, *Haiti in Caribbean Context: Ethnicity, Economy and Revolt* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985) and Matthew J. Smith, *Liberty, Fraternity, Exile: Haiti and Jamaica after Emancipation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

focus. I raise these issues mostly to do battle with my own thoughts on race and national and international politics and openly to place on the table the difficult issues that trouble this research—even as I work to tackle them.

As I grapple with “states” of blackness—in a political and global sense—I remain convinced that just as we need new narratives of Haiti and other self-avowed and internationally marked black nation-states we also need new frames of articulation that allow us to understand racialisms and politics even as we seek ways to redraw power within and outside of international systems of governance. These redrawings have taken on significant urgency as notable areas, such as the USA, the United Kingdom, France and Germany, confront shifting forms of racism (and fascism) within their political structures.<sup>76</sup> These are elusive and slippery terms to quantify and capture. Refusing to try and understand black sovereignty, though, is something that we cannot continue to do. Lives, I believe, depend on our bearing witness to its moves and its continued work—positively and negatively—in shaping Haiti’s and other black nation-states’ futures.

What I have written above, and what circles these pages, are difficult and contentious issues that have attracted political philosophers, activists and theorists to work through and on them.<sup>77</sup> The reasons people turn to them are the very reasons that I have placed them for us to consider in this introduction: they impact on the “black” world and our figurations of it. As a singular body of work, this text does not aim to solve the problem of blackness within nation-state sovereignty but to highlight that it actually is a problem worth discussing. Although political theorists, such as Siba Grovogui, have written about blackness, race and sovereignty, much of the discussion on sovereignty and quasi-sovereignty focuses on indigenous sovereignty or the tumultuous mid-twentieth-century movements for decolonisation that reverberated around portions of what is often referred to as the Global South—movements that articulated a vastly different version of the “rising tide of color” that Lothrop Stoddard feared in

<sup>76</sup> This, of course, is the aim of a host of other scholars who are interested not in being necessarily “against race,” but in using their knowledges and voices to be against racism. For the against race camp, see Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) and Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007). For more of the anti-racism community and the ways that race threatens, see David Theo Goldberg’s *The Threat of Race*. For more on race, Europe and changing political policies, see Akwugo Emejulu and Leah Bassell, *Minority Women and Austerity: Survival and Resistance in France and Britain* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2017).

<sup>77</sup> Two recent books exploring these themes are David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013) and David Theo Goldberg, *Are We All Postracial Yet?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).

the 1920s.<sup>78</sup> Although indebted to Grovogui, and others, for their keen twentieth-century observations, this book places sovereignty and blackness into historical context by examining a challenge to sovereignty rooted much further back in time than the decolonisation movements of the twentieth century and grounded by figurations of race.<sup>79</sup>

*The Unfinished Revolution*, then, works consciously, to situate these processes within international relations, the performances of power and global politics. Even as it examines these considerations and gathers a heretofore unexplored and untheorised set of material objects associated with them, it remains committed to ensuring that additional work adds to this dialogue. And it is a dialogic exchange that is envisioned here as these objects speak to and from the times and situations that gave them meaning.

The archive assembled for this project makes clear the precariousness of power as performed by particular racialised and politicised bodies—and the responses by multiple players to this precarity. It asks questions about the forms of this performance, its tropic dimensions and its responses (and adaptations) to the shifting dynamics of blackness and power in the nineteenth-century Atlantic world, even as it charts Haitian leaders' and their representatives' demands for reciprocity, sovereign equality and recognition from other sovereign entities. These demands, occurring in divergent circumstances and situations, such as private letters, diplomatic cables or cultural products, circulated through established capitalist flows of knowledge throughout the Atlantic world, drew together competing and, oftentimes, compelling figurations of black sovereignty and empire.

National leaders on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean struggled to recognise Haiti as an equal nation-state throughout the nineteenth century, especially one capable of engaging in sovereign decision-making. But this refusal and declared disavowal is only part of the story.<sup>80</sup> Sources from the assembled archive within this volume amply demonstrate that many of the agents who refused politically to recognise Haiti encouraged—either directly or through various economic agents—commercial and military

78 Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color: The Threat Against White World-Supremacy* (Scribner, 1920). Project Gutenberg. [www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/37408](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/37408).

79 For more on this, see Siba Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self-determination in International Law* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), Gurinder K. Bhambra, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008) and Walter Dignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

80 For more on aspects of Atlantic nation-state's disavowal of Haiti, see Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*.

entanglements with Haiti. Although some media and political agents were quick to label Haiti's entire machinery of state power as the "best burlesque" the world had ever seen, others sought ways to harness Haiti's resources or direct its capital. And Haitian officials often fed off or even manipulated this "hunger" for their own means. Meanwhile, public discourses on both sides of the Atlantic grappled with how best to describe and deal with Haiti, the political entity.

US newspaper accounts from around the mid-nineteenth century routinely portray Haiti as a political absurdity.<sup>81</sup> As a nation, Haiti was dubbed the Atlantic world's foolish parody. Its monarchs, emperors and presidents represented the punchline of comical dark jokes—as if shades of colour and politics could never mix. Haiti's attempts at engaging in statecraft were often mocked and its leaders recast in sketches as simian-like creatures ridiculously attempting to engage in politics. Critics have produced a body of literature that charts these caricatures and isolation—especially as they relate to the early years of Haiti's existence.<sup>82</sup> This text dives into this archive and begins to ask what Haiti's black sovereignty is and how have the battles to be/ remain sovereign responded to racialisms and racisms within the sectors of politics and international relations. In considering this history, the text places these older battles for sovereignty within current transnational and *extragovernmental* initiatives and projects aimed at Haiti's current economic and political future. The next section lays out some of the stakes of these battles for authority within sovereignty before turning to an overview of the book's chapters.

### Sovereignty without Power: The Role of Race in the Battle for Authority

As a text about Haiti and its articulation, construction and performance of sovereign power in the nineteenth century, *The Unfinished Revolution* does not simply argue that Haiti has been on the receiving end of ostracisation since its inception. Although non-recognition (at different times and within different contexts) from France, the United Kingdom and the USA carried with it significant penalties for Haiti, Haitian politicians, their official and unofficial designees and cultural representatives routinely staged oppositional performances of empowerment. By refusing politically to engage with

81 "An Emperor's Toothpick," *Ballou's Monthly Magazine* 32 (1870): 507.

82 For more on this, see Elizabeth C. Childs, "Big Trouble: Daumier, Gargantua, and the Censorship of Political Caricature," *Art Journal* 51 (1992): 26–37, Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle* and Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Cursed Mimicry: France and Haiti, Again (1848–1851)," *Art History* 38, no. 1 (February 2015): 68–105.

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Haiti, various international political actors (such as US President Thomas Jefferson, who was in office from 1801 to 1809) consciously deployed strategies of disengagement, or perhaps controlled engagement, that framed exchanges with Haitian officials and their intermediaries as variations of “not”—*not* politics, *not* recognition, *not* reciprocity and definitely *not* transnational exchanges as equal sovereign nations. In framing these diplomatic and quasi-diplomatic conversations and entanglements around “nots,” Jefferson and others stressed that they did *not* see people of African descent as beings capable of articulating, crafting or practising politics.<sup>83</sup> Although many of these politicians rejected or outwardly struggled with the radical antislavery potential of the Haitian Revolution (and its violence), they also refused to assign political power to *any* entity—including nations—coded as black. The Haitian Revolution may have inspired fantasies and fuelled nightmares of a contagion of slave upheavals, but it also stirred up deep chasms between abstract notions and articulations of freedom and the type of people who had the right to claim those ideas for themselves on an individual, collective and nation-state level.

Political theorist Siba Grovogui traces some of this history, its impact on international relations and the role of sovereignty within these processes. In an important chapter discussing these issues, Grovogui examines the impact of the American, French and Haitian Revolutions on sovereignty’s contemporary construction. He concludes that “centuries before the modern Refugee Convention, the Helsinki Accords, and the philosophical treatises of Giorgio Agamben and Hannah Arendt, Haitian slaves had pondered bare existence and the right to those so reduced to such an existence to claim sovereign rights for themselves.” These rights-claimers, Grovogui continues, demanded in their continued national existence that people of African descent, including formerly enslaved persons, had “equal access to the resources of life” and power.<sup>84</sup>

Grovogui’s theoretical moves, above, suggest the tensions that exist within sovereignty studies between articulations about who has access to (or controls) the so-called “resources of life,” how power moves between the entities connected within sovereignty’s web and who ultimately wields sovereign authority. Political geographer John Agnew occupies a specific

83 For more on Jefferson’s suggestion that blacks who were free needed to be removed far away from admixture in order both to protect them from negative views but most importantly to protect the nation, see Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London: Stockdale, 1787) and Michelle M. Wright’s critique of these views in *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

84 Grovogui, “The Secret Lives of the ‘Sovereign,’” 269.

role within these debates. Rather than arguing the case for sovereignty's elusiveness or its irrelevancy in our hyper-global world, Agnew takes aim at the artificial aspects of its supposed spatial demarcations. In other words, sovereignty can extend beyond state and territorial borders due to the networks that power uses to travel or the multiple outside entities that a sovereign state has to encounter. Agnew does not reject the state as superfluous. Instead, he reimagines state power as deterritorialised, setting his theories in opposition to critics who argue for either the centrality of globalisation (see sociologist Sassia Sassen for more on this) or the impact of liquid modernity upon the transnational circuits of power that fuel "extraction zones" and repeated cycles of dispossession.<sup>85</sup>

What Agnew stresses is the geography of sovereignty—and its unequal moves. In recognising the disparateness in which sovereignty can tether legitimacy to the wielding of state violence in the name of "defending the state," Agnew draws attention to the ways in which sovereign claims or the practice of acting as a sovereign sets up a relational field in which only designated sets of actors are able to engage within certain political projects. This is a powerful situational field of engagement and disavowal that has significant domestic and international implications. As Agnew states, "claims to sovereignty provide the linguistic coin in which both domestic and international politics are transacted."<sup>86</sup> Although Agnew's case studies are read through the lens of deterritorialisation and not race (in counter-distinction to my reading of black sovereignty), we nevertheless share a conviction that "sovereignty is made out of the circulation of power among a range of actors at dispersed sites rather than simply emanating outward from an original and commanding central point."<sup>87</sup> Agnew takes aim at the abstracted state, but his evaluations of sovereign practice involve little consideration of "race matters" within these processes.

The same is true of other international relations scholars who mostly resist discussing race. The potential importance of race to sovereignty lies just beneath the surface in many of these discussions. Take, for example, the work of international relations scholar Jens Bartelson, who, in writing about the indivisibility of sovereignty and its "symbolic form," takes

85 For more on this, see Sassia Sassen's classic *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) and her newer work, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), along with Zygmunt Bauman's influential *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

86 John Agnew, *Globalization & Sovereignty* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 2.

87 Agnew, *Globalization & Sovereignty*, 9.

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the reader through a historical reconceptualisation of early theorists of sovereignty—namely, Hobbes, Bodin and Grotius—while noting that even as scholars grapple with definitions of sovereignty and its legal and potentially *extraterritorial* contours, “sovereignty cannot simply be wished away, since it has been foundational to the differentiation of modern political life into a domestic and an international space.”<sup>88</sup> If race and difference have played roles in domestic, military and imperial expansions, so too must they dance along the contours of sovereign articulations. We must not ignore sovereignty’s origins, its mutations over time as certain nation-states have been absorbed within it—or distinguished as different—or the implications of these distinctions for exceptional nation-states. For the purposes of this book, it is clear that sovereignty’s nation-state beginnings do not include political bodies that represent people of African descent. By default, race must play a key role, as political entities demarcated as non-white would have been denied sovereign recognition at their conception.

Scholars such as Kevin Bruyneel have written extensively about indigenous or tribal sovereignty, especially as it relates to indigenous and aboriginal communities and First Nation peoples within North America, South America, Africa and the Pacific. Alongside work by Grovogui, these examinations within sovereignty studies have critiqued the limitations of tribal or quasi-sovereignty, including those within decolonised and paracolony spaces still economically or politically tied (some would say controlled) by former imperial powers. These two strands of scholarship are extensive and growing and help support much of the considerations of race that inform my readings of sovereignty. Rather than read black sovereignty through a more Agambian notion of “bare life,” I read black sovereignty through the critical lens of blackness. This is not a sovereignty given meaning by enslavement, violence or the control of life, but a sovereignty given meaning through political struggle.

The limitations and contours of sovereignty have recently attracted the attention of scholars outside of sovereignty studies and international relations. Humanists, political theorists and cultural critics have turned to sovereignty in large numbers, primarily due to the 1998 publication of the English translation of Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* [*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*] (1993). In it, Agamben restructures Walter Benjamin’s, Michel Foucault’s and Carl Schmitt’s murmurings regarding power, authority and articulations (and

<sup>88</sup> Jens Bartelson, “On the Indivisibility of Sovereignty,” *Republic of Letters: A Journal of the Study of Knowledge, Politics, and the Arts* 2, no. 2 (June 2011): 86. <https://arcade.stanford.edu/rofl/indivisibility-sovereignty>.

control) of life and paints each onto an explicitly postcolonial canvas.<sup>89</sup> Within this frame, he considers how affordances of rights and even life are controlled by the being that gives rights—the sovereign—and takes life away. Through these ruminations, Agamben is able to stitch together a reconceptualisation of sovereign power that makes clear how the sovereign politicises life, violently reproduces itself and its exceptionalism and removes certain actants from being able to participate within its structures. In this instance, Agamben sees the state as the decoder that can control bodies, even as it moves some into a bare existence for its own political means.<sup>90</sup> A generative work of political theory, Agamben's discussions of sovereignty have stimulated new strands of research, even as it has closed off certain questions regarding race and sovereign power, such as what occurs when the sovereign is a racialised body that has typically existed as the exception outside of the international political order.

Cultural anthropologist Chelsey Kivland, writing about what she describes as Haitian “street sovereignty,” argues that “when Haitians conceptualize sovereignty, another principle takes center stage: respect (*respè*).”<sup>91</sup> Respect, though, far more than mere recognition, would be in short supply throughout Haiti's sovereign existence. Some republics and territories in the African diaspora exhibited respect, if not full reciprocity and engagement; still others rejected or boxed Haiti into an anomalous category. Laurent Dubois, in a detailed but brief history of Haitian sovereignty, asks, “How is it that a country that so importantly pioneered and developed ideas of sovereignty has seen its sovereignty so persistently undermined both by conflicts within and by pressure from outside?” Dubois thinks the answer partially lies in the “fundamental relationship between Haiti's powerful demand for sovereignty through its revolution and the consistent refusal of recognition and respect for that sovereignty.”<sup>92</sup> Dubois, Kivland and others participated in the Elliot School of International Affairs 2014 symposium on sovereignty in Haiti. That conference and the edited volume that emerged from it, offer new terrains to consider regarding Haiti's sovereignty, but more

89 There is a growing and extensive list of critics who have moved into sovereignty through the study of these and other issues. In addition to reading Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, I would recommend Achille Mbembé and Libby Meintjes, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40 and Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, eds., *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

90 Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

91 Chelsey Kivland, “Street Sovereignty: Power, Violence, and Respect Among Haitian *Baz*,” in Maguire and Freeman, *Who Owns Haiti?*, 140.

92 Laurent Dubois, “Haitian Sovereignty: A Brief History,” in Maguire and Freeman, *Who Owns Haiti?*, 16.

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needs to be done to see fully the “sovereign turn” actually engage with race, racism and racialisation and the role of racial recognition in the process.

Even as studies into sovereignty expand notions of authority, certain segments of diplomacy and international relations remain tied to the basic, Westphalian principles of sovereignty.<sup>93</sup> According to sociologist and political theorist Radhika V. Mongia, “central to sovereignty is the notion of recognition: an entity can only be sovereign if it is recognised as such by other sovereign entities.”<sup>94</sup> Mongia makes clear what Agamben does not: sovereignty, at least amongst external bodies, is a relational performance.

The critical influence and role of recognition remains transparent within international reports on sovereignty, such as *The Responsibility to Protect* (2001) report issued by the ad hoc International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. Called into action by the government of Canada and backed by the UN and other funders, the report provides “official” guidance to the UN General Assembly about the circumstances with which nation-states can intervene within other sovereign territories, including the conditions for (and limitations against) using military force for humanitarian purposes—a key rationale that has galvanised nation-states to enter and seek to control Haiti for more than three decades. Although much of the report traverses this terrain, its beginnings offer a definition of sovereignty that makes clear the problems with equality, reciprocity and respect inherent in sovereign state recognition and the challenges for black sovereignty.

Subtitled the “Norm of non-intervention,” the opening of the report stresses that:

Sovereignty has come to signify, in the Westphalian concept [based on the 1648 treaty of the same name that ended the Thirty Years War], the legal identity of a state in international law. It is a concept which provides order, stability and predictability in international relations since sovereign states are regarded as *equal*, regardless of comparative size or wealth.<sup>95</sup>

93 This 1648 treaty ended a series of interconnected wars in the 1600s in Europe that are now known as the Thirty Years War. It involved significant numbers of European territories and would determine the rights and borders of the various fighting bodies. It would also lay the groundwork for what is now thought of as the rights of sovereign nation-states.

94 Radhika V. Mongia, “Historicizing State Sovereignty: Inequality and the Form of Equivalence,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 2 (2007): 394.

95 Institutional Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001), 12; emphasis mine.

And therein lies much of the problem with the world's interest in granting sovereign recognition to black-identified or racialised nation-states, such as Haiti. To be sovereign amongst other sovereign nation-states means that one is equal to them. And Haiti, unfortunately, has not been granted equal recognition. It remains labelled, as discussed above, a failed nation-state. What I note here is that its problems with sovereignty do not begin in the twentieth century. The roots of this unfinished work date back to its nineteenth-century origins, even as they continue to have twenty-first-century consequences.

Sociologist Linden Lewis, writing in a book collection focused on sovereignty throughout the Caribbean, notes that the region “finds itself at a political, economic, and social conjuncture in which the crises are so deep, the challenges so foreboding, that there is little to hold on to except an elusive sense of independence of thought, of national integrity, and of control over its own destiny.” He worries that as the world continues to integrate and dispossess the Caribbean, “many in political, academic, and popular circles have come to believe in the necessity of holding firmly to their beliefs in the ideals of sovereignty, democracy, and development” to the detriment of equality and social justice.<sup>96</sup>

Other contributors to the Caribbean sovereignty collection noted above offer more hopeful forecasts of the political future(s) of the area. Latin Americanist and comparative cultural scholar, Silvio Torres-Saillant articulates a positive vision of Caribbean political futures that wrestles with the paradoxes of politics, race, capital, religion and the legacies of colonialism that impact the peoples and territories that move through and outside the region. Although much of *The Unfinished Revolution* benefits from

<sup>96</sup> Linden Lewis, “Sovereignty, Heterodoxy, and the Last Desperate Shibboleth of Caribbean Nationalism,” in Lewis, *Caribbean Sovereignty*, 1. In a related essay in the same volume, Lewis goes further in his critique of sovereignty, noting that it emerges from a Westphalian belief in the domination of people of colour (see pp. 69–72 for more on this). As such, the notions of self-determination and independence that infuse sovereignty, today, merely buttress the notions of domination of colonial peoples that gave it meaning. Lewis and I may appear to be in disagreement about sovereignty. We are not. I remain sceptical about sovereignty's purpose and use, but argue, still, that black nation-states have been adapting and practising forms of sovereignty that can be traced back to the independence of Haiti (and to other pre-Haiti sovereign kingdoms) that deserve further research and examination. Rejecting any and all attempts to understand the political challenges from black nation-states due to a belief in the flawed nature of the laws perpetuates the myth of mimicry regarding postcolonial states and ignores the agency and creation of their new forms of being/politics. This book recognises the ways that power and capital flow through this system, but reads the ways that race informs and pushes back against sovereign concepts and performances of it on the global stage.

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the theoretical conversations about black politics and self-determination in the Caribbean that informs the work of Linden Lewis, Alex Dupuy, political scientist Hilbourne Watson, historian, journalist and philosopher C. L. R. James, political theorist and Africana studies scholar Tony Bogues, historian Matthew Smith and anthropologist Deborah A. Thomas, it adds to this body of scholarship a sustained interest in grappling with race and sovereignty between nations, as opposed to sovereignty as imagined between citizens and their nation-state representatives.<sup>97</sup> This book makes this move not to deny the importance of understanding how power moves between sovereigns and subjects but instead to argue that race informs the larger sovereign puzzle within international relations. What comes in the following pages is a book that produces an unexamined and rich archive of black politics that links Gilroy's earlier call to understand black political thought and Haiti to Silvio Torres-Saillant's dialogical contextualisation of sovereignty and place in the Caribbean that I will quote, in full:

Our perilous present, however, points to an urgent need to imagine ways in which the countries inhabiting the Antillean world might realistically aspire to realizing the most cherished dream of the peoples of the region. Their dream, we have grounds for speculating, consists of reaching a political moment when native leaderships, legitimized by the will of the people, can apply themselves to the task of developing economically viable, socially humane, and culturally inclusive societies, unencumbered by the external pressures of forces inimical to the well-being of the region's population. Paradoxically, we can hardly engage in such imagining without envisioning *something like sovereignty* as an inexorable aspiration, as something that people in the region embrace, shape according to their needs, and make relevant to their political lives.<sup>98</sup>

This book stresses that Haiti's *something like sovereignty* remains an unfinished political project that must be historicised and contextualised in order fully to comprehend the ways that racialisation weaves through Haiti's contemporary politics.

<sup>97</sup> In addition to the sources in this chapter, see Deborah A. Thomas, *Exceptional Violence: Embodied Citizenship in Transnational Jamaica* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) and Hilbourne A. Watson, ed., *Globalization, Sovereignty and Citizenship in the Caribbean* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2015). For a related text that focuses more on the issues of postcolonial sovereignty in the French Antilles, but nevertheless provides useful ways of considering the morphologies of sovereignty, see Yarimar Bonilla, *Non-Sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>98</sup> Silvio Torres-Saillant, "Paradoxical Sovereignty: Imagining Caribbean Futures," in Lewis, *Caribbean Sovereignty*, 138; italics mine.

### Moments of Black Sovereignty and the Contents of This Book

*The Unfinished Revolution* adds to the historical record of black politics by detailing the ways nineteenth-century Haitian political leaders, cultural workers, mediators, agitators and unofficial and official transnational representatives engaged in wider and broader international statecraft in order politically to (re)position Haiti in an Atlantic world fuelled by Atlantic racial slavery and strategies of dispossession sown from the seeds of racialisms and pejorative “natural” histories of human difference.<sup>99</sup> It moves backwards and forwards in history through this terrain, pulling these flashpoints into their present-day new guises with new players working through the same unfinished political business.

In traversing across historical periods, *The Unfinished Revolution* reckons with two important and oppositional notions about blackness, time and politics: racial hauntings of the past have afterlives in the present; and futures imagined, but unfinished in the past—such as Haiti’s black sovereignty—carry the weight of their incompleteness into the present. The first notion concerns things such as memory and trauma; the second, power and futurity.

In his influential *Conscripts of Modernity*, anthropologist and Caribbeanist David Scott argues that what is at stake in our political present is our very future. He stresses that the emancipatory potentials of our past anti-colonialisms have little place in our contemporary postcolonial and post-revolutionary presents. In essence, we need new tools to (en)counter this moment—something that would move everyone, critic and activist alike, away from heroic acts of resistance or narratives of emancipation. Our postcolonial predicament, he stresses, highlights our “anxiety of exhaustion” in which “we are left with [...] an exercise of power bereft of any pretense of the exercise of vision.”<sup>100</sup> In order to reactivate our potential, we must give up Romance and embrace tragedy. He suggests that “for tragedy the relation between past, present, and future is never a Romantic one in which history rides a triumphant and seamlessly progressive rhythm, but a broken series of

99 This area of research is wide and varied. Select titles worth reviewing include: Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009) and Nell Irwin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011).

100 Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 2.

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paradoxes and reversals in which human action is ever open to unaccountable contingencies—and luck” (13).

Although motivated by Scott’s notion of temporality, contingency and emancipatory futures, *The Unfinished Revolution* returns to the materials of the past and uncovers their role within the struggle for and recognition of black sovereignty in the Atlantic world. By doing so, it reconsiders these moments—and their agendas—while contributing to and shaping contemporary articulations of black power and legitimacy. Although I am hesitant to argue that this history is a usable past, I do feel that there is a connection between my work on this primarily nineteenth-century history of black sovereignty and Gary Wilder’s interests in alternative futures. In a *Public Culture* essay on Aimé Césaire, utopian visions and colonisation, Wilder dances into the battleground of colonial politics, anti-colonial pasts and obfuscated freedoms in order to redraw our critical lenses onto “futures that were once imagined but never came to be, alternative futures that might have been and whose not yet realized emancipatory possibilities may now be recognized and reawakened as durable and vital legacies.”<sup>101</sup>

Black sovereignty exists within these same tensions—as something from which the practice of sovereign power can become a fugitive figuration of blackness *and* a fantasy held in abeyance by the forces of racism and the slipperiness of racialisms. *The Unfinished Revolution* considers the performances of Haiti’s creativity, industry and modernity in a world that often decried it or considered it violent and/or inconsequential to wider and larger transnational dynamics, even as a large and vocal segment sought to profit in and outside of Haiti (and still do) off narratives of dispossession and attempts to destabilise, or perhaps more accurately, to weaken, Haiti’s government.

My foray into this historical terrain is inherently interdisciplinary, combining the methodologies of critical race studies, critical discourse analysis, political theory and cultural studies (among others) into a tangible narrative of the performance of black sovereignty in the nineteenth-century Atlantic world. To make the vectors of this performance legible, this study has deployed a range of tools that unveil and sift through the roots of this unfinished work. In these pages, the reader will discover diplomatic exchanges read for their performative properties, daguerreotypes analysed for their visual iconographic content and gendered portrayals of power and social networks of finance and control interrogated for their exploitation of nation-state recognition for their own capital gains. As single episodes, the scenarios, writings and material objects within these pages offer up intriguing moments, but when read together they extend a momentary

101 Gary Wilder, “Untimely Vision: Aimé Césaire, Decolonization, Utopia,” *Public Culture* 21, no. 1 (2009): 103.

flashpoint of power and the production of sovereignty into a longer arc of political nation-state crafting.

Language plays a key role in this project as I travel along with documents that signify the relations between Haiti and the North Atlantic world. In following the archive, the project works quite consciously to include material objects that carry linguistic codes from multiple languages—although English predominates. Because of the focus on material found or circulating in the Atlantic world, sources may be in English or French. In fact, many textual sources appear in English-speaking regions in French, such as the French-written Haitian governmental documents that circulated in the United Kingdom and the USA and were translated by a host of intermediaries. In some instances, French and English translations of the same document have been assembled and kept together within the archives.

There are a number of questions about these transliteral political documents. Who translated them (a person of Haitian descent)? What is each text's connection to Haiti (do they form a correspondence network amongst Haitian and African diasporic politicians within a nationally grounded, yet still transnational black Atlantic)? And how did the material circulate (essentially, how far was its intended reach)? Where possible, I have provided answers to these questions. This archive, though, is an ever-growing body that will I hope yield more answers for future researchers. To that end, it has been imperative to stay attentive to the politics at play within the archives, the production of history, collective knowledge and the reproduction of assumptions of difference while finding and examining these moments of cultural diplomacy, black political theorisation and statecraft. This has meant paying close attention to what has been covered, chronicled or written up, at what time, in what context and by whom—as well as to what end. For this project, “reading slant” has been a necessary methodological tool for understanding the paradoxical attempts, by some nation-states and their political representatives, to champion Haiti while simultaneously gaining access to and control of its resources. Control, whether rearticulated by France or other nation-states, would motivate Haitian officials in their efforts militarily to protect Haitian borders from foreign invasion throughout the nineteenth century.

Although cross-Caribbean and French interactions remain important, and do appear within the project, I have not sought to tell an imperial story or a postcolonial narrative of Haiti's interactions with its former empire. There are excellent scholars and texts that explore these dynamics.<sup>102</sup> Instead, I focus on what my archive presented to me: a far more global exchange

102 For an excellent foray into this area, see Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles: Creole Identities of Post-colonial Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave*

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of information and ideas. Influencing nineteenth-century international relations meant finding opportunities to enter the world stage—such as the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago where Haiti would have a gleaming white pavilion building directly in the hottest location within the “white city.” This was a Chicago event, but it had global implications for the political lives of people of African descent. Taking these and other informal moments of statecraft as cues has allowed me to witness the polydirectional flow of black sovereignty and its polyvocality. This is especially important when we consider that a number of nineteenth-century Haitian governmental officials spent time in the USA, often as part of Haiti’s diplomatic core. While it may be tempting to read the project as one about how other nineteenth-century nations viewed or treated Haiti, I have remained focused on the crafting of black sovereignty by all sides—including considerations of the role that Haitians played in the middle of this drama, crafting, orchestrating and often rejecting descriptions of their power.

These figurations took on many forms, but there are a number that repeat throughout the historical overview within these pages: black sovereignty as currency (using publicity to generate wider acceptance of its sovereign and black contours); black sovereignty as fungible commodity (using it as a substitution for something of similar or higher value—such as capital); black sovereignty as racio-political kinship (using it as a tool or as an incentive to enmesh certain people of African descent within a shared space or to encourage the adoption of a shared concept—not always used positively); and black sovereignty as an intractable problem (using it as a weapon or a threat to differentiate “normal” political bodies from absurd, comical or dangerous ones). As tempting as it may be to categorise the first three tropes as “positive” Haitian-directed ideas and the last as a “negative” formulation made by foreigners about Haiti, all manner of individuals have used the currents and pathways of black sovereignty for their own means. In seeking to signify black sovereignty’s reach and “unfinishedness,” I have resisted categorisations that cast Haiti as a victim in this unfolding history, ever on the receiving end of negative press, negative representations and negative politics. Placing Haiti within such a degenerative role, makes it difficult to see fully and appreciate the ways that certain black and brown bodies profited from other black and brown bodies within Haiti—and utilised the contours, currents, confusion and conditionality of black sovereignty in order to achieve their aims. This work resists offering a “Haiti against the world” portrayal and instead makes it clear that profit and dispossession can reside in any body and change from one form of dispossession (such as plantation

*Trade*, and Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, eds., *Postcolonial Thought in the French-speaking World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009).

economies) to another (including processes of enforced labour). In other words, becoming a nation-state may not have done much to alter power relations between elites and those who fought for a “counter plantation” existence. These tensions—of who wielded power and over whom—would erupt from the earliest beginnings of the revolutionary fires in August of 1791 as the rebels, the *gens de couleur* and a mix of people from all walks of life (including Polish regiments fighting on the side of the rebels), worked to transform the slave-wielding, brutal French colony of Saint-Domingue into the black-held nation of Haiti. This transfiguration involved rejecting the “outlaw” status that Clark attacked in his 1853 essay and resisting, through textual, aural and performative means, the title of outsider.

In *Beyond the Slave Narrative: Politics, Sex, and Manuscripts in the Haitian Revolution*, francophone literary historian Deborah Jenson reconceptualises the mediated and oral archive articulated by Haitian revolutionary leaders and courtesans from 1791 to 1806 in Saint-Domingue and then Haiti. In collecting and assessing this “literary” repository of mediated writings and poesis of the early black Atlantic, Jenson notes how these texts provide “detailed accounts of *un-becoming* the legal property of another human being—and, unfortunately, *becoming* the national equivalent of ‘brigands’ on the international scene [...] sovereign ‘brigands’”;<sup>103</sup> while at the same time resisting the language of domination that would not only see all black people as slaves but also, as I have argued above, see all black bodies, including nation-states, as apolitical matter. Jenson teases out the ways that Haitian revolutionary leaders and early postcolonial agitators and cultural workers would seek to write or “orate” themselves into legitimacy. This move between political and sexual modes of dispossession and texts that contested these forms of relation, situate Jenson’s book within a particular scholarly field of literary inquiry that includes others.<sup>104</sup>

Coming from different perspectives, these scholars have countered the perceived historical silence of the Haitian Revolution by reassembling the literary history of the Haitian Revolution and articulating the “scribal politics”—to borrow Bongie’s term—at play in the crafting of the Haitian world by revolutionary and political thinkers, essayists, scientists, historians, poets and orators in and outside of Haiti. Although a burgeoning field, as Jenson notes, more needs to be done to situate their archives within a wider and longer black Atlantic tradition—and to link this work with the field of international relations and sovereignty studies.

<sup>103</sup> Jenson, *Beyond the Slave Narrative*, 3.

<sup>104</sup> For a range of disciplinary perspectives in this area, see the many publications of Garraway, Daut, Dayan, Nesbitt and Bongie, many of which are included in various notes in this chapter.

## Introduction

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Surprisingly, the archive of Haiti's black sovereignty is extensive, comprising a range of objects and documents, including never-before-examined government treatises containing significant but buried details about Haiti's credit economy in the late nineteenth century. Unsurprisingly, the archive of Haiti's black sovereignty is extensively dispersed in ephemera, letters, government missives, trade documents, personal memoirs, artefacts and cultural productions. It is also encoded in the lived experiences—and lived theory—of its participants.

Take, for example, Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines. These two revolutionary agitators' lives—and experiences—resound with the energies and constraints of Haiti's emergence. According to Jenson, "Dessalines is today the popular hero of Haitian political consciousness, additionally associated with the warrior-like *Iwa* Ogoun in vodou culture, [but] it was Toussaint who forged a dialogue of tenuous peer relationship with metropolitan and colonial leadership, and out of it an enduring foothold for critique and mobility."<sup>105</sup> This dichotomy has been fed by past and current scholars who tend to view the two men through different revolutionary lenses.

Although much has been previously claimed and invented about Toussaint and his life, scholars have been able to put together a fairly complex portrait of him that does more than just place him as an exalted leader of the Haitian Revolution. According to Madison Smartt Bell, "Toussaint Bréda had been a trusted retainer on Bréda Plantation, near Haut du Cap, and only a short distance from the port of Cap Français."<sup>106</sup> A coachman, *commandeur* and, we now suspect, small slaveholder before 1791, Toussaint seems to have had his ears to the ground long before his purported ascendancy in 1793.<sup>107</sup>

Just before the August fires of 1791 swept through then Saint-Domingue, *commandeurs* are said to have gathered in an area called Bois Caïman to plot an insurrection. This gathering comes after a long and volatile history of violent encounters between the members of the by then 500,000 enslaved persons or captives and the French colonial plantation system that practised routine brutality on the bodies of Africans in an effort to control their labour. Of course, this system of enforced control of who was or could be

<sup>105</sup> Jenson, *Beyond the Slave Narrative*, 47.

<sup>106</sup> Madison Smartt Bell, *Toussaint Louverture: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007).

<sup>107</sup> A new biography by Philippe Girard challenges this narrativisation of Louverture. See *Toussaint Louverture: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2016). For more on Toussaint's early life, see Jean Fouchard, Gabriel Debien, and Marie-Antoinette Ménier, "Toussaint Louverture avant 1789: Légendes et Réalités," *Conjonction:Revue Franco-Haïtienne* 134 (1977): 67–80.

free remained incomplete—so much so that Saint Domingue would also contain a sizeable community of multiple tens of thousands of black people and people of colour who were not, and in some cases had never been, owned by someone. Importantly, this free population, or *anciens libres*, included Toussaint Louverture.

But Bois Caïman contains another story. The revolutionary responses to the colony's history of brutality, the eruptions of the French Revolution and the potential rumoured promises of more free time or less restrictions for enslaved persons came together in a ceremony marked by spirit possession, sacrifice and a call for spiritual support in rebellion. Scholars are divided on their views regarding this ceremony, with historian Jeremy Popkin taking the position that there is no archival evidence that the event ever happened and historian Carolyn Fick representing those who view the ceremony as a foundational and fundamental moment of self-actualisation within the lives of enslaved persons.<sup>108</sup> Laurent Dubois takes a middle position, arguing that regardless of the state of the archive regarding this ceremony Bois Caïman matters within Haitian history.<sup>109</sup>

What is indisputable is the fact that this event played and continues to play a significant role in Haitian and wider black political thought as visions of this gathering contain elements of collective power, mobilisation and resistance. What is unclear, beyond considerations of what to do about the testimonies and confessions regarding the gathering, is whether Toussaint was in attendance. He has not emerged within Haitian traditions as the leader of the vodou ceremony. That role is co-held by Boukman Dutty, a *commandeur* and purported *houngan* (or priest), who tradition suggests led the gathering along with *mambo* Cécile Fatiman (a priestess).<sup>110</sup>

108 For more on this, see Fick. *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* and Jeremy D. Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). Popkin, although keen to “work with the surviving documentary evidence to reconstruct a more precise picture of how the slave insurrection of August 1791 began,” does offer a more qualified reading of the Bois Caïman ceremony and the activities that occurred that night in his *Concise History of the Haitian Revolution* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 36. Popkin's views about history have not shifted so much as the debates about the ceremony have had to reckon with new historical methodologies and ways of knowing that have worked to understand the revolution from those freedom fighters and agitators who participated within it.

109 For more on this, see Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*.

110 Historian Sylvian A. Diouf persuasively argues that Boukman was probably a practising Muslim, noting that Boukman may have been a French spelling of “bookman,” the name routinely given to men who had or carried a Qur'an. See Diouf's newly updated *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 2013) for more on Boukman and Makandal (another of the many possible practising Muslims in Saint-Domingue).

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Although the gathering has become an important touchstone within Haitian oral and national heritage, it has also been used as a weapon by those claiming that the enslaved persons on Saint-Domingue were fuelled by the Devil—a claim that has its modern-day equivalent in US Evangelist and multiple (unsuccessful) candidate for US President Pat Robertson’s assertions that the Haitian revolutionaries had a “pact with the Devil” that was somehow implicated, perhaps in the Devil seeking payment in blood, in the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti.<sup>111</sup> What Robertson espouses in his curious echoing of nineteenth-century rhetoric of supernatural help in the rebels’ anti-colonial victory over the French (not to mention the British and the Spanish) is a curious, circular form of recognition—morphing syncretic spiritualism into a reifying portrait of Haitians as “not-quite” normal. In this refrain, Haitians remain “not-quite” capable of rebelling without spiritual assistance and, more importantly, “not-quite” able to position themselves to lead on their own, forever entitled to suffer the guidance of those entities that see themselves as more morally grounded—and possibly Christian.<sup>112</sup>

This is not the narrative of the uprising of 1791 that now predominates throughout the Atlantic world. Due to the circulation of Haitian studies material, alongside the proliferation of work from scholars within other fields, critics have produced a sizeable archive of counter-narratives to this pejorative framing. Yet, as Robinson’s comments attest, these views persist. In 1791, the impossible was improbable to many. The spread of the fires in August 1791, the devastation of the plantations in the northern province and the reported violence (and brutal retaliations) against various black, brown and white bodies seem to have taken many French colonists by surprise. Toussaint may have known of these activities, but he is not an active player in the colonial record until far later in 1791, when letters suggest that he may have joined the rebels as a secretary and doctor.<sup>113</sup>

Eventually, he would rise within the ranks of the leaders, move to the Spanish side and fight against the French colonial machine, before switching sides again and fighting on behalf of the French against the Spanish and the British forces, who both tried to manipulate this moment of colonial instability in order to grab Saint-Domingue, a territory often referred to at

<sup>111</sup> For more on this, search out any major news outlet. Robertson’s now infamous broadcast elicited immediate responses from critics, politicians, philanthropists and other pundits.

<sup>112</sup> In addition to the sources in this chapter on vodou and religion, there are increasing reports about missionary work in Haiti. For examples of some work that has drawn public scrutiny, see reports in the media of the US missionaries arrested in Haiti for kidnapping shortly after the January 2010 earthquake.

<sup>113</sup> Smartt Bell, *Toussaint Louverture*, 18–57.

## The Unfinished Revolution

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the time as the “pearl of the Antilles.” Toussaint would begin the revolution as a *commandeur* but by 1801 he would be the highest-ranking French officer in the colony.

As the French Revolution brought upheaval to Paris, it also brought conflicts to the colonies and Saint-Domingue was no exception as members of the *gens de couleur* saw this moment as one in which their political rights should match up with their economic power in the colony. First, they would be granted citizenship. Almost immediately thereafter they would be drawn into the battle against the enslaved rebels. Eventually, they would join forces against the French government’s attempts to reverse political rights and opportunities for people of African descent once Napoleon came into power.

It is around this time that Toussaint drew up the first official document that attempted to change the status of the colony in 1801, with the creation of his committee-crafted Constitution. According to Madison Smartt Bell, “in the first months of 1801, Toussaint Louverture was at the apogee of his military and political success; he looked to be invincible [...] He held a kind of court in the government buildings of Cap Français and Port-au-Prince.” Even with this power on display, Smartt Bell notes that Toussaint “remained extremely cautious, even or especially at this height of his powers.”<sup>114</sup> And his powers were extensive. Those who opposed him were removed—banished from the colony or even killed.<sup>115</sup>

Opposition was nothing new for Toussaint. His attempts to recast plantation economies as the central feature of colonial life were in opposition to the purported desires of the masses to cultivate their own smallholdings. What ultimately emerges, in the 1801 Constitution, is a document containing 77 articles that sought to consolidate Toussaint’s individual power while crafting a “something like sovereignty” for the colony. With the help of a carefully assembled representative body—that included no one from the masses—the document, often called Toussaint’s Constitution, would declare that the colony was a part of the French empire, outlaw slavery throughout the territory (even going so far as abolishing it forever), engender some form of labouring system (perhaps through importing workers) and grant Toussaint control of the government for the rest of his life. As historian Julia Gaffield puts it: “Toussaint Louverture, Chief General of the revolutionary army, created the first constitution of the colony in 1801 after ten years of war in Saint Domingue.” Gaffield argues further, in analysing the content of the constitution and its links of citizenship to France and Frenchness, that “while a very small proportion

<sup>114</sup> Smartt Bell, *Toussaint Louverture*, 197.

<sup>115</sup> See Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, for more on this aspect of Toussaint’s power grabbing.

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of the residents in the colony would have visited France or would have even known the French language, Toussaint wanted to create solidarity by assigning everyone the same nationality.”

This tactic allowed Toussaint to craft a singular vision for the colony that also encouraged recognition.<sup>116</sup> Smartt Bell expands on this claim, arguing that the assembly’s composition and the resulting constitutional document that they co-produced “reflected Toussaint’s desire to produce a document that would be palatable not only to France but also to other powers closer by: the English colonies and the United States.”<sup>117</sup> Toussaint had already engaged in treaty making with the British and had obtained additional control of the Spanish side of the island. Now, it seemed, his sights were set wider—to influence the Americas. Literary historians Michael Drexler and Ed White, in situating the 1801 Constitution as one of the most widely read pieces attributed to a member of the black Atlantic, note that within the first few months at least 24 newspapers published aspects of it. Drexler and White suggest that as the 1801 Constitution appeared in English with auxiliary documentation, the assembled material helped to ground the new governance structure, legitimise its crafting and present evidence of the acceptance of Toussaint’s policies and power within Haiti.<sup>118</sup>

While recognition may have been key to Toussaint’s political “spin” within the Constitution and other texts produced alongside it by his secretaries and representatives, much of the structural positioning of his constitution demanded that France and its “special” colony transform its colonial relationship into a new form in which reciprocity would play a strategic role. Implicit within this new relationship was a demand that shored up the universalist rhetoric within France and unfolded it within the particularity of Saint-Domingue—and in one particular body now leading the colony, namely Toussaint’s.

As Semley argues, “Louverture’s formulations about citizenship, in particular [...] presented new ways of thinking about ‘blackness’ and ‘Frenchness.’” In a passage working through the differences and similarities between CLR James’s notion of dominion status, Claude Moïse’s observations of “sovereignty by association” and Toussaint’s interactions with the French imperial system, Semley suggests that the dominion that Toussaint crafted in his 1801 Constitution allowed colonists to see themselves—if they even could imagine a

116 For more on this, see Julia Gaffield, “Complexities of Imagining Haiti: A Study of National Constitutions, 1801–1807,” *Journal of Social History* 41, no. 1 (Fall 2007), 86.

117 Smartt Bell, *Toussaint Louverture*, 212.

118 Michael J. Drexler and Ed White, “The Constitution of Toussaint: Another Origin of African American Literature,” in Gene Andrew Jarrett, ed., *A Companion to African American Literature* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 61.

world outside of their province—as “an integral part of the French empire.”<sup>119</sup> And although the 1801 Constitution made claims about equality under the law for all, the same document made every political body report directly to Toussaint. Historian Philippe R. Girard succinctly makes this point when he notes that Toussaint “had the right of life or death over his subjects.”<sup>120</sup> This power grabbing looks eerily similar when read through the activities erupting in France after the Terror that allowed Napoleon Bonaparte, a military hero, to become First Consul of the provisional government.

Many rumours, stories and narratives of the legend of Toussaint typically bring up his role as the Atlantic’s “Black Spartacus,” leading his enslaved people to freedom. Given Toussaint’s own prior slaveholding and his freeperson status well before the fires of 1791, it might be better to describe him as a self-made man constrained by the contours of Atlantic racial slavery and pejorative ideas about black people wielding power.<sup>121</sup> That constraint was not just about his reach, but the reach of the colony, soon to be nation-state, of Haiti.

Smartt Bell describes both Toussaint and Napoleon as “self-invented and self-made men” who could have seen themselves in the other.<sup>122</sup> Toussaint clearly saw sameness in their roles and ascension. From the moment that the 1801 Constitution came before him, Napoleon emphatically rejected any sense that he could or even should recognise Toussaint as an equal power broker. Yet, in many ways, equality was not actually on offer. Although much has been rumoured about Toussaint sending Napoleon a letter addressed to the “First of the Whites from the First of the Blacks,” this exchange has not been found within the archive. Instead, what emerges are attempts to differentiate what power France had over Toussaint—and, by extension, the colony.<sup>123</sup>

During the presentation of the 1801 Constitution to Napoleon by an official representative from the colony, it was unveiled that the constitution had already been adopted in the colony; making the presentation to Napoleon little more than a notification of its existence. This bold act contains the richness of Toussaint’s performance of black sovereignty. Yes, this sovereignty revolved around power. And, yes, this sovereignty demanded recognition. Yet, Toussaint’s offering of sovereignty managed to

119 Semley, “To Live and Die Free and French,” 77.

120 Philippe R. Girard, *The Slaves Who Defeated Napoleon: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian War for Independence, 1801–1804* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011), 20.

121 This point is made, ironically, in a review by Carolyn Fick of Girard’s biography of Toussaint. See Carolyn E. Fick, “Toussaint Louverture: A Revolutionary Life by Phillippe Girard (review),” *William and Mary Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (October 2017): 790–94.

122 Smartt Bell, *Toussaint Louverture*, 217.

123 Smartt Bell, *Toussaint Louverture*, 217.

position blackness as a core feature of the political world on offer. Caribbean and Latin American comparativist Sibylle Fischer argues that “viewed from this perspective, the early Haitian constitutions,” including Toussaint’s 1801 Constitution, “function more like declarations of independence than legal codes.”<sup>124</sup> No matter the complex codes of difference proliferating within Haiti, those articulations of independence created a space for black politics in the Atlantic world.

Toussaint would not position blackness in the same way as Dessalines—explicitly as a citizenship mandate. As Fischer notes, Dessalines’s co-mingling of citizenship and blackness was “not to legislate away (or disguise) in the law the racial divisions that continued to be operative, or to clarify a possible ambiguity. Calling all Haitians ‘black’ is clearly a political act, or what legal scholars would call ‘expressive lawmaking.’”<sup>125</sup> Instead, Toussaint would wear his blackness on his skin and declare, through his existence and the manoeuvrings of his semi-autonomous colony, that blackness and politics co-mingle. In fact, he would even go so far as to declare that Saint-Domingue would still be a French territory, but it would be one that was not subservient to any white person. White people could be allies, but they could no longer be full masters over the dominion—or over its citizens. Fischer makes clear what this articulation meant. She argues:

At a time when eighteenth-century racial taxonomies were beginning to mutate into racist biology and scientific racism, the Haitian constitutions [including Toussaint’s] take the opposite direction and infuse distinctions of skin color with political meaning. In doing so, they enter into a difficult realm where universalist ideas of the equality of the races and identity-based claims of past injustices and future redemption need to be negotiated.<sup>126</sup>

As Fischer further notes, Toussaint’s 1801 Constitution clearly positions the colony’s relationship to freedom (although the constitution’s many articles illuminate the thorny tensions between each citizen’s self-actualisation and the territory’s attempts to curtail those envisionings as it chased the colony’s past economic wealth). Smartt Bell assesses Toussaint’s localised autonomy for Saint-Domingue as a form of “carrot and stick” approach. “The fat juicy carrot,” he argues, was “restoring the vast prosperity of Saint Domingue for the benefit of France.”<sup>127</sup> The carrot combined the vast potential riches with a cooperative relationship with the white planter class (something that

<sup>124</sup> Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 229.

<sup>125</sup> Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 234.

<sup>126</sup> Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 227–28.

<sup>127</sup> Smartt Bell, *Toussaint Louverture*, 222.

would be firmly and violently rejected by Dessalines). Toussaint's stick if the carrot did not work? His successful army. His entreaties faced important constraints and limitations.

Toussaint's moves—those visible and performed through the mere presence of the colony sitting under his command—resist Napoleon's attempts to co-locate *unfreedom* and political nullification within black and brown bodies, but not completely. Toussaint's sovereignty is an unfinished claiming. His demands of recognition from Napoleon of the colony's right to a political autonomy not yet possible for French colonies hinged on Napoleon seeing Saint-Domingue as a "special" case—with a vast wealth that Toussaint sought to reinstate through conscripted and enforced internal or external labour. Toussaint's political resistance, encoded within the 1801 Constitution, also depended on Napoleon being willing to offer reciprocity for the black fungible forms of sovereignty that Toussaint was developing.

Most conceptualisations of fungibility rest on the economic notion of monetary interchangeability. For example, we would all comfortably accept that a £5 note in my hand is equivalent (from a financial point of view) to a £5 note in yours. In economic terms, money is fungible because one £5 can be substituted for another £5. They are interchangeable items. Other commodities can operate in the same manner. Cultural, political, legal and social critics of various systems have borrowed frames and terms from fungibility studies in order to develop arguments for comprehending and understanding bodies, labour, blackness, sexuality and gender expression and power.<sup>128</sup> Similar terrains are being explored in this body of work that resonate with this project as I sense in the shifts, exchanges and selling of black sovereignty an attempt to make visible—and reciprocal—the power at its core, even in contexts and situations where that very power is constrained or delimited.

This "tropic" link between fugitivity and constraint remains one of the ever-present aspects of black sovereignty. Although much of my frame for this lens comes from the theoretical material that I have highlighted above, it is also grounded in the formative work emerging from scholars working in and around black fungibility. Critical geographer, black feminist and black sexuality studies scholar Tiffany King, in discussing the openings and

128 For the monetary overview, see Johannes Abeler and Felix Marklein, "Fungibility, Labels, and Consumption," Discussion Paper 3500, IZA, 2008. Available at <http://ftp.iza.org/dp3500.pdf>. For examples of fungibility studies within other disciplines, see Anna M. Agathangelou, "Neoliberal Geopolitical Order and Value," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 15, no. 4 (2013): 453–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2013.841560> and Stephen H. Marshall, "The Political Life of Fungibility," *Theory & Event* 15:3 (2012). Project MUSE, [muse.jhu.edu/article/484457](http://muse.jhu.edu/article/484457).

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foreclosings of black fungibility, argues that it offers, “as a flexible analytic,” “a mode of critique and an alternative reading practice that reroutes lines of inquiry around humanist assumptions and aspirations that pull critique toward incorporation into categories like labor(er).”<sup>129</sup>

King’s radical spatiality of black fungible bodies within and beyond their labouring potential allows me the critical space to imagine black sovereignty as both an interchangeable commodity in lieu of (or in tandem with) black labour, such as Toussaint’s enforced labouring strategy meant to reproduce and reanimate the colony’s plantation economies, and as the articulation of the power needed to ensure and ensnare those same labouring folk. Black sovereignty, paradoxically, is the power and the freedom to have that power over other black bodies—those coded as a territory or those identified as subject-citizens or hemispheric kin (more on this in Chapter 2)—in order to exchange or interchange that power or control for something else—in this case, capital. Racial capitalism has always already marked black and brown people for their monetary value. This form of black sovereignty emerges from this logic as an actuarial object. More often than not, this fungible figuration of black sovereignty is predicated on the (de)valuation of black labour. In Toussaint’s case, for sovereignty to be enacted, he needed to transmogrify the blood and sweat from black bodies into profit.

Although Toussaint’s specific articulation of black sovereignty focuses on the cultural, historical and political contexts of the nineteenth century within Haiti, his entanglement in the 1801 Constitution of sovereignty and labour is not an occurrence that would only happen in Haiti. Another black state, in this case, Liberia, would enmesh work and power as its sovereignty strengthened alongside the increasing exploitation of its national labour force, especially in the early decades of the twentieth century after the state imposed coercion in order legally to compel the populace to labour on its heavily subsidised foreign-owned resource extraction plantations, such as the Firestone Rubber Plantation.<sup>130</sup>

In this situation and in the situation within Haiti, black sovereignty was given meaning less through political struggle than through fungible assets, such as black bodies. *The Unfinished Revolution* tracks this and other moments in order to make visible the ways that black sovereignty moves and morphs within these spaces and contexts. In so doing, it makes tangible the many

129 Tiffany Lethabo King, “The Labor of (Re)reading Plantation Landscapes Fungible(ly),” *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 48, no. 4 (2016), 1023.

130 For more on Liberia, see this Verité report, “Rubber Production in Liberia: An Exploratory Assessment of Living and Working Conditions, with Special Attention to Forced Labor.” <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2777&context=globaldocs>.

ways that the unfinished aspects of this sovereignty-claiming and -making infuses various commodities, forms, assets, conversations and exchanges. Rather than read this struggle through a series of themes, each chapter works through a particular historical moment in the nineteenth century and reads the performances of power that emerge or exist within the centre of the encounters, as well as the echoes of these moments, where relevant, within contemporary Haiti. As mentioned above, the text consciously moves backwards and forwards in time in order to demonstrate the unfinished nature of black sovereignty and the ways that this struggle exists within modern international modes of engaging with Haiti—such as through the development of logic and economic models that govern particular sets of exchanges, like those between Haiti and the UN or between Haiti and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).<sup>131</sup>

Chapter 1 begins with the early days of Haiti's emergence. Rather than start in Haiti, this chapter shifts from the energies of Toussaint and Dessalines discussed in the introduction to focus on articulations of Haiti's sovereignty as given by English legal adviser and abolitionist James Stephen (1758–1832), who was a vocal critic of slavery along economic and juridical grounds. Highly connected (he married William Wilberforce's sister) and politically astute, Stephen played a significant role in the anti-slavery movement in the United Kingdom, including drafting the Slave Trade Act of 1807 that made it illegal to engage in the slave trade throughout the British colonies. Importantly for this book, his ideas and writings about slavery routinely included references to Saint-Domingue and eventually Haiti, including *The Opportunity; or Reasons for an Immediate Alliance with St. Domingo* (1804), a text that calls for recognition of Haiti's sovereignty, primarily for economic reasons.

This chapter examines Stephen's views regarding Haitian sovereignty and uses them as a platform to set up the discursive terrain of influence and political co-optation that surrounded foreign recognition of Haitian claims to power. It places Stephen's work directly in conversation with other Atlantic materials, including the writings and speeches of American-born educator and political activist Prince Saunders (1775–1839), who assumed the role of emissary for Henri Christophe's monarchic government while in the United Kingdom. Saunders's work on Haitian sovereignty directly challenged Stephen's public and private articulations and are probably best displayed in his compendium, *Haitian Papers*, published in England in 1816. In it, Saunders gathers Haitian laws, decrees and sovereign pronouncements

131 For more on USAID, see <https://www.usaid.gov>. The web page of the enormous geopolitical extragovernmental engine that is the United Nations can be accessed here: [www.un.org/en/index.html](http://www.un.org/en/index.html).

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and places those alongside his commentary on Haiti's power in the Atlantic world. His collection of material shifted the conversation in England about Haitian sovereignty from opportunity to power. Within its pages, Saunders presents English readers with proof that a black nation could develop political systems and rule a populace. Haiti, his collection stresses, was not a former colony saturated in violence: it was a nation. Saunders tries to change the terms and frames of Haiti's black sovereignty, but Stephen's texts and narrativisations engage in black sovereign games in order to exchange sovereignty for capital and control.

By the 1820s, political instability in Haiti had finally calmed. Jean-Pierre Boyer, one of the Haitian revolutionary leaders, reunified the country after the suicide death of Christophe and became Haiti's second president. Boyer inherited a country in the midst of revitalisation and racked by financial concerns. As a result, schemes of labour and capital accumulation consumed him. In the mid-1820s, in an effort to enlarge the financial reach of Haiti, President Boyer reached out to French and US officials as a means to ensure future economic stability and market recognition for Haiti. The detente with France did not go well, but the one with the USA was disastrous. Instead of an audience with the US President or the US Secretary of State, Boyer's requests were met with silence. No official US representative responded to his letters.

Faced with shutting doors on all sides, Boyer returned to an older project that pre-dated his administration: black migration. Through official and unofficial Haitian channels, and the networks of the American Colonization Society and those of black political activists in the USA, Boyer enacted a recruitment scheme aimed at enticing free-born and emancipated persons of African descent to leave the USA and settle in Haiti as its newest (almost) citizens. Although motivated, in part, by the actions (and inactions) of French and US officials, Boyer's project embraced a black sovereignty steeped in racio-spatial kinship. To claim that wealth, they had to come to Haiti. And they would come in the thousands.

Chapter 2 reads this scheme as one of transnational connectivity and racial belonging that ignores the fungibility that existed at the core of the project—turning black labouring bodies into capital. In drawing together material connected to the scheme, this chapter compiles an understudied archive that places US and Haitian organisational reports, governmental pamphlets, promotional materials, paintings, newspaper articles and essays alongside personal accounts from those compelled to go. Examining the material evidence of the impact of this scheme on the lives of Haitians and Americans of African descent illuminates not only what pulled people to Haiti, but also the hemispheric afterlives of plantation economies that lived in Haiti's rhetoric of sovereignty and citizenship. It extends this story by

linking it to similar entanglements between black fungible bodies and capital during the recovery and rebuilding efforts after the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti. As this chapter shows, the unfinished project of black sovereignty carries the echoes of its prior forms.

Chapter 3 moves into the mid-nineteenth century and highlights Faustin I's (the last emperor of Haiti, who ruled from 1849 to 1859) struggles to maintain control over Haiti's lands and seas in the 1850s and the ways that he would use this and other performances of power to alter the frames of black sovereignty. All around him, Haiti would be cast as an intractable problem or a burlesque. In the midst of fighting a sovereignty battle with the USA over Navassa Island, a tiny island 30 miles off the south-west coast of Haiti, Faustin I would assemble an impressive archive of black sovereignty. A ruler who actively courted adoration and violently wielded his power in Haiti, Faustin I pushed content about Haiti's—and by extension his—power into surprising circles. For example, the chapter investigates a unique archive of black sovereignty that draws together US, Haitian and British diplomatic tracts, US and Haitian visual representations and Haitian artefacts of black imperial power, such as the understudied album of daguerreotypes and lithographs commissioned by Faustin I for his coronation, *Album Impérial d'Haïti* (1852) and the Haitian objects on display at the 1853 Exhibition for the Industry of All Nations in New York. A counter to rhetorics of black sovereignty that cast it as a burlesque, this information produced a substantive and replicated body of new terms of reference that for a time configured Haiti as a powerful black nation-state.

By the 1880s, Haiti sat at a crossroads between its imagined black sovereign might and its geopolitical importance to outsiders invested in controlling the region. Although Haiti's political landscape remained tumultuous, Haitian officials in the latter half of the nineteenth century confidently argued that their country, its stature in the Atlantic world and its potential wealth made it a considerable economic resource for allies and a powerful independent force that could influence the future of trade and imperial politics in the region. In order to achieve these potentially oppositional objectives, Haitian leaders courted foreign business people, shipping magnets, artists, imperialists, black intellectuals and activists while struggling to control frustration amongst the Haitian masses and guard against outside threats to Haiti's sovereignty. Battling dissenters and pundits on all sides, these leaders strategically fought to place Haiti at the centre of the Atlantic world.

Chapter 4 presents information on the understudied history of Haiti's inclusion in the "White City" of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. Haitian leaders received a formal invitation to participate in the Fair from the US government and were encouraged to showcase the nation's industry and achievements. Haiti's then president quickly seized on this opportunity and

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found the financing needed to send artefacts and set up a national committee who appointed two strong, connected co-commissioners (including Frederick Douglass). These plans culminated in the establishment of Haiti's pavilion in the most sought after avenue of the Fair. By all appearances, Haiti had arrived.

For many readers, this is an unknown story. Most scholars of the Fair have either ignored it in favour of the decadence and racialisation displayed on the Midway Plaisance, or focused their energies on the platform that the Haitian pavilion gave to African American performers and orators after Fair officials rejected the inclusion of a dedicated wing or pavilion showcasing African Americans' industry and achievements. This chapter acknowledges the "proxy" work on behalf of the Haitian pavilion, but refocuses this moment not on the lack of African American involvement in the Fair but Haiti's inclusion by asking how and why it occurred and what its inclusion signalled about black sovereignty at the turn of the century. It gathers and examines an archive of material that surrounds Haiti's participation at the Fair and illuminates how a small set of Haitian and American cultural and political actors manipulated this moment to position Haiti as part of a new world order—one that whitewashed Haiti (literally, through its white city pavilion) and established the capital exchange of "arrival" for access to credit markets and eventually other monetary bodies within Haiti.

The last chapter of this book moves into our contemporary moment by turning from the US military occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 to consider the shifts in the twenty-first century that move through and depend upon the older logics and framings regarding black sovereignty that populate these pages. It builds upon the critical examination into Haiti's nineteenth-century sovereignty that occurs in the previous chapters by turning its eye to Haiti's current international standing and power in the Atlantic world. Informed by a more nuanced consideration of sovereignty developed throughout the book, this concluding chapter ultimately argues that any attempts to comprehend contemporary narratives regarding Haiti must include past and present considerations of its sovereign existence.

It demonstrates the benefits of this approach through a reading of recent visual culture, such as the book and photography exhibition of *État* (2015), a detailed series of print images, audio and text that work through power, race and place in Haiti by Dutch-Canadian photographer Paolo Woods and Swiss journalist Arnaud Robert. It examines this work for its handling of Haitian sovereignty and considers this same theme within creative works, essays and speeches produced just before and after the 2010 earthquake by Haitian officials and other international artists, activists and commentators, including Haitian writer Dany Laferrière's *The World Is Moving around Me: A Memoir of the Haiti Earthquake* (2013), as well as the interactive simulation/

game “Inside the Haiti Earthquake.” In comparing these different objects and their articulations of black sovereignty in Haiti, Chapter 5 illuminates the limits, potential and contestations over Haiti’s power that continue to impact the nation, its international relations and its unfinished political project of black sovereign legitimacy.

I have used the space of this introduction to highlight a searing truth that weaves throughout the pages of this book: this is not a narrative of affirmation or a teleological tale of modern self-determination by black people. It is also not a story of declension or black pessimism. What emerges from within this project are perspectives, opportunities, foreclosures, aggressions, complicities, refusals, brilliance and a cobbled and complex black futurity that draws from the past even as it refuses to remain within the past’s prior frames.

Although aspects of black sovereignty do not carry the same celebratory feel as the radical declaration of resistance or display at the Bois Caïman ceremony or Dessalines’s later call for Haiti’s independence in 1804, black sovereignty, as a whole, does carry within its many forms the hope, the pain and the means for a radical kind of political future. What I hope resides within these pages is not an argument for the aimlessness of nation-states or a disillusionment with the political apparatuses that orient transnational interrogations and engagements. Instead, I aim, quite simply to make visible the conditions, the histories and the possibilities that black sovereignty offers—even as it pushes against foreclosures to it or the constraints of its own limitations. There is, as ever, a need to rethink black political thought that places this real—and necessary—examination at its core.

# 1

## Games of Sovereignty and Opportunity

### Introduction

In 1804, British abolitionist and lawyer James Stephen discussed what he presented as “The Opportunity.”<sup>1</sup> Published in London, this document presented an assessment of England’s opportunities—given the declaration of independence of Haiti—to marshal its commercial interests and, importantly, to recognise Haiti’s sovereignty and protect the new nation from French interference. Stephen, who spent time gaining first-hand experience in the Caribbean of the atrocities of Atlantic racial slavery, positions this critical moment in 1804 as a choice—actually more like a political path—that could help Britain and Haiti form a lasting and economically beneficial relationship. Importantly, this path would slight the French and position the influencers in public who meddled in these moves as they steered the conversation about Haiti and sovereignty.

A pivotal figure in British anti-slavery, Stephen may not be as well-known as his contemporaries, William Wilberforce or Thomas Clarkson, but he was well connected—and influential—even eventually marrying Wilberforce’s sister. Born in Dorset, but having worked in St. Kitts and travelled throughout the Caribbean for a time, Stephen returned to England, settling in London. A member of a group of Anglicans focused on philanthropy and service, known as the Clapham Sect or “Saints,” Stephen and “this well-connected, pious, and activist group was the creative center of an extraordinary range of missionary, social, and philanthropic initiatives that

1 James Stephen, *The Opportunity; Or Reasons for an Immediate Alliance with St. Domingo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 [1804]).

would leave an enduring mark on British society”—including the creation of a colony in Sierra Leone.<sup>2</sup>

Stephen, with his African Institution membership, advocacy, writing and links to anti-slavery societies in England, presents an important example of the types of anti-slavery supporters of Haiti. Although this chapter will make clear Stephen's advocacy, it is less interested in charting how he and other English abolitionists thought through and formed their moral obligations against slavery and for freedom.<sup>3</sup> Many scholars have covered the work, thought, agitation and politicking of the Clapham Sect, the African Institution, William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, radical anti-slavery in Britain and French and British intrigues at the start of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Instead of retreading this known ground, this chapter draws together two disparate voices—James Stephen's and Prince Saunders's—in order to highlight the related links in their writings on sovereignty, recognition, trade and bodies—and how those terms and issues would be manipulated by Haitian officials, notably Henri Christophe, as a way to legitimate his monarchical state. While slavery and abolition danced within these debates, political power—and sovereignty—were still framed within the context of European leaders and their nation-states. Yet, as this chapter notes, European articulations over the political and economic future of the Caribbean had

2 Wilbert R. Shenk, "The Legacy of James Stephen," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 35, no. 4 (2011): 218.

3 There are a number of researchers who are taking this area of scholarship into intriguing terrain. For more on this work, see Kate Hodgson, "Internal Harmony, Peace to the Outside World: Imagining Community in Nineteenth-Century Haiti," *Paragraph* 37, no. 2 (2015): 178–92 and Jack Webb, "The Morant Bay Rebellion, British Colonial Policy, and Travelling Ideas About Haiti," *Journal of Caribbean History* 50, no. 1 (2016): 70–89.

4 This literature is vast and rapidly being reshaped as scholars investigate new terrains. In addition to many of the notes in this chapter, see Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600–1850* (London: Pimlico, 2003), Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: The British Struggle to Abolish Slavery* (London: Macmillan, 2005), Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), Jeremy Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Jenson, *Beyond the Slave Narrative*, John Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution: An International History of Antislavery, 1787–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) and the more recent scholarship of Catherine Hall and her team within the Legacies of British Slavery Ownership project.

to contend with the political machinations of Caribbean officials and their designated instigators, such as Henri Christophe, Alexandre Pétion and Prince Saunders—and the role of race in these processes. This interplay between actors, agents and accomplices would have significant ramifications once multiple Haitis emerged to contest for legitimacy as the new nation-state. Just a few short years after Stephen's text on recognition circulated, Haiti comprised both a republic and a separate monarchical state. While these Haitis fought each other for absolute power of the territory, the multiple "official" representatives manipulated/enticed European officials regarding the recognition and power of the one true and "real" Haiti.

The political actors involved in framing the foundations of each government nimbly negotiated the formal international legal apparatuses of sovereignty that hindered (or buttressed) their respective governments. Reading Stephen's personal and official writings alongside the writings and documentary archives of Saunders and Christophe is less a battle over recognising Haiti's independence and more of a visual and discursive battle over the frames (and limits) of Haiti's black sovereign power, its packaging and its sovereign demands. In drawing these frames together, this chapter aims to construct a different trajectory for Haitian recognition that responds to and considers black sovereignty.

### Opportune Times

In 1804, Dessalines—one of the highest-ranking rebels who fought alongside Toussaint Louverture—declared that Haiti was independent. After a tumultuous and bloody two-year fight against a re-invading (and determinedly re-enslaving) French empire, Dessalines (and his secretary Louis Boisrond-Tonnerre) would forever chart a new future for the former French colony of Saint-Domingue in proclaiming that Haiti—riffing on Ayiti, its Taíno name, meaning mountainous land—was free, independent and black. According to historian Philippe R. Girard, "however strongly worded, his proclamation was in the end neither an emancipationist call to arms nor a political manifesto articulating the rights of men, but a narrowly focused declaration of independence that denounced French imperialism."<sup>5</sup>

Although Girard, above, describes Dessalines's proclamation in ways that could be read as a singular "declaration," critics have recently become much more nuanced in their descriptions of the various documents and

5 Philippe R. Girard, *The Slaves Who Defeated Napoléon: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian War of Independence, 1801–1804* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011), 314. As Girard notes, Dessalines would be eager to keep Haiti's plantation economies alive.

performances that formed the core of Dessalines's break from France and declaration of Haiti in 1804. In the 2016 collection, *The Haitian Declaration of Independence: Creation, Context, and Legacy*, historians David Armitage and Julia Gaffield describe the materials that have now come to be regarded as Haiti's "declaration of independence" as "the oath sworn and then signed by Dessalines's generals to renounce France forever and to die rather than live under its dominion"; "the proclamation signed by Dessalines and addressed to the people of 'Hayti'"; and "another oath by which the generals of the Haitian army affirmed Dessalines as governor general for life, with sovereign powers to make peace, war, and name his successor."<sup>6</sup> Containing violent imagery, these documents set up the demand of Haitian sovereignty, as well as the refutation of French (and white) control—in addition to the concretisation of Dessalines's power.<sup>7</sup>

Soon after declaring Haiti a sovereign nation, Dessalines began a violent purging of (some) whites—mostly the French. Even as the exterminations increased, and some lucky former colonists managed to escape Dessalines's campaigns of vengeance, Haiti remained a potentially lucrative new nation. It was also one in which whites, according to the 1805 Constitution, could neither hold the title of master or proprietor, nor own land.<sup>8</sup> Dessalines's Haiti heralded a new world order in which people of African descent controlled the laws and structures of power at the nation-state level.

It is probably never wise to overinflate moments, but Dessalines's announcement must have shaken the world. Imagine: at the time, the British, the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Americans and the French all participate in the capturing, selling and trading of people of African descent in the Atlantic world. Industries such as sugar, coffee and cotton produced substantial wealth for their investors from the blood and sweat of enslaved labourers. Many people, purportedly unconnected with the slave trade, happily bought and sold products made through these enterprises.

6 Armitage and Gaffield, "Introduction: The Haitian Declaration of Independence in an Atlantic Context," 11.

7 Deborah Jenson, in an essay on the declaration, argues that "as new, contemporaneous copies of the Haitian Declaration of Independence come to light, evidence emerges of a collaborative verbal transmission and preservation process in which citizens worked with Dessalines to declare Haiti's independence as if it were a well-loved poem." See Jenson, "Living by Metaphor in the Haitian Declaration of Independence: Tigers and Cognitive Theory," in Gaffield, *The Haitian Declaration of Independence: Creation, Context, and Legacy*, 76.

8 This document and related speeches have recently been examined by a number of scholars. See the following texts for a good overview: Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, Gaffield, *Haitian Connections in the Atlantic World: Recognition after Revolution* and Gaffield, *The Haitian Declaration of Independence: Creation, Context and Legacy*.

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Atlantic racial slavery flowed through and helped form power and profit in the Atlantic world. The arrival of Haiti—born from the fires of blood and the brutal system of slavery under the French—must have signalled to those profiting from this system of dehumanisation, racial capitalism and violent enchainment that their days of legal control over dispossessed bodies was limited. Its presence asserted that if a large group of mostly formerly enslaved persons could revolt, fight off French, British and Spanish forces and declare themselves an independent nation that disallowed slavery from its origins, then many of the premises and rationales for the continued use and currency of slavery must be unfounded. Although those who rejected the system of slavery may have found the collapse of slavery within Haiti a welcome warning to other slave empires, it would be far too simplistic to imagine that these same abolitionists openly supported the active black political agency and governance engaged in by the new Haitians. All eyes, it seemed, turned to the Haitian “experiment” of governance to see what might happen.

As Saint-Domingue exiles travelled and fled to various ports, and news reports of creeping revolutionary fever spread from ships to novels, Haiti loomed as an imagined racial spectre of dis-ease, violent rebellion and black retribution—but also a potentially lucrative one. Contact with various economic agents continued, even as nation-states pondered how best to respond to the creation of Haiti. Two significant objects haunted these flows of trade, lamentations of catastrophe and even praises of black freedom and political equality: (1) the former wealth of the colony as France’s “pearl of the Antilles” and (2) the future wealth of the nation, if it could return to its former plantation glory.

In the introduction, I outlined some of the motivations for Louverture’s agricultural policies that sought to continue the practice of plantation economies and enforced labour, whether supplied by the masses or imported labourers from other islands, within Haiti. Capital mattered especially in the afterlife of slavery. This will not be the last time that capital will infiltrate black sovereignty and give it additional morphologies. I will untangle other stories in future chapters. In this chapter, I am more concerned with the ways that Haiti’s potential/future wealth gave meaning to its black sovereignty, turning any form of recognition of its actual political reality into an actuarial exchange that constantly shifted along a value chain. The refrain that haunted these encounters? “How much are you/your people worth”?

James Stephen, great grandfather of Virginia Woolf, is an unlikely advocate for Haiti’s sovereignty. Considered the chief legal architect of the Slave Trade Act of 1807, Stephen moved in fairly important circles alongside those engaged in working to remove Britain from the slave trade. After a

formative experience in the Caribbean witnessing a trial involving enslaved persons of African descent and further interactions with the violent system, he focused on describing and discussing slavery. Born into a fractious family wracked by debt, he would rise and become the head of a family notable for their continued resistance against slavery. In his monumental *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823*, historian David Brion Davis describes James Stephen as “perhaps the most powerful intellect of the British abolition movement” who for some 30 years “had a decisive influence on the movement’s policy.”<sup>9</sup>

Stephen’s arguments against the British slave trade extended into concerns about international relations, something that can be seen in his writings and letters in the midst of the Haitian Revolution about the crisis of revolution, the horrors of slavery and what the future inevitably held in the Atlantic world for the control—and production of—Saint-Domingue’s sugar. In a pamphlet entitled *The Crisis of the Sugar Colonies; or an Inquiry into the Objects and Probable Effects of the French Expedition to the West Indies* (1802), Stephen takes aim at France’s brutal history of slavery, Britain’s related slave system in the Caribbean, the fervour of the rebellion in Saint-Domingue, the real reason for France’s “return” to the colony (he described it as re-enslavement) and what he saw as the ultimate result of the confrontation between France and the rebels in the colony: the eradication of slavery. In his eyes, the sequence of events offered no other possible outcome given the extent of the violence and the brutality of the system of enslavement. The overall conclusion of the pamphlet was: let this violent upheaval be a lesson for Britain and its continued reliance on slavery.

Two short years later, in 1804, Stephen returned to the Caribbean with a new pamphlet, *The Opportunity, or Reasons for an Immediate Alliance with St. Domingo*. It begins, though, with a circle back to *The Crisis* and a recounting of Stephen’s prognostications of the future of sugar production, capitalism and power in the Caribbean. In the opening pages of *The Opportunity*, Stephen congratulates himself for being right about the reason why France sent a force to Saint-Domingue in 1802. Talks with the rebels were not planned. Peaceful negotiations were not desired. The entire exercise aimed to place the might of France against an erstwhile cadre of rebel fighters who dared to set the terms of their relationship with France—not exactly independence, but definitely an insistence on determining their own future. Napoleon responded to Toussaint’s claims of autonomy, as noted in the introduction, by sending tens of thousands of troops to Saint Domingue. Stephen did not accept France’s public statements concerning the arrival of

9 David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823*, new ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 273.

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troops in the Caribbean. To him, this was an invasion that had the potential to destabilise British colonies. He feared—and he was right about this—that Napoleon planned to reintroduce slavery. In *The Crisis*, he argues that any attempt at re-enslavement would be met with violence on the part of the revolutionaries. They would not go back to chains. In *The Opportunity*, he reflects on that moment and offers this commentary:

The author's premises [in *The Crisis*], as he has reason to believe, appeared not less questionable than his conclusions: yet, reasoning from these premises, he inferred with much confidence the high probability of events which have since actually occurred in St. Domingo [the former French colony], extraordinary and wonderful though these events have appeared to the European public.<sup>10</sup>

Undeceived by the rhetoric of reconciliation and entreaties of respect, Stephen was able to detect France's true intent and clearly foresee an improbable outcome—war with the free people of colour and the rebels after a refusal to resubmit to French rule and the re-establishment of slavery. In *The Crisis*, he details what he sees as France's plan—divide, reconquer, re-enslave—but acknowledges not anticipating the treachery that awaited Toussaint Louverture. He discusses France's duplicity and the arrest and death of Toussaint in *The Opportunity*, noting that even he failed to imagine that the French would set up a false meeting, then an ambush, and arrest Toussaint before sending him to die in the Jura Mountains far away in Europe. Stephen laments that he was “ignorant of the yet unfathomed depth of French depravity.”<sup>11</sup> But, being right about nearly everything that happened in *The Crisis*, he suggests in *The Opportunity* that he will probably be right about what he considers the only path forward for Britain in the Caribbean. In bold, capital letters, he announces the new pamphlet's thesis: “YOU OUGHT, SIR [addressing the Right Honourable William Pitt, Chancellor of the Exchequer], I CONCEIVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE WITHOUT DELAY, THE LIBERTY OF THE NEGROES OF ST. DOMINGO; AND TO ENTER INTO FEDERAL ENGAGEMENTS WITH THEM AS A SOVEREIGN AND INDEPENDENT PEOPLE.”<sup>12</sup>

Stephen makes this startling recommendation and then provides detailed support for it through an examination of Haiti's declaration of independence, how its independence will potentially impact the future of the region and the economic opportunities for Britain (and its colonies in the West Indies) if it allied with Haiti. The first topic that he tackles is not how Britain

<sup>10</sup> Stephen, *The Opportunity*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen, *The Opportunity*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen, *The Opportunity*, 10.

should take control of the Caribbean or remove France as an influencer in the region. His emphasis is not European control, but the changing world order that now included a black nation-state.

With the arrival of Haiti, the Atlantic world had turned on its head and something new had emerged. According to Stephen: “A new order of things has arisen in the West Indies, to which former precedents are quite inapplicable.”<sup>13</sup> Imperial fortunes may have brought Napoleon to the throne, but the Haitian Revolution shifted the basis of colonial policy. As Stephen explains, “it was [...] a fundamental maxim of all the powers of Europe who possessed colonies in the Antilles, that the supremacy of the European race, and the depression of the African, must be at all times [...] maintained.”<sup>14</sup> For Stephen, the former maxim no longer held and, in fact, had shifted in much the same way as the social revolutions within Europe saw the rebalancing of social hierarchies. In linking the eradication of racial antipathy and notions of black inhumanity with social transformations in Europe, Stephen signals the naturalness of these shifts and tries to place them within similar progressive political changes more recognisable to his audience—and mostly imagined as the privilege of people racialised as white.

While it may be tempting to read his sentiments as an expression of racial equality, Stephen denies that his view is some sort of moral awakening or a plot to transform the social order within the British Empire. Recognition of Haiti, for him, was merely a part of any good colonial policy that recognised how, and in what way, to maximise profit and power within a changing new world order, rather than resisting change due to a too ready reliance on the continued political policy of black nullification. For Stephen, continuing to resist acknowledging the existence of Haiti and refusing to steer and control the terms of connections with the nation would guarantee Britain faced economic and political consequences for pursuing a path of refutation and disavowal.

He reminds his readers that the former rebels possess “an entire island, the most important of the group: An island of far greater extent than any other (Cuba alone excepted) in the whole Western Archipelago, and which, in population and produce, was lately equal to all the rest united.”<sup>15</sup> This unencumbered, large, prosperous new territory, Stephen asserts, considered Britain an ally. To reap the benefits of this allegiance, Britain must recognise and maximise this gift. In extolling the potential political benefits of an alliance with Haiti, Stephen also issues a challenge, calling on his audience to recognise that the former French colonists had defeated the powerful

<sup>13</sup> Stephen, *The Opportunity*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen, *The Opportunity*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen, *The Opportunity*, 13.

and purportedly unassailable French forces and, therefore, were a fighting community that had achieved the impossible and deserved Britain's respect.

The formal recognition that Stephen wants does not occur until 1839—well after France recognises Haiti in 1825. Although there has been a suggestion within a number of historiographies of early Haiti that Haiti suffered isolation and rejection, more recent works have worked hard to redraw these narratives. For example, Julia Gaffield notes that after Dessalines's death, British merchants and officials were in contact with Haitian leaders. As Gaffield notes, "both Christophe and Pétion used foreign delegates to communicate and negotiate with British ministers in London."<sup>16</sup> These manoeuvres, although sparked into being due to a lack of formal diplomatic ties, enabled a range of players—including later designees of African descent—to engage in political work on behalf of Haiti. Stephen, even at the time of the writing of this pamphlet, understood what was at stake in maintaining and encouraging these alliances.

To Stephen, the drive of the rebels and their conviction to live and die free made them a formidable adversary and a cautionary friend. "Hispaniola," he argues, "no longer under the dominion of the house of Bourbon, or of that power, styling itself a republic, which has seized upon one of the thrones of the Bourbons will, if hostile to Spain, and in confederacy with ourselves, be found a most important ally." He recognises that this moment offered significant political and economic gain for Britain—if it made the small effort to form an alliance with the new nation. Stephen writes: "With the numerous ports on the North, South, and West of this large island at our command, and with an auxiliary army of negroes at our call, our power to distress the Spanish colonies and commerce, would be as wide as our inclination to do so."<sup>17</sup> Stephen's observations and prognostications make clear the benefits—and risks—of this moment. For an empire still practising the enslavement of people of African descent, the emergence of Haiti signalled that slavery may soon be over—but black politics had only just begun.

The solution for Britain in these uncertain times? Seduction, entreaty and friendship. Stephen warns that if Britain rejected the former colonists and refused to offer its recognition of the new nation's sovereignty, Britain would obtain a formidable foe and face interminable difficulties controlling the flow of freedom and the contours of power shifting in the Caribbean. If Britain decided to protect the former colony against France, Britain would gain an economic powerhouse in the region as a new friend. Only by channelling the fervour of freedom could Britain temper the winds of change within its own colonies.

16 Gaffield, *Haitian Connections in the Atlantic World: Recognition after Revolution*, 155.

17 Stephen, *The Opportunity*, 72.

## The Unfinished Revolution

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Other British commentators held different views. British vicar and visitor to Haiti William Woodis Harvey produced a “sketch” of Haiti that drew on his purported experiences in the country and his many interactions with Haitians and others, entitled *Sketches of Hayti; From the Expulsion of the French, to the Death of Christophe* (1827). Published in London, this long-format essay provides a curious counter-narrative to Stephen’s more radical anti-slavery rhetoric. Rather than see slavery as an evil that must be eradicated, swiftly, Harvey sees the only and sensible solution to the ending of slavery as one of gradualism. For him, Haiti is a case study of what can go wrong when ardour and passion are allowed to rule the necessary and careful steps needed to move black people from the evils of bondage into society. Harvey begins his tract by outlining what he sees as the circumstances facing Haiti and the future of its people:

[This moment] presents to us the picture of a people newly escaped from slavery, yet still suffering and exhibiting in their character, its pernicious and demoralising effects; *gradually* returning from scenes of confusion and bloodshed, to habits of industry, peace and order; *steadily* aiming, amidst *frequent reverses*, to establish a *regular* and independent government; and under circumstances of difficulty, with confined resources, labouring to *improve* their agriculture, to *repair* an exhausted population, to form commercial connexions [...] thus laudably endeavouring to lay the foundation of an empire, which may perhaps be compared hereafter with nations the most celebrated for their civilization and refinement.<sup>18</sup>

Laced throughout this passage are conditional terms that suggest a people in the throes of becoming something else. According to Harvey, Haitians, “newly escaped from slavery,” were in the process of forming a regular government. Although the task of forming a new nation is hinted at here, Harvey suggests that this formation is further constrained by “a people” who continue to exhibit “in their character” the “demoralising effects” of slavery. What is implied in the above, but unstated, is Harvey’s question whether a “regular” government could ever form from formerly enslaved persons. He has good things to say about many people he met in Haiti, but he clearly worries about the future of the country given some its leaders—especially some of the black ones.

Harvey, having also spent time with Henri Christophe, looks back on Dessalines’s rise to power and concludes that Haitians remain impacted by their “suffering” under slavery. At later points in the text, Harvey will argue,

<sup>18</sup> William Woodis Harvey, *Sketches of Hayti: From the Expulsion of the French, to the Death of Christophe* (London: L. B. Seeley and Son, 1827), vii–viii; emphasis mine.

countering Stephen, that the British system of slavery could never produce a Dessalines due to its gradual and perhaps more merciful approach to ending slavery. Whatever his thoughts about slavery, Harvey's articulations about the constraints facing Haiti—from resources to “repairing an exhausted population”—seem laced with considerations of incompleteness and, while not exactly black nullification, rationales that at least attempt to frame Haiti as not quite normal. As a nation striving to reach a better condition, Harvey sees this state of becoming as something immensely difficult for the country, not due to foreign interference, lack of economic support or French insistence on meddling in Caribbean affairs, but because of the blackness of the country and its history of slavery.

These views come through in articulations about Dessalines. Laurent Dubois notes the conflicting public responses to Dessalines. “Today,” he argues, “Dessalines is widely and justifiably venerated for his role in leading Haiti to independence. But the mythology surrounding him tends to obscure the internal conflicts within the revolutionary movement.”<sup>19</sup> It also tends to distort the life trajectories that brought many of the rebels from Africa to the colony of Saint-Domingue, as well as the realities of those rebels during the Revolution who never sided with the French.<sup>20</sup> Myopic vision notwithstanding, criticisms of Dessalines—and there were/are plenty—also conflate the purported vanity and grandiosity of the man with the absurdity of the nation's existence. As mentioned in the introduction, ridicule often emerged even in attempts to offer recognition and reciprocity, as mainly white Atlantic world officials struggled to place politics, aptitude and self-actualised black futures within their political landscapes. This view is captured in the following passage from Harvey as he critiques what he sees as Dessalines's egotistical “joyride” to emperor-dom:

In selecting this title, he [Dessalines] consulted his vanity alone. The mere name could tend neither to increase his power, nor to confirm what he already possessed; and with the less imposing title of chief, he would have been equally respected, and equally powerful. Vanity indeed is a fault not confined to negroes; but it is seldom displayed in a manner so bordering on the *ridiculous*. For what could be more *absurd* than an uneducated, barbarous, though indeed successful negro, having authority over negroes as ignorant and uncivilized as himself.<sup>21</sup>

19 Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 48.

20 For more on this history, see John K. Thornton, “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution,” *Journal of Caribbean History*, 25, nos. 1–2 (undated): 58–80, Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* and Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*.

21 Harvey, *Sketches of Hayti; From the Expulsion of the French, to the Death of Christophe*, 31; emphasis mine.

Absurd. Ridiculous. Harvey may have produced a book that contains positive statements about Toussaint Louverture and Henri Christophe, but it also contains vitriolic articulations about Dessalines that highlight his negative views about people racialised as black and those who claim an identity as a person of African descent. Harvey labels Dessalines's power-grabbing and his assumption of the title of emperor as an absurdity. Although Dessalines would claim a sovereign designation synonymous with that of Napoleon Bonaparte (who would become emperor in France), Harvey argues that Dessalines's power-grabbing bordered on the ludicrous as it placed a "barbarous" man at the head of a nation of "uncivilized" people.<sup>22</sup>

This figuration will be echoed in later encounters as Haitian leaders and their governance structures are labelled as a burlesque of empire. Abolitionist, orator, writer and future politician, Frederick Douglass, writing in an 1861 issue of his *Douglass' Monthly* (a monthly abolitionist magazine that ran from 1859 to 1863), encapsulates the views of Haiti that sought to denigrate its status and its people. While outlining his excitement about a planned trip to Haiti and, as a formerly enslaved person, what arriving on Haiti's shores would mean, he makes this astute observation about Haiti's international relations in the Atlantic world, especially within the context of interactions with the United States:

Both the press and the platform of the United States have long made Haiti the bugbear and scare-crow of the cause of freedom [...] The fact is, white Americans find it hard to tell the truth about colored people. They see us with a dollar in their eyes. Twenty hundred millions of dollars invested in the bodies and souls of the Negro race in this Republic—a mountain of gold—constitutes a standing bribe, a perpetual temptation to do injustices to the colored race. Haiti has thus constantly been the victim of something like a downright conspiracy to rob her of the natural sympathy of the civilized world, and to shut her out of the fraternity of nations.<sup>23</sup>

Reading Douglass's later work focusing on the USA against Harvey's more British articulations highlights the ways that Harvey links black sovereignty not with the chiasmus-like shift in power and wealth that Douglass imagines but with the comical and ridiculous posturing that emerges when blackness and politics mix. Although complimentary about some Haitian leaders,

<sup>22</sup> For more on this link between Dessalines and Napoleon Bonaparte, see Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 230–31.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Douglass, "A Trip to Haiti," *Douglass' Monthly* May 1861, as reprinted in Philip S. Foner, ed., *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, abridged and adapted by Yuval Taylor (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 441.

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Harvey targets Dessalines for his condemnation, signalling his contempt for the power—and the violence—embraced by Dessalines. This view, and contempt, were not unique.

In Francophone critic J. Michael Dash's influential *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*, Dash argues that “the stereotype of Haitian barbarity was highly favoured by those who believed that the sustained domestication of blacks was the only way of curbing their natural barbarous instincts.” As Dash notes, though, this translated throughout various international encounters with Haiti, especially by North Atlantic majority-white nation-states, as a pejorative narrative in which “Haiti became the extreme example of blacks lapsing into savagery when restraints were lifted. The denial of recognition,” manifested as the refusal to accept black sovereignty, “denied the black race the right to subjectivity and relegated Haiti to a zone of negativity and absence.”<sup>24</sup>

Consistently, throughout the passages on Dessalines, Harvey stresses that there is nothing beneficial about Dessalines's actions. Instead, he rejects Dessalines's anger, his violence and his sovereign power. In pushing Dessalines outside of the normal frames of sovereign power—even for power-hungry emperors, such as Napoleon—Harvey implies that Haiti is neither normal nor a model for future black political possibilities. For Harvey, the only appropriate response to Haiti—and Dessalines—is a paternalistic condescension. Britain would never produce a Dessalines, but it would also never allow a black emperor to place himself as the leader of one of its former colonies. Harvey makes it clear that the only power appropriate for a “suffering” and demoralised people was one that knew its place in the (white) Atlantic world. Gradual moves. Subtle shifts. A black nation in the Atlantic world needed a (white) paternalistic guide to help steer it away from its *unnatural* and *uncivilised* tendencies. Without these tempering constraints, a Dessalines emerges and has the audacity to take over a nation. What Harvey makes clear is that the problem of Dessalines is not just a problem of one man, but the problem of black people trying to claim more rights and power than their “state” allows. Harvey's assessment, in clear opposition to Stephen's “opportunity,” sees Haiti's black sovereignty not as an economic potential for Britain, but as a warning of the danger of unchecked black power. To guard the Caribbean, Britain needed to be vigilant and smart about its links to other nations and what any alliance with Haiti would mean to its internal black colonial populations. He would be right to worry about the impact of Haiti on relationships inside Britain and the British Empire.

<sup>24</sup> J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 8.

### Black Advocacy

In 1816, advocate, educator and, for a time, Haitian adviser and representative Prince Saunders (1775–1839) published a collection of letters, reports, proclamations and other translated documents from the then monarchical government of former Haitian Revolutionary leader Henri Christophe, who was the head of one of two Haitis that had splintered in the aftermath of Dessalines’s death—Christophe’s monarchy in the north of the nation and Alexandre Pétion’s republic in the south. Saunders, born in Connecticut in the USA to a West African mother and an American-born black father, obtained an education at schools in Vermont and Connecticut, before eventually attending a school affiliated with Dartmouth College and then moving, upon graduation, to Boston to become a teacher at the prestigious African School.<sup>25</sup> It would be in Boston, as a vibrant member of the black community, that Saunders would join in causes, such as the movement to Sierra Leone, with Paul Cuffee; become an active leader within the African Masonic Lodge; spend considerable time influencing the abolitionist societies, such as the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and corresponding with influential white British antislavery advocates, including William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson; and working, for a time, with Henri Christophe (through many of the above connections) to advance education and black sovereign rights within the Atlantic world, before eventually taking up the post of Attorney General in Haiti where he died in 1839.<sup>26</sup>

Saunders’s advocacy and work for Christophe began not through interactions with Haitians but through engagements with British allies—specifically, allies of Henri Christophe. Saunders would meet Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce during a trip to the United Kingdom for another of his many campaigns and causes. Saunders quickly earned their praises and soon found himself sent to Haiti to buttress further support for

25 For more on Saunders, see Arthur O. White, “Prince Saunders: An Instance of Social Mobility among Antebellum New England Blacks,” *Journal of Negro History* 60 (1975): 526–35, Julie Wench, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Ousmane K. Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle against the Colonization Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

26 For more on Saunders’ work, see n. 19. Also Prince Saunders, ed., *Haitian Papers: A Collection of the Very Interesting Proclamations, and Other Official Documents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013 [London: Printed for W. Reed, Law Bookseller, No. 17, Fleet Street, 1816]) and Prince Saunders, *A Memoir Presented to the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race, December 11th, 1818* (Philadelphia: Dennis Heartt, 1818).

plans for deeper links between the United Kingdom and Haiti. Although undoubtedly motivated by the same capitalistic urges and concerns about power (notably weakening France's influence in the Caribbean) that flowed through and within Stephen's and Harvey's writings, Wilberforce's and Clarkson's turn to Haiti involved the paternalistic moralism of (white) training and advancement in order to elevate Haiti and its people into a "civilised" nation. Stephen, Harvey and the continued practice of slavery within the British Empire, notwithstanding, the United Kingdom remained, at least in the Atlantic world that surrounded Saunders, a leader within the antislavery movement. Its role would be so prominent that Saunders will write his *Haytian Papers* specifically for the British people, penning an open letter to the British reading public in the opening pages to the compendium that includes these lines:

O happy England! to thee most appropriately belong the exalted appellations of protectress of the Christian world; the strong hold of rational freedom; the liberatress as well as the genuine asylum for oppressed humanity, and the promulgatress of civilization, knowledge, and piety to every region of the globe. In thee we see a practical exemplification of those principles of benevolence and kind affection which encompass the human character with the imperishable lustre of glory and honour.<sup>27</sup>

Saunders's rhetoric regarding England is saturated in rhetorical turns that identify the British people and their officials as agents and activists on behalf of the world. At no time does Saunders wrestle with Britain's continued practice of enslavement, its continued colonial and imperial desires or its difficult and contested entanglements and oft-repeated actions of dispossession when national representatives encountered indigenous cultures around the world. Instead, Saunders sees in the history of the fight against slavery within England—including the successful passing of the Slave Trade Act of 1807 that made it illegal to transport enslaved persons on British ships and participate in the slave trade—a moral light that provided a model of liberation and freedom that all people—and nations—should emulate. This over-inflation of British deeds and activities serves a specific purpose for Saunders: to gain the attention of the British public and encourage, for once and for all, the recognition of Haiti's sovereignty. He understood the difficulty of his task.

In *Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St Domingo* (1797), British politician, wealthy plantation owner, writer and fierce slavery proponent Bryan Edwards (1743–1800) presented his views on the then

<sup>27</sup> Saunders, *Haytian Papers*, ii.

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colony, Saint-Domingue, its rebellious people, its antislavery fight against the French and its anti-colonial fight against the Spanish, British and eventually, also, its former colonial rulers. Edwards, in producing remarks replicated by later pundits, such as Harvey, regarding Haiti and its political capabilities, sets the tone for the improbability of people of African descent ever being able to become anything that remotely resembles a prosperous, lawful or industrial society. Influenced by anti-slavery instigators, the “revolting Negroes”—as Edwards calls them—were dangerous, uncivilised and probably incapable of governance. In detail, Edwards writes:

I might here expatiate upon the wonderful dispensations of Divine Providence in raising up enslaved Africans to avenge the wrongs of the injured Aborigines; I might also indulge the *fond* but *fallacious idea*, that, as the negroes of St. Domingo have been eye-witnesses of the benefits of civilized life among the whites; have seen in what manner and to what extent social order, sober industry, and submission to the laws, contribute to individual and general prosperity (advantages which were denied to them in their native country), some superior spirits may hereafter rise up among them, by whose encouragement and example they may be taught, in due time, to discard the ferocious and sordid manners and pursuits of savage life; to correct their vices, and be led progressively on to civilization and gentleness, to the knowledge of trust, and the practice of virtue!<sup>28</sup>

On the one hand, Edwards has no love for those with fanciful, imagined dreams of avenging slaves. He might consider their actions sound retribution against perceived French ills, but he is clear that this agitation is a contagion that will transform the Caribbean and eventually infect all who participated in the sugar trade—including neighbouring British colonies. Yet, he also cautions supporters of the revolution in Saint-Domingue that the “negroes of St. Domingo” might never develop the order and industry that they had witnessed in their former state. Although this development might still happen in some future for the colony, what clearly seems impossible to him is the arrival of a leader who “may hereafter rise up among them, by whose encouragement and example they may be taught, in due time, to discard the ferocious and sordid manners and pursuits of savage life.” Edwards stresses that moving toward civilisation—especially under the rule of another black person—would be impossible for the “revolting negroes.” Only those prone to dreaming, he claims, would imagine a prosperous and industrial people could form from the seeds of black revolt. In fact, Edwards argues that “it

<sup>28</sup> Bryan Edwards, *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 [1797]), 190–91.

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is the mere creation of the fancy, the fabric of a vision”<sup>29</sup> to believe that anything remotely organised and political could emerge from the revolutionary fervour of the fires of 1791 in Saint-Domingue. If Edwards could not envision a strong and astute formerly enslaved individual, there was no way that he could imagine the creation of a black nation-state formed from the seeds of slave revolt.

Edwards died before Haiti was born, but he would have most likely criticised overtures toward Haiti by British abolitionists, philanthropists and traders after his death who ignored his warnings that blackness distorted everything. Looking at the world through his anti-black lens, black sovereignty could only be an improbable, absurd and dangerous configuration. In “sketching” Saint-Domingue, Edwards does more than just describe the world as it is. His chronicle also puts limits on the world as it could be. Into these frames, Edwards places doubts about the possible capital futures of territories without slavery and the ability of people of African descent to lead prosperous and productive lives. In routinely referring to the people of African descent in Saint-Domingue—and the wider Caribbean—as “barbarous men,” Edwards makes clear that people of African descent will forever be less than capable persons. Considering anything otherwise was an act of fancy. Edwards would not be the last to consider the absurdity of blackness and politics. Chapter 3 picks up this refrain in a different time period in Haitian history. What that chapter traces in a later context is what Saunders’s compendium stresses: Haiti mattered and would be heard. This reckoning is similar to what instilled Douglass with a mixture of excitement and hope on the lead up to his trip to Haiti in 1861. Haiti—and by extension, Haiti’s national existence—mattered.

Rather than leading a revolution by blood, Saunders engaged in a battle involving textual and figurative combat. If the Haitian Revolution from 1791 to 1804 and the further Haitian Constitutions after the creation of the nation laid out the rejection of slavery and anti-colonialism, the word battle that Saunders and others enacted in the 1810s centred on altering the currency of black life and black futurity by arguing that people of African descent refused to be silent in the face of attempts to re-enslave, disavow, colonise and reject the humanity—and politics—of people of African descent. Saunders would be joined in these endeavours by Haitian writers and statesmen, such as Baron de Vastey (1781–1820), who spent considerable time as Henri Christophe’s secretary.

Ostensibly born in Saint-Domingue into what was a wealthy mixed-race family (with possible familial connections to novelist Alexandre Dumas), Vastey would join the revolutionary army under Toussaint Louverture as a

29 Edwards, *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo*, 191.

young man and, potentially, spend time in Paris as a poet before producing his most well-known and militant work that condemned colonialism, *Le système colonial dévoilé* (1814). According to literary historian Marlene Daut, “in the early nineteenth century, Vastey was an international public figure who was well known for anti-colonial and black positivist writing.”<sup>30</sup> Through his writings, he set up a counter-narrative argument that contested articulations of black inhumanity and degeneration. “Vastey’s attention to the many racist distortions being produced in colonial discourse,” Daut stresses, “was aimed at contesting the dominant idea that Africans were a barbaric species, incapable of enlightenment, and that nineteenth-century Haiti could furnish the definitive proof for such beliefs.”<sup>31</sup>

It is Daut and postcolonial critic Chris Bongie who perhaps have contributed most significantly to repositioning Vastey within African Atlantic writing and political thought. This reckoning includes the recent English translation (2016) by Chris Bongie of Vastey’s most famous work (*The Colonial System Unveiled*). In what follows, I seek to add another voice to the early nineteenth-century Atlantic debates about Haiti and blackness: that of Prince Saunders. Circling around Christophe and Vastey were the writings and thought of a black intermediary who attempted to disrupt pejorative constructions of Haiti and black political futures by archiving, documenting and translating the actual political practices of Haiti’s leader, King Henry, and settling Haiti’s sovereignty within normative discursive frames of power within the Atlantic world.

He, too, would sit, for a time, in the circles closest to Henri Christophe, offering advice mainly about education. Although not Haitian, Saunders saw himself as a black political conduit who could, through his efforts to translate material surrounding Haiti’s political infrastructures and procedures, change the rhetoric towards and the political future of Haiti. Although asked by Christophe to return to the United Kingdom and

30 Marlene L. Daut, “From Classical French Poet to Militant Haitian Statesman: The Early Years and Poetry of the Baron de Vastey,” *Research in African Literatures* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 35. For more on the growing literature on Vastey, see Chris Bongie, “‘Monotonies of History’: Baron de Vastey and the Mulatto Legend of Derek Walcott’s *Haitian Trilogy*,” *Yale French Studies: The Haiti Issue: 1804 and Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 107 (2005): 70–107, Marlene L. Daut, “Un-silencing the Past: Boisrond-Tonnerre, Vastey, and the Re-writing of the Haitian Revolution, 1804–1817,” *South Atlantic Review* 74, no. 1 (2009): 35–64, Baron de Vastey, *The Colonial System Unveiled*, trans. and ed. Chris Bongie (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016) and Marlene L. Daut, *Baron de Vastey and the Origins of Black Atlantic Humanism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

31 Marlene L. Daut, *Tropics of Haiti: Race and the Literary History of the Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1789–1865* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 114.

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recruit British teachers who would help advance Christophe's vision for education in Haiti, Saunders was not asked to style himself as a royal cipher or a member of the royal court. He did that without any prompting, enjoying the love and attention from British abolitionists, newspapers and journals enamoured by the educated, erudite man of colour. That performativity went down well in British circles as many purportedly confused his first name with a hereditary title. Saunders did not disabuse those who made this assumption.<sup>32</sup>

For all of his grandstanding, Saunders was committed to removing falsehoods and elaborate constructions of inhumanity from the political cloud that surrounded Haiti. What he produces, through the compilation of materials, is an archive of political reactions, thought and influence that aptly refuses black nullification and black degeneration. This is also a refusal of any political formulations or frameworks that deny the mixing of blackness with politics and power. In reconfiguring space for black sovereignty, Saunders engages in a productive and generative disavowal of the terms of abjection that, to borrow from Africana studies scholar and black feminist theorist Tina Campt, "is defined less by opposition or 'resistance,' and more by a refusal of the very premises that have reduced the lived experience of blackness to pathology and irreconcilability in the logic of white supremacy."<sup>33</sup>

Saunders includes a letter addressed "to the Public" in the opening pages of his compendium of decrees, proclamations, imperial laws and letters from Haitian officials. In it, Saunders outlines his rationale for reproducing the documents, the current state of political life for people of African descent (although limited in his geographical reach), the need to address erroneous information about Haitians and black people, in general, and the power contained within the collection's pages. For Saunders, the collection assembled irrefutable evidence of black peoples' possession of the "natural intelligence which the beneficent Father of all ordinarily imparts to His children."<sup>34</sup>

Forced, in his letter, to address critics, such as Edwards, who saw the Haitian Revolution as a rebellion stoked by meddling (white) anti-slavery advocates, he quickly moves on to the major question of aptitude and abilities of people of African descent. The passage (above) brings up the idea of intelligence and the arguments of some opponents of black people and Haitians who questioned the capability of people of African descent to comprehend freedom, marshal the population into a productive national

32 For more on this, see Julie Wench, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten*.

33 Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 32.

34 Saunders, *Haitian Papers*, iii.

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community and construct a nation governed by people of African descent. Saunders, savvy to these pejorative claims, tries to head off dismissals of black authorship and political thought as absurdities or, to reuse Edwards's term, "fancy." Saunders calls out those who cast doubt about the capabilities and aptitude of Haitian people, and other people of African descent, as racist, spiteful and evil. He continues:

I say, being convinced, that for these inglorious and malevolent purposes, such persons have endeavoured to impress the public with the idea, that those official documents which have occasionally appeared in this country, are not written by black Haytians themselves; but that they are either written by Europeans in this country, or by some who, *they say*, are employed for that purpose in the public offices at Hayti; and, for the entire refutation of this gross misrepresentation, I upon my honour declare, that there is not a single white European at present employed in writing at any of the public offices; and that all the public documents are written by those of the King's Secretaries [*including Vastey*] whose names they bear, and that they are all black men, or men of colour.<sup>35</sup>

Yes, *Haytian Papers* contains papers regarding Haiti and its political infrastructure and laws. And, yes, *Haytian Papers* presents those documents (now translated into English, presumably by Saunders) as the unvarnished reality of the social and political conditions of life in Haiti—in contradistinction to the chronicles from white Europeans and Americans who may never have walked on Haitian land. But *Haytian Papers* does something else. It makes space within public and political discourse for a black nation to exercise and practise sovereign rights, as well as room for future nations (and by extension people of African descent) to engage in similar performances of black sovereignty. In demanding sovereign rights for black national futures that had not yet happened, but could—now that Haiti had led the way—Saunders strengthens and adds to the grammar of black sovereignty.

Echoes of Saunders's grammatical formulations can be found in the framework of black feminist futurity proposed by Tina Campt. In this framework, Campt moves beyond considerations of what will happen in the future and instead "strives for the tense of possibility that grammarians refer to as the future real conditional or *that which will have had to happen*. The grammar of black feminist futurity," Campt stresses, "is a performance of a future that hasn't yet happened but must [...] It's a politics of prefiguration that involves living the future *now*—as imperative rather than

35 Saunders, *Haytian Papers*, iii.

subjunctive—as a striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present.”<sup>36</sup> Turning back to Saunders and reconsidering his collection through Camp’s “future real conditional” lens, allows us to recognise that in order to see the future in the now Saunders had to evidence Haiti’s political world—and the future political worlds of people of African descent. In so doing, he carved a space for black sovereignty as something that went beyond the singular example of Haiti. In detailing Haiti, Saunders makes the case that black sovereignty had already arrived. It was now up to other entities to profit from its political existence—starting with Britain.

To that end, he made sure that Haitian declarations of sovereignty, proclamations and laws ended up in the hands of the British public in 1816.<sup>37</sup> Included in the collection are details about Code Henry (King Henri’s cultivation policy governing labourers, farmers and plantation owners), constitutional laws, the rise of Christophe to the throne and comments from Saunders about the abolition of the slave trade. Alongside these documents, Saunders placed a manifesto from Christophe that contains additional descriptions of the rise of black power in the Atlantic world.

Although Christophe would write letters to British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, engaging in a long correspondence on many topics, including how to strengthen the training and education of Haiti’s youth, we must be careful not to presume that Christophe’s British matchmaking, or Saunders’s, weakened Christophe’s rule, and by extension Haitian power, in the Caribbean.<sup>38</sup> Allies and assistance, including trade agreements, were encouraged. Giving up land or Haiti’s rights to self-determination would never happen in exchange.

Saunders’s collection includes one of Christophe’s manifestos that repeats this assertion. It starts not with grand proclamations of trade and economic vitality but with sovereignty and liberty and Haiti’s claims to both. The opening paragraph states:

Sovereign of a nation too long oppressed, a nation which has suffered cruel persecution, and which, by its energy, its perseverance, its valour, and its prowess, has succeeded in acquiring, by the sword, liberty and independence; the only object of our constant solicitude, of our incessant labours, for the happiness of the virtuous, brave, and generous people,

<sup>36</sup> Tina Camp, *Listening to Images*, 17.

<sup>37</sup> Although, importantly, the expenses during this trip and the publication of the decrees were probably not sanctioned by Christophe. Relations between them would be tested after this episode.

<sup>38</sup> For more on this correspondence, see Earl Leslie Griggs and Thomas Prator, *Henry Christophe and Thomas Clarkson: A Correspondence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952).

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who have confided to us their destinies, has always been, to give it a place within the pale of civilized nations.<sup>39</sup>

In this passage's re-telling of history, and in the pages that follow it, Haiti emerges as a fought for and sought after dream made reality, where enslaved persons violently rejected the brutality and the cruelty of their former masters and then formed a new nation that now sat amidst "the pale of civilized nations." Given what Haiti had to and still does face, the phrase "within the pale" takes on a double meaning. It hints at the etymology of the term that suggests "within the limits," yet the phrase in the context of black sovereignty highlights the actual paleness (or whiteness) of sovereignty's limits. Giving Haiti a place within sovereignty means confronting the ways that sovereignty, as acknowledged by other sovereign nation-states, never considered and may even outright reject black political bodies. Christophe's manifesto addresses this limitation through its very demands for placement within sovereign space. It also makes clear the limitations of what Haiti will give up to maintain its placement amongst (white) nations:

We appeal to all the Sovereigns of the world, to the brave and loyal British nation, which has been the first to proclaim, in its august Senate, the abolition of the infamous traffic in Negroes; which has done still more, in employing the ascendancy of victory for the noble purpose of recommending the abolition to all other states with which she has concluded alliances; we appeal to the philanthropists of all nations; in fine, to mankind at large, to the whole universe, what people, after twenty-five years of battle and bloodshed, having won their liberty and independence with the sword, will ever consent to lay down their arms, and become again the sport and victims of their cruel oppressors? We ask, what people would stoop to such an excess of baseness? No, the last of the Haytians will breathe out his last sigh before he will renounce his independence.<sup>40</sup>

Christophe's strident warnings were contested, at the time, and further constrained by practices of accommodation and alliances for profit that often placed labouring black bodies as anchor points for Haiti's future capital. For all of his entreaties to the British—including taking on Thomas Clarkson as an honorary adviser and announcing plans to make English the national language—history has not been kind to Christophe. Although Aimé Césaire produced an entire play focused on Christophe, *La tragédie du roi Christophe* (1963), Christophe has often been styled as an opportunist monarch whose end—a debilitating stroke and then fatally shooting himself—in the midst

39 Saunders, *Haytian Papers*, 154.

40 Saunders, *Haytian Papers*, 177–78.

of a mutiny, brought about unification with the republican south, but not without consequences, including the long afterlife of the “debt” of revolution (more on this in Chapter 2).<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion

Although interested in improving education (an area where Saunders played a role) and laying the groundwork for infrastructural support within Haiti, Christophe seemed mostly interested in advancing his stature. With the building of the fortress the *Citadelle Laferrière* (now a UNESCO World Heritage site in Haiti), constructed as part of a fortification effort against a future French invasion, and the monumental Sans-Souci Palace, another UNESCO World Heritage site, Christophe displayed his opulence to his people and to foreign visitors—while utilising Haitian labour to erect these buildings. Saunders would have undoubtedly spent time in these spaces and seen the ways that Christophe performed sovereignty as much as he proclaimed it into existence.

Beyond the legacy of the grand structures now sprawled as icons across Christophe’s former monarchical holdings, Christophe’s manoeuvrings have also given us the collection that Saunders has compiled, in addition to the letters that he wrote to British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson. That relationship would spark potential forays into a discussion with Czar Alexander in Russia and eventually lead to Christophe’s widow and daughters temporarily taking up refuge in Clarkson’s home in England. Through these encounters, what emerges are aspects of the pendulum of currency, capital and absurdity that move into and out of formations of black sovereignty and responses to it. Stephen, Edwards and Saunders will each respond to different dynamics of black sovereignty and different black political futures. Each, though, had to struggle with the very real constraints of power that would bring one leader in and force that same leader out of control.

By the time Christophe fired the fatal shot that took his life, and his son and heir was assassinated, Jean-Pierre Boyer (1776–1850), who would rule Haiti from 1818 to 1843, had assumed control of the south, following the

41 For more on the positioning of Christophe, see David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996) and Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 245–59. In addition to Césaire’s play, additional Caribbean writers have produced fictionalised accounts of Christophe’s involvement in the Haitian Revolution and his monarchical rule. See C. L. R. James’s *Toussaint Louverture* (1936) and Alejo Carpentier’s *El reino de este mundo* [The Kingdom of this World] (1949), for two examples of later takes on Christophe’s role within Caribbean history.

## The Unfinished Revolution

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death from yellow fever of Alexandre Pétion (1770–1818), who controlled and led the southern-based Haitian republic from 1806 to 1818. Boyer would face many of the same obstacles, limitations and difficulties positioning Haiti as a sovereign nation within the Atlantic world, but he would focus, quite specifically, on labour, wealth and capital—many would say to the country's demise.

## 2

# Selling Citizenship, Recognising Blood, Stabilising Sovereignty

### Introduction

This chapter reads the web of meanings that surround labouring bodies and the lands that contain them in particular places and at particular temporal moments in Haiti. Combining my background in transnational American, Caribbean and critical race studies and postcolonial governance allows me to weave hemispheric shifts, development rationales and racialised notions of difference together in order to chart the changing power dynamics and political implications that lend the land—and especially soil—legibility and translatability across national and racial lines. In tracing this arc, I read ecologies (and capital) through a racial lens, engaging in what literary critic and American studies scholar Rob Nixon describes as Caribbean environmental studies—an area he notes is a “particularly fertile domain of interdisciplinary enquiry.”<sup>1</sup> The interdisciplinary nature of these inquiries informs much of the richness of this scholarship. As a way of engaging in research, interdisciplinarity is an essential tool for tracing how racialisms live through and within the land and transform articulations of place into hierarchies of possibility and control that can transform certain black bodies into commodities that can be substituted for power—especially sovereign power.

There is a way to unveil these shadowy practices: retrace the “disturbances” within and of the land. According to Caribbeanist and sociologist Mimi Sheller, “land has been one of the key sites of social struggle in postslavery societies.” She continues, noting that “social relations of power, resistance,

<sup>1</sup> Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 260.

and oppositional culture building are inscribed into living landscapes of farming, dwelling, and cultivation” that mark out or “proclaim use-rights, ownership, or the sacrality of particular places” onto regions, territories, and entities such as roads, trees, and even soil.<sup>2</sup> Reading Sheller’s comments through the lens of black sovereignty, then, it is possible to comprehend how black space(s) can become imbued with power and how certain black bodies negotiate a complex path within and through these networked sites. In essence, black spaces trouble black bodies and the performance(s) of black sovereignty in intriguing ways.

What I am proposing, though, is more than just a call for further investigations into Caribbean landscapes. According to Martinican poet, philosopher and cultural critic Édouard Glissant, “describing the landscape is not enough” to understand its dynamism and intricacy in human–nature relationships. For him, “the individual, the community, [and] the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. Landscape is a character in this process.”<sup>3</sup> The trick is in how to interpret its persona and document its performance(s). Caribbeanist and cultural critic Antonio Benítez-Rojo suggests that interpreting Caribbean geographies and territorialities involves re-reading the Caribbean in a way that “reveals its own textuality.”<sup>4</sup> It is my contention that this kind of rereading reorients the landscape and allows it to be witnessed as an active player that nestles within and reacts to the power games between nations and communities. This type of crafting is not an attempt to transmogrify the landscape into an anthropomorphised entity that seethes within sovereignty battles. Rereading topographies for the ghostly matter that settles within and on the land enables critics to understand anew the ways that landscapes speak—especially in places such as the Caribbean—to the “slow violence” that has been perpetrated over a long period of time in often uncharted ways.<sup>5</sup> It also ensures that we begin to understand the significance of land—including plantations and other extraction zones containing resources, such as gold—within the contours of sovereignty and transnational negotiations.

Nixon defines “slow violence” as a “violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and

2 Mimi Sheller, “Arboreal Landscapes of Power and Resistance,” in Jean Besson and Janet Momsen, eds., *Caribbean Land and Development Revisited* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 207.

3 Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 59.

4 Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern*, trans. Jamas Maraniss (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.

5 See Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.”<sup>6</sup> This is, of course, easy to see in twenty-first-century narratives of natural disaster, such as Haiti’s 2010 earthquake that focused on destruction, but not the slow processes of control and consumption that had transformed Haiti’s landscape—and its very soil—since the earliest days of imperial contact. As suggested above, the earthquake of 2010 is a story about a natural disaster, but it is also one about the ways that “slow” forms of structural violence and dispossession can impact those struggling to merely survive.<sup>7</sup>

As a reminder: on 12 January 2010, an earthquake swept through Port-au-Prince and surrounding cities and areas in Haiti causing hundreds of thousands of deaths and displacing more than a million people from their homes, especially in the urban migration-heavy areas around the nation’s capital. The infrastructural and ecological forces that came together to amplify the devastation reflect, in part, what Sheller describes as “recent geographies of state rescaling and urban restructuring” that “emphasize the historicity of social space, the polymorphism of geographies, the dynamic restructuring of scale, and the continuous remaking of state space and urban space under capitalism.”<sup>8</sup> This tragedy—and its continuing aftermath—also brought with it food insecurities and cycles of political instability, while exposing to many who experienced and followed the reconstruction efforts the industrial complex that coheres intergovernmental and *extragovernmental* aid organisations, development specialists and charities. Embedded within these narratives of survival and recovery is another story about human vulnerability to violence enacted within and to bodies and soils across time that links these later manifestations to earlier performances and contexts.

This chapter comprehends how Haiti’s landscape—and its soil—have become entangled in labour strategies built into and out of the constraints and contours of past and present black sovereignty conditions. Specifically, I examine a nineteenth-century project in which Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer (1818–43) utilised Haiti’s landscape in a tangled con—selling Haitian citizenship to freeborn and emancipated American Africans in order to obtain their labour—and link that historical moment to the 2010 earthquake,

6 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 2.

7 For more on the ways that this “natural disaster” was not natural at all, but merely drew upon and reinforced older forms of interactions in Haiti that propped up foreign militarisation and securitisation while removing and ignoring local and political leaders, see Peter Hallward, “Securing Disaster in Haiti,” *Tanbou*, 2010. [www.tanbou.com/2010/SecuringDisasterInHaiti.htm](http://www.tanbou.com/2010/SecuringDisasterInHaiti.htm). Accessed January 2018 (a re-posting of an article that originally appeared on 22 January 2010 on the website of the Americas Program, Center for International Policy, <https://www.ciponline.org/programs/americas-program>).

8 Mimi Sheller, “Virtual Islands: Mobilities, Connectivity, and the New Caribbean Spatialities,” *Small Axe* II, no. 3 (2007): 18.

showcasing the temporal ways that land and labour entwine within aspects of black sovereignty. In the nineteenth-century context, I detail Boyer's efforts to foreground notions of racial connectivity along ecological lines and embed citizenship as an exchange with the land. Through this diachronic reading of race, ecologies and work, I detail the ways that labouring black bodies will be exchanged for the rights (and capital) imagined within black sovereignty's potential power.

With this multi-century weaving, I cohere landscapes with commoditisation in order to highlight the ways that capital can harness itself to racial articulations, as well as figurations of black sovereignty, in order to obtain legitimacy. What I am tracing are situations that attempt to extend kinship or belonging, but, in actuality, reify and explicitly separate particular bodies into commodified forms whose relationships to power are forever compromised and constrained. As Chapter 1 demonstrated, the seeds of this black futurity can be found in the Haitian Revolutionary era and in the early years of Haiti's existence. What this chapter suggests is that the tensions in the Atlantic world regarding racial futures—as well as black nullification—continued in Boyer's time and still resonate today.

Within Chapter 2, I delineate how sets of labouring bodies—in the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries—would be promised empowerment, jobs or security, on the one hand, while simultaneously being utilised as tools by the government to amass greater sovereign power in the hands of the few. In reading across times, the chapter notes how similar, yet temporally different, forms of black fungibility within similar economies hide their exploitation within articulations of overcoming, safety and abundance, when, in fact, these exchanges produce destructive equivalences.<sup>9</sup> In many instances, these discourses of progress and wealth-accumulation lure with promises of power or futurity, while the practices and forms of interactions comfortably slide into the abandoned site(s) of older forms of capitalist logic.

This is what occurred in nineteenth-century Haiti, when Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer framed citizenship and linked the rights to it with the Haitian landscape. In what follows, I investigate a series of letters, publicity materials and announcements that Boyer produced for agents stationed in the USA and his government appointee who left Haiti to tour the USA. The private letters would be republished by a printer in New York during the height of what could be described as a “citizenship for labour project.” Reading these documents and materials highlights the centrality of land in the exchanges between nations and capitalists. Reconceptualising this migration scheme by reading the landscape allows us to see the roles that sovereignty, power and place play in situating and securitising the nation.

9 For more on fungibility, see Marshall, “The Political Life of Fungibility.”

### Souls and Soil for Sale

Boyer's citizenship scheme obtained meaning and form through an articulation of blackness and a construction of transnational racial belonging that was then marketed to others. Although framed with expansive and inclusive language, Boyer's desires for profit and control would ultimately constrain his campaign. These limitations increasingly overshadowed the discourse of belonging and citizenship that permeated much of the campaign material and the writings of Boyer's surrogates. Although cloaked in the language of inclusivity and political rights, this migration project commoditised Haiti's revolution by yoking the nation's fecund soil with the purported blackness of the young nation's natural world. In articulating citizenship as a form of racial belonging and profit as a natural response of a black land to black people's industry, Boyer created a sovereign product that could be exchanged, marketed and sold to disparate bodies—one form to potential new black citizens and another to the global leaders and merchants interested in benefiting from the wealth that Haiti's soil (and its labourers) could generate.

This environmentally manufactured sense of racial belonging, though, hid the undercurrent of labour and the goal of economic productivity that drove the entire enterprise. What seems like an expansive form of racial connectivity across territorial boundaries was, in actuality, a mechanism for enlarging Haiti's labour force and ensuring the cultivation of specific capital goods. In reality, the offering of Haitian citizenship was an act. What was offered was not citizenship but a pseudo sense of belonging that actually quantified a person's racial connection to Haiti by accounting for their outputs. In other words, black bodies would be able to produce a certain amount of wealth as black people residing within a mythic black land. Boyer would not personally travel to the USA to convince black Atlantic citizens about his plan. Instead, he would designate a leading Haitian statesman to represent Haiti and Haitian interests during a tour through key US cities. These visits sought to enlarge the base of migrators and find additional sources of financial support for this enterprise. Identified as Citizen J. Granville in Boyer's letters, Granville would, in effect, broker this citizenship for Boyer in key American markets and, in the process, fashion a form of black sovereignty as racio-political kinship.

"Broker" is a term that has appeared within a number of fields to delineate a set of supportive diplomatic and extragovernmental roles. Here, I borrow the term from the field of development and foreign aid studies as it adequately describes the mediating role of black Atlantic agitators and actors who would plant themselves within various networks in order to

foster national agreements and steer transnational conversation—someone just like Prince Saunders, whom you met in Chapter 1. It is my contention that brokering aptly captures the type of manoeuvring that Granville would do on behalf of Boyer in order to bolster Boyer's power, Haiti's economic strength and sovereignty, as well as Haiti's position within geopolitical structures.

According to social policy critics David Lewis and David Mosse, brokers operate “within the fragmented politics of the postcolonial state, where power is exercised both through formal bureaucratic logics and through a diverse range of ‘supra-local’ associations and networks, in which there is a flourishing of intermediate actors and organizations.”<sup>10</sup> Granville, frequently identified as Citizen Granville within the US press, at the time, would employ these same logics in translating the campaign scheme within America to various abolitionist and philanthropic organisations, black intellectuals, activists and capitalists. His repeated mantra? Boyer's plan solved America's and Haiti's racial and economic needs.

Although Boyer's marketing scheme would prove extensive, his entreaties to people to come to Haiti were not the first. You will recall that Toussaint Louverture entertained an earlier migration scheme in order to obtain plantation labourers. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Henri Christophe would utilise the help of Prince Saunders to publicise his own migration project—although Christophe would die before the scheme took off. Not to be outdone, Pétion, another Revolutionary leader, launched his own plan; he, too, would die before it spread too far.<sup>11</sup> In the midst of these economic pushes was the need—or wish—for racial equality.

Emerging from similar capitalist desires, Boyer's migration project would be prompted not only by the pull for labouring bodies but also by the push for migration by black activists or abolitionists in the USA and by an agent in the American Colonization Society (ACS). Founded in 1816, the ACS counted Francis Scott Key, Henry Clay and Thomas Jefferson amongst its supporters. While its popularity would ebb and flow in the nineteenth century, there is no mistaking its reach into diverse pockets of American society, as it drew slave-holders, philanthropists, Christian moralists, abolitionists and crafty politicians together within an umbrella aide society that not-so-innocently sought to encourage, and at times legally move, free-born American Africans and emancipated former slaves to lands

<sup>10</sup> David Lewis and David Mosse, eds., *Development Brokers and Translators: The Ethnography of Aid and Agencies* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, Inc., 2006), 12.

<sup>11</sup> For more on Dessalines's and Pétion's emigration projects, see Sara C. Fanning, *Caribbean Crossing: African Americans and the Haitian Emigration Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

far away from white Americans.<sup>12</sup> Although not a new phenomenon, the ACS had a significant new advantage: governmental links.

Members of the ACS may have suggested aspects of what became Boyer's migration plan, but the ACS, officially, had a wide range of responses to it. I will return to their elaborate responses, below. What is key at this stage in the story is less how the ACS would respond than how the US press would cover Boyer's campaign. It is not too far-fetched to suggest that the high visibility in the US media of the plan—and it would be widely written up in articles—was due, in part, to its initial linking with the ACS. As the USA struggled to deal with the burgeoning fights over Atlantic racial slavery, black power, freedom and the future of slave-holding within the USA, the ACS, and Boyer's scheme, provided logical pathways to claim racial exclusion and racial particularity. By removing people of African descent and turning them over to other lands, the white supremacists within the ACS could argue for the bolstering of (white) US customs, aims and ideals. By calling for the aligning of people of African descent from the USA with their racial "kin" within other lands, those more morally minded within the ACS could claim that they were sensitively dealing with race problems by removing people of African descent to an area more favourable and amenable to them. Either way, removing black people benefited everyone.

Haitian President Boyer must have been aware of these US issues as he sought to manipulate them for his own nation's sovereign gain. To do that, he had to navigate his own country's long-term responses to colourism politics and the volatile and often violent responses to Haiti from other Atlantic nation-states that often played up to racist assumptions about difference—as seen in comments by Harvey in Chapter 1.

By the 1820s, three decades had elapsed since the first fires of the Haitian Revolution lit up the Atlantic world, yet Haiti's international reputation as a nation of bloodthirsty slaughterers endured. Even as these narratives circulated, Boyer sought to crush them. Although considered one of the revolutionary leaders, he would have a different trajectory from Toussaint. A member of the *gens de couleur*, Boyer would be educated in France, fight, for a time, in an uprising against Toussaint in Haiti, travel back to France and return in the final years of the battle as a French officer, only to switch allegiances (once again) and join the rebels. Boyer rose to power in Haiti after the assassination of Jean-Jacques Dessalines (1806), the yellow fever death of Alexandre Pétion (1818) and the suicide of Henri Christophe (1820) removed the final leaders of the Haitian Revolution and the first political leaders of the young nation from power.

<sup>12</sup> See P. J. Staudenraus's *The African Colonization Society 1816–1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961) for an excellent recounting of the ACS.

He would be a vastly different leader from all of them, but one still focused on consolidating power and pushing forward sweeping national changes in order to return to the vast plantation wealth produced when the nation was a French colony. Once installed as President of Haiti, Boyer would unite Haiti and the Dominican Republic into one island nation (in a bloodless but contentious invasion) and focus on recapturing the wealth that had earned Saint-Domingue its nickname as France's "pearl of the Antilles."<sup>13</sup> According to sociologist David Nicholls, "these years were marked by a concentration of power in the hands of a small group of mulatto families. It was a time of relative peace and stability, enlivened with only occasional plots and protests."<sup>14</sup> Increasingly outward-looking and seeking to situate Haiti strategically within the Atlantic world, Boyer would reach out to other nation-states in the circum-Atlantic and declare that the "pearl" had now become the "Queen" of the Antilles. This power-play would demand a significant amount of rhetorical flourish and persuasion.

In order to convince others of Haiti's might, Boyer framed Haiti, and its wealth and untapped market, as the smart partner of Atlantic states willing—and eager—to trade with and acknowledge the young nation. In figuring Haiti as the queen of the Caribbean, Boyer engaged in a form of self-fashioning that would see the "self" enlarged to encompass not just the political and economic arrival of a singular person, but also the arrival of an entire nation.<sup>15</sup> In combining aspects of economic vitality, similarly to Stephen in Chapter 1, to productivity, Boyer would configure a new African-sensitised natural world. This turn to the natural landscape of Haiti enabled him to sell Haiti as a viable and economically powerful Atlantic republic.

Boyer grappled with how economically to move the young, self-avowed black republic into global markets still fuelled and formed by racialised Atlantic slave economies. Leading a nation isolated and disavowed in many ways, Boyer sought a way to make Haiti free and economically prosperous in an Atlantic world that resisted according, if not outright refusing to recognise, prosperity and power to black bodies, be they nations or citizenship-seeking individuals. President Boyer, representing a nation (as opposed to a free black community) in the Atlantic world sought a

<sup>13</sup> For more on this, see Rayford W. Logan's *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776–1891* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941) and Anne Eller, *We Dream Together: Dominican Independence, Haiti, and the Fight for Caribbean Freedom* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Nicholls, *Haiti in Caribbean Context*, as produced in Sepinwall, *Haitian History: New Perspectives*, 185.

<sup>15</sup> For more, see Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776–1891* and Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*.

path through this minefield that would include arguments by agents on his behalf, the negotiation of trade agreements in the middle of the night, a flurry of diplomatic manoeuvrings between antagonists and supporters and a test of the tethers of affiliation that sought to ease Haiti's isolated position within the chaotic family of Atlantic nation-states. For them, place mattered. Any marketing analyst, today, tasked with drawing industry and capital to disavowed nations would argue that place still matters.

In examining Boyer's and Granville's writings, we can see the importance of what development adviser and theorist Simon Anholt describes as "place-branding."<sup>16</sup> Anholt argues that place-branding focuses on more than just the image of a place: it also deals with resources, history, reputations and even ideas. Today, many places—such as hospitals, universities and even cities—seek to develop an identity or to represent themselves in ways that reflect their values, products, services or concepts. Much like a corporate brand, place-brands have become the new "it" thing for countries to invent or construct as they coordinate programmes that shape, broadcast and sell aspects of their land, culture, people and histories to the wider world.

Although territories, cities and nations engage in this place-crafting, this process is not limited to actual locales. It is possible to turn spaces not yet reached by all, such as the Moon, as well as artificially engineered places, such as Atlantis, the grand island resort on Paradise Island in the Bahamas, into conceptual entities and tangible commodities that can attract investors, buyers and supporters.<sup>17</sup> These idealised holiday spots and other massive developments in the Caribbean are spaces that Sheller describes as "new virtual islands—amalgams of infrastructure, architecture, software" that are "unbundled from local communities, citizenries and publics, and repackaged as intensely capitalized destinations of untouched paradise."<sup>18</sup>

Although Haiti, with its cycles of earthquakes and hurricanes, would seem vastly different from the pristine, palm tree-laden splendour of manufactured island zones, we only have to remember that disaster can engender its own sort of tourism, as well as entice capitalists to rebuild places in their own image. Although Anholt's is a contemporary description of a twenty-first-century marketing phenomenon, I find it an equally relevant

<sup>16</sup> For more, see Simon Anholt, "Editorial," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 1, no. 1 (2004): 4–11.

<sup>17</sup> See the website for Moon Express, the first private company to be approved for travel outside Earth's orbit and land on the moon in order to harvest lunar resources at [www.moonexpress.com](http://www.moonexpress.com) and information about Atlantis on Paradise Island at [www.atlantisbahamas.com](http://www.atlantisbahamas.com).

<sup>18</sup> Sheller, "Virtual Islands: Mobilities, Connectivity, and the New Caribbean Spatialities," 20.

way to describe Boyer's nineteenth-century efforts to market—and actually brand—place, land, labour, bodies and citizenship. As seen through this lens, Boyer essentially sold Haitian citizenship in an effort to sell more Haitian goods while creating a new narrative that cast Haiti as a land of black abundance. Wrapped around the entire exchange was sovereignty. This may seem like an ahistorical application of place-branding, because the term comes out of contemporary global situations; however, it is my contention that what Anholt identifies by name is not a new phenomenon, but rather a much older practice.

Wally Olins, an advertising and corporate brand guru, notes that “the truth of the matter is that nations have always tried to create and modulate their reputations in order to create domestic loyalties and coherence and promote their own power and influence in neighbouring countries.”<sup>19</sup> Olins—a twenty-first-century professional adviser in nation branding—differs from Anholt owing to his advocacy of marketing and the consultation services he offers to nation-states who seek help crafting a brand identity. Anholt, who tends to consider how place-branding can alter negative and unjust images about certain spaces has been in many ways pushed aside in his theorising by marketing mediators like Olins. Although I would distance myself from Olins's more corporate approach to place-branding, I thoroughly agree with his assessment that “there is in reality nothing new about national branding, except the word ‘brand’ and the techniques that are now used, which derive from mainstream marketing and branding techniques.”<sup>20</sup> Anyone working in Haiti in the twenty-first century will attest to this.

In many ways, Olins's formulation is a new way to describe older forms of statecraft—something that I argue is a necessary and wide-ranging component in the figuration of black sovereignty. In an essay delineating the links between freedom, antislavery radicalism and “free” soil in Haiti and the wider Caribbean, historian Ada Ferrer argues that “for Haiti's leaders, the process of guaranteeing and giving meaning to freedom from slavery, first locally and transnationally, was always tied to the question of sovereignty.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, Haiti, in the process of becoming a black nation-state, had to make itself up—and then politicians, such as Boyer, set about marketing that narrative past and future black sovereignty for capital gain.

19 Wally Olins, “Making a Nation Brand,” in Jan Melissen, ed., *The New Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 170.

20 Olins, “Making a Nation Brand,” 170.

21 Ada Ferrer, “Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (2012): 48.

### In Search of Black Futures

Anholt and Olins may come at marketing from different perspectives, but both accurately sense the timelessness of the act of place-branding and its abilities to re-present the human and non-human world in often fungible forms. Anholt links these “forms” with the art of persuasion and what he optimistically describes as a nation’s “truth.” He notes that “political parties, governments, good causes, state bodies, even non-governmental organizations [...] understand that profound truth about human endeavor which marketers always knew: that being in possession of the truth is not enough. The truth must be sold.”<sup>22</sup> Truth-telling and -selling sits at the heart of Boyer’s citizenship scheme. He would, as I note above, sell one image of Haiti—and its landscape—in order to market another that depended less on the environment and more on labouring bodies and crop yields. Publicly, Haiti would be a black paradise; privately, it would be a black workstation. Fate, or, rather, the Atlantic nation-states’ history of disavowal and containment of Haiti, forced this contrapuntal citizenship scheme into action—especially the actions of the USA.

In using space and race to economically sustain and environmentally manufacture Haitian citizens, Boyer responded to specific political conditions. Initially, Boyer tried to sell self-avowed black Haiti not as a black nation but as a French one in an Atlantic world where he believed that aligning with a European power would help ease Haiti’s arrival as an autonomous player within Atlantic economic markets.<sup>23</sup> To do this, Boyer sought diplomatic discussions with France with the express aim of creating a mutually beneficial recognition compact. This type of political action would be difficult to pull off in 1820s France. By the time Boyer came into power in Haiti, the republican fervour of the French Revolution was almost 50 years old. This older France had shaken off its revolutionary youth and altered its political orientation. Once again, a monarch ruled France. Dealing with this political change prompted a historical readjustment or act of amnesia.

France’s first order of business? A didactic recasting of history. Historian Jeremy Popkin notes how, around this time, official French governmental documents began referring to Haiti as Saint-Domingue—its name when the territory was still under the colonial control of the French—in an effort to alter history. Popkin suggests that moves like this illustrate the

22 Simon Anholt, “Branding Places and Nations,” *Brands and Branding* (New York: Bloomberg Press, 2004), 214.

23 See Fanning, *Caribbean Crossing: African Americans and the Haitian Emigration Movement*.

ways that France sought to misremember losing Haiti.<sup>24</sup> It would be this historical amnesia and other bolder tactics that would fuel rumours within the Atlantic that a French invasion of Haiti was imminent. Although never fully actualised, the rumours forced Haitian officials, like Boyer, to fortify the surrounding ports and the interior from attack from foreign entities and governments.<sup>25</sup> Significant amounts of money would be spent to expand and prepare the military for the widely anticipated and feared invasions.

For strategic reasons, then, allying with another Atlantic nation-state would provide Haitian officials with an ally that would put international pressure on the French entities circling the island. According to Nicholls, Boyer may have guessed that “foreign protection from one power might at least prevent arbitrary intervention” by another more dangerous power.<sup>26</sup> He could still make this happen if the right US politician would give him an audience so that he could present his case and negotiate mutually beneficial terms. Before Boyer could start any negotiations with US officials, he had to get their attention.

James Monroe—then President of the United States—would make the task of forging a Haitian–American alliance difficult, if not impossible. Having just finished with the Missouri Compromise (passed by Congress in 1820), Monroe would be disinclined to deal with Haiti. Although the tenets of the Monroe Doctrine (1823) would seem to imply that Haiti would receive US protection from European interference, Monroe and his administration repeatedly asserted that this new policy did not include the black republic of Haiti. This view was apparent as early as June of 1823, when, in a letter to Thomas Jefferson, Monroe acknowledges having received a formal application from St. Domingo seeking Haitian recognition, but brushes the application aside, preferring instead to remain silent.<sup>27</sup> Monroe might have been able to control his administration’s stance regarding Haiti, but he could not stop the rest of his citizens from taking a keen interest in the young nation.

In 1825, outside of Monroe’s administrative team, debates raged within the US government regarding the recognition of Haiti by the USA—much of it hostile. US Senator Benton, from Missouri, captures much of the feeling, the volatility and the impossibility of black sovereignty when, during the

<sup>24</sup> For more on this, see Jeremy Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> See Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776–1891* and Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*.

<sup>26</sup> Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, 65.

<sup>27</sup> James Monroe, *The Writings of James Monroe*, vol. 6, 1817–1823, ed. Stanislaus Murray Hamilton (New York: AMS Press, 1969 [1902]), 316–17.

debate in the US Congress on Haitian recognition, he utters these words: “We purchase coffee from [... Haiti] but we interchange no consuls or ministers [...] And why? Because the peace of eleven states will not permit the fruits of a successful negro insurrection to be exhibited among them.” The USA, he states, would “not permit the fact to be seen, and told, that for the murder of their masters and mistresses, [... Haiti] are to find friends among the white people of these United States.”<sup>28</sup> In essence, white America had no interest in rewarding recognition to black people who had the gall to violently seek their freedom and demand reciprocity for their independence. The logics at work here replay the form and content of black nullification. Yet, these rhetorical moves also make legible a form of black invisibility. Rather than misremember the revolution, Benton’s framing simply makes all of Haiti disappear from view—becoming the unseen. Although a powerful world view, it would have to do battle with other forms of sovereign seeking and forming in which seeing, socialising, selling and stabilising sovereignty propelled contact and connectivity.

The *Niles’ Weekly Register* (hereafter referred to as the *Register*)—a leading nationally circulating news magazine established by Hezekiah Niles in 1811 and committed to “fairness and balance in the editorial agenda”—reprinted a letter written by Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer to John Dodge, a Boston-area trader.<sup>29</sup> The prefatory editorial remarks before the letter guide the reader in understanding the significance of this moment and the context of the exchange. The editor acknowledges that people in the USA do not fully understand Haiti and its continued fight for sovereign existence, but predicts that “the day, we trust, is not far distant when the United States will acknowledge their independence, with the full consent, not only of the philanthropist, but of the sagacious statesman.”<sup>30</sup>

The editor of the *Register* calls for the USA to form strategic ties with Haiti—a transatlantic echo of Stephen’s British “opportunity” in Chapter 1. In the *Register*, the editor argues that establishing an economic and military alliance with Haiti made strategic sense for a USA focused on increasing its share of the global economy. Niles understood that formal recognition and economic mutualism also offered a more practical benefit: racial removal. In

<sup>28</sup> *Register of Debates in Congress*, 19th Congress, 1 session. As quoted in Charles Callan Tansill, *The United States and Santo Domingo, 1798–1873: A Chapter in Caribbean Diplomacy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 122.

<sup>29</sup> William Kovarik, “Niles’ Weekly Register,” *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, ed. Stephen L. Vaughn (New York: Routledge, 2008), 366.

<sup>30</sup> “Letter.” Jean-Pierre Boyer, President of Hayti, to Mr. Dodge, at North Salem, Massachusetts, *Niles’ Weekly Register* (1814–37) 22, no. 571 (17 August 1822): 391. *American Periodical Series Online*.

another editorial in the *Register*, Niles suggests that rather than only sending thousands of “colored people” far across the Atlantic Ocean to Africa while many more enslaved persons were born in America’s slave states, the USA could remove every single person of colour by sending them to Haiti. In his formulations, Haiti was a ready and empty receptacle. “This republic,” he argues, has enough space to “receive all the colored persons of the United States, bond or free, at once.” In Niles’s world view, American Africans could be exchanged for profit and influence in the West Indies. In this context, black bodies are, once again, fungible.<sup>31</sup> While Niles raises some concerns about the “return” of people of African descent within the USA to Africa, he also emphasises the important role Haiti plays in America’s economic and political future.

Boyer explicitly and emphatically makes this point in his letter to Dodge. In it, he stresses that “it cannot be denied that Hayti is of great importance in the scale of commerce.”<sup>32</sup> Alluding to Haiti’s past as France’s “pearl of the Antilles,” Boyer reminds his readers that aligning with Haiti would allow the USA to reap the benefits of Haiti’s anticipated future wealth without having to deal with France’s imperial shadow—a charge made, if you will recall, in Chapter 1 by Stephen and Harvey. An alliance between the USA and Haiti, he argues, would only be possible after the USA recognises Haiti’s power within the Caribbean as “the Queen of the Antilles.”<sup>33</sup> Boyer warns the USA that not acknowledging Haiti’s sovereign power and working productively alongside it would encourage his administration to seek an alliance elsewhere. Monroe and his administration offered no response to these arguments, calls, entreaties and demands.

Disavowed by the USA, Boyer would again turn to France, and this time try to come up with an agreement that would not politically enchain Haiti to its former imperial master. Successful in fighting off previous French imperialistic attempts, Boyer would be less successful in fighting off the economic colonialism that France ultimately offered, and Boyer accepted.<sup>34</sup> In 1825, the King of France, Charles X, publicly announced his infamous *Ordonnance* in which Haiti agreed to pay 150 million francs to the French planters who lost “property” during the Haitian Revolution in exchange

31 “The Free Blacks—Hayti and Africa.” *Niles’ Weekly Register* (1814–37) 22, no. 669 (3 July 1824): 283.

32 “Letter.” Jean-Pierre Boyer, President of Hayti, to Mr. Dodge, at North Salem, Massachusetts, 391.

33 “Letter.” Jean-Pierre Boyer, President of Hayti, to Mr. Dodge, at North Salem, Massachusetts, 391.

34 For more on this, see Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776–1891* and Fanning, *Caribbean Crossing: African Americans and the Haitian Emigration Movement*.

for France's official recognition of Haiti's sovereignty. This deal, although designed to ensure Haiti's entry into global markets, actually chained Haiti with debt that would spiral and impact subsequent Haitian administrations' strategies for economic stability within the nation. Not surprisingly, Haiti had initially to secure money from an outside source to pay the indemnity, as it did not have that kind of wealth in its coffers. French banks were only too willing to loan the money at exorbitant rates.

In the lead-up to this offer, Boyer—recognising from earlier negotiations that if France could not get Haiti's land, then it would take Haiti's money—marshalled one last campaign, reaching out directly to those tied to Haiti through the legacies of slavery, migration, and displacement: American Africans.<sup>35</sup> Boyer reached out to these communities in multiple ways: through letters to commercial agents, abolitionists and their supporters; American Africans who had already migrated to Haiti and reported their stay to those in the USA; black newspapers; and, what I will focus on here, an unlikely alliance (however brief and tenuous) with agents affiliated with the ACS.<sup>36</sup>

According to an early ACS pamphlet, the ACS dedicated itself to establishing “colonies, by voluntary contribution, on the western coast of Africa, and thus [restoring ...] free people of color to their kindred and country; [... and encouraging and producing] an entire emancipation of that race from America.”<sup>37</sup> Entangling the discourse of removal and exclusion with articulations championing emancipation and restoration, the ACS managed to bridge white racist rhetoric about the separation of races with morally driven calls for the repatriation of people of African descent back to Africa. Influential and able to impact policies within the US Congress, the ACS would be instrumental in shaping much of the early strategies on black migration financed by the US government.

For example, in the early 1820s, the ACS set up a colony at Cape Mesurado on the coast of West Africa funded by the US government. Things did not go well in the colony. Ravaged by disease and facing intense animosity from the local inhabitants, the colonialists—and the ACS—encountered increasing agitation from the local inhabitants and from opponents in

35 For more, see Chris Dixon, *African America and Haiti: Emigration and Black Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000).

36 Although I focus on the ACS here, there would be other people in the USA who would be involved in the migration project, notably leaders of various Haitian Emigration Societies.

37 Anon., *A Sketch of the Origin and Progress of the American Colonization Society, with Some Notice of the Slave Trade, and of the Interior Condition of Africa, by a Friend of the Cause* (Hartford, CT: P. Canfield, 1833), 7.

the USA. Annoyed at the growing challenges facing colonisationists, and specifically the ACS, Loring Dewey—an ACS agent from New York—set about exploring a much closer colonisation opportunity after a chance meeting with a Haitian citizen. Following that encounter, Dewey sent a vague and misleading letter full of questions directly to Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer in March of 1824 where he inquired about the possibility of creating an ACS colony in Haiti. Boyer promptly responded and turned Dewey’s potential ACS endeavour into an economically fuelled marketing opportunity for Haiti.<sup>38</sup>

Boyer’s response to Dewey’s letter obscures his burgeoning plans. In initial answers to Dewey’s questions, Boyer touches upon education, the place of marriage within Haitian society and the possibility of Haiti funding all or part of the emigrants’ voyages to Haiti’s shores. Eventually, he deals with Dewey’s major issue: the request for an ACS colony in Haiti. Boyer replies that this “cannot be.”<sup>39</sup> In offering up this refusal, Boyer joins a list of other Haitian leaders who historian Ada Ferrer notes, made Haiti’s sovereignty clear when they reiterated, as Boyer did, that “while ‘emigration’ would be welcomed and sought, ‘colonization’ would be impossible.”<sup>40</sup> Boyer would follow up his rejection to Dewey with these important lines: “Those who come [to Haiti], being children of Africa, shall be Haytiens as soon as they put their feet upon the soil of Hayti: they will enjoy happiness, security, tranquility, such as we ourselves possess.”<sup>41</sup> This articulation carries some of the echoes of historian Sue Peabody’s “freedom principle” and Ferrer’s notion of the link between radical antislavery and the soil, but Boyer offers additional riches beyond freedom with his soil terminology—items such as positive emotions, economic abundance and citizenship.<sup>42</sup>

Let’s return to his short, but meaningful passage. In the first few clauses, note the explicit insertion of Africa as the cultural link between American

38 Boyer notes, in his letters, that although he had brought various African Americans to Haiti before this citizenship scheme, these efforts were not as coordinated and as widespread as this endeavour.

39 *Correspondence Relative to the Emigration to Hayti, of the Free People of Colour, in the United States, Together with the Instructions to the Agent Sent Out by President Boyer* (New York: Mahlon Day, 1824), 10.

40 Ferrer, “Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic,” 49.

41 *Correspondence Relative to the Emigration to Hayti, of the Free People of Colour, in the United States, Together with the Instructions to the Agent Sent Out by President Boyer*, 10.

42 See Sue Peabody and Keila Grinburg, “Free Soil: The Generation and Circulation of an Atlantic Legal Principle,” *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no. 3 (2011): 331–39 and Ada Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Africans and Haitians. While Boyer does not tie his own ancestry to Africa, he makes it clear that those Americans who are somehow identified as “children of Africa” immediately become Haitian upon spatial contact with the nation’s fecund soil. This soil is not just a territory of freedom, where slavery cannot exist. It is a land of ecological abundance where rights and economic security flow unchecked for the “children of Africa.”

This vague ecological transference raises more questions than it answers, such as, does the designation of “Haytien” come with limited privileges for the new citizens, as long as certain conditions are met, or are these new Haitians full citizens? If full citizenship is accorded—as Boyer probably wants his readers to believe—then why the shifting pronouns towards the end of the phrase? Based on Boyer’s word choices, it would seem that the new Haitians, having experienced derogatory and belittling treatment that kept them from their full potential as citizens in the USA, would only obtain the privileges and wealth already in possession of “real” Haitians if they journeyed to Haiti.<sup>43</sup> This distinction between natural (but limited) privileges in the USA and the extension of full (but constrained) privileges to settlers who came to Haiti reflects the dilemmas facing Boyer. He needed people to come to Haiti and take over crop production within the abandoned plantations. To do that, he had to highlight the transference of rights that the soil would give these travellers. But in framing the plan, the distinctions between the various bodies break free of his textual attempts to contain them.

No matter how much he may have rhetorically danced around the racial same-ness of Haitians and American Africans, Boyer could not hide the fact that people of African descent from the USA who came to Haiti through this citizenship scheme were merely a means to an end, allowing, through their bodies and their labour, the Haitian nation-state to perform its sovereignty within the Atlantic world where some nations disavowed it and other nations desired to obtain it.

The above passage from Boyer’s letter to Dewey contains an additional important line. Boyer notes that once American Africans placed their “feet upon the soil” of Haiti, the natural environment would respond specifically to them. According to Boyer, during this process, the Haitian soil magically conveys citizenship to “the children of Africa.” In some manner, then, the soil can distinguish between racial types and, more importantly, recognise

43 In his letters to Granville, Boyer states that “the constitution having established by the 44th article, that all individuals of African blood, who will appear in the Republic, shall, after a years [*sic*] residence, enjoy the civil and political rights and quality of a citizen” (*Correspondence*, 21). As I briefly show here, these rights contained significant chains (if indeed they were fully granted).

when someone of African descent steps onto the land. Yet, this process describes more than just racial affiliation and kinship. The soil, in Boyer's framework, contains a protective border that actually separates Haitian citizens and (white) foreign others, and in so doing distinguishes between those that do and do not spatially belong within the nation. In this context, the natural environment contains a protective mechanism that enables it to recognise those persons whose cultural and racial roots lie within Haiti.

This protection extends beyond ecological belonging to the economy. In Boyer's ecological imagination, the landscape constrains the ability of foreigners to touch Haitian soil and receive any current or future wealth and productivity from it. Rather than frame Haiti as a pristine landscape waiting for someone to maximise its potential, Boyer recasts Haiti as a place that evokes—quite literally through the soil's productive output—the social and political order that surrounds it. Black soil generates prosperity for black bodies that reside in a black nation and where, combined, both can produce black wealth. In entreating American Africans to undertake the journey to Haiti, Boyer creates a narrative where Haiti's soil heals African-descended souls damaged by restrictive and racist practices within the white Atlantic world.

This argument should sound familiar to Americanists who study the nineteenth century. In crafting a kind of racio-spatial kinship through the bodies of black foreigners, Boyer's campaign engages in the type of discourse-making that American studies and literary critic Amy Kaplan sees in the US context as the link between Manifest Destiny and domestic discourse in which "spatial and gendered configurations are linked in complex ways that are dependent upon racialised notions of the foreign."<sup>44</sup> In Haiti, the foreigner is always *blanc*—even someone that would be categorised as black in his or her own country of origin. In making American Africans neither *blanc* nor foreign Boyer allows them to be recognised by the soil—and the nation—as Haitian citizens, but not in order to extend rights and freedoms to kinsfolk outside of Haitian territory. Instead, this crafting is an act of sovereign manoeuvring that allows racio-spatial kinship and black fungible bodies to be substituted for future national wealth.

In setting up this structural transference, Boyer casts the landscape as a mechanism, seemingly engaged without the manipulation of humans or governments, that can detect an individual's cultural and/or racial connection to Africa. The soil can literally read the soles of humans and detect whether each person has an African soul. If found, the landscape, not Boyer or his government, would transfer citizenship. As fantastical as it sounds, Boyer is not the only one to consider the role of the landscape in shaping human

44 Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Destiny," *American Literature* 70, no. 3 (1998): 583.

political agency. Examining a longer arc of Caribbean history, Mimi Sheller suggests that the environment has existed and continues to exist as a “living landscape” that carries within it knowledge about the “different textures of freedom as lived” by its human inhabitants.<sup>45</sup>

None of this racial particularism and ecological trickery mattered to ACS agent Loring Dewey. He uses this moment to cast himself as the liberator of American Africans *and* Haiti. To lay the groundwork for this, he initiated the printing of his correspondence with Boyer. The published letters made headlines across the USA. The *North American Review* took the time to print a review of the publication. In the review, the writer extols Boyer’s morality and his willingness to help people of African descent living under harsh conditions in the USA. The reviewer sees Boyer’s actions as part of an engagement that is “fair and honorable.” Hinting that while there may be other—unstated—motives for the campaign, the reviewer still finds in Boyer’s “communications and all his actions” the proof that “he has a higher motive; that he feels deeply for the condition of the colored people in this country, and that he is ready to make any reasonable sacrifice for their relief.”<sup>46</sup>

By casting aside any material or political rationale for Boyer’s plan, the reviewer emphasises the “higher motive” and moral imperative that guides Boyer’s actions. Motivated, perhaps, by a celestial calling, the reviewer suggests that Boyer extends a hand of friendship and belonging to dispossessed and disempowered black people in the USA. Or perhaps he was invested in something a bit more sinister.

In his letters, Boyer pushes the religious rhetoric even further. He stresses that Haiti’s soil would baptise American Africans anew and turn them into something beyond what they were before. He continues these ruminations in a letter to another US philanthropic agent, Charles Collins. Here, Boyer ties Haiti’s soil to cultivation, cultivation to citizenship and citizenship to virtues. I quote the following passage in full as it clearly delineates the role of Haitian citizenship within this racio-political kinship exchange. Boyer stresses to Collins:

What joy will it give hearts like yours, to see these scions of Africa, so abased in the United States, where they vegetate with no more utility to themselves than to the soil which nourishes them, transplanted to Hayti, where they will become no less useful than estimable, ennobling them in their own eyes, [where they] cannot fail to attach them to regular habits, and the acquisition of social virtues, and to render them worthy by their

<sup>45</sup> Sheller, “Arboreal Landscapes of Power and Resistance,” 215.

<sup>46</sup> Anon., “Review: *Correspondence Relative to the Emigration to Hayti, of the Free People of Colour, in the United States, Together with the Instructions to the Agent Sent Out by President Boyer.*” *The North American Review* 20, no. 1 (1825): 204.

## The Unfinished Revolution

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good conduct, to enjoy the benefits which their new country will bestow upon them!<sup>47</sup>

Boyer argues that once on Haitian soil American Africans will finally transform into the moral citizens they were always meant to be.

Yet, coming to Haiti and stepping onto the soil would not immediately make one Haitian. According to Boyer, the new arrivals had to earn their Haitianness through particular sets of practices and actions. Engaging in certain types of “good conduct” was a start, but more was needed. Boyer articulates just what American Africans would need to do for their citizenship in his instructions to Jonathas Granville—the Haitian agent charged with marketing migration in the USA.

Granville would travel across the east coast of the USA, spending time in cities such as Philadelphia. At meetings, gatherings, dinners and during talks, he shared Boyer’s plans, encouraged migration to Haiti and tried to shore up support for the plan amongst leaders within various communities of colour and white philanthropists. Newspaper accounts describe him as a sophisticated emissary who charmed his audiences. During research for this book, I was able to track down a portrait of him, painted by local artist Philip Tilyard (and dated 1824), that now hangs in the Baltimore Museum of Art (Figure 2.1). Granville probably sat for Tilyard during a trip to Maryland for the campaign. In the painting, Granville’s body faces off to the right while his eyes face forward, casting a portion of his face in shadow. His clothes appear refined, but casually worn. In a white vest (with the top button undone), a white shirt with a collar gathered close to his neck and a dark jacket, he carries off the insouciance of a bored aristocrat with ease. He stares at the viewer, mouth flat, earring gleaming in his ear. His portrait adequately captures the exoticism that often swirled around him.<sup>48</sup>

As Granville traversed the country, he would encapsulate with his charm and his mannerisms a new brand of Haiti that ran counter to sensationalised stories about bloodthirsty savages. In coupling performance and persuasion, Granville would entice people to leave their homes and travel to Haiti while also convincing them that Haiti would welcome their presence.

While Granville engaged in outward persuasion, he made sure to follow Boyer’s instructions. Those instructions were reproduced in the publication of Boyer’s correspondence with Dewey. Most of the information in the instructions to Granville is fairly innocuous. Long and elaborate articles

<sup>47</sup> *Correspondence Relative to the Emigration to Hayti, of the Free People of Colour, in the United States, Together with the Instructions to the Agent Sent Out by President Boyer*, 16.

<sup>48</sup> See Baltimore Museum of Art and Sona Johnston, *American Paintings, 1750–1900, from the Collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art* (Baltimore, MD: The Museum, 1983).



**Figure 2.1** Portrait of Jonathas Granville (1824).  
Oil on canvas. Philip Tilyard. Baltimore Museum of Art.

detail how and why the project started. Yet, nestled within the mundane and the tedious are comments and articulations that turn away from the moral suasion seen in Boyer's earlier exchanges of letters with the agents.

Casting aside the language of racio-spatial citizenship, Boyer gets down to business in his notes to Granville, outlining who Granville should meet in the USA before leaving the USA behind and outlining where the new arrivals should live in Haiti and what commodities they should produce. The detailed information segregates future labourers within particular regions and assigns them cultivation duties within specific plantations or villages. As the plan attests, the new citizens weren't free: they were confined. In placing restrictive boundaries around mobility, rights, labour and belonging, Boyer

attempts to police the citizenship promised to the “new” Haitians by tying their habitation to certain plantations and their labour to the production of certain goods.

In essence, what Boyer suggests in his cold, practical calculations is that while the soil “reads” for the right codes of blackness through the soles of all those who step onto Haiti’s shores, it also marks the “new” Haitians within a system of capital accumulation by implicitly yoking their orderly labour with orderly made products, and orderly made products with economic stability. By selling the soil as abundant, rich and giving, Boyer attempts to hide—except to Granville—the fact that citizenship and labour would be exchanged in order to stabilise Haiti’s sovereign position in the Atlantic world. Although forced, in many ways, to entertain this plan through the political disavowals and desires of US and French officials, Boyer’s scheme would successfully lure upwards of 13,000 American Africans to Haiti for purposes that were neither as innocent nor as egalitarian as they at first seem.<sup>49</sup> In exchange for migrating to Haiti, American Africans would obtain a Haitian citizenship through a scheme enchainned by demands of labour or capital and pushed into being by the unfinished nature of Haiti’s sovereignty. Although rhetorically laced through with the power of the natural world, Boyer’s scheme would have less to do with the land, in figurative terms, and more to do with the literal cultivation of the land.

As noted above, Boyer sold Haiti’s landscape to multiple groups—most notably American labourers of colour—as the answer to the USA’s and Haiti’s economic and racial problems. He sought to alter, through this campaign, Haiti’s geopolitical position in the Atlantic world by stabilising its sovereignty and its power while rewriting its reputation or place-brand. Although forged from the unfinished nature of black sovereignty and framed within the language of racio-spatial citizenship, Boyer’s migration plan was a nineteenth-century place-branding scheme. As compelling as it might be, it would not be the last time that Haiti’s landscape would become entangled in attempts to sell Haiti to the highest bidder and ask how much Haiti is worth and to whom.

Before venturing further, I want briefly to sketch what is known about the lives and experiences of the American Africans who came to Haiti’s shores in the 1820s. Reports differ as to what happened to the new citizens. Some, it seems, returned to the USA, convinced that Haiti was vastly different from

49 Also quoted by Chris Dixon, this figure is considered an estimate. For more, see Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Colin [Joan] Dayan, “A Few Stories About Haiti, or, Stigma Revisited,” *Research in African Literatures* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 157–72 and Fanning, *Caribbean Crossing: African Americans and the Haitian Emigration Movement*.

the landscape that Boyer described. Others may have stayed or migrated to other Caribbean colonies. A full accounting of the life experiences of these migrants remains incomplete. At the time of the printing of this book, no detailed history has been presented that illuminates how these individuals navigated the lived realities of this commoditised form of citizenship in which cultivation—and order—remained such key components.<sup>50</sup> It is possible, though, to speculate about their lives, especially if one reads another publication intended specifically for those entertaining migration to Haiti alongside Boyer's instructions and correspondence.

Published in New York in 1824, *Information for the Free People of Colour, who are Inclined to Emigrate to Hayti* is not authored by Dewey or Boyer, but contains elements of both within its pages, most notably in the descriptions of the landscape that the new citizens would inhabit and cultivate. Rather than noting the ways that the new Haitians would benefit from an encounter with Haitian soil or lacing the entire plan in moralistic rhetoric, the *Information* stresses the mobility constraints and the limitations of the type of work options available to the new arrivals once in Haiti, as well as their locations for habitation.

Instead of being able to experience the soil's abundance within any Haitian locale, the *Information* stresses that the new transplants must reside on "uncultivated or neglected lands." Barred from settling anywhere they chose, the new citizens could only inhabit areas that had been "deserted."<sup>51</sup> The former French and Creole planter class left these uncultivated, neglected or deserted lands and the Haitian masses were disinclined to go back to where they were finally able to leave. To produce crops, Boyer needed to bring in bodies to labour in these areas and grow material that could be sold. The issue of labour would continue to haunt Boyer and eventually compel him to introduce the Rural Code, a policy that Caribbeanist and comparative literature specialist Sibylle Fischer notes "forced [Haitian] workers to attach themselves to a plantation, prohibited them from even leaving the property without permission, and thus, in fact, reintroduced a form of unfree labor."<sup>52</sup> As the *Information* notes, the newly minted Haitian/American African labourers and the Haitian peasant population remained the most vulnerable and least protected within society.

Boyer, though, is only one example of the entities who have engaged in brokering Haiti's natural resources in the last few centuries. In offering

50 One text that gives us some account is Fanning's book—although much of it focuses on migration from the USA to Haiti beyond the time period under investigation.

51 Anon., *Information for the Free People of Colour, who are Inclined to Emigrate to Hayti* (New York: Samuel Wood & Sons, 1824), 7.

52 Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 150–51.

a close examination of one of these actors, I have presented a way to understand the role of the built and natural landscape in political processes while offering new sources for perusal. The importance of the environment is not something new, but its role within the performance of sovereignty, remains a critical component of Haiti's past and future recovery.

For Haiti's political and economic future to be different, the tangled practices of consumption, extraction and oppression must be critiqued and, perhaps, changed. What I am suggesting is that the rationale for Boyer's scheme matters to our present moment. Although his plan depended upon foreign migration, new labouring and capital schemes in Haiti depend upon internal migration (more on this below). In both instances, bodies need to move to accommodate capitalist fantasies and the acquisition of power. Yet, these schemes and plot lines contain additional formulations about truths and the selling of belonging.

Nation-states, corporations and politicians, such as Boyer, sell various truths about the lands around us even as they confront various limitations about the role and nature of sovereignty in the process. It is up to us as community members and global citizens to take on anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot's challenge to track these power shifts and expose their roots in our many presents.<sup>53</sup> The following section offers up an example of this kind of tracking through its focus on a newer, more recent phenomenon of the entwining of labour, capital and sovereignty in Haiti.

### **Fungible Bodies, Tremulous Presents: The Entanglements of Soil, Labour and Sovereignty in the Twenty-first Century**

In tracing "cycle[s] of capital" and their fusion with tropes of subhumanism, philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe notes how collusions between life and capital "translate," he argues, "in concrete terms into the militarization of borders, the fragmentation and partitioning of territories, and the creation of more or less autonomous spaces within the borders of existing states." Mbembe traces these activities within spaces, contexts and situations "under the control of foreign armies or of international organisations operating under the pretext of, or on behalf of, humanitarianism," such as what I see as the situation within Haiti after the 2010 earthquake.<sup>54</sup> The aftermath of this natural disaster, though, contains echoes of the exchanges of labour, capital and power at the heart of Boyer's scheme.

A reminder of the conditions on 12 January 2010: shortly after the

<sup>53</sup> Trouillot. *Silencing the Past*, xix.

<sup>54</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 5.

earthquake struck at 5.14 p.m., people used whatever means necessary to try and reach lovers, family members, acquaintances and employees. Sitting in front of her computer in New Orleans, writer and activist Beverly Bell recalls staring at the screen as the word “earthquake” came before her. Writing later about the experience in *Fault Lines*, she describes how “some would call the earthquake *goudougoudou*, for the terrifying sound that roared up out of the ground. Most would just refer to it as the *evènman*, the event. The day was so defining it simply came to be known as *douz*, twelve.”<sup>55</sup> Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat recounts driving around Little Haiti in Miami, Florida in a bit of a fog. “My heart was racing,” she notes, “as I started running down, in my mind, a list of the people that I would need to call, e-mail, text, or fax to check on in Haiti.”<sup>56</sup> Journalist Jonathan Katz, settled upstairs in the Associated Press House in the hills above Port-au-Prince on 12 January, captures the terror on the ground:

I heard a sound like trees being mowed down in a forest. It was the house next door collapsing. Seconds to go. I thought about running through the shattered glass and tumbling down the stairs, but there was no time. When the second floor went, I could either be under it or ride down on top of it. I went with on top and braced for the pain.<sup>57</sup>

No one was spared in the area. Even the gleaming UN Headquarters in Haiti’s capital was destroyed, taking with it the life of several prominent UN staff members, including Hédi Annabi, the head of MINUSTAH.<sup>58</sup> The magisterial National Palace, built by US Naval engineers in 1920 and set on a site that had been the homes of French governors-general and Haiti’s first president, Alexandre Pétion, lay in ruins immediately after the earthquake and has since been demolished, awaiting final plans for rebuilding and modernisation.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Beverly Bell, *Fault Lines: Views Across Haiti’s Divide* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 1.

<sup>56</sup> Edwidge Danticat, “*Lòt Bò Dlo*, the Other Side of the Water,” in Paul Farmer, *Haiti: After the Earthquake* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 250.

<sup>57</sup> Katz, *The Big Truck That Went By*, 15.

<sup>58</sup> For more on the impact on the UN Mission, see [www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=33471#WM7xootKPII](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=33471#WM7xootKPII). As of October 2017, MINUSTAH will cease operations and will be replaced by a smaller operation focused on justice.

<sup>59</sup> For more on the palace, see Randal C. Archibold, “Palace in Haiti, Damaged by Quake, is Being Razed,” *New York Times* 13 September 2012 [www.nytimes.com/2012/09/14/world/americas/haitis-national-palace-being-demolished.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/14/world/americas/haitis-national-palace-being-demolished.html) and Merlin Fulcher, “Competition: National Palace, Haiti,” *The Architects’ Journal* 10 October 2017. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/competitions/competition-national-palace-haiti/10024240.article>.

Those living in far more cramped and precarious buildings found themselves hastily scrambling to occupy spaces that would swell in size in order to accommodate the millions of internally displaced persons who would not be able to return to their homes—either because of unsafe conditions or because they could no longer afford to pay the now exorbitant rental rates for intact properties. Although significant amounts of community organising, healing and planning took place throughout Haiti in the immediate days after the earthquake, most international media tended to focus on stories of devastation—often repeating claims about the risk of looting and rioting.<sup>60</sup>

Alongside these narratives, a vocal and critical contingent of Haitian studies scholars, Haitian diasporic peoples, investigative journalists, rights advocates and social justice workers produced historical overviews, convened talks and critiqued certain funding structures, such as the now disbanded Interim Haiti Recovery Commission, co-chaired by former US President Bill Clinton and the then Haitian Prime Minister Jean Max Bellerive, and the linked, but separately operated, Haiti Reconstruction Fund, chaired by a member of Haiti's government, but administered by the World Bank.<sup>61</sup> This vocal critical community made it clear that while the earthquake may have impacted everyone in the area, it also made the existence of the large influx of Haitians who had already fled their nutrient depleted fields or mountains devoid of trees for cities such as Port-au-Prince, increasingly precarious. Many of these displaced persons found themselves, unless they were able to move elsewhere, squeezed into increasingly unstable and unsecure temporary camps after the earthquake.

These same camps became international targets for aid, photo opportunities by a voracious public hungry for visual moments of disaster pornography and wild and mostly unfulfilled promises of structural change.<sup>62</sup> Today, most international reporters hasten to report that nearly all the original displaced persons have now found housing, but they often fail to add that those remaining in the camps are those who literally have nowhere else to go. I will return to the impact of the 2010 earthquake in later chapters (where I will discuss the spread of, and responsibility for, the cholera epidemic), but, for now, let's return to the months just after the devastation.

60 For more on this, see Bell, *Fault Lines: Views across Haiti's Divide*.

61 These sources appear throughout this chapter. An excellent read for much of these discussions can be found in Mark Schuller and Pablo Morales, eds., *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti since the Earthquake* (Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2012).

62 An example of this form of journalism can be found in Douglas Brinkley, "Welcome to Camp Penn," *Vanity Fair* 1 July 2010. [www.vanityfair.com/news/2010/07/sean-penn-in-haiti-201007](http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2010/07/sean-penn-in-haiti-201007).

After the earthquake, the tent camp for displaced persons that immediately sprang up on the golf course in Pétionville was deemed unsafe due to flooding. Sean Penn, the Oscar-winning film actor, emerged after the earthquake as the head of a new NGO that would obtain access to projects and networks far beyond the norm for a new enterprise. Penn played a small, but important, role in the move of the Pétionville camp residents to an official redevelopment camp planned just north of the capital, in Corail. Promised jobs, many of these new residents journeyed out of the city to settle on land journalist Amy Wilentz notes “was owned by a consortium in which a number of Haiti’s most powerful families were involved.” Wilentz argues that this “barren, unpopulated area” soon became a new “money-maker” after the earthquake.<sup>63</sup> Journalist Jonathan Katz makes this point even plainer: “Everyone had dollar signs in their eyes.” Investigating the issue in 2010, he encountered mysteries. He discovered that “whoever had the land under the official camp [Corail] would finally be in line for compensation—under the terms of [Haitian President] Préval’s expropriation, the government would reimburse the owner, from a \$7 million fund expected to balloon.” But there were other players here in this exchange of land for power. Political scientist Charles Vorbe highlights the long-standing role of these players, arguing that “such is the case in Haiti, where humanitarian action [...] serves objectively as an instrument to reinforce the domination of the country by the US superpower and the ‘international community.’”<sup>64</sup>

Vorbe’s assessment accurately captures what happened next with recovery in Haiti. As the world mobilised to respond to the crisis—producing objects, people and products as varied as food, portable housing and health providers—donations amassed. A figure in the billions linked private citizens, charitable organisations, governments and intergovernmental entities. As Haitian communities came together and set up support networks and coordinated efforts to rehouse and assist displaced persons and those facing other crises—including threats to personal safety and sexual violence—everyone struggled to come to grips with the complex form of disaster capitalism that unfolded.<sup>65</sup> Writer and activist Naomi Klein provides the contours of disaster capitalism in her influential *The Shock Doctrine*. In it, she spells out the ways that regions and areas grappling with disasters become engulfed

63 Amy Wilentz, *Farewell, Fred Voodoo: A Letter From Haiti* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 113.

64 Charles Vorbe, “Earthquake, Humanitarianism, and Intervention in Haiti,” in Schuller and Morales, *Tectonic Shifts*, 62–63.

65 See Mark Schuller, *Killing With Kindness: Haiti, International Aid, and NGOs* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012) and Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

in the logics of capitalism that seek to profit from these destabilisations. Klein's work, focused on historical moments of instability (such as Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the Iraq War), has provided ready language to describe how companies and agencies find ways to profit from disaster.<sup>66</sup> In many ways, Klein's criticism of neoliberalism and radical changes to governmental policies that seek to increase profits—ostensibly of everyone but the affected citizens—accurately encapsulates the manoeuvrings in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. Key for us is less Klein's assertions of the role of capitalism in this process and more how racial capitalism—especially black labour—would enable the exchange of capital for power to play out.<sup>67</sup>

What happened next with the resettlement plan in Corail and the development opportunities described by Katz? Nothing. Paul Farmer had a front row seat to these plans as the then UN Deputy Special Envoy to Haiti, working under the then UN Special Envoy, former US President Bill Clinton. Farmer, writing about that time, notes how “the promise of construction jobs lured thousands to the deforested plain of Corail to stake out a claim in this promising frontier settlement,” until the rains made clear that this, too, was a flood plain.<sup>68</sup> Between the bureaucracy and the impacts of deforestation, Corail went from a stalled plan to a cancelled one. But the search for a major reconstruction effort continued—and it would hinge on black labour. Lots of labour.

Katz, writing about these new plans in the epilogue of *The Big Truck That Went By*, notes that much of the focus after Corail fell through was “on building infrastructure and housing for the Caracol Industrial Park near Cap-Haïtien.”<sup>69</sup> With investments of nearly \$300 million, and drawing together the US government (from the US State Department to US AID) and national and international leaders, charitable organisations and businesses, Caracol has been touted as the glittering answer to Haiti's infrastructural problems and recovery needs: move people away from the

<sup>66</sup> Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* and Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

<sup>67</sup> For more on the twinning of race and capital, see these formative works: W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of White Folk*, which appeared in his collection, *Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil* (1920). Copies and reprints of this seminal essay can be found in bookstores and online. For a free copy, access the *Darkwater* collection at: <https://archive.org/details/darkwatervoicesfooduborich/page/n5>. In addition to Du Bois, consult the work of sociologist and critical theorist Cedric J. Robinson, who offers a twentieth-century rendition of the tensions of these terms and their entanglements in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000 [London: Zed Books, 1983]).

<sup>68</sup> Farmer, *Haiti: After the Earthquake*, 160.

<sup>69</sup> Katz, *The Big Truck That Went By*, 281.

capital, repopulate depopulated areas, link transport grids, build better housing, draw in investment and, critically, buttress the garment industry (once again) as the core economic engine of Haiti's future.<sup>70</sup>

Katz has doggedly followed this story and illuminated the economic plans that lay at its foundation, the nexus of private and public entanglements that have drawn together agencies such as the Clinton Foundation and the Inter-American Development Bank and the role of international business investors. Writing in 2013, Katz notes how “hundreds of smallholder farmers were coaxed into giving up more than 600 acres of land for the [industrial] complex,” but vast areas in the park remain empty.<sup>71</sup> An early tenant still on site? Sae-A Trading Co. Ltd. A Seoul-based global garment company founded in 1986, Sae-A has close ties to Haiti's elite and influential UN representatives.<sup>72</sup> In establishing a base in Haiti, it received significant tax breaks, with guarantees of being settled within a northern powerhouse in Haiti that would stimulate the economy of the entire nation. This grand vision of the “new” Haiti brought together sectors to establish new ports and infrastructure—all on the basis of the “new” jobs promised to all.

Although the imagined and proposed 60,000–100,000 jobs have not materialised in Caracol, money keeps flowing to those invested in building the future of Haiti—and profiting from the labour of the masses. Pay remains cheap for the few thousands in employment in the park and questions continue about the completion of promised housing. While it may be tempting to blame government officials—Haitian or foreign—for the current state of play in the industrial park, this moment is actually part of a much longer cycle of labour and economic exchange. We will return to some of these moments, in future chapters, as they link to other constraints and issues related to black sovereignty.

70 See Jake Johnston, “Outsourcing Haiti: How Disaster Relief Became a Disaster of its Own,” *Boston Review* 16 January 2014. <http://bostonreview.net/world/jake-johnston-haiti-earthquake-aid-caracol>.

71 Jonathan Katz, “A Glittering Industrial Park in Haiti Falls Short,” *Al Jazeera America* 10 September 2013. <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/9/10/a-glittering-industrialparkfallsshortinhaiti.html>.

72 See Sae-A's company website, [www.sae-a.com/eng/main/main](http://www.sae-a.com/eng/main/main), for information from their perspective and this *ABC News* story by journalists Matthew Mosk, Brian Ross, Brian Epstein and Cho Park for a more critical perspective that includes a more in-depth analysis of Sae-A's relationship to the Clinton Foundation: <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/haiti-factory-big-money-state-department-clintons-meet/story?id=42729714>.

### Conclusion

As the first two chapters have shown, since the time of Toussaint, Haitian leaders have engaged in a tangled history of exchanging black and brown labour for capital, capital for power and power for even more power—in this case, sovereignty. Struggling against the vectors of containment and consumption that try to frame (or limit) black sovereignty, black nation-states, such as Haiti, find themselves paradoxically needing land, resources and bodies to resituate, secure and stabilise the muted aspects of their very power.

As this chapter demonstrates, Boyer is only one example of the entities who have engaged in brokering Haiti's image or exchanging labour for sovereign power, capital or recognition in the last few centuries. As the brief sketch of Caracol Industrial Park suggests, the ghosts of fungible black bodies remain ever present. As nation-states, corporations and politicians sell various truths about the lands around us, we must confront the role of power—and race—within these processes.

Chapter 3 delves into these roles and processes by examining some of the political manoeuvring, public performances and unrelenting constraints facing Haiti's sovereign project by the mid-nineteenth century. It does this by drawing together related case studies that illuminate the ways that Haiti's rulers, their antagonists and those who treated Haiti as a "problem" in the 1850s, utilised a diverse range of media and public spheres to engage in visual, rhetorical and physical battles over Haiti's sovereign rights and the performances of that power. These many configurations assemble into an intriguing archive of struggle that pushes against formulations that attempt to define black sovereignty as a racial burlesque.

# 3

## Burlesquing Empire

### Performing Black Sovereignty on the World Stage

Saint Domingue is first the “pearl” of the Antilles, the most perfected example of the plantation system, and then its egregious failure, a decline from splendour to unparalleled squalor in the years following independence. Lost in between is the emergence of the Haitian state itself.

Michael J. Drexler<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

I want to tell a story. The time is the 1850s. The place? Haiti. The narrative of the story foregrounds the political life of Faustin I, a forgotten Haitian monarch, his performance(s) of sovereignty and the ways that his machinations during this era would impact on the widespread use of images and objects that sought to transform Haitian sovereignty from parody to power. It is a narrative that also looks forward to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as it links activities from the past that challenged Haiti's sovereignty under Faustin I to contemporary moments that illuminate the complexity of black sovereignty's constraints. Although the nineteenth-century encounters described within this chapter occurred nearly half a century after Haiti's declaration of independence, they echo the unfinished sovereign encounters outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. These flashpoints highlight literary historian Michael Drexler's musings above about the ways that Haiti is tied to remnants of its colonial history as a perfect plantation machine, even as its revolutionary life challenged chattel slavery,

<sup>1</sup> Michael J. Drexler, “Haiti, Modernity, and U.S. Identities,” *Early American Literature* 43, no. 2 (2008): 354.

colonialism and black nullification. It is not surprising if somewhere lost in those grand skirmishes is the Haitian state. As noted in earlier chapters, this book fills this gap and draws together a range of materials, perspectives, objects and political thought in order to delineate the forms and fractures of black sovereignty. Although much of this book focuses on the ways that Haitian officials, cultural workers and ancillary friends (and foes) made black sovereignty legible, contested its existence, or continued to fight for its relevancy in global politics, it also argues that black sovereignty was and is an unstable, unfinished figuration.

As tempting as it may be to wish for a teleological narrative of becoming that sees Haitians and others of African descent breaking off chains of enslavement and figurations of political dispossession before emerging as full sovereign agents, the figurations of black sovereignty, as chronicled in this project, resist such formulations. As this chapter and the rest of the book shows, the performances and tropes within the frames of black sovereignty illuminate the muted, fragmented and, at times, fractured aspects of the political thought and actions at its core. Neither stable nor singular, black sovereignty was and always has been a constantly renegotiated and constantly redrawn set of political power-making and -forming across borders and between categories of difference. This is due both to the changing political nature of various cultures, colonies and nations within the Atlantic world and the agitations and resistances within communities that have sought (and sometimes violently demanded) the right to self-govern.

*The Unfinished Revolution* investigates and chronicles these tropes and histories, but it also asks us—critics, activists, citizens and other global workers invested in and concerned about black futurity—to hold black sovereignty as a real and critical “problem space” through which black politics and global political actions can be read, formulated and critiqued.<sup>2</sup> Anthropologist and Caribbeanist David Scott, in an illuminating conversation with cultural theorist, activist and sociologist Stuart Hall around the publication of Scott’s *Conscript of Modernity*, offers up a definition of “problem space” that is useful for thinking through black sovereignty:

[A “problem space”] is first of all a conjunctural space, a historically constituted discursive space. This discursive conjuncture is defined by a complex of questions and answers—or better, a complex of statements, propositions, resolutions and arguments offered in answer to largely implicit

<sup>2</sup> For more on the role and work of “problem spaces,” see David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity* and an illuminating discussion between him and Stuart Hall in *BOMB Magazine* 90 (Winter 2005): Artists in Conversation: <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2711/david-scott>.

questions or problems. Or to put this another way, these statements and so on are moves in a field or space of argument, and to understand them requires reconstructing that space of problems that elicited them.<sup>3</sup>

Seeing black sovereignty through this lens means that we neither reject sovereignty as a mode of politics nor unproblematically accept its purported self-legitimising properties. Instead, the grappling that I am proposing from a theoretical and a material perspective urges us to see how black sovereignty—even as an unfinished project—exists within the political structures and the lived experiences of nations that identify themselves, however spasmodically, as black. It is the reckoning with the embodiment(s) and performance(s) of black sovereignty alongside blackness's existence outside the frames of sovereignty's origins that moves this project into the wake that black queer theorist and visual culture scholar Christina Sharpe describes as “the ground that we walk on,” where we must reckon with the normalisation of “the requirement of our death” for this “so-called democracy.” In creating a space of care and thought in order to think about this wakefulness, Sharpe asks: “What kinds of possibilities for rupture might be opened up? What happens when we proceed as if we *know* this, antiblackness, to be the ground on which we stand, the ground from which we to [*sic*] attempt to speak, for instance, an ‘I’ or a ‘we’ who know, an ‘I’ or a ‘we’ who care?”<sup>4</sup> Black sovereignty exists within this same maelstrom of becoming, being and negation and takes some of its energies from Jared Sexton's recent call for “all black everything” in which he argues that “to think the terms of political analysis and mobilisation, to say nothing of aesthetic practice and judgment, through a black or blackened lens is to think from the point of constitutive exclusion from those very terms.”<sup>5</sup> Our task? To peel back black sovereignty's layers even as we resist placing black futures, and our radical hopes, in the hands of any sovereign state body—be it black or otherwise.<sup>6</sup>

3 *BOMB Magazine* 90, Artists in Conversation (Winter 2005).

4 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 7.

5 Jared Sexton, “All Black Everything,” *e-flux journal* 79 (February 2017), 10.

6 There is a wide and considerable debate happening within black studies, African diaspora studies and black political thought regarding blackness, antiblackness and black futurity. For an introduction to these discussions and the various forms of the interrogation of these terms and tropes, refer to many of the sources in this chapter, in addition to these texts: Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, “Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism,” *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 3 (June 2014): 669–85, Katherine McKittrick, “Mathematics Black Life,” *Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 16–28, Christina Sharpe, “Black Studies: In the Wake,”

Now, on to our story. In 1858, the US Secretary of State received a letter from a US-backed guano mining company. Guano, for those of you unacquainted with this natural resource, is excrement from birds and other animals that is high in phosphorous. It played a key role for a significant period of time in the nineteenth century as a way to augment nutrient-deficient soils, such as those in the south-eastern USA, with an abundant and natural fertiliser.

Most US farmers, at the time, sourced their guano from overseas and paid dearly for it. Southern plantation owners, determined to reduce these costs, began lobbying the US Congress to seek out and create American-controlled guano territories.<sup>7</sup> In 1856, the US Senate heard and responded to these requests, producing the Guano Act. After approval, the Guano Act legally granted US subsidiaries the temporary right to claim and extract guano from purportedly uninhabited and unclaimed territories.<sup>8</sup> For all intents and purposes, the act set up temporary US guano plantations around the world. These guano territories and islands played vital roles in the lucrative business of agro-economies.

The guano company representative writing directly to the US Secretary of State may have felt justified to bring his issue directly to the secretary given the importance of guano to the USA's economic growth. Regardless of whether he overstepped the chain of command by reaching out to a US cabinet official, he clearly felt that his company was entitled to US protection and support. In the letter, the representative outlines what he describes as the unjust interference from Haiti in the company's "legal" right to occupy and extract guano from Navassa Island, a 2-square-mile barren island, 30 miles south-west of Haiti in the Caribbean Sea.<sup>9</sup> Frightened and feeling terrorised by the Haitian vessels of war that encircled the company, the representative asks the US State Department for direct aid and protection against its Haitian aggressors. Although the letter captures the mood of the company and its perceived fear of Haitian retaliation against its occupation of Navassa Island, it also includes these lines regarding Haiti's claims to the island territory:

*Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 59–69, Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (New York: Penguin, 2015) and Jared Sexton, "The *Vel* of Slavery: Tracking the Figure of the Unsovereign," *Critical Sociology* 42, nos. 4–5 (2016): 583–97.

7 See Christina Duffy Burnett, "The Edges of Empire and the Limits of Sovereignty: American Guano Islands," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (September 2005): 779–803.

8 For a good overview on guano, see nn. 7, 64, 66 and 67, as well as Jimmy M. Skaggs, *The Great Guano Rush: Entrepreneurs and American Overseas Expansion* (London: Macmillan, 1994).

9 Navassa Island is currently administered, protected, financed and rigorously controlled by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as the Navassa Island Wildlife Refuge.

## Burlesquing Empire

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The claim of the Haytien government [...] is predicated upon the assumption that Navassa is one of the “dependencies” of St. Domingo [an alternative name also used to designate Saint-Domingue]; that it has become, as such, part of the Haytien territory, under the various political changes which have taken place in that quarter; and that Hayti has been in peaceable and undisputed possession of the same for half a century. The perfect *futility* and *absurdity* of these *pretensions* will be quite obvious to you.<sup>10</sup>

The above quotation highlights the ways that black sovereignty in the Atlantic world pivots between sovereignty’s need for recognition and the negation and nullification of blackness that makes normal sovereign acts—such as the moves by Haiti’s government to protect what it sees as its sovereign territory—absurd. Caught in this vortex, performances of sovereignty by Haitian officials remain read as illegible and pretentious. In refusing to recognise Haiti’s sovereignty, some political and economic actors attempted to frame and constrain Haiti’s sovereign contours by wresting control from Haitian officials, demanding that Haitian leaders give up certain sets of rights or, in the case of the guano mining company, refusing to acknowledge that Haiti has sovereign control or rights over anything. The last move is not surprising given that the processes of recognition and the material shape of its appearance, imbued (and continues to frame) Haiti’s sovereign claims with a specific racialised threshold—a threshold made all the more apparent in the refusal of the above company representative to regard Haiti’s claims to Navassa as valid or even possible. As this book has already shown, the company advocate would not be the first entity to refuse to recognise Haiti’s sovereign power.

Haiti’s conspicuous beginnings and its revolutionaries’ and early leaders’ unmoored radical conceptualisations of slavery, power and race impacted on dealings with it and conceptualisations of it by nineteenth-century thinkers, governmental bodies, politicians and businesspeople, such as the company representative, above. In the Atlantic world that swirled around it, Haiti’s demands of reciprocity shook up the contours of political power throughout the Americas by forcing various agents to see it and work either to negate or to fear its actions. The case above demonstrates both approaches and amply illuminates how disruptive black sovereignty would be as the actions of the Haitian vessels compelled the company to seek potentially violent countermeasures from the US military. Haitian officials understood the role of performance and would engage in this and similar dramatic international

<sup>10</sup> *Mr. Cooper to Mr. Cass, June 17, 1858. Letter. S. Ex. Doc No. 37, 36th Cong., 1st Sess. (1860); italics mine.*

acts in order to force other nation-states to recognise Haiti's borders, its sovereign rights and its power. Although the letter writer describes the purported fear of the company workers and officers, he also takes time to label Haiti's political strategies as *black farce*—or what I have come to see as a response to Haiti's racial burlesque.<sup>11</sup> Race, then, occupied a pivotal nodal point as symptom and emblem of Haiti's political and sovereign authority.

I have discussed in earlier chapters the ways that blackness flows as state(s) of contact, culture, resistance, presence/absence, nullification, materiality, politics and other figurations of being/non-being/fragmentation. Throughout this text, I have been confronting blackness, its futurity and political formulations, as it plays out and within sovereign spaces. In drawing awareness to these performances and their ramifications, I signal the importance of race and power to the rights and recognition of Haiti's political reality. It is hard to be sovereign and wield those rights amongst other nation-states when company representatives read the blackness of your politics as an indication of your black absurdity. Yet, there is also a powerful process of dismantling occurring by working within this space of abjection—the potential for different solutions. By unknowing sovereignty's enchained whiteness and rejecting its assertions about white superiority as the only form of politics, black sovereignty holds open black futures. Black sovereignty is not a sovereignty that's given meaning by displacement, dispossession or captivity, but one that's given meaning by political struggle. Although much of this book examines Haiti's fight for sovereignty as an unfinished project, there may be something quite productive in the incompleteness of these actions—if Haiti can control the terms, enabling a sovereign state to define itself, with its own contours and its own figurations that live within the impossibilities of black sovereignty's blackness. While blackness and sovereignty might not mix, in terms of sovereignty's origins, saturating various pathways of knowledge production and cultural forms with its reality allows for something else to emerge: a new currency in which black sovereignty does not mean absurdity. By burlesquing race, politics and empire, especially during Faustin I's reign, Haitian officials offer up a visual and textual “soup of signs” that transmit black sovereignty's contours, as well as demand a wider adoption of its terms.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For more on the ways that the performance of burlesque challenged particular cultural norms about beauty, sexuality and gender constructions, see Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) and Jacki Willson, *The Happy Stripper: The Pleasures and Politics of the New Burlesque* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Antonio Benítez-Rojo. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. James Maraniss (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.

In examining the unfinished aspects of Haiti's black sovereignty and the many responses to its presence(s) within the nineteenth century, and beyond, I have found a curious dilemma about the recognition of Haiti's sovereignty by other nation-states: the more Haitian officials act on behalf of the nation as a sovereign entity the less they would be recognised (at least by some) as anything other than an absurdity.<sup>13</sup> In these instances, displays of power by Haiti, such as the deployment of war vessels around Navassa Island in the story above, are categorised as pretentious efforts—futile dramatic demonstrations. These assertions, of course, are troubled by the very inclusion of the fears of the company, but there's something comforting, I sense, in the company representative's inclusion of immanent violence from black bodies and the curtailing of those bodies by powerful "others"—a kind of return to the normal order of black violent bodies needing the moderating influence of white masters. Yet, Haitian officials continued to perform sovereignty and demand equal status, even as the Atlantic world routinely identified, imagined and imaged Haiti as its *bête noire*, especially during the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

Imagining Haiti has always been a challenge. Euro-American artists, politicians and writers have attempted to frame and construct Haiti as various entities—from black rebels to black devils and everything in between.<sup>15</sup> In situating Haiti as the representation of diasporic hope and freedom, on the one hand, and symbol of unchecked black violence and dystopia, on the other, many cultural commentators struggle to reckon with the actual work of Haiti.<sup>16</sup> In imbuing the objects and narratives about Haiti with a fear of rebellious infection or violent contagion, opponents cast Haiti as abject. For some, conceptualisations of Haiti tended to echo the violence of the Haitian Revolution, complete with fantasies of the eradication of all white people if its rebellious energies spread to other regions. These fantasies of

13 The rare instances of entreaties of recognition (such as that offered by France in 1825) tended to come with enchaining capital conditions and fees.

14 In other places, I have categorised how Haitian leaders responded to these views of absurdity by enchaining racialised labour to Haitian soil. See Karen N. Salt, "Haitian Soil for the Citizen's Soul," in Joni Adamson and Kim Ruffin, eds., *American Studies, Ecocriticism, and Citizenship: Thinking and Acting in the Local and Global Commons* (London: Routledge, 2013), 37–49.

15 See these works for critiques of this imagery: J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), Krista A. Thompson, "Preoccupied with Haiti: The Dream of Diaspora in African American Art, 1915–1942," *American Art* 21, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 74–97 and Lindsay J. Twa, *Visualising Haiti in U.S. Culture, 1910–1950* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014).

16 For more, see Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*.

white removal suggest that black sovereignty—and, by extension, black freedom and politics—are threats to the “natural” order of the world. Rather than being an empty container for other people’s fantasies and fears, Haiti was/is an actual nation, engaged in continuous political acts and sovereign engagements that resist attempts to foreclose or contain those actions within the veil of violence or mimicry. This would be a challenging task in the face of repeated attacks by external agitators and other nation-states.

In the decades that followed the tumult of the Haitian Revolution, political agents and non-governmental representatives increasingly turned to Haiti, mostly for its strategic location within the Caribbean as an independent nation (and assumed manoeuvrable territory given its tenuous position amongst other nation-states) within a strategic shipping zone connecting Europe to the Americas. Those not focused on Haiti as a reacquisition or a new colonial acquisition sought additional ways (not unlike France’s 1825 indemnity and debt-holding) to occupy Haiti financially or extract its wealth. While wealth extraction remained a possibility, occupation remained difficult, especially given the fact that multiple versions of the Haitian constitution continued to forbid land ownership by foreigners. As a result of the capital desires and territorial fantasies of Atlantic agents and Haitian officials, people continued to seek out ways to profit from its former plantation economy wealth, in addition to the fears and hopes regarding Haiti that encouraged people to converge on Haiti, talk about Haiti and negotiate with Haitians for profit and political gain. Haiti, for all intentions, was a coveted territory. Haitians? Routinely belittled, even by those in and outside of the USA who valorised Toussaint Louverture.<sup>17</sup>

Rather than accept these silences, challenges and manipulations, Haitian rulers accessed new and old tools in order to present a new currency of blackness and politics that took the form of Haiti’s evolving black sovereignty.<sup>18</sup> Included within these tools and productions were visual and textual compilations of power crafted by, about or for Haiti’s political elite. In Chapter 2, I presented the painting of Jonathas Granville by Philip Tilyard that hangs in the Baltimore Museum of Art. Additional images circulated in the Atlantic world, including portraits of Henri Christophe,

<sup>17</sup> For more on the valorisation of Toussaint Louverture, see the recently published Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, *Toussaint Louverture*.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the performance of these rights, see Karen N. Salt, “Ecological Chains of Unfreedom: The Challenges of Black Sovereignty in the Atlantic World,” *Journal of American Studies: Special Issue “Acts of Emancipation,”* 49, no. 2 (2015): 267–86 and Karen N. Salt, “Migrating Images of the Black Body Politic and the Sovereign State: Haiti in the 1850s,” in Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Leigh Raiford, eds., *Migrating the Black Body: African Diaspora and Visual Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 52–70.

images of Toussaint and what I will focus on for a portion of this chapter, a set of images and objects associated with the last emperor of Haiti, Faustin-Élie Soulouque (1849–59).<sup>19</sup>

Faustin I, as he was known, makes a curious case study for black sovereignty given the power—and the brutality—that he wielded against his people. Although prone to violent attacks, culling of opponents and the suppression of dissent during his monarchy, his activities as a member of the rebel forces during the Haitian Revolution hint at a quieter figure. From what we know of his early life, Soulouque was born in 1782 to parents purportedly from Africa. Born into enslavement, Soulouque would grow up and eventually join the side of the freedom fighters. Chroniclers produced few narratives of his exploits at the time. A member of the armed rebellion, his memory is not enshrouded in the same mystique and rebellious agitation as Toussaint or Dessalines.<sup>20</sup>

Soulouque used his military training to set up a respected, but arguably unremarkable career. Post-independence, as a member of Haiti's new military, he would serve under various leaders before becoming the head of the presidential guard during the presidency of Jean-Pierre Boyer.<sup>21</sup> Everything changed for him when his name was put forward as a compromise presidential candidate (and possible puppet figure) during a battle between factions for the future of Haiti in 1847.

He moved into office without bloodshed or drama hanging over his presidency. This temperate state would not last. Soon, public bodies, adversaries and even supposed friends felt his wrath when anyone opposed his policies or his rule. Soulouque also turned his eye toward to Santo Domingo (the other side of the island). Historian Anne Eller notes how France's

19 For more on these images, see n. 20 and Tabitha McIntosh and Grégory Pierrot, "Capturing the Likeness of Henry I of Haiti (1805–1822)," *Atlantic Studies* (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2016.1203214>. New work is also being prepared by a crop of scholars who focus on Soulouque, such as historian Jack Webb, whose thesis "Haiti in the British Imagination, 1847–1904" (University of Liverpool, 2017) is a compelling work. Although this chapter traces the nineteenth century, the imaging of Haiti with and through its political leaders continues to the present day. For a contemporary example, see the photo exhibition that includes a focus on Haiti's presidents, captured in Paolo Woods and Arnaud Robert, *État* (Arles: Éditions photosynthèses, 2013).

20 In addition to n. 24, see Karen N. Salt, "Faustin I," in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Franklin W. Knight, eds., *Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

21 Scattered scholarly works on Haiti tend to cover Faustin's history, but two in-depth pieces provide more focused coverage, albeit from a fairly negative perspective: John E. Baur, "Faustin Soulouque, Emperor of Haiti His Character and His Reign," *Americas* 6, no. 2 (1949): 131–66 and Jennie J. Brandon, "Faustin Soulouque—President and Emperor of Haiti," *Negro History Bulletin* 15, no. 2 (1951): 34–37.

flirtations with protecting Santo Domingo, Haitian citizens' demands for reform and British overtures for reunification may have spurred Soulouque to engage in an ill-fated imperial campaign to invade and absorb Santo Domingo (again) into Haiti.<sup>22</sup> Diplomatic historian Rayford Logan sees this campaign as part of the financial response to France's economic pressures on Haiti. With Santo Domingo's wealth added to Haiti's coffers, Soulouque would be able to specifically use "the Dominican customs revenues to help meet Haiti's obligations on the French indemnity and debt."<sup>23</sup> Rather than retreat in the face of these significant battles and detractors, Soulouque ensured that he would rule for life, with absolute control. In 1849, Soulouque, the president, became Faustin I, the last emperor of Haiti. His assumption of this new role came after the Haitian public purportedly demanded that he become emperor. Supposedly, influenced by the public outcry of support, officials quickly "ratified" the decision. Within a short period of time, the president had new imperial clothes. Reports circulated around the Atlantic world of Faustin I's opulence and his ostentation. If these reports are true, this was a man clearly prepared to wear his power for all to see.

Although Soulouque is not remembered today as a significant Haitian leader like Duvalier or Aristide, during his day, Faustin I was well known. Brutal and often described as paranoid in circulating public documents, Faustin I also played a significant role in altering the language and discussion about Haiti by offering a new currency—black sovereignty.

This chapter picks up Soulouque's many performances of sovereignty and acts of recognition through a focus on moments in the 1850s where Soulouque and his supporters demanded recognition and displayed Haiti's power to the world (including a display of power over the USA's "capture" of Navassa Island) before turning to the ecological chains and sovereign battles that remain at the heart of contemporary entanglements between the USA and Haiti over Navassa Island. Within these moments, black sovereignty emerges as a form of currency that, in its reach and extension into various networks and pockets of life, overcomes the very subjects and entities that reject its claims. In many ways, by being everywhere, Soulouque's black sovereignty attempted to normalise images and language that comingled blackness, power and politics. I end the chapter with a focus on our contemporary moment, pondering what does being seen mean for Haiti given the ongoing challenge(s) to its unfinished sovereignty—especially as it relates to the USA's continued sovereign claims to Navassa.

<sup>22</sup> See Anne Geller, *We Dream Together: Dominican Independence, Haiti and the Fight for Caribbean Freedom* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 49–58.

<sup>23</sup> Rayford W. Logan, *Haiti and the Dominican Republic* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 34.

### Burlesquing Empire

In the 1850s, performing sovereignty while black would often be greeted in the wider Atlantic world with disdain. Grovogui ties the frequent attacks on Haiti's sovereignty to racialised notions of political aptitude and power. He maintains that some universal features of modern politics or legal theory—such as sovereignty—are in actuality produced *through* articulations of racial difference, as in many cases “the modern law of nations has been proposed by a select group of nations,” in order to foreground hegemonic practices.<sup>24</sup> Although many politicians, theorists, jurists and scholars argue for or resist sovereignty's reach and existence, it cannot be argued that sovereignty played and continues to play a significant role in the worth and abilities of non-white nations. For leaders such as Soulouque, recognition was not just a legal challenge to disavowal. With it carried notions of reciprocity and equality that meant that all sovereign nations were sovereign entities. Soulouque quickly recognised that he, and by extension Haiti, would not be granted this power, so he crafted it—and in so doing turned the pejorative notions of Haiti's burlesque on its head.

In 1849, just after he made himself emperor, Faustin I was immediately attacked in the US press for his title, his assertions of nobility and his creation of royal titles and ranks for his supporters and family. The *Saturday Evening Post* went on the attack, arguing that Faustin I's first proclamation “*might* almost be deemed a burlesque, it is so full of protestations of liberty [and] equality.”<sup>25</sup> Although the writer uses conditional language, the implication is clear: Faustin I's claims of black sovereignty were absurd.

Other publications shared the joke, but also found themselves reproducing Faustin I's texts or (re)presenting illustrations of his imperial power. This was the case with the popular Boston-area *Ballou's Monthly Magazine* that published an overview of Faustin I's reign in 1870. In “An Emperor's Toothpick,” the magazine's writer paints a portrait of Faustin I as a “dark specimen” wandering amongst the nation's “uncrowned vagabonds.”<sup>26</sup> Although by that time French satirists and parodists had linked Soulouque's rule with Louis Napoleon's, the Atlantic world also had to deal with a ruler who proved reluctant to budge on his power.<sup>27</sup> The magazine offers a representation of that

24 Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*, 43–44.

25 “Hayti,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 29 September 1849, vol. 29 (1470): 2; italics mine.

26 “An Emperor's Toothpick,” 507.

27 There is not enough space here to chronicle France's complex relationship with race, slavery, republicanism, colonialism and Haiti. All must be comprehended in order to understand how mid-nineteenth-century French viewers would read the likeness of a Haitian emperor and his black political body. For more on these tangled

strength in its depiction of the objects connected to Faustin I's sovereignty. According to the writer, the most important sovereign object after Faustin I was his "imperial dagger"—derogatorily identified in the article's title as the emperor's toothpick. The article takes pains to suggest that Faustin I was a silly emperor, ruling an absurd nation, who, as a violent and subhuman ruler, carried ridiculous tools as objects of power.

If the article followed the pattern of public discourse and knowledge about Faustin I, it should have presented him as a fool in imperial robes: a buffoon pretending to have airs and graces. Instead of presenting an actual toothpick, the article recounts the material reality of the emperor's treasures and then circulates that knowledge, producing a new currency about Faustin I's (black) sovereignty. For example, the magazine writer describes Faustin I's dagger as dangerous. Utilising language that elicits fear, the writer fantasises (and titillates) about the blood that might remain on the dagger's hilt. At the time of this article's publication, Faustin I had been out of power for over a decade. Yet, his memory helped circulate language and contestations about Haiti's sovereignty even after his removal from the throne. This 1870 retrospective illuminates how much recognition may have changed the image of Haiti, as the USA's recognition of Haiti in 1862 probably enabled the writer of the article to claim that the world now recognised the possibility of "colored rulers."<sup>28</sup> Recognition may have formally been offered by the USA to Haiti, but seeing Haitians as capable and powerful people engaged in political acts had not. By linking Faustin I with Haiti in the 1870s, the article suggests that all Haitian leaders use daggers as toothpicks—hinting at Haitians' dangerous and bloodthirsty "nature."

This narrative of primitivism and brutality is circumscribed within the article by the writer's reckoning with the actual imperial objects that embodied Faustin I's rule and circulated as representations of that power in the Atlantic world. Although the article contains language of dis-ease often associated with Haiti, it inserts information—perhaps prepared by Faustin I and his official representatives—about the cultural objects and images related to Faustin I's imperial reign that, I argue, troubled the continued configurations of pejorative ideas about Haiti. These new narratives rejected depictions of Faustin I and his nation as an imperial minstrel show for the global masses.<sup>29</sup>

ideas, see Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-revolutionary France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002) and Christopher Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> "An Emperor's Toothpick," 507.

<sup>29</sup> The best example of this type of artwork can be found in the images of French

Resisting these assumptions made Faustin I a target as he began a series of disastrous attempts to outmanoeuvre his imperial opponents, notably the Americans, the British and the French who each wanted greater control of the prized shipping lanes connecting Latin America and the Caribbean to global markets. Laurent Dubois suggests that “Soulouque was also aware that some [US] Southern planters had an ambitious plan for the Caribbean: they dreamed of taking over Cuba and making it into another slaveholding state of the United States.” He continues, noting how a number of US philanthropists, capitalists and annexationists turned to the Caribbean with dollar signs in their eyes and a deep-seated conviction that “the population of the Caribbean” was “in desperate need of help and discipline from the north.”<sup>30</sup> Jennie J. Brandon, writing in the mid-twentieth century, describes the world Haiti faced in the 1850s:

An outcast among the nations of the world, not one of which would accord her official recognition, Haiti was beset by demands from foreign governments [...] secession of the Spanish part of the island, a legacy of dissension between the northern and southern [...] districts [and] unrest among the peasants.<sup>31</sup>

Although Brandon ignores France’s recognition of Haiti in 1825, possibly due to its damning indemnity clause, the world that she describes adequately captures the difficulties Soulouque encountered turning his country, and his reign, into a power house. Displaying that power to his critics may have influenced Haiti’s subsequent involvement in 1853 in the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations held in New York (hereafter referred to as the Exhibition).

The roots of the Exhibition can be found in another fair: the 1851 Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations that took place in

caricaturist and lithographer Charles Amédée de Noé, who created caricatures for the illustrated French newspaper *Le Charivari*, in addition to books, under the pseudonym Cham. By the mid-nineteenth century, publishing political satire in France was dangerous as it was banned by the ruling monarch, King Louis-Philippe I, who although initially the people’s king became more and more conservative and controlling. By the time the Second Republic began in 1848, caricaturists were able to work more freely, until the arrival of the Second Empire in 1852, under the reign of Napoleon III, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, brought strict fines and censorship. According to Elizabeth C. Childs, caricaturists such as Cham and Honoré Daumier articulated domestic issues through a specific foreign black body—Faustin I. For more on “*soulouquerie*”—a derogatory slang—and these satirists, see Childs, “Big Trouble: Daumier, Gargantua, and the Censorship of Political Caricature,” 26–37.

30 Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 147.

31 Brandon, “Faustin Soulouque,” 34.

London.<sup>32</sup> Exhibitions or expositions date back to the eighteenth century and typically focus on national interactions, with few international participants. By the early nineteenth century, national expositions were still the rule as grand celebrations of arts and industry took place in such varied sites as Vienna (1820), Berlin (1822) and Lausanne (1837). The first exposition to demonstrate a truly international sensibility was the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London. This event included nearly 14,000 exhibitors from around the world. Dubbed the Crystal Palace Exhibition in honour of the nearly 1 million square feet of space in the cast plate glass building that sat in the centre of the festivities, this global gathering set the standard for future international exhibitions.

Known as the first official world's fair, it was a resounding success. Visitors to the fair's site in Hyde Park were entranced by the wonder and industry of Britain, its empire and the other regions and nations on display from around the world. Opened by Queen Victoria, the Crystal Palace would become the symbol of Victorian England.<sup>33</sup> With receipts of over \$1.7 million, and an estimated income surge to London of about \$20 million, the London Crystal Palace exhibition set the stage and the tone for subsequent international fairs.<sup>34</sup> Even as the event unfolded, exhibitors and promoters considered how to replicate the fair's success in other venues. Many felt that it was time to take the show on the road. The USA beckoned.<sup>35</sup>

Most of the actual work in bringing the fair to New York began in earnest when Edward Riddle, who was the US Commissioner to the London Crystal Palace, assembled backers and permission to use Reservoir Park, an area near the New York Public Library's main building, and the private-public park near 6th Street and West 42nd in Manhattan (now known as Bryant Park), as the site for the new exhibition. Riddle eventually left the project, but interest in the scheme gained momentum.<sup>36</sup> The drama of its

32 Scholarship on the Fair is extensive. Two recent examples of the current positioning of the exhibition can be found in Jeffrey Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999) and Jeffrey Auerbach and Peter H. Hoffenberg, eds., *Britain, the Empire, and the World at the Great Exhibition of 1851* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

33 Anon., *The Book of the Fairs: Materials about World's Fairs, 1834-1916, in the Smithsonian Institution Libraries* (Chicago: American Literary Association, 1992), 4.

34 Anon., *Dedicatory and Opening Ceremonies of the World's Columbian Exposition. Historical and Descriptive. As Authorized by Board of Control* (Chicago: Stone, Kastler & Painter, 1893), 19.

35 For more on the Fair, see Horace Greeley, *Art and Industry: As Represented in the Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, New York, 1853-4* (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1853) and William C. Richards, *A Day in the New York Crystal Palace* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Co., 1853).

36 Although Riddle left the initiative, other investors joined, including the poet

birth was soon eclipsed by the opening of the gleaming New York Crystal Palace, which directly copied London's structure. Surrounded by nearly five acres of domes, galleries and towers, the Exhibition heralded a new vision of the world that focused far more on the Americas.

According to historian Charles Hirschfeld, "the exhibition flung a challenge to aristocratic Europe even as it deferred to Old World tradition."<sup>37</sup> An 1853 article published in the *Illustrated Magazine of Art* argued that the Exhibition was essential viewing as it "affords us opportunities to learn the present condition of the arts and progress of the race, such as we have never enjoyed before."<sup>38</sup> The author goes on to assert that Americans, especially, could benefit from this opportunity to learn about others.<sup>39</sup>

Historian Robert C. Post suggests that the Exhibition's leadership understood the importance of exchange and greater learning, arguing that by coming to the event US citizens would be able to witness:

speedy avenues and modes of transportation and communication, on rapid methods of exploiting natural resources, on keeping track of time, measure and quantity, on protecting the safety of persons and possessions, and on mechanizing the production of consumer goods and the whole range of operations relating to farming, food and textile processing, and clothing manufacture.<sup>40</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the nation-states on display at the Exhibition included the "leading" nations of the world, at the time, exhibiting the objects, culture, art and industry of Italy, Great Britain, Germany, France, Austria and Holland. Together, foreign exhibitors totalled nearly 2,700.<sup>41</sup> In the north-west corner of the Exhibition's Crystal Palace, tucked in amongst Italy, Austria and Holland was Haiti.<sup>42</sup>

Haiti's presence at the Exhibition may seem surprising given the circulating knowledges about Faustin I. As the earlier newspaper accounts suggest, there were competing ideas floating around concerning Haiti.

and journalist William Cullen Bryant and the nephew of novelist Catherine Maria Sedgwick. For more on this view of the Fair, see Robert C. Post, "Reflections of American Science and Technology at the New York Crystal Palace Exhibition," *Journal of American Studies* 17, no. 3 (1983): 337–56.

37 Charles Hirschfeld, "America on Exhibition: The New York Crystal Palace," *American Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (1957): 101.

38 "The American Crystal Palace," *Illustrated Magazine of Art* 2, no. 10 (1853): 258.

39 "The American Crystal Palace," 258.

40 Post, "Reflections of American Science and Technology," 341.

41 "The American Crystal Palace," 254.

42 Richards, *A Day in the New York Crystal Palace*, 26.

Faustin I may have seen this as an opportunity to alter the language and narrativisations—for good—about Haiti by participating in this global event. Exhibition materials repeatedly refer to Haiti (identified as Hayti) and include no references to absurdity. The burlesque had been effectively burlesqued—at least for a time.

The inclusion of Haiti with nations presumed to represent the foundations of civilisation and the forward-facing markers of modernity suggests that it was as an equal member of the family of Atlantic nation-states. Yet, circulating narratives challenged these attempts to bring Haiti into the global theatre of sovereign nations. This kind of resistance can be found in responses to a monetary dispute between several US citizens and Haiti that dated back to the time of Christophe. This dispute and others about rights and claims to authority prompted US officials to send ships in the 1850s to Haiti in order to intimidate Faustin I into resolving the situation. The *New York Herald* published an article about the altercation and Faustin I's role. In it, the article continually refers to Faustin I as a “nigger” and calls for him and his population of “niggers” to be beaten into submission. A follow-up piece went even further, declaring that if Haiti did not resolve the claims against it by US citizens, the US government—or some other powerful entity—should recolonise Haiti and re-enslave every Haitian encountered in the process.<sup>43</sup> Haiti, the *New York Herald* piece claims, was not just absurd, it was also morally abject and unscrupulous. Laurent Dubois notes, “if Soulouque was usually dismissed by external critics as stupid and inept, it was [...] in part precisely because he proved rather stubborn in the face of outside pressures, granting few concessions to foreign governments.”<sup>44</sup> These attitudes and rhetorical framing of Haiti were not present at the Exhibition.

To date, a full accounting of Haiti's objects at the Exhibition has not been compiled. Questions remain about the entire enterprise. How was the government approached to participate? Why was Haiti positioned in that part of the Crystal Palace? Who was responsible for ensuring their participation and organising their display? Writings that appeared at the time of the Exhibition suggest that Faustin I undoubtedly received and responded to the circular sent by the US Secretary of State that encouraged diplomats around the world to aid European agents who sought exhibitors.<sup>45</sup> Haiti wasn't European, but that didn't matter to Faustin I. How he would be able to use this targeting of “European agents” for his own positioning is not fully clear. That Haiti would be on display for the masses is part of

43 Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776–1891*, 249–55, as quoted in Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 148.

44 Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 146.

45 Hirschfeld, “America on Exhibition: The New York Crystal Palace,” 104.

the record. If Haitian diplomats, government representatives and business leaders did use consular networks and the circulation of tracts and missives with which to gain entry to the Fair, this would be a major coup, as US congressional discussions in the 1850s concerning Haiti tended to censor Faustin I's imperial desires regarding the Dominican Republic while at the same time labelling the nation as inherently dangerous (especially to the legal system of slavery in the USA). To many US politicians, Haiti, no matter its self-described majesty, remained troublingly black.<sup>46</sup>

For these and other reasons, the Haitian objects that circulated at the Exhibition—identified in some Exhibition documents as including samples of mahogany—put forward new language and images about Haiti. While some US politicians struggled to identify and recognise Haiti as a modern and industrious nation, others proffered a different view—even if it was motivated by capital urges. For the latter, Haiti was, for all intents and purposes, a nation deserving of being on display.

### Imaging Black Sovereignty

Around the same time that pejorative images and articles circulated about Faustin I and, curiously, just before the opening of the Exhibition, Faustin I assembled one of the most important contributions of his empire: an album of lithographs derived from daguerreotypes, including depictions of his royal family and portraits of his court. *Album Impérial d'Haïti* captures Faustin I's coronation ceremony in 1852 and offers compelling evidence of the power that Faustin I sought to infuse into his reign. As a historical record of the event, the album seeks to provide counter-visual rhetoric that challenged the pejorative ideas circulating regarding Faustin I's blackness and his rule. Rather than a mere illustration, these daguerreotypes offered the translation of information about Haiti as Haitians imagined it—not as critics and racists absurdly cast it. As an object, the album transmits its importance due to its size and its production value. Of course, as the images in the book are not the original daguerreotypes, but lithographs that have had additional material drawn on them (in some instances), they are not *exact* copies. Many people had a hand in the creation of the images: the sitters (minus the coronation scene), the daguerreotypists, the lithographers, the artists who drew additional details on/for the lithographs, and the printers.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> For a wide range of approaches and details concerning the invasion, see "Soulouque and the Dominicans," *Democrat's Review* 30, no. 2 (February 1852): 137; Britannicus, *The Dominican Republic and the Emperor Soulouque* (Philadelphia: T. K. Collins, Jr., 1852) and Logan, *Haiti and the Dominican Republic*.

<sup>47</sup> Three lithographers are mentioned throughout the album as offering their services:

Measuring just over 11 inches × 16 inches, the album is a stunning piece of art whose size allows significant details to be transmitted within every page. Published in Manhattan and produced by French-trained daguerreotypists, the album is a fusion of Atlantic creative talents and a transnational product—a feat that adds to the import of its production as an album of Haitian sovereign power. As a collection of pictures, the album joins a vital line of image-capturing by people of African descent who used this form to document their lives and the lives of their families.<sup>48</sup> Black visual cultural critics, such as Deborah Willis and Shawn Michelle Smith, note that as this visual form of image-capturing expanded, photography allowed people of African descent, including Frederick Douglass, to make visible their achievements, the respectability of their families and their humanity.<sup>49</sup> In discussing the ways that photography assisted the cultural work of black people, feminist theorist and American studies scholar Laura Wexler argues that photography had the potential to act as “a visionary force, offering an important avenue for change.”<sup>50</sup> African Americanist and visual culture scholar Leigh Raiford may have had in mind objects

Th. Lacombe (who is also listed as the printer), P. A. Ott and N. Corradi. C. Severyn and C. G. Crehen are credited with drawing (with notes of del. appearing after their names). One additional name, L. Crozelier, is signed against a few images, but is not given a role in the production of the prints. And these are prints meant for reproduction. At least two of the prints include this important detail at the bottom of the page: “Entered according to act of Congress in the year 1852 by A. Hartmann in the Clerks Office of the District Court of the Southern District of New York.”

48 The scholarship on black visual culture is wide and varied. Two relevant sources include Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) and Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). According to Tina M. Campt, photography has been an important medium for African diasporic peoples. Campt notes that photos have been used “to document and simultaneously pathologize the history, culture, and struggles of [African diasporic] communities,” even as the form also provided, “a means for challenging negative stereotypes and assumptions about black people in ways that create a counterimage of who they are, as well as who they might be or become.” For more on this, see Tina M. Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 5.

49 See Deborah Willis, “‘The Sociologist’s Eye,’ W. E. B. Dubois and the Paris Exposition,” in *A Small Nation of People: W. E. B. Du Bois and African American Portraits of Progress* (Washington, DC: The Library of Congress, 2003) and n. 60 for more on this.

50 Laura Wexler, “‘A More Perfect Likeness’: Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation,” in Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith, eds., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 18.

such as Faustin I's album in her call for more maps of "the vast [...] terrain of nineteenth-century photographic representation of the black figure," within disparate and "subordinate archives" that can help us understand how these representations shaped and distorted "the social terrain of this period."<sup>51</sup>

As the costs of producing photographs reduced, people who claimed an existence within the black world began to make those products speak for them. The album demonstrates how this trend could also produce new forms of visual discourse about the power of black nation-states. Archivist Joan M. Schwartz, in writing about the power of nineteenth-century photography for governments and businesses, argues that the form and content of this image-making could "convey government policy, communicate corporate ideology, construct national identity, shape collective memory, establish symbolic space, and define concepts of self and the cultural other."<sup>52</sup> If we turn these comments toward Haiti, it is possible to see the critical role that these images played in stressing and (re)dressing black power. Faustin I, by all indications, harnessed this powerful new visual technology in order to document and perhaps shift the conversation and presentations about Haiti, its sovereignty—and, ultimately, his.

This attention to form and look starts from the embossed cover design to the heavy stock paper used to convey the images to the viewer. This is a book of beauty that argues its importance in its very design. There are no caricatures or pejorative images about people of African descent within these pages. Instead, the book's collection of ten royal images and one frontispiece contain significant cultural details, including information about specific people's unique hairstyles. In illustrating the unique characteristics of Haitians, the album presents a collection of people rather than a collection of racial types that sought to borrow from the visual bank of scientific racism to offer black stereotypes of wide noses, enlarged eyes, distended lips and absurdly white teeth. See Figure 3.1 for the grand Frontispiece that includes the Emperor's crest and Figure 3.2 for a portrait of Faustin I.

What emerges within the album's pages was a feat only possible due to the increasing technological advancements that reduced processing times and allowed travelling daguerreotypists to tour the world and record life outside of studio settings. A. Hartmann is one of the main photographers

51 Leigh Raiford, "Ida B. Wells and the Shadow Archive," in Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith, eds., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 302.

52 Joan M. Schwartz, "We Make Our Tools and Our Tools Make Us: Lessons From Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomats," *Archivaria* 40 (1995): 42.

attached to the album. Specific images can be attributed to him as his name appears under various prints beside the title of daguerreotypist.<sup>53</sup> His life is a bit of a mystery, but after consulting with various archivists and other visual culture specialists, I now have more information about his migratory life as a photographer.<sup>54</sup> Sources suggest that Hartmann travelled extensively throughout the Caribbean and may have encountered Faustin I during one of these journeys. Although his exact locations and lengths of stays remain shrouded in uncertainty, the dates of the album suggest that Hartmann was in Haiti for the public coronation of Faustin I in 1852.

Rather than representing the people of Haiti, this album of power offers a visual record of black imperialism, including rarely seen portraits of Empress Adelina (identified in the print as L'Impératrice Adelina) (Figure 3.3) and Princess Olive (Figure 3.4). As the only images within the album of women, the portraits offer compelling counter-responses to the black masculinity on display within the pages. Although both wear gowns and jewels, they also stare resolutely at the viewer and are positioned at the centre of each shot. The only thing that surrounds them is a white space. Framed in white, but depicted with darker skin tones, the two women seem to shimmer on the page, not as exotica, but as persons captured, for a moment, in their power—even as they are ironically surrounded by the men who sit on the throne and govern the country. Empress Adelina's and Princess Olive's portraits are not action scenes, such as the photograph of the public coronation that displays throngs of bodies watching the events unfold. Instead, these sittings are more private; yet, they too seem as if they are on display for others to watch, and witness, their world. We are only just beginning to put together knowledge about this album, its importance and the ways that it came together, but the themes, tensions and constructions of power contained within its pages and in its possible circulation demand future work and investigation.<sup>55</sup>

53 His name appears at the bottom of a number of the images within the album.

54 I would like to thank Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby and Leigh Raiford for providing me with access to information on A. Hartmann. I would especially like to thank Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby for the chance to read a version of her *Art History* essay, "Cursed Mimicry: France and Haiti, Again (1848–1851)" before it was published. The helpful and always supportive curatorial team of the Americas at the British Library also provided additional material, advice and information regarding the album.

55 The full album is available in the British Library and in other archives around the world. Additional single prints of specific lithographs are available for viewing at the Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture in New York and may be housed in additional archives as prints or as an original copy of the album.



**Figure 3.1** N. Corradi, “Empire d’Haïti,” lithographic plate 1 from *Album Impérial d’Haïti*, New York: Th. Lacombe, 1852.  
© The British Library Board, HS.74/2132.

Although we do not know every detail about the album and its commissioning process, we do know that it had an impact on visual attempts to configure Haiti. One example comes from an 1856 article in the *Illustrated London News (ILN)*. A weekly British newspaper that boasted a large readership, the *ILN* aimed to provide its avid readers with visual content. This particular article does not disappoint. Entitled “His Imperial Majesty Faustin, Emperor of Hayti,” the article casts Haiti as the Atlantic world’s dark-skinned—and distempered—foundling: an aggressive and bumbling



**Figure 3.2** L. Crozelier after a daguerreotype by A. Hartmann, “Faustin ier Empereur d’Haïti,” lithographic plate 3 from *Album Impérial d’Haïti*, New York: Th. Lacombe, 1852. © The British Library Board. HS.74/2132.



**Figure 3.3** L. Crozelier after a daguerreotype by A. Hartmann, “L’Impératrice Adelina,” lithographic plate 4 from *Album Impérial d’Haïti*, New York: Th. Lacombe, 1852. © The British Library Board. HS.74/2132.



**Figure 3.4** P. A. Ott after a daguerreotype by A. Hartmann (with additional drawing by C. G. Crehen), “S. A. I. Madame Olive, Fille de L. L. M. M.,” lithographic plate 5 from *Album Impérial d’Haïti*, New York: Th. Lacombe, 1852. © The British Library Board. HS.74/2132.



**Figure 3.5** Illustrations of Faustin I and Empress Adelina, copied from lithographs by L. Crozelier that were derived from daguerreotypes by A. Hartmann, as found in the *Album Impérial d'Haïti*, New York: Th. Lacombe, 1852. “His Imperial Majesty Faustin, Emperor of Hayti,” *Illustrated London News*, 16 February 1856, 185.

entity engaged in a comedy of errors as a nation-state on the international stage.<sup>56</sup> According to the author of the text, the entire imperial drama produced “the best burlesque upon an empire that the most fertile brain [...] could have imagined.”<sup>57</sup> But something else is happening in these pages. Alongside these comments and caricatures is a set of images that critiques these views by their very inclusion. Alongside the negative text sit two large and detailed images of the last emperor of Haiti, Faustin I, and his wife, Empress Adelina (Figure 3.5).

At first viewing, the images seem out of place. They do not relate to the content, narrative and information about Haiti contained in the article. They also do not conform to the same themes that the article highlights. These are

<sup>56</sup> “His Imperial Majesty Faustin, Emperor of Hayti,” *Illustrated London News* 16 February 1856, 186.

<sup>57</sup> “His Imperial Majesty Faustin, Emperor of Hayti,” 186.

not images of buffoonery or absurdity. Instead, the emperor and his empress are presented, in separate illustrations, in all of their regal glory. In full-body portraits, Faustin I and Empress Adelina display their power and wealth for all to see, complete with crowns, robes and monarchical finery.

The images of Faustin I and Empress Adelina are copies of their portraits within the *Album Impérial d'Haïti*. Accompanying a negative article about Faustin I, these images are not signed or attributed, but their form and figuration does more than merely suggest a similarity to the album. These are the same images—complete with jewels, sceptres and crowns. Questions remain about the album's reach across the Atlantic and how the unattributed illustrator for the *ILN* got his or her hands on them. Did the album circulate across the sea during its initial publication? Did Faustin I bring his commissioned portraits as one of Haiti's displayed objects at the Exhibition? Although the illustrations are not signed, it may be possible to learn more about the illustrators at *ILN* and whether this particular illustrator travelled to the Exhibition. It may also be possible to find more Exhibition content connected to Haiti. What cannot be disputed is the fact that images within the album left the confines of that space and became “normativised” as generic illustrations of Haiti and its ruler. Although not a permanent (re)configuration, this change did offer a markedly distinct and important new visual vocabulary. As the example of the *ILN* demonstrates, there may be other illustrations from the album that also circulated—offering new visual narratives about blackness, power, politics and sovereignty.

The next section of the chapter returns us to the story of Navassa Island that we began with in order to see how confluences of Haiti's sovereignty with absurdity can morph into transnational strategies of “protection” that remain supported by older logics of control. This is not a pivot of focus. Navassa Island will emerge as a sovereignty crisis during the midst of Faustin I's reign. Ironically, as he tried various attempts to ward off US intermediaries and companies from acquiring Haitian territory, his efforts were dismissed as futile, absurd and pretentious—as the story that started this chapter, shows. Read alongside information about Faustin I and the caricatures circulating around the time of the album, it is possible to see the links between territorial acquisition, black nullification and sovereign negation.

In picking up the story and following it from the perspective of Navassa, the remaining section of this chapter makes it clear that this moment of “sovereignty under siege” was not a response to the power of Faustin I but to all of Haiti, forever enchainning its sovereignty to the extractive demands of others. In what follows, I unveil the ways that continued political, capital and environmental fights over Navassa challenge Haiti's black sovereignty. As an interesting case study of the contours and limitations of black

sovereignty, Navassa amply demonstrates the “unfinishedness” of this project and the political struggle that we must make visible in order to disentangle black nullification and disempowerment from new frameworks of “saving” and “protecting” the planet—or articulations of recognition or belonging that reify the absurdity or limits of black sovereignty (a refrain that I will explore in greater detail in Chapter 4).

### Ecological Chains of Unfreedom

As discussed above, Haiti’s nineteenth-century performance of black sovereignty made visible the challenges and constraints of black power in an Atlantic world where the lives and afterlives of Atlantic racial slavery seeped within the land and the lives of many people. Of course, pejorative articulations of people of African descent are not surprising given the ways that imperialists and colonial-minded people across temporal and geographical zones have paradoxically diagnosed Haiti’s (and by extension the Caribbean’s) supposed “ills” while working furiously ecologically, materially and economically to consume it. Thanks to the work of critics such as Sheller, we can more subtly trace the ways that Caribbean “things and or commodities” are consumed, “as well as entire natures, landscapes, cultures, [and] visual representations,” forming all manner of chains of belonging and chains of unequal power relations.<sup>58</sup>

The particular chains under discussion in this final section are ecological and geopolitical in nature. My ecological slant to black sovereignty occurs at a prolific time in the “greening” of the humanities. In recent years, new journals and books have emerged that have moved environmental studies and ecocriticism from nature writing or examinations of unspoiled wilderness to a more global environmental justice and even postcolonial edge.<sup>59</sup> Literary and postcolonial critics Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley note the importance of the latter lens, suggesting that “place [...] might be defined geographically, in terms of the expansion of empire; [...] genealogically, in linking communal ancestry to land; as well as phenomenologically, connecting body to place.” They go on to note that “place encodes time, suggesting that histories embedded in the land and sea have always provided vital and dynamic methodologies for understanding the transformative impact of empire and the anti-colonial epistemologies it tries to suppress.”<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 14.

<sup>59</sup> Examples of this include n. 24 and Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, eds., *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (London: Routledge, 2009) and the new journal, *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities*.

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, “Introduction: Toward an

As I argue here these places transmit the vectors, limitations and contours of ecological enchainment that illuminate the problems and figurations of black sovereignty.

To understand more of this, let's return to Navassa Island. Although Navassa has a long history as a site for itinerant fisherfolk to catch bounty from its near coastal territory, I want to begin this story of Navassa during Faustin I's tumultuous reign in the 1850s and during the global mania regarding guano. Although it is the story of a singular moment in a longer sovereign battle over the control of Navassa, I use it to argue that there has been (and continues to be) an ecological chain that entwines racialised notions of power with racialised notions of sovereign rights.

The ecological and geopolitical challenges to spaces, such as Navassa, garner little notice in a world swept along by a hyper-media focus on grand geographical events, such as Hurricane Sandy in the USA and the 2004 earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean. Going further back in time does not remediate this tendency. Navassa, for all intents and purposes, is a small, uninhabited and remote island in the Caribbean that has had a spectacular history—one that has remained mostly unexamined. Its history unfolds without the grand sweep of blood of the Haitian Revolution, the labour upheavals of Jamaica or Grenada or the social unrest of Cuba. Instead, Navassa's waters have been fished and its shores travelled to and from by humans and non-humans alike for a very, very long time.

Although a non-actor in Atlantic emancipation movements or strategies of political change, Navassa is at the heart of a key sovereign conflict in the region. This role may be surprising given the fact that Navassa is a territory that has mostly existed within the shadowed recesses of global modernities. Elsewhere, I have labelled such island sites as "twilight islands"<sup>61</sup>—critically important to geopolitical processes and global capitalism but nonetheless neglected. The Caribbean has a significant number of these sites—both those engineered, such as the resort island, Atlantis, and those ignored, such as Navassa Island.

Navassa's history is almost a textbook illustration of the historical processes of consumption and accumulation that have enabled certain Caribbean sites to move in and out of geopolitical importance. This may be a surprising fact given that Navassa Island is bounded by dense coral reefs, measures about 2

Aesthetics of the Earth," in Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, eds., *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

61 My conceptualisation of "twilight islands" in the Caribbean context is informed by anthropologist Marc Augé's conceptualisation of non-places. For more on this, see Marc Augé, *Non-places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (London: Verso Books, 2009).

square miles, and is, most importantly, situated off the south-western coast of Haiti in the Caribbean Sea. Isolated, rocky, and difficult to reach, the island lacks fresh water, but has become a centrally important node in the geopolitics of the region.

Isolated from the cultural imaginary of the Atlantic world and often removed from critical examination, islands such as Navassa operate as intriguing locales whose natural resources, economic contribution and sovereign status remain unnoticed. In essence, by existing outside of public scrutiny, these locales have been (and can continue to be) consumed and exploited (and even protected) at will by an increasingly diverse range of power players. In many ways, what appears here about consumption, shadowy deals and resource extraction are processes of control that regions—including spaces outside of the Caribbean—have dealt with for centuries. What I offer are new tools and cases within which to understand how race and sovereignty move through and within consumptive and capital constructs of the land—and its uses. The need for this type of analytical lens becomes apparent once one considers the Caribbean, with all of its historical contingency and varied linguistic discourses, as a unit of analysis.

Individually small, sparsely populated and politically less influential than much larger regions in the world, the Caribbean Basin—even in its chaotic and assorted conglomerations of linguistic, economic and political entities—has come to see itself as a concentrated source of economic and ecological power in the world, even as North Atlantic global leaders have stressed the political instability and economic underdevelopment of some territories and nations within the region.

Rather than offer you its entire historiography, I will focus on sporadic encounters in Navassa that would pit Haitian sovereignty against US demands, and forcible acquisitioning, of territorial claims. Reading across time, but rooting the investigation in place, allows us to understand the role Navassa plays in the economic fortunes of transnational political actors and the military industrial complex within the USA. Although predicated by different economic urges, the sovereignty battles that erupt across this terrain translate the macrobiota of the island and its surrounding reefs into a language of profit that conspicuously, in its unfurling, denies Haiti any recognition of its sovereignty. In addition, the activities that emerge in the period under investigation, including scientific expeditions, highlight the perceived absurdity (according to US representatives) of Haiti's attempts to wield power. Instead of directly colonising Haitian land or engaging in a covert attempt to neuter Haiti's long-fought-for independence (activities that the USA will enact in the twentieth century), the USA acquired and appropriated Haitian territory by delegitimising Haiti's, and by extension, Faustin I's, claims to power through repeated acts of non-recognition.

Our first moment of contact for review occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, not long before the exchange that opened this chapter, and was led by a team of engineers and metallurgists who went to Navassa at the behest of the Navassa Phosphate Company, a New York-based company that had a commercial interest in Navassa. In a report to the company about the island, one of the team members, with an eye on profit, notes, “exploration of this island could not have been made at a more propitious time.” It “opens a new era,” he continues, by “restoring and exalting the fertility of exhausted and worn out lands; [... Guano has] increased our agricultural products, and thus [...] our general welfare.”<sup>62</sup> He concludes with a special flourish: “I am happy to record here the discovery, I may say, of an inexhaustible quantity of a mineral substance [...] so instrumental in the development of agricultural wealth.”<sup>63</sup> Literary critic Jennifer James recently linked the agricultural wealth imagined by the team member with capitalism, noting that many of the labourers that mined this product in unsafe and unscrupulously managed conditions around the world were people of colour.<sup>64</sup> Navassa’s time as an itinerant fishing site had come to an end. Its age of racial capitalism had begun.

In 1856, when the Guano Act finally emerged from the US Senate, debate swirled around the potential for territorial creation, the dangers of making claims of sovereignty in foreign spaces and the limits of expansion. Proponents such as Senator Seward (the drafter of the bill that would become known as the Guano Act) scoffed at the notion that the bill created new US territories. “The bill is framed,” he claimed during discussion on the legislative floor, “so as to embrace only [...] the] more ragged rocks, which are covered with thus deposit in the ocean.” Any territories created from the act would only be used as extraction sites because they were “fit for no dominion, or for anything else, except for the guano which is found upon them.”<sup>65</sup>

Once approved, the Guano Act granted US subsidiaries, such as the Navassa Phosphate Company, the right temporarily to claim, occupy, and extract guano from uninhabited and unclaimed territories discovered to contain natural fertilisers, such as bird droppings, typically found on seacoasts.<sup>66</sup> The law also obligated any “discoverer” of a guano island to

62 Navassa Phosphate Company, *Report of Dr. G. A. Liebig* (Baltimore, MD: Navassa Phosphate Company, 1864), 5.

63 Navassa Phosphate Company, *Report of Dr. G. A. Liebig*, 8.

64 Jennifer James, “‘Buried in Guano’: Race, Labor, and Sustainability,” *American Literary History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 115–42.

65 *Cong. Globe*, 34th Cong., 1st Sess. 1698 (1856).

66 For a good overview on guano, see nn. 7, 8, 64, 67 and 69.

claim legal possession of the island for the USA and report that claim to the government before beginning any extraction of deposits.

As a testament to its focus on resource extraction rather than territorial acquisition, the act included an “out” clause allowing the termination of the claims of possession once the ecological resources had been forcibly (and violently) removed. The desire to control the removal of and profit from this mining drove the Age of Guano mania that involved multiple empires and cultivators in the nineteenth century. Environmental historian Gregory Cushman argues that guano allowed “our species to escape a major limitation imposed by the ecological old regime,” enabling crop yields to be pushed ever higher, no matter the resulting soil degradation and environmental loss of ecosystem viability.<sup>67</sup> Given this boost, nations around the world rushed to set up their own guano fields.

From the outset, the US government claimed that it wanted resources, not colonies. As a result, the Guano Act set about making the sovereign claims along these ecological chains both visible and temporary. It would do this by offering tangled legal language that allowed the islands to exist as “*neither* foreign *nor* part of the United States.”<sup>68</sup> This would be the juridical interpretation of these words within the act:

whenever any citizen of the United States discovers a deposit of guano on any island, rock, or key, not within the lawful jurisdiction of any other government, and not occupied by the citizens of any other government, and takes peaceable possession thereof, and occupies the same, such island, rock, or key may, at the discretion of the President, be considered as *appertaining* to the United States.<sup>69</sup>

These new islands were connected to the USA, but were not truly a part of it.

Just after the Guano Act of 1856 passed, Navassa ended up in the hands of Peter Duncan—and this was immediately challenged by Faustin I and his government. Duncan occupied Navassa for the express purpose of extracting guano and would eventually file the necessary paperwork declaring possession with the US government in 1857. Duncan would work with the Navassa Phosphate Company. By filing the claim, Duncan and his associates could obtain the full backing and protection of the US government for their enterprise.

They would need it. In a letter of 1858 from one of Duncan’s agents to

<sup>67</sup> Gregory Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 39.

<sup>68</sup> Christine Duffy Burnett, “The Edges of Empire,” 799.

<sup>69</sup> “48 USC 1411 Guano Districts,” *Legal Information Institute*, Cornell University Law School, [www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/48/1411](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/48/1411).

## The Unfinished Revolution

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James Buchanan, then President of the United States, the agent gives some scope as to the scale of extraction being undertaken on the island. He roughly estimates that about 80–90 men had pulled out some 3,000 tons of guano, an amount then valued at about \$22 a ton.<sup>70</sup> This wealth, the agent asserts, faced threats from a delusional Haitian government and its emperor who dared, “under the *absurd pretense* that Navasa is a ‘dependency’ of St. Domingo,” to place “the island in a state of blockade by its armed forces” (*italics mine*). As mentioned at the start of this chapter, Haitian vessels had entered Navassa’s waters and stopped any other ships from arriving at the island and those anchored there from departing. The blockade also prevented Duncan’s other ships “from leaving provisions or water for the men who are there.”<sup>71</sup> What they labelled as their rights, Faustin I clearly interpreted as a foreign occupation and set out forcibly to remove the invading forces. By describing his actions as a “pretense,” the agent sought to link Faustin I’s sovereign actions with comedy—deadly black comedy.

In the letter, the agent calls for redress by the USA against any lost property and capital due to the “imminent danger” the company faced by being exposed to the rapacious and frightening Haitians. Although he never actually labelled Haiti as the Atlantic world’s *bête noire*, his wording comes close, as he casts the Caribbean nation as a dangerous and potentially violent entity that only the might of the USA could stop. And Haiti definitely needed stopping, he argued, as it dared to interfere with “an American citizen, prosecuting a lawful trade,” and demand the cessation of excavation activities. The agent challenged how “a foreign government outside of its own territorial jurisdiction” could even attempt such a thing.<sup>72</sup> By refusing to extend this rationale to his own activities—or those of the USA—the agent failed to comprehend how the USA could be exercising a potentially unlawful sovereignty grab “outside” of its *own* “territorial jurisdiction.” This was—and remains—Haiti’s claim.

After the letter-writing campaign, the Commander of the US Sloop Saratoga, T. Turner, arrived in the Caribbean with his crew and went to investigate the situation in Haiti. In a letter recounting his time there to his superiors, he laments the entire affair, noting how it put him in an embarrassing and tenuous position to intercede in a fight between nations over the rights to “shit.” Continuously, he asserts that while he has no “opinion upon the points of disagreement,” he would “protect this company” on behalf of the USA; Haiti be damned.

<sup>70</sup> Mr. Cooper to the President, June 24, 1858. Letter. S. Ex. Doc. No. 37, 36th Cong., 1st Sess. (1860). Valuation listed also comes from the same Executive Document.

<sup>71</sup> Mr. Cooper to the President, June 24, 1858.

<sup>72</sup> Mr. Cooper to the President, June 24, 1858.

Within a short period of time, he learned that Duncan had a partnership with another man that dissolved acrimoniously. The bitter business break-up may have driven the former partner to approach the Haitian government and ask for the right to lease Navassa in return for a share in the profits. The entire affair would soon be exposed, prompting Haitian officials to cut all ties with Duncan's former partner. This did not make the issue of rights disappear.

Commander Turner encountered the question of Haiti's rights during his investigations when he interviewed Lieutenant Colonel Hogarth of the Haitian army. Hogarth, sent by the Haitian government to talk with Turner, stressed during his discussion with Turner that "the Island of Navassa is a part of the Haytien empire."<sup>73</sup> And he meant empire, not nation. Faustin I remained committed to retaking the other half of the island of Hispaniola. Haiti's invasion of the Dominican Republic dominated discussions in the US Congress that seemed to hinge not on Haiti's rights but the Dominican Republic's "race." This debate would get so heated that two different political tracts were published by Haiti's Commercial Agent in the USA, the Boston merchant B. C. Clark, on the blackness of the Dominican Republic—troublingly engaging in colourism politics around US recognition of Haiti, and Haiti's blackness, and US intervention in the Dominican Republic, and the Dominican Republic's purported non-whiteness.<sup>74</sup> Clark attempted to intervene in and shift political discussions circling in the USA that situated the Dominican Republic as a white nation in need of saving or protecting from the black brutality and absurdity of Faustin I.

Clark would also intercede in the battle over Navassa. In a letter of 13 November 1858 sent on behalf of Faustin I's government to the US Secretary of State Lewis Cass, Clark laments the "unauthorized" occupancy of Navassa by US citizens. He argues that "the territory over which Hayti now claims sovereignty was once the property of Spain, who, in the exercise of an undisputed right, ceded said territory to France" at the Treaty of Ryswick of 1697.<sup>75</sup> Clark goes on, though, stressing that France's recognition of Haiti as a sovereign nation in 1825 "vested her with the perfect title to the 'French part' (popularly termed) and all of its dependencies."<sup>76</sup> This undisputed claim had never been rescinded, Clark noted, stressing that

<sup>73</sup> *Commander Turner to Mr. Toucey, August 16, 1858. Letter. S. Ex. Doc. No. 37, 36th Cong., 1st Sess. (1860).*

<sup>74</sup> See B. C. Clark, *A Plea for Hayti, with a Glance at Her Relations with France, England and the United States, for the Last Sixty Years* (Boston: Eastburn Press, 1853) and B. C. Clark, *Remarks Upon United States Intervention in Hayti, with Comments Upon the Correspondence Connected with It* (Boston: Eastburn Press, 1853).

<sup>75</sup> *Mr. Clark to Mr. Cass. November 13, 1858. Letter. S. Ex. Doc. No. 37, 36th Cong., 1st Sess. (1860).*

<sup>76</sup> *Mr. Clark to Mr. Cass. November 13, 1858.*

“although frequently importuned,” Haiti had “never ceded, sold, or leased either of these dependencies to any nation, company, or individual.”<sup>77</sup> In linking Haiti’s revolutionary origins and anti-colonial tendencies with its black sovereignty, Clark asserts more than just rights: he sets up an ethical dilemma for the USA. Instead of merely being temporary extractors, Clark suggests that the USA was an imperial agent intent on trampling Haiti’s independence and ignoring its continuous presence in the world as a sovereign nation. To Clark, this non-recognition was unjust and racially motivated.

The Assistant US Secretary of State, John Appleton, would not address this challenge in a letter sent to Clark dated 17 November 1858. Called on to respond to Clark by his superiors, Appleton claimed that the USA had “sufficient proof” that Navassa had lain “derelict and abandoned” and, therefore, was an empty, available island for claiming—temporary claiming. As proof of this, he included a copy of the Guano Act of 1856 with his letter, in which he stresses “the act does not make it obligatory upon the government to retain permanent possession of the island.”<sup>78</sup> In retrospect, these are empty promises. The USA did, and continues to, possess Navassa. Why? And, more importantly, how? To understand these challenges, we have to move on a bit from the 1850s in Navassa.

After the Guano Act was signed, waves of convict and conscripted labourers—mostly American Africans—removed guano from Navassa. They worked in dangerous and horrific conditions, facing imprisonment for insolence, a significant lack of food and little or no safety provisions even as they used explosives to move their way across the island. This was deadly work that allowed no rest, sick leave or even a change of mind regarding employment. Nearly every man that came to the island to work for the Phosphate Company had their travel added to their lists of debts to pay back to the company. This system forced many workers into a cycle of acquiring debt and working to pay off the additional charges to the company.

In 1889, the stifling and violent conditions wielded by the white overseers finally came to an end when the black labourers on the island rebelled.<sup>79</sup> Although quickly arrested, the labourers faced a range of charges that in some cases carried a maximum penalty of death. Almost immediately, the men reported concerning the conditions on the island. While investigations into the working conditions commenced, legal allies and aid societies

<sup>77</sup> *Mr. Clark to Mr. Cass, November 13, 1858.*

<sup>78</sup> *Mr. Appleton to Mr. Clark, November 17, 1858. Letter. S. Ex. Doc. No. 37, 36th Cong., 1st Sess. (1860).*

<sup>79</sup> For more on the riot, see John Cashman, “‘Slaves Under Our Flag’: The Navassa Island Riot of 1889,” *Maryland Historian* 24, no. 2 (Fall–Winter 1993): 1–21.

in Baltimore, Maryland, such as the Grand United Order of Galilean Fishermen—a large, beneficial society open to men and women, with upwards of 50,000 members by 1897—banded together to raise funds for the costs of court cases and to publish information about the conditions the men faced while working for the phosphate company on Navassa.<sup>80</sup> In the trial that followed, the defendants' core defence centred on the fact that Navassa Island was Haitian territory. Since it belonged to Haiti, the USA had no sovereign rights within it. Consequently, as US labourers on Navassa, they were not subject to US laws. In essence, the entire case hinged on the USA denying Haiti sovereignty over its territory and applying US laws to the labourers working on the island. This claim was part of the defence in *Jones v. United States* heard before the US Supreme Court justices—the highest court in the land—in 1890.

They heard the case and returned a verdict. In a majority opinion, the justices rejected the claims of the defendants. In their written response, they also provided additional arguments that settled the constitutionality question of the Guano Act and provided legal frameworks that would appear, again, in the insular cases involving US sovereignty claims to Guam, Puerto Rico and other island spaces. In their majority decision, the justices argued that the Guano Act enabled permanent non-incorporation of land. It also made clear that Haiti's sovereign claims did not matter. In essence, their sovereignty was not recognised as sovereignty—at least not by the legal guardians of American law. The USA could acquire Navassa and interact with it as the government's designees saw fit—as long as their handling remained within the frameworks outlined within the Guano Act. What is critical for us here is not that guano mania swept the globe, but that Haiti's sovereignty would prove inconsequential in the face of the USA's determined right to acquire territory for its own environmental needs. This denial and disavowal plays upon the rhetoric of acquisition and emptiness that buttressed other imperial and colonial claims. Yet, in situating this decision within the midst of black nullification, it is possible to see the denial as emblematic of the “not quite realness” of Haiti's black sovereignty. It is not just that the nation is not sovereign enough; it is the fact that they will never be sovereign, at all, enabling the needs of a “real” sovereign always to matter more.

80 The Grand Order of Galilean Fishermen emerged just before the Civil War and combined symbolism (such as those used by Masons) with service, providing funds to cover funerals. As a fraternal organisation formed in Maryland, they are thought to have spread up and down the Eastern coast of the USA. For more on the Grand Order of Galilean Fishermen, see Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos and Marshall Ganz, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 47–49.

And the USA's needs regarding Navassa Island continued to extend. At the beginning of this chapter, I noted that Navassa was situated directly off the coast of Haiti, but I did not mention that it currently exists not as a guano island remnant, but as a protected, unorganised, unincorporated US territory, the Navassa Island Wildlife Refuge. No longer a guano site, Navassa is now a world-recognised biodiversity hotspot that purportedly needs protecting by the USA. The question remains: from whom?

Although companies would cease extracting guano on Navassa not too long after the *Jones v. United States* case, Navassa remained in the hands of the USA. It morphed from an environmental resource site to a military possession, eventually under the control of the US Coast Guard. A lighthouse appeared on its shores, but for all intents and purposes, Navassa remained a rocky, difficult to traverse island with no water and no people that the USA refused to cede back to Haiti or recognise Haitian sovereignty over.<sup>81</sup>

Haitians responded to this by performing acts of sovereignty on the island. In the 1850s, Haitians built cultural icons, such as a church, on the rocky island for fisherfolk, and broadcast radio shows from Navassa more than a century later.<sup>82</sup> Political scientist and legal theorist Fabio Spadi notes that while various US governmental departments posted “no trespassing” signs on Navassa, Haitian citizens continued to travel to the small island in the twentieth century, even though they faced immediate removal or possible detention—quite possibly at the US Naval base at Guantánamo Bay. Haitian governments since the time of Faustin I also kept up the pressure, publicly, by rejecting the USA's claims to Navassa and arguing their rights and sovereignty over the island. Haitian officials deny any rejection of their sovereign claims over Navassa and typically cite the Treaty of Ryswick and Haitian constitutions since Toussaint's in 1801 as proof of their territorial rights. Their arguments went unheeded, especially as the island became a critical geopolitical point on the shipping lanes to the Panama Canal. Navassa's military and strategic importance shifted, once again, in 1998 with a second research expedition to the island.

81 For more on Navassa, see sources in this chapter along with Karen N. Salt, “Twilight Islands and Environmental Crises: Re-writing a History of the Caribbean and Pacific Regions Through the Islands Existing in Their Shadows,” in Joni Adamson and Michael Davis, eds., *Humanities for the Environment: Integrating Knowledge, Forging New Constellations of Practice* (London: Routledge, 2017), 57–69. To read more about the work of the Humanities for the Environment, go to the website for the Humanities for the Environment Asia-Pacific Observatory, of which I am a key researcher. More on the mission and overall work of the Humanities for the Environment can be found here: <http://hfe-observatories.org/about/>.

82 Fabio Spadi, “Navassa: Legal Nightmares in a Biological Heaven?” *IBRU Boundary and Security Bulletin* 9, no. 3 (undated): 115.

In 1998, the US-based Centre for Marine Conservation led a scientific tour of Navassa. During this visit, researchers from US institutes, agencies and universities discovered nearly a hundred different indigenous macrobiota. In countless newspaper and journal accounts that heralded their “discoveries,” the expedition leaders described the island in terms that seemed to combine notions of ecological conservation with articulations of wealth and capital, calling it “a marvel of biological treasures,” “a true gem,”<sup>83</sup> and “green gold.”<sup>84</sup> Although the US-based scientists never discussed what these island gems were worth, others translated their language through the imperial and power processes of Haiti’s past relationship with Atlantic nation-states, prompting Lafanmi Lavalas, the political party connected to former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, to take to the streets in protest.<sup>85</sup> This was ecological imperialism at its most ardent.<sup>86</sup> In a move typical of the politics of the region, Navassa would cease being merely a guano island or a security site for US military officers of the seas. It would become a world treasure policed by the USA, an entity that designated itself the planetary sovereign.<sup>87</sup>

Today, Navassa is administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and federally protected as part of the much larger Caribbean Islands National Wildlife complex. A living museum, it remains in the hands of the USA. No longer a site for resource extraction, Navassa is a global ecological “gem” that the USA must protect. But, again, from whom? As of this writing, Navassa remains closed to local and regional traffic and mostly closed to researchers based at agencies and centres principally outside the USA. For the longest time, Haitians, even Haitian-based scientists, were barred from entry, and in the case of the scientists could not even accompany the US expedition teams.<sup>88</sup> Through these actions, the USA makes clear that Navassa Island does not need saving from the ravages of global climate

83 “Arguing over an Island of Biological Treasures,” *UNESCO Courier* 51, no. 12 (1999): 13.

84 Jennifer Bauduy, “US, Haiti Face Off Over a Tiny Island’s ‘Green Gold,’” *Christian Science Monitor* 90, no. 228 (20 October 1998), 1.

85 For more on this, see Larry Rohter, “Port-au-Prince Journal; Whose Rock is It? And Yes, the Haitians Care,” *New York Times* 19 October 1998. [www.nytimes.com/1998/10/19/world/port-au-prince-journal-whose-rock-is-it-and-yes-the-haitians-care.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1998/10/19/world/port-au-prince-journal-whose-rock-is-it-and-yes-the-haitians-care.html).

86 For more on this, see Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

87 For more on a planetary sovereign, see Joel Wainwright and Geoff Mann, “Climate Leviathan,” *Antipode* 45, no. 1 (2013): 1–22.

88 Although there is some evidence that suggests a few Haitian scientists are being included in US research teams, the island remains restricted, with access for all carefully controlled by US agencies.

change or other environmental crises as much as it needs saving from Haiti's sovereignty.

What the above brief historiography of Navassa suggests is that the USA's ardent desire to protect Navassa as an ecological marvel that needs conserving for the world depends on a misremembering of the slow environmental damage waged against the island by the Navassa Phosphate Company, the US Marines, and, ultimately, the government of the USA.<sup>89</sup> It also depends on a particular line of thought regarding black sovereignty that rejects the terms Faustin I circulated. Instead of a powerful black nation, the rhetoric of a failed state—in need of a planetary parental figure—remains. In light of this kind of framing, Haiti's sovereignty may never be sovereign enough.

In terms of Navassa, its future is uncertain. Navassa is not so much an untouched paradise as it is a site continuously able to be retouched by the USA in any way it so chooses. As a result, the island can now be environmentally saved by the same entity that exploited it—even while it remains in the hands of the USA. And, if Haitian rumours are anything to go by, this saving is not for species conservation purposes but for pharmacological reasons. This “gem,” these protestors believe, is literally full of green gold that US companies seek to keep for themselves.

In a 2007 op-ed piece for the *New York Times*, Ted Widmer, then Director of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, succinctly captures the situation, asking: “On the 150th anniversary of the year Navassa came into American possession, it feels a bit unseemly to see the world's richest nation entangled in a dispute with the poorest nation in our hemisphere over a remote rock.” Widmer continues, echoing much of the arguments in this chapter: “All that Navassa holds for us is the right—or, more specifically, the power—of its possession. Perhaps we should celebrate the sesquicentennial by just giving it back—to Haiti.”<sup>90</sup> This has not happened, and will more than likely never occur, as what Widmer imagines would be a kind of sovereign recognition that the USA has struggled to give Haiti, but which has made apparent the threshold of black sovereignty and the limits of black power in the Atlantic world.

While not a complete disavowal, the ways that Haiti has been seen, but not recognised—especially around its rights to Navassa—as a sovereign entity has had long-standing ramifications. From the indemnity placed on it by France in 1825 (in which Haiti had to pay its former imperial masters

<sup>89</sup> For a more detailed consideration of the term “slow violence,” see Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>90</sup> Ted Widmer, “Little America,” *New York Times*, 30 June 2007.

150 million francs for recognition of its own freedom) to the various structural adjustment programmes in the late twentieth century that tied loans and monetary aid to certain free market strategies, Haiti has been enchained by various concepts and considerations that have articulated its sovereign status as something laughable, absurd, or, more troublingly, dangerous.

This section of the chapter has given some form to this enchainment by noting the ways that the contours of Haiti's black sovereignty has been tempered and challenged by various political and cultural considerations. It has focused on a particular set of circumstances—the sovereignty over Navassa Island—and used this issue as a way to chart black sovereignty's movements and morphologies from the time of Faustin I to the present day.

### Conclusion

Black sovereignty is neither an impossibility nor a progressive mode of becoming in which time will eventually shift its limitations (by gradually going away) or legal constructs of recognition and reciprocity will magically support. Instead, black sovereignty is the space between those modes. It grapples, furiously, with the charged rhetorics of absurdity and nullification that swirl around it. By demanding space and occupying the place of unbecoming, black sovereignty alters the language of power and demands that sovereign entities *unknow* the failure at the heart of sovereignty's origins. By performing that which has been deemed a burlesque, black sovereignty opens space up for black nation-states to participate as already recognised political bodies.

Yet, as this chapter has shown, there are limits to the currency of black sovereignty. The *ILN* may have adopted a new form of counter-discursivity in its illustration of Faustin I and Empress Adelina, but, as the case of Navassa shows, the contours of black sovereignty can be quickly dismissed as a form that lacks critical components—namely, power, aptitude and intent. Of course, *unknowing* black nullification and absurdity allows those of us invested in charting and understanding black sovereignty a path of radicalism that keeps open the future primarily through our political struggle with the political end(s) of blackness.

By claiming blackness and performing sovereignty, Haitian and other black nation-state officials reject attempts to disavow the presence of that power or label it an intractable problem in need of fixing. In reading these histories and listening and witnessing their many configurations, critics and citizens alike keep pressure upon those entities committed to ignoring the many challenges, battles and unfinished projects that give black sovereignty meaning.

## The Unfinished Revolution

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The next chapter traces more of Haiti's black sovereignty turns by focusing on a later period of the nineteenth century: the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, before turning to contemporary dynamics of inclusion/exclusion that seem to hinge on credit, money and the ghostly presence of shadowed capital.

# 4

## Welcome to the New World Order

### Haiti and Black Sovereignty at the Turn of the Century

Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, Blackness and race have constituted the (unacknowledged and often denied) foundation, what we might call the nuclear power plant, from which the modern project of knowledge—and of governance—has been deployed.

Achille Mbembe<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe, in writing about “practices of zoning” that trouble Blackness and beingness in the world, notes how “in some cases such practices are subtracted from all forms of national sovereignty,” existing within the lines of authority that populate *extragovernmental* entities. In other cases, these practices “remain under the control of foreign armies or of international organisations operating under the pretext of, or on behalf of, humanitarianism.” For Mbembe, these are forms of engagement linked to disorganisation, disaster and other forms of structural violence geared toward multiplying “states of exception nearly everywhere.”<sup>2</sup>

This framing of black presents meets up with Mbembe’s search for black futures in which he ponders how power will emerge from these moments in the black world. “Power comes to those who can dance with the shadows,” he argues, weaving “tight links between their own vital strength and other chains of power always situated in an elsewhere.” As if speaking about Haiti and its unfinished black sovereignty, Mbembe continues, noting that

<sup>1</sup> Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Dubois, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 5.

“power cannot be enclosed within the limits of a single, stable form,” mainly because all power—and specifically black power—“is power thanks only to its capacity for metamorphosis.”<sup>3</sup> Haiti and its leaders have been engaged in this process of being, constraint, loss and metamorphosis since its revolutionary beginnings. In resisting disavowal and totalising nullification, Haiti maintains its “unfinishedness” by refusing destruction—even as it remains enchained to certain modes of interaction with international bodies that, contrary to their rhetoric, seem engaged in a process of “imperialism by disorganization.”<sup>4</sup>

Throughout this book, I have argued for a way to grapple with the unfinished project of Haiti’s black sovereignty. In earlier chapters, I discussed the ways that fungible transnational black labour set up a performance of black sovereignty that sought to accrete capital through racio-political kinship and black sweat. In presenting black sovereignty’s mutations, I highlighted certain attempts by US newspapers and company representatives to (con)figure black sovereignty as a burlesque, while Haitian leaders (re)configured Haiti and its black sovereignty with imagery of power, generating a new currency that found an audience across the Atlantic Ocean in Britain.

This chapter echoes some of the above moves, but opens up new conversations and logics that place black sovereignty at the dawn of a new era: the twentieth century. After nearly 100 years of sovereignty, Haiti had emerged by the 1890s as a recognised nation-state. From the Vatican to the USA, foreign entities finally acknowledged its existence. Still others set their sights on not just seeing it, but profiting from an alliance with it—or somehow manipulating its internal workings. Repeated civil wars had divided the nation and competing foreign investors now formed tangled webs with internal agents, external commercial entities and Haitian politicians. With the addition of diplomatic actors from France, the USA and Britain in the mix, the stage was set for manipulations, counter-insurgencies and plots, aplenty.

Into this space came the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. While there are other events and activities at the end of the nineteenth century that highlight the role of imperialism and colonial expansion within multiple national spaces, the World’s Columbian Exposition (hereafter referred to as the Fair), offered a different tone and consideration. Initially, the idea of commemorating Columbus’s landing in Hispaniola generated interest between only a handful of business leaders and historians of the day. After

3 Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 131.

4 This is a riff on Mbembe’s notion of the imperialism of disorganisation, as stated in *Critique of Black Reason*, 5.

the financial successes of London's and New York's Crystal Palaces, and Paris's Exposition Universelle of 1889 that included colonial villages and their related concessions, disparate factions brought together a proposal that eventually caught the attention of US President Benjamin Harrison and the US Congress. After an intense battle, Chicago won the rights to host.<sup>5</sup>

Although the Fair sought to celebrate 400 years of industry and progress within the Americas since Columbus's arrival in 1492, it also proposed a glimmering portrait of the world as imagined by the many architects and builders who participated in its construction. With buildings designed in the magisterial Beaux-Art style—and with its Midway Plaisance of “edutainment”—the Fair was a showcase for the 27 million people who visited it during its six-month run. Within 30 years of a bloody civil war, the Fair served as a declaration to the world that the USA had fully recovered from its internal, political and cultural conflicts and was now open for business on a global level.<sup>6</sup>

The sheer volume of archival material and scholarship related to the Fair suggests the importance of this cultural moment to the development of US exceptionalism and the forging of a modern world-order in which commercialism became increasingly intertwined with notions of democracy and progress.<sup>7</sup> According to Latin Americanist and cultural critic Camilla Rojas, the displays and the buildings of the Fair “offered a postured modernity that exposed US anxieties about not being modern enough [... amongst the many] nations on display.”<sup>8</sup> Writing in 2007 about delinking knowledge and the continued spell of progress, literary and decolonial critic Walter D. Mignolo argues that “modernity and modernization, together with democracy,” are routinely “sold as a package trip to the promised land of happiness, a

5 For more on the voluminous literature on the Fair, see these selected texts: Reid Badger, *The Great American Fair: The World's Columbian Exposition and American Culture* (Chicago: N. Hall, 1979), Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at America's International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), James Gilbert, *Perfect Cities: Chicago's Utopias of 1893* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), Julie K. Brown, *Contesting Images: Photography and the World's Columbian Exposition* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994), Donald L. Miller, *City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996) and Arnold Lewis, *An Early Encounter with Tomorrow: Europeans, Chicago's Loop, and the World's Columbian Exposition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

6 For more on this view, see Gilbert, *Perfect Cities*.

7 In addition to n. 5, see Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

8 Camilla Fojas, *Cosmopolitanism in the Americas* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005), 86.

paradise.”<sup>9</sup> The Fair offered up a portrait of this fantastical future. As Fojas stresses, the Fair and its gleaming city of grand white buildings and avenues of coloniality, “imagined, ordered, and hierarchized from the perspective of an equally imagined U.S. dominance” a new world order.<sup>10</sup> In and amongst that world: Haiti, with its pavilion in the “white city.”

Although Haiti emerged in the early nineteenth century as a nation disavowed and routinely feared, it would end the century in a different position—at least as it was represented at the Fair. Haiti’s presence in Chicago suggested that it belonged not just as an equal player in the Atlantic world, but also within constructions of global modernisms: not as an antithesis or problem of modernity but as an example of its progress. Haiti, this narrative asserted, had arrived. And with this arrival came another set of image-framing narratives aimed at instantiating new ways of seeing Haiti. Instead of a nation characterised by deficiency and declension, Haiti appeared at the Fair on an equal footing with other American republics and European empires that displayed their national goods and industries within their respective pavilions in the “white city.”

During a speech to commemorate the completion of Haiti’s pavilion, abolitionist, writer and editor Frederick Douglass, a co-Commissioner of Haiti’s pavilion, read Haiti’s presence amongst the other “civilised” nation-states as more than a mere act of charitable inclusion. In his eyes—moulded by his time as a black activist and US diplomat—Haiti’s participation in the Fair marked a sea-change in world opinion regarding the self-avowed black nation and its black sovereignty. In this same talk, he stresses that the decision to include Haiti in the “white city” represented “a reaffirmation of her existence and her independence, and her place among the sisterhood of nations.”<sup>11</sup>

As this chapter will show, this new recognition of Haiti as one of the “sisterhood of nations” masked the ways that its presence at the Fair—and within the wider circuits of power and capital within the Atlantic world—would serve the commercial and trade interests of the USA. In fact, I argue that Haiti’s much desired location within the “white city” was not because it was somehow now seen as a politically and culturally viable nation but because of its proximity and access to commercial spaces in Latin America and the Caribbean. Haiti would be framed by certain politicians

9 Walter D. Mignolo, “Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality,” *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (March–May 2007): 450.

10 Fojas, *Cosmopolitanism in the Americas*, 94.

11 Anon., “Hayti’s Building Completed,” *Northwestern Recorder* 1 February 1893, 5. *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*. Infotrack. Gale Cengage Learning.

and governmental representatives surrounding the Fair as equal in stature and power to the USA and other independent republics in the Americas, yet this rhetorical construction of equality and reciprocity was as much a facade as the white-washed plaster cast that gave the “white city” buildings their gleaming presence. The purported extension of equality and rhetoric of recognition that framed Haiti’s invitation to the Fair included a charged racial dynamic: including Haiti in the “white city” enabled the republic to be represented as neither a space of racial equality nor as one of racial neutrality, but as a (pseudo) white nation. In being reimagined—or, more accurately, reconstructed—as a white nation-state, Haiti and its revolutionary past could be deracialised, thereby erasing its black citizens from the cultural landscape. Divested of its blackness, Haiti could emerge as the USA’s favoured Atlantic child, ready for its “parent” to control its political and economic plans for the future. In what follows, I illustrate how the appearance of belonging and its attendant logics of exchange carried a steep and long-lasting price that Haiti is still paying off today<sup>12</sup>—and must use all of its unfinished powers to withstand.

In this chapter, I analyse archival letters, photographs, government documents and published essays that illuminate how and in what manner Haiti would be, for a brief time, positioned as a filial relation. In what follows, I read the personal and official papers of William Eleroy Curtis, the Director of the Latin American Department at the Fair and the first Executive Director of the Bureau of the American Republics; Frederick Douglass; and Charles A. Preston, the former Secretary to the Haitian Minister to the USA and (along with Douglass) co-Commissioner of Haiti’s Fair pavilion. In examining these papers alongside the public documents that chronicle Haiti’s role in the movement of Atlantic capital, I present another way in which attempts to figure black sovereignty morphed into a (con)figuration of black fungibility in which blackness was nullified—once again—on the path of becoming a “sister” to white nation-states. Understanding these shifts illuminates the ways that the mapping of Haiti into the “white city” directly responded to machinations within the plantation and military complexes swirling for new capital forms within Latin America and the Caribbean. In tracing these histories and logics, this chapter interrogates how Haiti arrived, what it became in the process and for whom.

<sup>12</sup> Although this fee is different in form and extent from the debt-inducing indemnity levied by France, the reciprocal illusion of same-ness would inevitably cost Haiti in similar ways—as indicated by the later invasion efforts and takeover of the economic infrastructure by foreigners.

### Fair Logics

With its palatial white-washed buildings and well-appointed halls and cafés, the “white city” of the Fair was meant to appear, at least visually and conceptually, as an ideal urban environment. It was the perfect city: inherently cosmopolitan and conspicuously white. A map from Rand McNally and Co.’s *A Week at the Fair* (1893) contains a detailed write-up of the buildings and an oversized map of the grounds. Marketed by the company as *the* definitive guide for Fair attendees, the accompanying map locates Haiti’s pavilion on the main avenue within the fairgrounds on Jackson Park near Lake Michigan, adjacent to Great Britain’s, Spain’s, Canada’s and Germany’s pavilions. Haiti’s presence within the central gathering and strolling spots within the “white city” sent a significant message that challenged articulations of black absurdity and burlesque.

The objects displayed by Haiti at the Fair reinforce this power and uniqueness. Within the exhibition space, visitors could find agricultural products; works by Haitian artists; texts by Haitian writers; and national relics such as the anchor of Columbus’s *Santa Maria* and a sword belonging to Toussaint Louverture.<sup>13</sup> Just above the entryway, three dates were arranged near each other to form a triptych: 1492, 1804 and 1892. The first date corresponds to the “discovery” of America (and Haiti’s shores) by Columbus—a date ubiquitous in Fair-related materials. The second, undoubtedly, signals Haiti’s founding. The last corresponds, of course, to the 400th anniversary of Columbus’s arrival—and what I call Haiti’s “Inter-American” birth, insofar as it linked Haiti’s participation at the Fair to its approaching commercial—and eventual political—colonisation. It would become a viable nation able to be included in the parade of foreign exhibitors at the World’s Columbian Exposition, but coterminous with its arrival was the loss of nearly all ability to craft its own image in the Atlantic world. As the USA advanced steps to cohere and direct the republics within the Americas, Haiti emerged as a vital commercial extension to this enterprise.

The triptych of dates on the outside of the pavilion situate Haiti within the history of the Atlantic world, but does so by aligning Haiti more specifically

13 See Moses P. Handy, ed., *The Official Directory of the World’s Columbian Exposition, May 1st to October 30th, 1893. A Reference Book* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1893) and Renée Larrier, “DuSable, Douglass, and *Dessalines*: The Haytian Pavilion and the Narrative of History,” *Écrire en pays assiégé—Haïti—Writing Under Siege*, ed. Marie-Agnès Sourieau and Kathleen M. Balutansky (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 39–56, for more information on Haiti’s exhibits and the pavilion’s construction details. Additional information can be found in Wendy Asquith, “The Art of Postcolonial Politics in the Age of Empire: Haiti’s Object Lesson at the World’s Columbian Exposition,” *Historical Research* (IHR), 91 (2018): 528–53.

with notions of US exceptionalism and cultural and commercial progress. Frederick Douglass helped solidify this specific alignment when he uttered these revealing words about Haiti's presence in the "white city" during the pavilion's dedication: "[The pavilion's] location is a desirable one. It is not a candle put under a bushel, but a city set upon a hill."<sup>14</sup> Here Douglass evokes the lay-sermon given by John Winthrop aboard the *Arbella* as he and his fellow Puritans crossed the Atlantic from England en route to their future home in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.<sup>15</sup> By linking Haiti's pavilion with Winthrop's declaration of the destiny of a chosen people, Douglass offers a striking parallel about fate, futures and symbols. He suggests, through this yoking, that the USA's future would be realised not only with but also *through* Haiti.

Countless political documents suggest that since Haiti's founding, various nation-states within the Atlantic world identified Haiti as a racial and sovereign problem. Too revolutionary and too black, it experienced shifts in political disavowal and attempts at accumulation, many of which have been presented in various chapters of this book. While nation-states scrambled to determine how or when to recognise Haiti's sovereignty, many remained focused on commercially profiting from its existence. Reading Douglass's positive sentiment regarding Haiti's inclusion in the "city set upon the hill" at the Fair provides an important perspective from which to consider the USA's conflicting political and commercial relations with Haiti. Mapping the links between US and Haitian commercial entities and politicians, and the intermediaries engaged in moving Haiti into the new family of belonging at the Fair, allows a richer assessment of Haiti's role at the Fair to take place.

In formulating and assessing this archive of information, we can begin to compile analyses that respond to literary critic Chandan Reddy's call for

<sup>14</sup> Frederick Douglass, "Oration of Hon. Frederick Douglass, Ex-United States Minister Resident to the Republic of Haiti, Delivered on the Occasion of the Dedication of the Haitien Pavilion at the World's Fair (Jan. 1893)," in William Edgar Easton, *Dessalines: A Dramatic Tale, A Single Chapter From Haiti's History* (Galveston, TX: J. W. Burson-Company, Publishers, 1893), 134.

<sup>15</sup> This passage from both Douglass's and Winthrop's speeches paraphrases a section from the Gospel of Matthew. In Douglass's speech, two verses are combined to form his point about Haiti's pavilion, Matthew 5:14-15: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house." See the Holy Bible [vol. 2]. (London: R. Bowyer, 1796). For more on Winthrop, see any number of databases for copies of Winthrop's "Model of Christian Charity," Saçvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978) and Philip H. Round, *By Nature and By Custom Cursed: Transatlantic Civil Discourse and New England Cultural Production, 1620-1660* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999).

researchers to “situate the formations of modern knowledge within global histories of contact, collaboration, conflict, and dislocation, examining in each instance how the category of the modern has distorted those global histories, producing units out of hybridity and development out of displacement.”<sup>16</sup> If the Fair engendered a “complex fiction”—to borrow art historian Diane Dillon’s terminology—where “ideas about selling and owning could literally and figuratively be mapped onto ways of seeing and knowing” then examining the epoch-shaping Fair through the lens of Haiti should offer new perspectives on the formation of US modernity in the late nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> In recent years, wide ranges of critics have worked through these processes, moving outside the binary of modernism’s purportedly totalising incompleteness or death. My interest in global markets and international trade relations has influenced my reading of the turns and re-turns to the modern—and its interpenetrations within globalisation.<sup>18</sup>

At first glance, the siting of Haiti’s pavilion suggests that the efforts of Faustin I and other Haitian leaders to alter the narratives about Haiti were successful. And, to be clear, there are indications of shifts in tone as foreign nation-state representatives discussed Haiti. Yet, there are also indications that this rhetorical reciprocity merely hid (old) capital desires. These desires are not apparent in the McNally and Co.’s map. There, the

16 Chandan Reddy, “Modernity,” in Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, eds., *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (New York: New York University, 2007), 164.

17 Diane Dillon, “Mapping Enterprise: Cartography and Commodification at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition,” in Ronald R. Thomas and Helena Michie, eds., *Nineteenth-Century Geographies: The Transformation of Space From the Victorian Age to the American Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 75.

18 In addition to the books and essays on modernity and modernisms within various notes within this chapter, see this brief list for examples of seminal and critical texts on or around these themes that have influenced my research: Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), José David Saldívar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), Laura Doyle and Laura A. Winkiel, eds., *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914–1962* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), Chris Bongie, *Friends and Enemies: The Scribal Politics of Post/Colonial Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), Valerie Kaussen, *Migrant Revolutions: Haitian Literature, Globalization, and U.S. Imperialism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), Annalisa Oboe and Anna Scacchi, eds., *Recharting the Black Atlantic: Modern Cultures, Local Communities, Global Connections* (New York: Routledge, 2008) and Gurminder K. Bhambra, *Connected Sociologies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

foreign pavilions, the Midway Plaisance exhibits, the sites and buildings connected to the various US states and the names of statues and special houses dominate. Included with the index of these places and their locations was a two-dimensional representation of the Midway Plaisance, complete with the individual titles of the various camps, villages and booths.

Inspired by the Paris Exposition Universelle's living performances of colonial and "exotic" life, the Midway Plaisance presented a significant number of racialised and minoritised peoples whose presence was part of a commercial exchange. Living villages provided ethnological content—and spectacle—for which fairgoers were willing to pay a premium.<sup>19</sup> As the Smithsonian Institution asserts, the villages at the 1889 Paris exposition exerted tremendous and lasting influence on future international shows, as "no subsequent world's fair lacked a variation on this ethnological exhibit."<sup>20</sup> The Midway Plaisance continued this theme within its mile-long strip in the fairgrounds. Although Frederick Ward Putnam—a Harvard-trained anthropologist and curator of the Peabody Museum—originally controlled the design and content of the Midway exhibits, this space would eventually become the playground of a young entrepreneur named Sol Bloom.<sup>21</sup>

Born in 1870 to Polish immigrants, Bloom grew up in booming San Francisco, and, according to his autobiography, held a variety of odd jobs in the theatre and entertainment business.<sup>22</sup> Midway organisers such as Bloom brought in whole tribes to perform for those fairgoers who briefly sought to enter the various "worlds" on display and transport themselves from a strip in Chicago to a Dahomey village, a street in Cairo, or a cliff in the US south-west (to name but a few of the staged places and performances attendees could experience for a fee).

Bloom's dreams and plans for the Midway first began during a trip to the Paris Exposition Universelle, where he spent considerable time exploring his favourite exhibit—the Algerian Village. After witnessing the Algerians and other colonial peoples going about their "normal" life tasks while on display for eager onlookers, Bloom had an epiphany. He realised that "nothing like these dancers, acrobats, glass-eaters, and scorpion swallowers had ever been

<sup>19</sup> Rydell, *All the World's A Fair*, 62.

<sup>20</sup> Anon., *The Book of the Fairs*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> For more on this see, Curtis M. Hinsley, "The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893," in Karp and Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures*, 344–65.

<sup>22</sup> He succeeded in the political arena as well, winning a seat in the US House of Representatives where he served several terms, eventually being appointed as delegate for the founding meeting of the United Nations. For more on his life, see Sol Bloom, *The Autobiography of Sol Bloom* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1948).

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seen in the Western hemisphere.”<sup>23</sup> He was convinced that he could bring the Algerians—or a similar group—to the United States and make a fortune. When he was approached to take over the Midway project from Putnam, he jumped at the chance to develop the ideas that had captured his imagination in Paris. Although Bloom would not bring the Dahomey to Chicago—that task would be accomplished by French geographer and businessman Xavier Pené—he would provide the perfect combination of atmosphere and space along the 600-foot-wide Midway that enabled the creation of a “primitive” African space identified as the Dahomey Village (more on that below).<sup>24</sup> According to cultural critic and historian Curtis Hinsley:

The nature of the peoples at the peripheries was of some interest [...] they tended to be imagined and evaluated in terms of the market and its functions. In other words, the ultimate judgment of these peoples was levied not on aesthetic or cultural grounds but on economic ones: *Do these people know their price?*<sup>25</sup>

Paid to be different, the performers of the Midway were encouraged by their handlers to display themselves for a consuming public. For cultural historian Robert Rydell, this process was predicated on a specific confluence of racist assumptions and desires: “The vision of the future and the depiction of the nonwhite world as savage were two sides of the same coin—a coin minted in the tradition of American racism, in which the forbidden desires of whites were projected onto dark-skinned peoples, who consequently had to be degraded so white purity could be maintained.”<sup>26</sup> In examining the plethora of images and ephemera from the Midway, it is hard not to recoil, intellectually and emotionally, from the visceral racial dis-ease that encouraged the Fair’s organisers and visitors to treat the groups, tribes and communities gathered from around the world as if they were a museum exhibition (at best) or a carnival sideshow (at worst) of human difference. Through all encounters—from the hiring to the viewing—money changed hands.

Haiti’s portrayal at the Fair suggests a less commercial intent—although I have hinted that the purported filial inclusion of Haiti as a member of a

<sup>23</sup> Bloom, *The Autobiography of Sol Bloom*, 107.

<sup>24</sup> Gertrude M. Scott notes in her frequently cited dissertation that “in spite of general press reports that were more virulent and derogatory than those for any of the other villages, the concession proved to be one of the most financially successful ventures on the Midway Plaisance.” See Gertrude M. Scott, “Village Performance: Villages at the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893” (PhD Thesis, New York University, 1991), 283.

<sup>25</sup> Hinsley, “The World as Marketplace,” 362.

<sup>26</sup> Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 67.

community of nations masked a capitalistic motivation. We—as critics—have far more to discover about both of these stories and their framings.<sup>27</sup> In what follows, I trace these co-joined histories, but mostly focus on their impact on, response to and framing of black sovereignty and fungible black lives.

The incongruous logics that brought Haiti into the heart of the Fair also correspond to aspects of the racial taxonomies on display that have been investigated by other scholars. While there are similarities in our examinations, there are vast differences. For example, for critics such as historian Christopher Reed, Haiti's pavilion plays a role as the stage from which Americans of African descent protested their displacement at the Fair. In describing those who travelled to the pavilion to give talks or exhibit various forms of art, Reed does not ask why Haiti would be there at all. Reed is not alone in this omission.

Part of this occlusion may be due, in part, to the lack of transnational or hemispheric considerations of “racialogy” at the Fair. In examining race at the Fair as a US problem or a problem of exotica and otherness within the Midway Plaisance, the formation and figuration of Haiti remains on the sidelines. Neither a fully “othered” group at the Fair nor one refused space at the gathering, Haiti, then, troubles readings of the Fair that seek to criticise the Fair's lack of recognition of the contributions of American Africans and the racism, orientalism and othering on display within the Midway Plaisance. Although dependent upon the logics of consumption and control proliferating within the encounters with both groups, Haiti's situation illuminates how the USA's new world order planned to build its future control of the region. And that future started in Chicago.

Four cities initially competed to host the Fair. After a period of intense drama and shenanigans, Chicago ultimately received the nod over New

<sup>27</sup> Of those writing about issues of race at the Fair or those tracking Douglass's life amid and amongst Haitian politics, few have delved further into considerations of Haiti's presence at the exposition. As of this writing, Renée Larrier and Wendy Asquith have provided the only in-depth examinations of the Haiti pavilion. See, Larrier, “DuSable, Douglass, and *Dessalines*: The Haytian Pavilion and the Narrative of History,” and Asquith, “The Art of Postcolonial Politics in the Age of Empire: Haiti's Object Lesson at the World's Columbian Exposition.” For examples of critical texts that mention Haiti in conjunction with other subjects, but do not focus on Haiti's presence, see Elliot M. Rudwick and August Meier, “Black Man in the ‘White City’: Negroes and the Columbian Exposition, 1893,” *Phylon* 26, no. 4 (1965): 354–61, Russ Castronovo, “‘As to Nation, I Belong to None’: Ambivalence, Diaspora, and Frederick Douglass,” *ATQ American Transcendental Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1995): 245–60, Fionnghuala Sweeney, *Frederick Douglass and the Atlantic World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007) and Robert Levine, “Frederick Douglass, War, and Haiti,” *PMLA* 124, no. 5 (October 2009): 1864–68.

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York, Washington, DC and St Louis.<sup>28</sup> While Chicago could not match the other cities in terms of history or prestige, it projected a progressive forward-looking spirit that seemed entirely appropriate for a Fair meant to signal not only the anniversary of Columbus's landing but also the dawning of a new century. Historian H. H. Bancroft, writing on the Fair in 1893, argues that Chicago was the best choice for this new age: "An exposition which is to represent the progress of the world in science, industry, and art, should be held amid this the most progressive of all of our New World communities."<sup>29</sup> The definitive guide to the Fair, *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition* (1897), describes late nineteenth-century Chicago in these terms:

There was once a [Spanish empiric] dream of a Golden Circle whose center should be Havana, and whose radius twelve hundred miles. This illusive vision has long since passed away; but we have learned that there is in reality a golden circle whose center is not on any island of the sea, but in the very heart of the continent, whose radius is at least five hundred miles, and whose golden products are those most necessary to the welfare and enjoyment of the human race. Here, for the present epoch at least, is the seat of empire, and here was properly placed the great Exposition that fitly marked the closing years of our century.<sup>30</sup>

For many entrepreneurs and businesspeople of the late nineteenth century, the "golden circle" of Chicago provided them with an opportunity to build a "tranquil" and resplendent "white city" alongside the extended visual peepshow of the Midway. These same visitors, of course, paid additional sums to witness decidedly more risqué forms of entertainment along the Midway—such as belly-dancing.<sup>31</sup> Vice and industry. Profit and progress. The Fair in all its glory.

<sup>28</sup> In addition to the sources in the notes containing histories of the Fair, see Scott, "Village Performance."

<sup>29</sup> H. H. Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair* (Chicago: The Bancroft Company, 1893), 36: *World's Columbian Exposition of 1893*. Paul V. Galvin Library Digital History Collection. Illinois Institute of Technology. 1999.

<sup>30</sup> See Rossiter Johnson, ed., *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition, Held in Chicago in 1893* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897), 4. It is curious that Johnson and his editorial team imagine Chicago as the seat of empire. Reading Chicago as the centre of US imperial dreams enables the "white city" to fold in other sites and buildings as symbolic US territories—including Haiti.

<sup>31</sup> For more on this type of entertainment, see Scott, "Village Performance," Meg Armstrong, "'A Jumble of Foreignness': The Sublime Musayums of Nineteenth-Century Fairs and Exposition," *Cultural Critique* 23 (Winter 1992–93): 199–250 and Robert W. Rydell, "A Cultural Frankenstein? The Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in

Let us return, for a moment, to the Dahomey Village. The Dahomey came to the Fair while engaged in a protracted war with France that would result in the Kingdom of Dahomey's territory—and that of some surrounding communities—being absorbed into French West Africa in 1892. Although the Dahomey had traded goods and weapons with Europeans along its coast for centuries, they were brought to the Fair to represent the organisers' notions of authentic and unadulterated African primitivism—and to capitalise on the West's infatuation with visions of “darkest Africa.”<sup>32</sup> Although characterised as a barbaric and backwards people by some Western travellers who encountered them in the nineteenth century, the Dahomey had been in contact with various European empires for a very long time. In many ways, their history exemplifies the potential benefits and perils of cross-racial trade, especially within the captivity and transportation of enslaved African peoples.

Photographs of the Dahomey villagers at the Fair taken by C. D. Arnold—the official photographer—attempt to represent the Dahomey as barbaric subjects, nearly inhuman in their conduct and their activities. One famous print of the Dahomey Village by Arnold presents the display materials situated on the Midway Plaisance that enticed attendees to enter the village. As fairgoers wander near its entrance and sit on chairs near the straw huts and walls of the Village, they interact with carefully placed placards that contain violent and troubling gendered portraits supposedly of a female Dahomey warrior holding the severed head of a man. As a villager looks down from a platform onto the milling crowd and the ticket guard sits near an Admission stand, viewers are being trained to frame the “lived experiences” on display and see the warriors as primitive, dangerous—and in keeping with some of the imagining of black sovereignty in Chapter 3—absurd (Figure 4.1).

Bancroft describes the Dahomey Village as a “hollow square” with “huts built in native fashion, with rough mud walls thatched with the bark and boughs of trees and with wooden floors and windows.” Bancroft's detailed account of the villagers' living conditions highlights what he considers the most primitive and barbaric aspects of their culture. Among the characteristics he notes are the scars on their faces, their lack of clothing and their

1893,” in Keith L. Eggener, ed., *American Architectural History: A Contemporary Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), 249–66.

32 In addition to the sources throughout this chapter, see M. J. Herskovits, *Dahomey: An Ancient West African Kingdom* (Hamburg: J. J. Augustin, 1938), Samuel Decalo, *Historical Dictionary of Benin* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1987) and James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).



DAHOMY VILLAGE.—ON THE MIDWAY.

**Figure 4.1** C. D. Arnold and H. D. Higinbotham,  
*Official Views of the World's Columbian Exposition*  
(Chicago: Press Chicago Photo-Gravure, Co., 1893). Plate 110.

purported violent tendencies that they can barely keep in check as they go about their daily routines. According to Bancroft, such tendencies were readily apparent when they drummed and danced. He claims that “there is nothing of the graceful or sensuous” in their movements; instead, their bodies quiver “with [a] swinging of weapons as though nothing would delight them more than to kill and destroy.” What made the violence of the Dahomey even more provocative, though, was the inclusion of Dahomey women—called the Amazons—in the village.<sup>33</sup>

A mid-nineteenth-century British Naval officer attended a ceremony on the coast of present-day Benin that included 2,400 women and offers what he claims is an accurate statement from one of the “Amazons.” “I am a wolf,” he overhears her saying, “the enemy of all I meet who are the king’s enemies, and if I do not conquer, let me die.”<sup>34</sup> These women, in all of their

33 Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair*, 877–78.

34 Frederick E. Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomeans, Being the Journals of Two Missions to the King of Dahomey and Residence at His Capital in the Years 1849 and 1850* [vol. 2]. (London: Frank Cass, 1966 [London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson Ltd., 1851]), 109–10.



GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, SWEDEN, HAYTI AND NEW SOUTH WALES.

**Figure 4.1** C. D. Arnold and H. D. Higinbotham,  
*Official Views of the World's Columbian Exposition*  
(Chicago: Press Chicago Photo-Gravure, Co., 1893). Plate 75.

aggressive figurations, were prominently on display at the Dahomey Village and the intended message of such crude racial iconography was quite clear: these were dangerous women who could kill you.

Attempts to configure narratives of violence about the Dahomey Amazons were not limited to the materials consumable on the Fair's grounds. Other forms of cultural production placed these Africans within the hierarchies and racial taxonomies of the USA. One of the more striking of these attempts features the work of writer Charles M. Stevens, who crafted a fictionalised version of Rand McNally's *A Week at the Fair* in the publication of his *The Adventures of Uncle Jeremiah and Family at the Great Fair* (1893). Among the various adventures faced by Uncle Jeremiah and his family was a "first contact" encounter between two young purportedly (white) American boys and Dahomey women during a trip to the Fair that enabled them to study Africans as if on a safari. In a particularly revealing passage, the narrator of the novel links the behaviour of the Amazons to that of standard Gilded Age anti-black caricatures (such as coons, Sambos and mammies) in scenes of everyday life within the village:

The amazons are twenty in number and for the most part are occupied in the pursuit of keeping their pickaninnies from making mud pies with the drinking water [...] A rail runs in front of the huts and a board sidewalk, on which the amazons squat to perform their toilets, mainly consisting of the application of greasy combs to the half inch of wool accorded them by their Creator [...] Day and night they oil themselves. Other times they oil one another. Their shining bodies reflect the glory of the noonday sun. Their complexions when their toilets are fully complete approach patent leather. Other times they stop short at the tint of a newly blacked pair of Oxfords.<sup>35</sup>

Depicted as more object than human, accounts, such as the fictionalised one above, present the Amazons as substandard in every respect: their complexions are like patent leather; their unruly hair matches their wild and uncontrollable natures. The children receive similar treatment, as the novelist describes them as “pickaninnies,” placing the women and their families firmly within the context of nineteenth-century racialisms that construct black children as inherently impish and wild. They are, in other words, direct literary descendants of Topsy from Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and a host of other black child-characters from both antebellum and postbellum texts.<sup>36</sup> These framings neatly associate whiteness with civilisation and blackness with primitivism.

When we turn our attention away from the Midway and back to Haiti’s pavilion in the “white city,” these racial typologies struggle to remain intact. The performances at and tied to the pavilion, such as the all-black actors who performed playwright William Easton’s “Dessalines: A Dramatic Tale: A Single Chapter from Haiti’s History,” might refer to Haiti and how the Fair’s materials capture Haiti’s structural inclusion, but the pavilion’s associated architecture, style, design and exterior representation placed it more in

35 Charles McClellan Stevens, *The Adventures of Uncle Jeremiah and Family at the Great Fair: Their Observations and Triumphs* (Chicago: Laird and Lee, Publishers, 1893), 130. Project Gutenberg. <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/20184>.

36 The literature on this topic is extensive. A good start to this criticism should begin with: Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film* (New York: Continuum, 2001), Martin A. Berger, *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) and Brigitte Fielder, “Animal Humanism: Race, Species, and Affective Kinship in Nineteenth-Century Abolition,” *American Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (September 2013): 487–513.

line with the pavilions that surrounded it.<sup>37</sup> Design critic Meg Armstrong describes the “white city” as containing “the monumental architecture and technology of European and American displays of industrial prowess.”<sup>38</sup> Associating Haiti with such “industrial prowess” would seem far-fetched in a commercial sense. The iconography that framed illustrations and textual narratives of the Dahomey and other peoples of colour within the Midway Plaisance should have restricted any consideration of including Haiti within the “white city.” And, given the violent afterlife of slavery in the USA that would compel people like journalist, suffragist and activist Ida B. Wells soon to write *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All its Phases* (1892), and lead further campaigns against lynching, Haiti, with its revolutionary beginnings, should have frightened most white nation-states with its declaration of freedom and anti-coloniality—along with its blackness. These and other views compelled Wells and Frederick Douglass (amongst others) to produce a pamphlet, *Reasons Why the Colored American is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition* (1893)—even as they handed out the pamphlet near Haiti’s doors. Incongruously, Haiti appeared to “arrive” at a moment when it should never have even been on the grounds. Rather than examine the pavilion for the activities that it allowed American Africans and Haitians, I focus my energies on trying to unpack how and why Haiti would be included at all.

The economic shifts and trade desires mentioned earlier in this chapter signal the moves being made in order to capitalise on Haitian trade and credit. Although the inclusion of Haiti in the Fair suggests that it had become one of the sisterhood of nations, as I have suggested, this filial extension is actually synonymous with older logics of consumption regarding Haiti. According to French and Caribbean literary critic J. Michael Dash, “American intentions to reshape, control and dominate Haiti [...] are sustained by an imaginative grid of stereotypes through which Haiti is filtered into America’s consciousness.” For Dash, these stereotypes frame the course of action on the part of US operatives and determine how Haitian officials and intermediaries will respond. In his slim but powerful text *Haiti and the United States*, Dash notes that politicians, pundits and nation-states have utilised these four images of Haiti—“the rebellious body, the repulsive body, the seductive body and the sick body”—discursively throughout the nineteenth century (and

<sup>37</sup> For more on this play, see Easton, *Dessalines, A Dramatic Tale: A Single Chapter from Haiti’s History* and for more on Easton, begin by reading Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch, *A History of African American Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> Armstrong, “A Jumble of Foreignness: The Sublime Musayums,” 201.

during later eras). In the process, they have “fixed Haiti in the Western imagination.”<sup>39</sup> Even Frederick Douglass, former Minister Resident to Haiti and staunch supporter of Haiti’s sovereignty, wrestled with what to do about Haiti. The nation remained, even at the Fair, a problem-space.

Fair materials that include Haiti do not depict this dichotomy. Instead, the pavilion appears in beautiful illustrations with or without positive textual affirmations of its stature and presence. For example, Rand McNally and Co.’s guide for fairgoers, *A Week at the Fair* (1893) illustrates Haiti’s pavilion, showcasing its wide verandas, columns, floor-to-ceiling windows and its colonnade, framed by flags mounted in every corner of the building. In this image, no other buildings surround it. Although the off-set illustration gives some sense of the dimensions of the structure, it provides little information about the nation of Haiti itself.

This same logic plays out in official photographs of Haiti’s pavilion taken by C. D. Arnold during the Fair. In the photograph in Figure 4.2, the pavilion appears as viewers would have seen it, to the right of the pavilion of New South Wales. Other than the triptych that graces the entryway to the pavilion, Haiti’s building provides little cultural history—either in its style or its features. Instead, the pavilion is cast as a non-specific place within the “white city.” Neutral in presentation and in design, little can be discerned about it at first glance. Could this indistinguishableness be an intentional project of passing Haiti, the nation, off as white?

More might be gathered by assessing the sizeable number of photographs of Haiti’s pavilion that were taken by Arnold.<sup>40</sup> From these photographs and the official published directories of the Fair, we know that Haiti’s pavilion was built in the Greco-Colonial style, had a gilded dome, eight Doric columns and a three-sided piazza. A number of the official prints share the same negative, but the various versions published from this original differ owing to what appears to be hand-painted colour added to the Haitian flag, the inclusion of a US flag in lieu of the Haitian standard on the top of the pavilion and the addition or removal of people moving outside the building. Another print, published before the opening of the Fair, presents a vastly different area. With no grass or walkways, the pavilion looks unmoored and isolated. Again, as with the illustration, these images offer no way to determine the national affiliation of the pavilion—minus those where the Haitian flag prominently features. In most cases, the Haitian pavilion may be Haitian, but its

39 J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 137.

40 These prints—and negatives assembled from fairgoers—are available in the Chicago Public Library’s C. D. Arnold Collection in the Special Collections Division.

form and structure reflected the many European and US buildings that surrounded it.

Although Arnold produced additional prints that captured the pavilion, unofficial, probably amateur, photographers may have archived even more, sharing the images as postcards or placing them within family albums. Looking through the archives gathered for this book suggests that there may be a larger body of such images in private collections or within other archives that offer up a potential counter-narrative to the more staged captures by Arnold's lens. For example, in the "Illinois in the Gilded Age" area of the Northern Illinois University Library's Digitization unit—a source that brings together primary sources from Illinois libraries, museums and archives such as the Chicago Historical Society—there is a print of the Haiti pavilion.<sup>41</sup> Taken by an unnamed photographer, the image conveys the same affective charge of Arnold's more formal images of the grand buildings and avenues of the "white city." On the one hand, this synchronous style is to be expected from a photographer of Arnold's stature. I am less interested in the ways his images brand the Fair than I am in the ways that Haiti's pavilion, and by extension Haiti, visibly corresponds to the pattern of the other white spaces within the "white city." As mentioned above, Haiti had arrived, but at what cost and in what form?

### **An Invitation to Temporary Whiteness and the Fight for Black Sovereignty within**

The initial absorption of Haiti into US trade and commercial fantasies in the Americas can be mapped—literally and figuratively—through the efforts of US government intermediaries working with the Fair's administration to steer the republics within Latin America and the Caribbean. Although this type of commercial manoeuvring and political entanglement is not new within the region, the inclusion of Haiti as a specific financial node deserves additional scrutiny given the USA's troubling interactions up to that point with Haiti.

As soon as Haitian President Louis Mondestin Florvil Hyppolite, a career military member appointed to his post by a council in 1889, received US President Benjamin Harrison's invitation to the Fair in 1891, he began organising a national committee of political luminaries to oversee internal preparations. He immediately tapped two additional representatives who would act as Haiti's commissioners at the Fair. One of these commissioners,

<sup>41</sup> This print probably comes from this photographic text: anon., *Reminiscences of the Fair: A Portfolio of Photographs of the World's Columbian Exposition* (St. Louis: Usa Lester, Lawrence & Miller, 1894).

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mentioned previously, is well known in US and Haitian history—the orator, writer and activist Frederick Douglass. Charles A. Preston, the second commissioner, mentioned above, was the son of a Haitian diplomat and spent a large portion of his adult life in the USA. It would be Preston, not Douglass, who would be involved in most of the planning for the pavilion, including interacting with the Fair’s official directors and the Director of the Fair’s Latin American Department, William Eleroy Curtis. Douglass, though, would be an instrumental advocate and vocal champion for Haiti at the Fair, especially given his notoriety and stature within the USA and his former diplomatic role as US Minister Resident to Haiti (more on Douglass below).

The Fair may have helped position the USA globally as a world leader with creative talents and industry, and situated Haiti, in the process, but this story of Haiti at the Fair is not one about US dominance and Haitian acquiescence. Haitian leaders had their own impulses that worked against, as well as in tandem with, US interests. As Reddy and Dillon suggest, accounting for such complexity is the key to understanding the distorting effect on knowledge of a place’s or a people’s history. These power dynamics are reconstituted in the Fair. An examination of the letters and other artefacts of the Fair illuminates how Haiti’s position as a critically important trade and commercial zone vital to the expansion of capitalism within and beyond the USA both required and fostered rhetorical alternatives of dysfunction and inferiority that respond to the “unfinishedness” of Haiti’s black sovereignty.

In 1891, just two years before the opening of the Fair, Haitian Minister to the USA Hannibal Price circulated *The Haytian Question*, an essay that examines the looming economic perils for Haiti in the geopolitics of the Atlantic world. Published in New York under the pen name Verax, *The Haytian Question* was the minister’s public response to US claims of Haitian duplicity two years after a violent civil war rumbled through Haiti—a war instigated in part by US commercial and military machinations.<sup>42</sup>

In it, Price stresses that Haiti would continue to be trampled on by the “greed and jealousies already awakened” within “the Colossus of the North”—the USA. In light of the USA’s long history of meddling in Haitian political and economic affairs, Price anticipates only increased contestations of power between the two countries. He predicts that “the piercing of the Central American isthmus, sooner or later, by an inter-oceanic canal—whether at Panama or at Nicaragua—with the enormous economic interests engaged with and to be developed by that enterprise, must inevitably make

<sup>42</sup> See Verax [Hannibal Price], *The Haytian Question* (New York: Louis Weiss & Co., Printers and Publishers, 1891).

the sea of the Antilles,” Haiti, and the nations that exist within and around it, “the cynosure and strategic point of the principal maritime and commercial powers [...] of the great Republic of the United States of America.”<sup>43</sup> Price extends this criticism of US–Haitian relations by considering what will likely be future political dealings between the USA and Haiti. By his calculations, as long as Haiti remained at the centre of the USA’s Antillean fantasies, Haiti’s stability and sovereignty would be in question. According to Price, the USA’s desire and greed for the Antilles was about more than commercial concessions for individual merchants. Haiti, he argues, had to contend with coordinated and concentrated attacks by entire industries (such as shipping) as well as a history of diplomatic interference by the USA that extended back further in time but included efforts in the 1870s and 1880s that focused on acquiring territory within the Caribbean.

The real reason Haiti was important to the USA, Price asserts, was because of the value of its trade with (or more accurately through) Haiti. According to figures from 1891, Haiti imported annually goods from the USA worth nearly \$6.5 million, yet exported to the USA manufactures worth only \$2.2 million.<sup>44</sup> By the turn of the century, almost 70 per cent of Haiti’s goods were imported from North America for a population that by 1910, totalled 1.5 million.<sup>45</sup> US businesspeople and traders constantly reminded Haitians (especially the Haitian elite) that they needed the USA and *more and more* American goods if they were to expand their wealth and prosperity.

Haiti’s economic potential would also be on the minds of those politicians and reformers within Haiti who wrestled with the rise of foreign brokers and the role of foreign investment in Haiti’s politics and future.<sup>46</sup> Some reformers believed that true prosperity within Haiti could only come to fruition once the country removed the foundational constitutional prohibition on foreign ownership of land. They believed that only with the repeal of this provision could the government, commerce, industry and Haiti’s allies in the global trading and investment community infuse Haiti’s markets with much-needed capital. For many of these advocates, this investment in Haiti’s economic future prosperity could be done without the loss of Haiti’s freedom.

43 Verax [Hannibal Price], *The Haytian Question*, 6.

44 Verax [Hannibal Price], *The Haytian Question*, 67.

45 Brenda Gayle Plummer, “The Metropolitan Connection: Foreign and Semiforeign Elites in Haiti, 1900–1915,” *Latin American Research Review* 19, no. 2 (1984): 122.

46 For more on these considerations, as well as the political and cultural contributions of people of African descent, see: Anténor Firmin, *De l’égalité des race humaines* (1885) and Hannibal Price, *De la réhabilitation de la race noire par la République d’Haïti* (1893).

For some, this investment need highlighted the brokerage role of foreigners—and foreign intervention—in Haitian politics and economic life. And as the nineteenth century amply demonstrates, Haitian politicians occupying diverging political positions would use these brokers as a way to maintain or acquire power. For this reason, many foreign merchants and government representatives realised that the best way to gain influence in Haiti was to interact actively with politicians. Sociologist and Caribbeanist David Nicholls suggests that this foreign game-playing would “prove fatal to the country’s independence” in the twentieth century.<sup>47</sup> Although Haitian politicians and merchants argued that laws could be made that could control or constrain the many foreigners targeting the country, the enactment and application of these laws would prove difficult to ensure as burgeoning imperialists within and beyond the Atlantic rim sought to solidify and increase their control and consumption of goods and spaces—and targeted Haiti in the process.<sup>48</sup>

In Haiti, international merchants—from France, Great Britain, Germany and Syria (although mostly Lebanese Christians)—vied for economic power alongside US merchants who were not willing to abandon the potential market for trade in and through Haiti without a fight. According to diplomatic historian Ludwell Lee Montague, in his classic *Haiti and the United States, 1714–1938*, the rise of the USA’s influence in Haitian trade was nothing short of miraculous. The inclusion of Haiti in the “white city” was both symbol and catalyst for this drastic change in market share. In 1893, the year of the Fair, “Great Britain had commanded four fifths” of the sale of textiles in Haiti, “but in 1903 the United States dominated it in the same degree.”<sup>49</sup> These foreign importers would use the changes in global capital at the end of the nineteenth century to forge alliances with Haitian intermediaries and Haitian politicians vying for national control of the government.

It would be these same foreigners who would—when faced with various Haitian policies that aimed to contain or limit their investment and involvement—turn to their respective governments for “aid” that often involved warships and military demonstrations in the waters off the Haitian

47 Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, 141.

48 See these excellent sources for information on these economic issues: Brenda Gayle Plummer, “The Metropolitan Connection: Foreign and Semiforeign Elites in Haiti, 1900–1915,” Nicholls, *Haiti in Caribbean Context*, Dupuy, *Haiti in the World Economy* and Mark Schuller, “Haiti’s 200-year old Ménagement-à-Trois: Globalization, the State, and Civil Society,” *Caribbean Studies* 35, no. 1 (January–June 2007): 141–79.

49 Ludwell Lee Montague, *Haiti and the United States, 1714–1938* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), 169.

coast.<sup>50</sup> Although some Haitian politicians fought these changes, others courted foreigners for their money and influence. These shifts were fuelled by a steady flow of capital through this area. Sociologist Alex Dupuy notes that this flow was substantial: “By 1913, the value of U.S. exports [to Latin America and the Caribbean] increased to \$1.7 billion” and “the value of imports went from \$850 million to \$1.2 billion.” Access to these markets motivated the USA to create the conditions necessary to whitewash Haiti for inclusion at the Fair.<sup>51</sup>

Haiti, then, emerged at the Fair as an intriguing example of progress, civilisation and advancement in the 400 years since Columbus’s landing in the Americas. Erected in order to meet the demands of global commerce, Haiti’s pavilion would represent the contradictory impulses of global modernisms that could transform a black Antillean nation into a vehicle for US global capital. This process would be given form and meaning by political forces at the level of the US nation-state (specifically, through the office of US Secretary of State James G. Blaine and his able Fair/US State Department/Bureau of the American Republics intermediary William Eleroy Curtis) and their work on behalf of the First Inter-American Conference to craft and conceive a new category of American states that included Haiti. This overtly capitalist organisation provided a conceptual road-map and vital rationale for Haiti’s inclusion in the “white city.”

### The Inter-American Conference, Haiti and Capital

The Inter-American Conference, today known as the Organization of American States (OAS), emerged in the 1880s, following decades of false starts, to organise and strengthen ties among the nations of the Americas. Although a number of meetings and conferences were held beginning in the 1820s—mostly at the instigation of the newly formed Latin American republics—the Inter-American Conference and its goals took concrete form in the 1880s with the formation of a more permanent political and economic confederation of American states.<sup>52</sup> It was led and organised

50 For more on this, see Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*.

51 Dupuy, *Haiti in the World Economy*, 129.

52 Although the process to form a confederation can be traced to the moments listed in the body of this chapter, there were additional attempts to create reciprocity treaties between the USA and other republics within the Americas. US President Chester Arthur is credited with initiating policies to promote exports from the USA to other countries. In 1884, President Arthur would appoint a commission to investigate the best procedure for creating commercial relations between the USA and Central and South America. William Eleroy Curtis would play a significant role in this commission; initially as its secretary, before becoming a presidential appointee in 1885. This group

by US Secretary of State James G. Blaine, who called for the creation of a pan-American enterprise during his first of two terms as US Secretary of State.<sup>53</sup> The enterprise went by a number of names—including the Bureau of the American Republics. When discussing the conference itself, I will refer to it as the First Inter-American Conference—the name that appears on the published documents from the initial meeting—and use its subsequent name, the Bureau of the American Republics, when referring to the organisation that grew out of the gathering.

The First Inter-American Conference of 1889 and 1890 would, as the name suggests, be the first of several meetings that drew together delegates from the Americas in order to create a coordinated political and economic bloc that would effectively curtail European commercial trading—while at the same time elevating the power of the USA within the region. This first conference was convened and paid for by the USA and took place in Washington, DC. The published *Minutes of the International Conference* shows that representatives came from the Argentine Republic, Bolivia, Brazil, Chili, Columbia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Salvador, Uruguay, Venezuela and Haiti. Santo Domingo—or the Dominican Republic—was also invited, but declined the invitation.<sup>54</sup> Authorised by Congress, financed by the USA and presided over by the intrepid US Secretary of State Blaine, the First Inter-American Conference would encourage the republics of the Americas to discuss and plan how they could help each other prosper within various global markets.

travelled to the various republics and discussed the possibility of reciprocal trade agreements, met with merchants about promoting US trade and conferred about the USA convening a conference of the American republics. This conference would be the one that Blaine would convene, and Curtis would attend in 1889. For more on this commission, see William Eleroy Curtis, “A Brief History of the Reciprocity Policy,” *Annals of the Academy of Political and Social Science* 29 (1907): 16–21.

53 For more on his views, see Joseph B. Lockie, “James Gillespie Blaine (Second Term),” in Samuel Flagg Bemis, ed., *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), Alice Felt Tyler, *The Foreign Policy of James G. Blaine* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, [c.1927] 1965), Allan Peskin, “Blaine, Garfield and Latin America: A New Look,” *Americas* 36, no. 1 (1979): 79–89, David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Trade and Investment: American Economic Expansion in the Hemisphere, 1865–1900* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998) and David Healy, *James G. Blaine and Latin America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

54 *Minutes of the International American Conference*. 51st Congress. 1st Session. Senate. Executive Document Number 231. Washington, 1890, 2–3. The Dominican Republic, it should be noted, lies near the Mona Passage shipping lane. With the Dominican Republic (temporarily) out of the picture, that only left Haiti as the main territory that the USA could influence or manipulate in order to enact its transportation plans for controlling commerce within the Americas.

## Black Sovereignty at the Turn of the Century

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As reciprocal as such discussions seemed, US politicians were not above punishing those who tried to finagle deals for their own benefit. For example, when Haiti refused to change its tariffs on US goods just after the conference started, US President Harrison imposed retaliatory duties on Haitian goods that included coffee, the most important Haitian export.<sup>55</sup> US government officials made it clear that in order for these tariffs to be lifted Haiti would have to fall in line with the USA's plans for the Americas. Haiti could participate—on US terms—or be pushed out of the family.

Still, the fact that the USA sought as a general rule to dictate the terms of capitalist development within these spaces is less of a point of interest for me than the particular emphasis these policies placed on simultaneously recognising Haiti's sovereignty and attempting to undermine it. Residing on or near the Windward Passage and the Mona Passage, two shipping lanes to the east and west of Hispaniola, meant that Haiti remained a significant site for expansion-minded people and capitalists within the US administration who wanted to make moves within the region that did not require them to interact with France, England or Spain. While Jamaica, Cuba and the Bahamas are closer to the USA than Haiti, the fact that other empires swirled around them made them less attractive to US interests—a fact clearly understood by Secretary Blaine.<sup>56</sup> Independent Haiti offered a different option.

Blaine was not alone in his efforts, of course. Naval historian Benjamin Franklin Cooling argues:

While Blaine dreamed of trade and Pan-American union, [President Benjamin] Harrison worked closely with the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee to strengthen the Maritime Canal Company of Nicaragua [...] and [Naval Secretary Benjamin] Tracy sought a practical way to secure a base to service Atlantic naval units which policed trade lanes in the area as well as the eastern approaches to the potential canal.<sup>57</sup>

Cooling goes on to suggest that Harrison's and Tracy's efforts centred on the USA's control of and influence on one specific place—Haiti. For

55 In addition to the sources in this chapter, see David Pletcher, "Reciprocity and Latin America in the Early 1890s: A Foretaste of Dollar Diplomacy," *Pacific Historical Review* 47, no. 1 (1978): 53–89.

56 Samuel Guy Inman, *Inter-American Conferences 1826–1954: History and Problems*, ed. Harold Eugene Davis (Gettysburg, PA: Times & News Publishing Co. [The University Press of Washington, DC and the Community College Press], 1965), 34.

57 Benjamin Franklin Cooling, *Benjamin Franklin Tracy: Father of the Modern American Fighting Navy* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1973), 111.

these and other reasons, the First Inter-American Conference would be an essential platform from which the USA could implement its plans for Haiti and the rest of the Americas.<sup>58</sup>

Blaine, designated as the First Inter-American Conference's Chairman, opened the proceedings with the following:

Gentlemen of the International American conference [...] Your presence here is not an ordinary event. It signifies much to the people of all America today. It may signify far more in the days to come [...] the delegates whom I am addressing can do much to establish permanent relations of confidence, respect and friendship between the nations which they represent. They can show to the world an honorable, peaceable conference of seventeen independent American Powers in which all shall meet together on terms of absolute *equality*.<sup>59</sup>

Sounding a refrain of respect, friendship and sovereign recognition, Blaine stresses that the Inter-American Conference brought together equal nation-states, ready and eager to develop closer relations throughout the Americas. Although Blaine professes that a sentiment he calls "American sympathy" permeates the proceedings, he quickly moves away from affect and begins talking about space. He devotes considerable attention to the spatial proximity between the republics within the Americas. Blaine suggests that the geographical nearness of the American republics to each other—and ostensibly to the USA—offered the countries a chance to become a powerful family of nation-states. Blaine constructs a new formation of "America," in which, as Dillon notes, "ideas about selling and owning could literally and figuratively be mapped onto ways of seeing and knowing."<sup>60</sup> From the map of individual states, he foresaw the emergence of a new America. According to Blaine, sharing the same geographical region allowed the nations to develop a shared feeling that could serve as the inspiration for mutual development.

The conference delegates exchanged these and similar discussions over a series of 70 sessions from 2 October 1889 to 27 April 1890. Described by missionary and reformer Samuel Guy Inman as a conference to "promote the prosperity of the American States," the formation of a customs union, regular port communications and a "uniform system of customs regulations," the conference built upon earlier endeavours to draw the nations within the

<sup>58</sup> Cooling, *Benjamin Franklin Tracy*, III.

<sup>59</sup> Senate Executive Document, No. 232, Part I, p. 38, as quoted in Samuel Guy Inman, *Inter-American Conferences 1826–1954: History and Problems*, 38–39; emphasis mine.

<sup>60</sup> Dillon, "Mapping Enterprise: Cartography and Commodification at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition," 77.

Americas into some formal group.<sup>61</sup> Coming to fruition a mere six years after Blaine first proposed a Pan-American Congress in Panama, the First Inter-American Conference in Washington, DC marked a new era in US foreign affairs. To political historian Allan Peskin, this development “was nothing less than a fundamental reorientation of American foreign policy,” in which the USA assumed the “moral and political stewardship of the entire Western hemisphere”—even if they were not actually asked to do so.<sup>62</sup> This paternalism borrowed the rhetoric of recognition and sovereignty in order to marshal acceptance of its controlling practices. While familial links were espoused, any nation-state that refused—such as Haiti for a time—risked being penalised or economically isolated, not only by the USA but by the other participants, as well. This language of equality offered reciprocity, but was operationalised as control, signalling to Haiti, and any other American republic, the risk of reprisal if they did not respond in the manner expected of them by US officials.

Economic endeavours such as the First Inter-American Conference were pivotal to the future expansion of US trade into new markets, and many US officials—like Blaine—believed that the country could expand its power by dominating global trade. Although Blaine’s opening address occludes this desire, other documents published at the time by US representatives of the conference take up this theme.

In an essay entitled “Friends in South America” that appeared in an 1889 issue of the *North American Review*, William Eleroy Curtis tries to convince his readers that South America would benefit from closer ties to the USA. Written just before the First Inter-American Conference meeting, this essay stresses that while no one expects the conference attendees to “fall upon one another’s necks with *embracios* and vows of eternal peace and affection,” the USA must nevertheless try to draw Latin American and Caribbean markets away from Europe. This, Curtis emphasises, is the real import of the First Inter-American Conference.<sup>63</sup>

The link between Curtis and Blaine is intriguing. As noted earlier in the chapter, Blaine appointed Curtis to an earlier commission charged with gauging the interest of Latin American republics in attending such an event. And at the First Inter-American Conference itself, Blaine took the opportunity, as the host, to nominate Curtis as its Secretary. Delegates who—despite Curtis’s friendly overtures—detected in Curtis’s earlier essay a dangerous and threatening tone immediately challenged this nomination.

61 Inman, *Inter-American Conferences 1826–1954: History and Problems*, 40.

62 Peskin, “Blaine, Garfield and Latin America: A New Look,” 82.

63 William Eleroy Curtis, “Friends in South America,” *North American Review* 149 (1 September 1889): 377.

## The Unfinished Revolution

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Blaine sidestepped the controversy by setting up Curtis as the Executive Director of the conference—a position that would turn into the Executive Directorship of the Bureau of the American Republics, once formed.<sup>64</sup>

Although reports from Latin American delegates suggest that they did not understand the significance of Curtis's designated title, Curtis understood exactly what authority he could wield as the Executive Director over the sovereign nation-states. In 1890, writing under his new directorship title, Curtis published a document for delegates that found its way to the US Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs. Entitled *Trade and Transportation between the United States and Latin America*, this more than 300-page treatise describes the specific circumstances and directives for trade between the USA and other states within the Americas. It also clarifies why this trade matters:

People who have not studied the subject have very little conception of the magnitude and value of the foreign commerce of Central and South America. The fifty millions of people south of the Rio Grande and the Gulf of Mexico are engaged in a trade which amounts to \$1,000,000,000 annually, nearly evenly divided between exports and imports [...] The total value of the foreign commerce of these countries increased from \$709,000,000 in 1870 to \$1,014,000,000 in 1884, a gain of \$304,732,000, or 43 per cent.<sup>65</sup>

Money, it seems, was destined to make new friends out of former strangers. The potential to acquire some of the one-billion dollars in Latin American trade motivated US officials to finance the aims of this grand inter-American project.

After specifying the amount of trade money being generated by the nation-states participating in the Conference, Curtis goes on to note that a number of European countries were controlling the terms of trade for these nations. These terms, Curtis implied, were orchestrated and conceived to the detriment of the USA's plans for global market ascension. In a section entitled "Our Share of the Latin American Trade," Curtis stresses that "the share of the United States in the commerce of Latin America during the year 1888 was \$244,219,000; of which our imports were valued at \$175,229,000, and our exports \$68,990,000." "In other words," he argues, "we bought 35 per cent. of what our neighbors had to sell, and sold them less than 15 per

<sup>64</sup> For more on this, see Inman, *Inter-American Conferences 1826–1954: History and Problems*, 37.

<sup>65</sup> William Eleroy Curtis, *Trade and Transportation between the United States and Latin America*. 51st Congress, 1st Session. US Senate. Executive Document. No. 54 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1890), 8.

cent. of what they purchased.”<sup>66</sup> This imbalance, the report urges, must be addressed, specifically through the creation of a new trade infrastructure and transhemispheric transportation networks.

*Trade and Transportation between the United States and Latin America* devotes chapter-specific analyses to 16 of the 17 nations participating in the First Inter-American Conference. The one participant without its own chapter is Haiti, and the omission is telling. Rather than give Haiti its own analysis, Curtis slips Haiti into other discussions, repeatedly focusing on its status as a shipping and transportation depot for the movement and flow of global capital. Moreover, he outlines the mechanisms by which such capital could be channelled through Haiti’s system of credit. In Haiti, he states, “credit is essential to trade,” but the “system of credit is so deeply rooted in this community that merchants sell to retailers principally on credit, and these in turn sell to most of their customers on similar terms.” Curtis stresses that this unlimited system of exchange could enable US investors to advance their capitalist aims exponentially. The best part? “This credit system,” he argues, “is restricted by neither law nor regulations.”<sup>67</sup> Included in the First Inter-American Conference purportedly as an equal amongst sovereign nations, Haiti emerges within this side marginalia as less a fellow trade partner and more as a zone for the extension of commerce whose profitability required oversight by the USA. Essentially, Curtis recognises Haiti’s sovereignty in exchange for the control of capital through and within Haitian territory. By emphasising the nation’s viability as a site for trade, while at the same time making clear that any profits depended on US control, Curtis links Haiti’s sovereignty with its outlaw status—and its blackness—due to what he perceives as Haiti’s lack of laws and dysfunctional credit regulatory system. It is suspiciously Haiti’s lax regulations that make it both a valuable sovereign space to move transnational capital and a fragile zone of capital in need of greater control by another sovereign entity.

Curtis’s investment in and extension of credit within Haiti is driven, in part, by his categorisation of Haiti’s financial institutions as precarious entities in need of US intervention in order to avoid destabilising the entire region. Historian Brenda Gayle Plummer puts a finer point on these foreign moves in her assessment that the rise of commission and credit houses in Haiti led to an increase in the power of foreigners—especially Germans—who, she notes, “vigorously promoted commercial expansion in the Americas.” French Antilleans, Corsicans, Italians and Syrio-Lebanese immigrants and merchants would join these intrepid capital-seekers. Some of these newcomers to Haiti may only have stayed on Haiti’s shores for a limited time,

<sup>66</sup> Curtis, *Trade and Transportation*, 10.

<sup>67</sup> Curtis, *Trade and Transportation*, 319.

but they would constitute a commercial force, especially after Haiti's internal traders and brokers declined in influence and power.<sup>68</sup> This circular system of economic exploitation, consumption and corruption included Haitian officials, foreign leaders, merchants and traders with complicated national ties throughout the Atlantic world. Plummer notes that this particular trading community included not just people directly from the metropole or fixed national locations within the circum-Atlantic, but also those from territories within and between these zones—including individuals from or born in the Turks and Caicos Islands, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, St. Thomas and Curaçao. These individuals may have been born on colonial lands or territories ruled through complex sovereign structures, but they were often tied in complex ways to transatlantic ports and communities.<sup>69</sup>

The capital fantasies generated by these traders—and stoked by Curtis—not only determined Haiti's status within the First Inter-American Conference, but also its position within the “white city” of the Fair—even before the “white city” was fully formed. Report 1454 to the 52nd US Congress (1st Session) details the amounts of money that various countries and states within the Americas planned to spend displaying their Fair exhibit materials. Conspicuously, nearly every nation that had delegates at the First Inter-American Conference appeared on the list, including Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Haiti.<sup>70</sup> Of the larger group, only Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil and Haiti would have freestanding pavilions set up to

68 See Plummer, “The Metropolitan Connection,” 125. Plummer notes that the Syrio-Lebanese community peaked in Haiti around 1904 when close to 6,000 were in the country.

69 As noted, Americans entered a crowded field of transatlantic entrepreneurs, exporters and financiers that included “new world” Creoles of various complicated national identities. These nineteenth-century Creoles—some not rooted by choice—used their flexible ties and constantly changing allegiances in order to chart a path through conflicting Atlantic trade laws and restrictions. And, these individuals did not just make a living; many made a fortune. It would be one particular group of foreigners—the merchant bankers—who would charge upwards of 50% on loans to Haiti, in order, they claimed, to protect themselves from the unstable political landscape that would witness at least ten provisional and official presidents assume power in the period between Haitian President Hyppolite's term of office (1889–96) and the USA's military takeover of the nation in 1915. For more on this time, see Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “Haiti's Nightmare and the Lessons of History,” in Deidre McFadyen and Pierre La Remée, eds., *Haiti: Dangerous Crossroads* (Boston: Southend Press, 1995), Renda, *Taking Haiti*, Crichtlow, *Globalization and the Post-Creole Imagination* and Peter James Hudson, *Bankers and Empire: How Wall Street Colonized the Caribbean* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

70 Only Chile had yet to signify that they had a commission working on an exhibition.

showcase their national products and goods. And while it was neither the largest nor the most opulent of these pavilions, Haiti's would be the only one located in the most sought after location of the "white city."

### Come to the Fair

Examining Curtis's texts alongside official government documents illuminates the extent of the planning that linked the First Inter-American Conference to the goals of the Fair. Indeed, Curtis's essay in the *North American Review* hints at the trade connections he hoped to foster between both events:

Tourists [from America] are beginning to visit Central and South America, where they have never gone before, and each returning traveler brings back intelligence that tempts others to follow in his footsteps. The coming conference will greatly increase this new-born interest [...] and the proposed exposition [or the Fair] to commemorate the discovery of Columbus will be a great international educator.<sup>71</sup>

The nations from the First Inter-American Conference—including Haiti—made a strong showing at the Fair and included some of the grandest and most talked about pavilions. The *Official Directory of the World's Columbian Exposition* (1893) describes Guatemala's pavilion as a grand 12,500-square-foot structure that included a centre court that "resembles the old patios in a Spanish house."<sup>72</sup> The Guatemala pavilion was joined nearby by other First Inter-American Conference nation-states. American studies critic David F. Burg states that while these foreign buildings "could hardly have been expected to arouse people's interest quite to the extent that the Court of Honor [*the eye-catching fountain, waterways and buildings*] did [...] they were [still] integral to the grounds, purposes, and nature of the White City as a whole."<sup>73</sup>

Grouped near each other on pathways, the First Inter-American Conference nations consolidated the collective trade power of Latin America and the Caribbean. What emerges from this collective, then, is a form of *supra*American state—forged by the USA—that would break away from

71 Curtis, "Friends in South America," 378–79.

72 Handy, *The Official Directory of the World's Columbian Exposition*, 127.

73 David F. Burg, *Chicago's White City of 1893* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976), 210. The Court of Honor refers to the grand and majestic US buildings that surrounded the basin that contained the striking statue, State of the Republic. The surrounding buildings included the Electricity Building, the Manufacturers and Liberal Arts Building and the Administration Building.

the controlling power of Europe and situate the Americas as the centre of the world—or at least the world controlled by the USA in which the suppression of sovereignty—especially black sovereignty—hides behind grand demonstrations of recognition. What may have been abstractly conceived in the chambers of the First Inter-American Conference sessions, and reaffirmed when the delegates embarked on a multi-week train excursion from Washington, DC to Chicago and back, took on real and tangible representation in the distinct buildings that brought each nation to life at the Fair.

William Eleroy Curtis worked to shape these representations in his capacity as the Director of the Latin American Department for the Fair. Curtis, in this position, sent letters to the foreign pavilion commissioners of the Latin American republics—such as the co-commissioner of Haiti’s pavilion, Frederick Douglass. In a letter of 1892 from Curtis found in the Frederick Douglass Papers in the Library of Congress, Curtis informs Douglass that he has learned “through an official despatch to the [US] Department of State” that Douglass was appointed as a commissioner for Haiti.<sup>74</sup> Curtis’s letter arrived just seven days after John Hurst, the Haitian *chargé d’affaires ad interim* to the USA (a temporary diplomatic position similar to an envoy), wrote to Douglass to inform him that the President of Haiti had appointed him as a commissioner to represent Haiti at the Fair. The timing between these two letters suggests that Curtis used his connections within the US State Department in order to gather information that he could use to his advantage as the Director of the Latin American Department at the Fair.<sup>75</sup>

Curtis, in this same letter to Douglass, also states that he knows that Douglass had yet to accept the appointment as one of Haiti’s commissioners at the Fair. In order to influence Douglass’s decision—and bolster the view that the Fair and the First Inter-American Conference supported Haiti’s sovereignty—Curtis invites Douglass to meet him at his Bureau of the American Republics offices.<sup>76</sup> Through these efforts, he advanced the global capital aims of the Fair and the USA-led and -financed Bureau of the American Republics.

While this influence can be traced in the 1892 letter to a period before Frederick Douglass agreed to take on the position of commissioner, Curtis

<sup>74</sup> Letter from William E. Curtis to Frederick Douglass, 8 March 1892, *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Library of Congress.

<sup>75</sup> Curtis engaged in this kind of behaviour again and again. Later, after Douglass accepted the appointment, he received letters from Curtis regarding the Fair that were sent on a Bureau of the American Republics letterhead. Curtis also held meetings with Fair officials in his Washington Bureau offices.

<sup>76</sup> Letter from William E. Curtis to Frederick Douglass, 8 March 1892.

exercises even more authority as time moves on. In a series of generic letters almost certainly sent to all the foreign commissioners of the Latin American and Caribbean republics, Curtis instructs the individuals—identified as “sirs” in the letter—to “send all packages intended for his Department” to him so that he could keep track of every item.<sup>77</sup>

Curtis was interested in more than just exhibition content. In another letter in the Frederick Douglass Papers in the Library of Congress, dated 25 April 1892, Douglass informs the former Haitian Minister of Public Works, Dalbémard Jean-Joseph—one of the members of Haiti’s internal committee for the Fair—that he and Charles A. Preston had “called at the Bureau of [the] American Republics for the purpose of making application for suitable space for the exhibits to be presented from Haiti at the exhibition.” Douglass goes on to note that Curtis informed them “that the space allotted to the Argentine Republic had been vacated and he advised us to make immediate application for the same, which application we there and then made.”<sup>78</sup> This application, though, did not finalise the location of Haiti’s pavilion.

Additional letters on 2 and 3 May between Curtis and Douglass suggest that they, in conjunction with Preston, were to meet in Chicago to (the 3 May letter states) “receive any assistance” from Curtis that would help the commissioners obtain “suitable space for the exhibit at the Columbian Exposition, which shall be sent there by the Republic of Haiti.”<sup>79</sup> As the letter implies, Curtis would use his influence with the Fair organisers to establish Haiti’s pavilion in a suitable location. Although additional material may exist that explains more, the evidence reviewed for this book suggests that Curtis worked tirelessly to position Haiti within a prime location within the “white city.”

It is possible to read Curtis’s efforts as a distorted form of sovereign recognition and racial equality that exchanged seeing and reciprocity for preferential treatment within credit systems. By bringing Haiti into the Fair, Curtis and others expected something in return—most notably, access. In extending his influence as Director at the Fair, Curtis was able to bleed the goals of the two organisations into one and use his power to assist in bringing Haiti into the “sisterhood of nation-states.” Curtis, then, brought Haiti to the Fair exactly as Haiti was imagined at the First Inter-American

<sup>77</sup> Letter from William E. Curtis to “Sir,” 5 April 1892, *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Library of Congress.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from Frederick Douglass to D<sup>ar</sup> Jean-Joseph, 25 April 1892, *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Library of Congress.

<sup>79</sup> Letter from Frederick Douglass to William E. Curtis, 3 May 1892, *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Library of Congress.

Conference: as a site central to the USA's commercial goals and desires in the Americas. Through Curtis, the "white city" was turned into a physical reflection of the financial links and capital networks at the heart of the First Inter-American Conference and the Bureau of the American Republics.<sup>80</sup> This group did not take the place of the state, but, instead, was orchestrated by the USA for its state-centric economic benefit—with the sovereignty of other nation-states, and especially Haiti's, being swept to the side. In Haiti's case, this would have far-reaching implications for its financial and political future autonomy.

### Conclusion

Blaine and Curtis understood something fundamental about the USA's quest to control the Americas. They knew that real manipulation of these nation-states began on the seas. Controlling the seas began with controlling the shipping lanes and the territories that surround them. Given its proximity to two critical lanes—the Mona Passage and the Windward Passage—Haiti remained a potential territory for a US naval base, a coaling station or even annexation. As I have noted above, Curtis understood how to turn this desire into capital action, manipulating those within the First Inter-American Conference and orchestrating behind the scenes at the Fair as the Director of the Latin American Department. Fusing these roles allowed him to push forward the interests of the republics within the Americas. Further engagement by Preston and Douglass influenced the strategic siting of Haiti in the "white city." This literal mapping reinforced the figurative mapping of Haiti in the USA's plans for expansion.

This chapter has focused on the movements, networks and socio-spatial relations that determined the planning and location of Haiti's pavilion at the Fair. Above, I set out a series of encounters and entanglements that brought the capital logics of the Fair in dialogue with the capital logics of expansion—especially within territories still influenced by plantation economies. By drawing these narratives together, it is possible to see how the "complex fictions" of the First Inter-American Conference were put into practice at the Fair.

Yet, even as the foreign pavilions in the "white city"—in their differentiation from the "racialogy" on display in the Midway—made visible the trade routes and commercial networks forged by the Bureau of the American

<sup>80</sup> I am indebted to Andy Merrifield for prompting this consideration. For more on his work on Lefebvre, see Merrifield's "Henri Lefebvre: A Socialist in Space." in Mike Change and Nigel Thrift, eds., *Thinking Space* (London: Routledge, 2000), 167–82 and his *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Republics, Haiti remained on the outside of this new world order. As such, its position within this matrix was as vexed as its position within the “white city” of the Fair. Acting as Haiti’s saviour, its “sister” nation—in a distorted set of gendered links—and its friend, the USA masked its actual political and economic work as Haiti’s gatekeeper, its police force and its judge. It would be through the competing aims of recognition and capital—as mapped at the Fair—that US merchants and industries would situate Haiti in the midst of their commercial desires. Haiti remained important to US creditors and traders who saw opportunities for capital accumulation in the region, along with the potential to control transcontinental shipping lanes connecting Latin America and the Caribbean to global markets. But Haiti itself remained an intractable problem that the logics of the Fair, the First-Inter American Conference and the Bureau of the American Republics sought to control through a tangled matrix of recognition and economic control.

This co-joined approach on the part of the USA would have far-ranging implications as internal political power within Haiti swung amongst factions and foreign merchants and governmental representatives jockeyed for influence and control. Others, though, continued to engage in long-standing framings of Haitian politics, its existence, sovereignty and its blackness. One example of this is British Minister Resident to Haiti, Sir Spenser St. John’s book, *Hayti, or the Black Republic* (1889). Published just as the First Inter-American Conference convened, St. John’s text synthesises the racist ideas prevalent throughout the Atlantic regarding the capacity of “the black man” to steer the islands of the West Indies politically. In amassing his evidence of the ability of people of African descent to lead, he recounts supposed cannibalistic vodou rites that included the eating of children. These purportedly accurate cultural descriptions of Haitian behaviour are matched, point-by-point, by his assessment of the political aptitude of black people: “I know what the black man is, and I have no hesitation in declaring that he is incapable of the art of government, and that to entrust him with framing and working for the laws of *our islands* is to condemn them to inevitable ruin.” He extends this criticism and assessment of the impossibilities of black political thought with this lamentation:

What the negro may become after centuries of civilized education I cannot tell, but what I do know is that he is unfit to govern now. There are brilliant exceptions doubtless, as the black Chief-Justice of Barbadoes, but we must judge them as a race, and as a race they are incapable.<sup>81</sup>

81 Sir Spenser St. John, *Hayti, or the Black Republic* (London: Frank Cass, 1971 [London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1889]), xi.

Although St. John's assessment implies that he has the ability to diagnose which nations and citizens have political capabilities, he also writes at length about the inscrutability of Haiti and Haitians. For all his talk about knowing "what the black man is," St. John manages to reinforce Dash's assertions about Haiti's supposed "impenetrable mystery, its irredeemable strangeness, its unpredictable 'Otherness.'"<sup>82</sup> Rather than amplify this Otherness, the logics at the Fair erased them—allowing Haiti temporarily to pass into the "sisterhood of nation-states." By nullifying the nation's blackness, Haiti could become a member of the "white city"—while its sovereignty was surreptitiously attacked.

St. John suggests the enormity of this racial project of reclassification. He quotes a French officer who described the changes in Haiti since he last visited: it was "dirtier than before."<sup>83</sup> To the officer and to St. John, the mere presence of people of African descent within the landscape spread dis-ease, allowing pestilence possibly to leach from "dirty" bodies onto the land. St. John's presentation of this and other scenes of blackening are examples of the ecological darkness that literary and Caribbean critic Sibylle Fischer describes as characteristic of racist colonial imaginaries through which:

Haiti is returned to the reader [or viewer] as the bare-boned, incomprehensible place of unspeakable cruelty and bodily suffering, of [...] "voodoo doctors" and corpses drifting in muddy swimming pools, as a liminal space on the edge of Western civilization, without the social and political practices and taboos that constitute life in Western society.<sup>84</sup>

Rereading the French officer's observations about Haiti through Fischer's lens allows us to see the officer's concerns about filth as a critique of Haitians' control of and sovereignty over Haiti. Haiti, this view implies, is in decline because Haitians are incapable of making or keeping their environment clean—just as they are incapable of governing the nation or developing its economy. This purported lack is a convenient aggregate of all ills, problems, normal cycles of life or disruptions. No matter what, someone else would have to intervene in Haiti, if only to keep Haitians from destroying themselves. Within this carefully problematic reasoning, paternalism emerges as the only answer. Even those entities that recognised Haiti's sovereignty did so without altering the parameters of nullification

82 Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*, 3.

83 St. John, *Hayti, or the Black Republic*, 4.

84 Sibylle Fischer, "Haiti: Fantasies of Bare Life," *Small Axe* 23, vol. II, no. 2 (June 2007): 3.

and control that made non-recognition so compelling. Tethered between these poles, Haiti's sovereignty would remain constrained.

Although it may be tempting to read Haiti's arrival at the Fair as an instance of "postraciality," I read it more as a type of masquerading "antiracialism" that David Theo Goldberg identifies as a way of "forgetting, getting over, moving on, wiping away the terms of racial reference" that have the desired effect of making the past—especially the racist practices of the past—also seemingly disappear from history.<sup>85</sup>

In *The Haytian Question*, Price suggests that by the end of the nineteenth century Haiti was involved in a set of engagements that emerged from older forms of power hierarchies between unequal territories and empires. Other nations and territories of similar size and prominence, he argues, often find themselves "by mere accident of [their ...] latitude and longitude upon the disputed ground of international competitions and rivalries." With their newfound global importance, these spaces "acquire a sudden celebrity disproportionate" to their place in history.<sup>86</sup> Although he acknowledges that US politicians, anti-slavery advocates, abolitionists and Haitian writers and leaders have argued about the existence and symbolism of Haiti since its founding, he believes that the discourse in the late nineteenth century was different now that Haiti had become a starring actor in the USA's plans for market expansion.<sup>87</sup>

What Price senses and I have discussed within this chapter is the way that this expansion would borrow the language of recognition and black nullification in order to see Haiti not as a black sovereign entity but as one temporarily brought into the "sisterhood" in order to infiltrate its systems and control its infrastructure. This might sound alarmist, but the transitions and shifts begun in the lead up to the Fair would be actualised some 20 years later when the USA engineered a takeover of Haitian banks and the US military invaded the country under the guise of stabilisation. The military occupation would last 19 years and see cycles of brutality and violence (not to mention enforced labour and ecological destruction in the name of progress) that many critics identify as enabling the dictatorships of Papa Doc Duvalier and his son Baby Doc Duvalier to emerge.<sup>88</sup> In the latter part of the twentieth century, the rise of Father Aristide would bring another

85 Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*, 21.

86 Verax [Hannibal Price], *The Haytian Question*, 5.

87 Verax [Hannibal Price], *The Haytian Question*, 5.

88 For more on this time period, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti: State against Nation: Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000) and Marie Vieux-Chauvet's trilogy, *Love, Anger, Madness: A Haitian Trilogy*, trans. Rose-Miriam Réjouis and Val Vinokur (New York: Modern Library, 2009).

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round of US and foreign interventions and assistance—in the form of UN peacekeeper troops—once again setting Haiti up as an intractable problem that could only be solved by further restricting its sovereignty. Other critics and scholars have documented the history of Haiti in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—although there is still room for a focus on black sovereignty in future examinations. Rather than retread this history, the remaining portion of the book will offer an extended conclusion that revisits the ideas within the previous chapters, in addition to asking what the cycles and reverberations of black sovereignty mean for our present moment.

The next chapter explores these issues in greater detail, pondering just what it might mean to keep open the unfinished project of black sovereignty while its very existence remains under threat and potential eradication.

# 5

## Sovereignty under Siege?

### Contemporary Performances of Black Sovereignty

#### Introduction

Haiti's initial invitation to the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 coincided with another moment of expansion and control: diplomatic negotiations between the USA and Haiti for control of a particular harbour in the north-western corner of the republic—the Môle-Saint-Nicolas. Although acknowledged by all parties that the harbour remained under the clear sovereign control of Haiti, the area nevertheless continued to play a starring role in the USA's plans for control of the shipping lanes leading to the proposed isthmus canal on the mainland. Haitian diplomat Hannibal Price highlights this harbour in *The Haytian Question*, noting that it pointed “like a cannon upon what must necessarily be the European line [or American coal-fuelling stopover point] to the inter-oceanic canal, whether this be completed at Panama, or eventually, at Nicaragua.”<sup>1</sup> So central was this harbour to US expansion efforts that abolitionist, activist and writer Frederick Douglass, in his role as US Minister Resident to Haiti, potentially tried to influence the intense diplomatic negotiations with Haiti's Foreign Minister Anténor Firmin over the USA acquiring (or even leasing) this harbour. Rather than put undue pressure on Firmin through the use of force or coercion—such as that displayed by other US officials during the negotiations—Douglass extended an invitation to Haitian President Hyppolite to the Chicago World's Fair from US President Harrison. As a fleet of US gunships patrolled the Haitian bay on supposed “routine” manoeuvres, Haitian leaders' stance in the negotiations did not change. Firmin responded to the USA's “request” to acquire Haitian territory with

1 Verax [Hannibal Price], *The Haytian Question*, 7.

a firm “no.”<sup>2</sup> The Fair invitation prompted a different response: Haitian officials enthusiastically agreed to participate.

US newspapers, at the time, described Douglass as more Haitian than American after negotiations for the harbour broke off; although they used this description as a way of linking the failure successfully to negotiate the acquisition of the harbour to Douglass’s racial connections with (black) Haiti. In these claims, Douglass did not fight for US interests, but for those of his racial kin. Supportive of Haiti and emboldened by what its presence meant for the futures of people of African descent in the Atlantic world, Douglass was equally supportive of the USA’s right to acquire territory and “foothold[s]” in the Caribbean—bringing the USA in line with “every other great nation in the world.”<sup>3</sup>

Completely comfortable with the blackness of Haiti’s sovereignty, Douglass was less able to frame Haiti’s sovereignty outside of his paternalistic US lens. While this paternalism might be benevolent and based on mutual beneficial considerations and terms, the rhetoric used to configure it echoes the rhetoric of black sovereignty that considers that very sovereignty both as an intractable problem that needs solving by a stronger and more powerful force and a commodity that can be exchanged for something else—in Douglass’s case, US access to the region and greater territorial control.<sup>4</sup>

2 US military representatives and a host of commercial shippers sought to turn Môle into a possible US coaling station and naval base—similar to what would be set up in the coming years at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. For more on this harbour, see Frederick Douglass, “Haiti and the United States: Inside History of the Negotiations for the Mole St. Nicolas,” *North American Review* 153, no. 418 (1891): 337–46, Frederick Douglass, “Haiti and the United States: Inside History of the Negotiations for the Mole St. Nicolas II,” *North American Review* 153, no. 419 (1891): 450–60, Ludwell Lee Montague, *Haiti and the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1940), Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776–1891*, Myra Himelhoch, “Frederick Douglass and Haiti’s Môle St. Nicolas,” *Journal of Negro History* 56, no. 3 (1971): 161–80, Robert Debs Heinl, Jr. and Nancy Gordon Heinl, *Written in Blood: The History of the Haitian People, 1492–1971* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1978) and William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991) and the biography that came out during the final preparations for this book, David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

3 Douglass, “Haiti and the United States. Inside History of the Negotiations for the Mole St. Nicolas,” 340.

4 For more on Frederick Douglass’s views, see John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan, eds., *The Frederick Douglass Papers. volume 5, series 1: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews, 1881–1895* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992) and Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass. Autobiographies: Narratives of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, My Bondage and My Freedom, Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Library Classics of the United States, 1994).

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In a series of talks that Douglass gave in Chicago on 2 January 1893, only one of these—actually at Haiti’s pavilion—dealt with the “arrival” of Haiti at the Fair, the generosity of Haitian President Hyppolite and the beauty of the finished pavilion. In another 2 January talk, at Quinn Chapel, one of the oldest African Methodist Episcopal churches in Chicago, in a speech before thousands, Douglass moves on from the Fair to discuss history, politics and black futures. Here he omits any mention of the liberality of the Fair’s organisers or Haiti’s entry into the “sisterhood of nations.” Instead, he chronicles the power of black people, as seen through the remarkable creation of Haiti. Many readers and critics will undoubtedly have read or heard snippets of this speech, including the rousing refrain in which he decodes the disavowal exhibited by the USA toward Haiti: “Haiti is black, and we have never forgiven Haiti for being black.”<sup>5</sup>

This is a vastly different speech from his address at the Haiti pavilion where he critiques black radicalism and revolutionary fervour. While arguing that cunning, shark-like foreigners (and greedy and ambitious Haitians) often stoke instances of political unrest in Haiti, he maintains that Haitians’ actions have been the primary cause of the nation’s abject state: “This revolutionary spirit of Haiti is her curse, her crime, her greatest calamity and the explanation of the limited condition of her civilization.”<sup>6</sup> If Haiti wants truly to be included in the “sisterhood of nations” it will need to change its behaviour. Based on the new impulses and capitalist desires outlined in Chapter 4, this recommendation appears as a warning: in order to stay in the “white city,” be less revolutionary and radical.

In a rousing refrain, Douglass labels Haiti’s revolutionary spirit as evil and sounds a dire warning about the potential future of Haiti if this spirit is allowed to grow and expand. The following long passage expresses the complexities of his views:

While this [*the revolutionary spirit*] shall prevail, ignorance and superstition will flourish and no good thing can grow and prosper within her orders [...] While this shall prevail, her rich and fruitful soil will bring forth briers, thorns and noxious weeds. While this evil spirit shall prevail, her great natural wealth will be wasted and her splendid opportunities blasted.<sup>7</sup>

5 Frederick Douglass, “Lecture on Haiti,” African American Perspectives: Pamphlets from the Danial A. P. Murray Collection, 1818–1907. *American Memory*. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mfd.25020/>.

6 Frederick Douglass, “Haiti and the Haitian People: An Address Delivered in Chicago, Illinois, on 2 January 1893,” in Blassingame and McKivigan, *The Frederick Douglass Papers. volume 5, series 1*, 518.

7 Douglass, “Haiti and the Haitian People: An Address Delivered in Chicago, Illinois, on 2 January 1893,” 518.

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Focused on wealth and capital accumulation, Douglass sounds like the negative echo of Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer. Rather than searching for a citizenship scheme in order to entice people of African descent from the USA to Haiti, Douglass imagines a future full of economic (and political) loss for Haiti if it did not manage its disorder and take a more active role in governing and restricting its dissenting bodies. Douglass continues:

While this spirit of turbulence shall prevail, confidence in her public men will be weakened, and her well-won independence will be threatened [...] While this evil spirit shall prevail, faith in the value and stability of her institutions, essential to the happiness and well-being of her people, will vanish. While it shall prevail, the arm of her industry will be paralyzed, the spirit of enterprise will languish, national opportunities will be neglected, the means of education will be limited, the ardor of patriotism will be quenched.<sup>8</sup>

It wasn't just Haitians and their institutions that would be impacted. Douglass argues that the nation's "national glory will be tarnished, and her hopes and the hopes of her friends will be blighted."<sup>9</sup> What Douglass describes is not just an evil spirit, but a wave of problems all brought about because of the revolutionary energies and perceived internal challenges to Haiti's prosperity. Douglass feared that if those "energies" went unchecked, the nation faced the brink of destruction. Living with and through those conditions would transform the entire nation, he laments, where "commerce is interrupted, progress halts, streams go unbridged, highways go unrepaired, streets go unpaved, cities go unlighted, filth accumulates in her market places, evil smells affront the air, and disease and pestilence are invited to their work of sorrow, pain and death."<sup>10</sup> What would stop this cycle of discontent and unrest in Haiti? A strong central government that dissuaded—by punishment, if necessary—rebellion and dissent. In essence, what created Haiti—its fiery revolution—could not be allowed to happen, again.

Although Douglass steadfastly remained a supporter of Haiti's black sovereignty, he would carve out a space for doubt about the abilities of its leaders adequately to function and generate wealth for the nation. The questions about political capabilities that he stokes through his story-telling are not so far off from earlier articulations within previous chapters that

8 Douglass, "Haiti and the Haitian People: An Address Delivered in Chicago, Illinois, on 2 January 1893," 518.

9 Douglass, "Haiti and the Haitian People: An Address Delivered in Chicago, Illinois, on 2 January 1893," 518.

10 Douglass, "Haiti and the Haitian People: An Address Delivered in Chicago, Illinois, on 2 January 1893," 518.

questioned the ability of people of African descent to govern and rule. While Douglass does not doubt his political abilities, he does cast doubt on the political world as it was evolving in Haiti. Clearly, Haiti remained a problem in need of some sort of sovereign solution or support—by others.

Douglass's paternalistic posturing sets up the ultimate solution to Haiti's sovereign problem—and one that would sort out its blackness, as well: take-over by someone else, probably a majority white someone else, for the betterment of everyone. Douglass's prophetic imaginings would prove prescient. In 1915, the US military would invade Haiti under the conditions that Douglass envisioned: to establish control and order; to make bridges and roads (using Haitians as labourers); and to stabilise commerce and industry. In effect, the takeover occurred because the USA believed Haiti was unable to solve its own problems—and those problems had now impacted negatively on Americans and American interests. As historian Mary Renda asserts, the occupation set up a racialised logic of domination that not only situated the USA in relation to Haiti, but also informed the racialised and gendered encounters between individual military personnel, Haitian leaders during the occupation and other intrepid practitioners representing the USA.<sup>11</sup>

This domination continues today, in new forms, as do the logics and rhetorical turns that have configured black sovereignty as an absurd or intractable problem in need of solving—or worse, narratives that forever frame the nation and its sovereignty as an absurd, errant, *enfant terrible* in need of a parent, a protector or, perhaps, an overseer. British journalist Jon Henley captures the quality and nuance of these tropic urgings in his writings in the wake of the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti. In a 14 January article in the *Guardian*, entitled “Haiti: A Long Descent to Hell,” Henley notes that “what has really left Haiti in such a state [of ruin] today, what makes the country a constant and heart-rending site of recurring catastrophe, is its history.”<sup>12</sup> From its title, the tone is set for a narrative of declension in which Haiti does not so much emerge from its revolution as become trapped in its history—doomed to saturate in the violent convulsions of becoming that which it should never have been in the Atlantic world: sovereign *and* black. Although Henley historicises Haiti's dealings with the USA and other Atlantic nation-states, he does so in large part by falling back on the familiar assumptions of deficiency and dysfunction that dominated earlier chapters. Colonialism plays a role in Henley's narrative, but he fails to grapple with Haiti in any meaningful way. Instead, he identifies Haiti's history as a long and constant descent into

<sup>11</sup> See Renda, *Taking Haiti*.

<sup>12</sup> Jon Henley, “Haiti: A Long Descent to Hell,” *Guardian* 14 January 2010. [www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jan/14/haiti-history-earthquake-disaster](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jan/14/haiti-history-earthquake-disaster).

horror and chaos. He links this history to Haiti's infrastructure, its leaders' political ineptitude and the suffering of its people: "The last five centuries [in Haiti] have combined to produce a people so poor, an infrastructure so nonexistent and a state so hopelessly ineffectual."<sup>13</sup>

Henley is not the first pundit to make this point. As I have shown throughout the chapters in this book, critics (and even some supporters) describe the nineteenth century as an era of marked isolation, mimicry or emptiness; read Haiti's purported contemporary failed state status into its history, implicitly linking today to its revolutionary beginnings; and prophesise how this failure will destroy Haiti's future. Echoing aspects of Douglass's nightmares of destruction, these rhetorics and logics lock Haiti as a state destined to fail—perhaps, the logic asserts, because the wrong people lead it and have absurdly thought that they could lead it.

In violently overturning a brutal system of enforced labour and captivity, Haiti's leaders went a step further. They took a radical rejection of slavery and linked it with a clamorous chiasmus-like rejection of white colonial control. Haiti would not just be antislavery and anti-colonial at its founding; it would also be problematically and emphatically black. In declaring Haiti's arrival into the Atlantic world, Haitian leaders made clear that politics and blackness would remain entangled. A self-avowed black nation-state had crashed the white sovereignty party in the Atlantic world.

Contemporary pundits may not frame their articulations of state failure and cycles of dispossession as critiques of Haiti's political creation, but their narratives of ineffectiveness, hopelessness and repeated mantras about Haiti's *history* being its ultimate problem logically lead one to conclude that removing it from history is the only solution. Again, Haiti's sovereignty—not to mention Haiti's people—emerge as an intractable problem. Some detractors of Haiti mention foreign interventions or the rise within Haiti of dictators, such as the Duvaliers, but too often the rhetoric about Haiti, especially by pundits within international relations, politics and development, slides easily from present to past and from problem to deficiency. Even outlets focused on dismantling power structures and speaking truth within an unequal world, such as the online platform, *openDemocracy*, have produced articles that detail Haiti as a problem. One *openDemocracy* article, "Haiti's Earthquake: A Future After Mercy," produced weeks after the 2010 earthquake, focuses on the nation's post-recovery efforts, but still includes a section about Haiti's history and its state failure. Surprisingly, given the tone and content of *openDemocracy's* typical articles, it also contains this line:

13 Jon Henley, "Haiti: A Long Descent to Hell."

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The treatment of Haiti and its people in this era is representative of a longer history marked by the international community's consistent prejudice against and exclusion of Haiti; the various foreign-inspired attempts to mould Haiti into a *cohesive state* have neglected to address the political, social and economic problems that are *at the root* of its near-failure in the first place.<sup>14</sup>

Haiti, these and other claims refrain, does not have a problem with its history. Haiti has a Haitian problem. Through my discoveries within this project, I sense these problems as problems of the entanglement of race and politics, even when those problems are expressed in the accumulation of capital or wealth. What, we must ask, is the future for black sovereignty given the constant challenges to its form and the promises of recognition that seek to dilute its liberative potentialities?

### Black Sovereign Lamentations

Caribbeanist and critical legal scholar Colin Dayan, writing just after the 2010 earthquake, reminds readers:

Representations of Haiti. They never change. As early as 1853, the Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle lamented the destruction of the richest colony in the New World. He called [postcolonial] Haiti “a tropical dog-kennel and pestiferous jungle.” Thirty-five years later, his biographer, the historian James Anthony Froude, would describe his first impression of the “ulcer of Port-au-Prince” as a smell of “active dirt fermenting in the sunlight.”<sup>15</sup>

Sir Spenser St. John. Thomas Carlyle. James Anthony Froude. These nineteenth-century chroniclers repeat the refrain of Haiti's problems and Haiti's dis-ease. They have a twenty-first-century compatriot: US evangelist, philanthro-businessman and would-be politician Pat Robertson. Robertson is well known for his commentary. After New Orleans faced the force of Hurricane Katrina, he claimed that the hurricane was actually the work of an angry god lashing out at New Orleans because Ellen DeGeneres, an out and vocal LGBTQI+ supporter, had been chosen to host the Academy Awards. The link between the weather and the TV host? DeGeneres was born in New Orleans. What remained unclear was why any deity cared.

<sup>14</sup> Johanna Mendelson Forman, “Haiti's Earthquake: A Future After Mercy,” *openDemocracy* 26 January 2010. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/johanna-mendelson-forman/haiti-s-earthquake-future-after-mercy>; emphasis mine.

<sup>15</sup> Colin Dayan, “Civilizing Haiti,” *Boston Review* 35.1. online version. 20 January 2010. <http://bostonreview.net/archives/BR35.1/dayan.php>.

Given his track record, it is unsurprising that Robertson would comment on Haiti. When his infamous comments about devil worship, revolutionary pacts and demonic revenge hit the media after the 2010 earthquake, people such as the White House Press Secretary labelled them as ravings. Others took his “devil talk” a bit more seriously and launched into a defence of Haiti. There were some, like Dayan, who recognised older rhetorical charges embedded in Robertson’s claims that correspond to narratives about the Bois Caïman ceremony and the Devil’s purported attempts to claim payment for revolutionary assistance—in the form of the earthquake. There are inconsistencies within logics such as Robertson’s, but these narratives routinely stress a problematic link between Haiti’s revolution and the stability of the nation. These narratives, fantasies and reconfigurations of history craft an erratic tether between pestilential or supernatural warnings or signs of Haiti’s problems and its origins and continued existence. What is telling is how few of these accounts mention specific foreign interventions, such as the structural adjustment programmes brought to Haiti in the twentieth century by the USA, the USA’s eradication of indigenous pig stocks in Haiti, or controversial Haitian policies, such as the creation by Haitian President François Duvalier of the *Tonton Macoute*, a secretive, violent paramilitary force created after a failed *coup d’état* and answerable only to him.<sup>16</sup> These accounts also often fail consistently to investigate the links between intervention, aid, paternalism, sovereignty and blackness. A case in point? The search for the cause of the recent cholera epidemic in Haiti and the subsequent calls for accountability and reparations.

Some nine months after the earthquake struck in 2010, people began talking about a rash of unexplained illnesses and deaths that occurred far from the earthquake’s epicentre. Journalist Jonathan Katz, while reporting on the ground in Haiti for the Associated Press, began some of the first investigations into the cause(s) of the outbreak. From the start, signs began pointing to UN Peacekeepers as “point zero” for the transmission of contaminated waste into the water system. Rumours quickly circulated.

According to Katz, “as word of the cholera epidemic spread, teledjol [or the mouth channel] lit up. Some said they heard the sickness had begun when a UN soldier emptied a latrine into a water source.”<sup>17</sup> It would take

<sup>16</sup> For more on this history, see Amy Wilentz, *The Rainy Season: Haiti since Duvalier* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), Trouillot, *Haiti, State against Nation*, Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, Peter Hallward, *Damming the Flood: Haiti and the Politics of Containment* (New York: Verso, 2008), Millery Polyné, *From Douglass to Duvalier: US African Americans, Haiti and Pan Americanism, 1870–1964* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Katz, *The Big Truck That Went By*, 224.

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years before the purportedly unfounded rumours would finally be regarded as truth: that UN peacekeepers carried a strain of bacterium that caused cholera in Haiti.<sup>18</sup>

Noted medical anthropologist and founder of Partners in Health Paul Farmer describes the epidemic as “the most devastating the hemisphere has seen in decades.” Within months, the outbreak had moved rapidly throughout the country. In his account of the early period of the outbreak, captured in *Haiti: After the Earthquake*, Farmer notes that “the cholera epidemic hit central Haiti—even more water insecure than the internally displaced persons camps—like a bomb, spreading from town to town and then into villages far from any clean or filtered water source.”<sup>19</sup> As of May 2018, more than 800,000 people had become infected, with thousands having succumbed to the disease.<sup>20</sup> A debilitating illness, cholera is also a disease that silently waits for its victims. The bacterium that causes the illness slowly spread throughout the intricate and vital water ecology within Haiti that the local inhabitants depend upon for drinking and other activities.

This outbreak is a case study of the limits of Haiti’s sovereignty and the constraints of the rights of a sovereign nation’s citizens. Any cursory examination of the UN’s responses to the outbreak and its long path to acceptance of responsibility for the epidemic highlights the lack of power within Haiti and the required role of various transnational advocates to fight for reparations for the victims of this disease.<sup>21</sup> Rebuilding sanitation systems, vaccinating the vulnerable and ensuring clean water are essential if cholera is to be eradicated in Haiti.<sup>22</sup> For some, though, the introduction of cholera is but another example of the things that need fixing in Haiti. These

<sup>18</sup> For more on this, see Claire Antone Payton, “In Moral Debt to Haiti,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 49, no. 1 (2017): 64–70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2017.1298247>.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Farmer, “Writing About Suffering,” in Abbey Gardner and Cassia Van Der Hoof Holstein, eds., *Haiti: After the Earthquake* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 192.

<sup>20</sup> Figure drawn from UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

<sup>21</sup> For more on the court cases filed against the UN, the UN’s new programme of support for cholera victims and those in recovery and the lack of coordinated funding to cover the needed support, see David Brand, “7 Years After a Cholera Epidemic, Haitians Are Fighting for Accountability,” *Global Citizen* 14 December 2017. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/7-years-after-a-cholera-epidemic-persistent-haitia/?platform=hootsuite>.

<sup>22</sup> There are advocacy groups such as the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) which are working to respond to and hold international and supranational bodies responsible. For more on IJDH, see [www.ijdh.org](http://www.ijdh.org).

configurations, which often pick up many of the morphologies and responses to Haiti's black sovereignty mentioned in earlier chapters, highlight the ways that Haiti and its presence would be seen as fundamentally too large a problem to fix. A sovereignty that was—and always had been—an intractable problem tainted by its revolutionary and black roots.

A 2010 editorial in the *New York Times* enlarges on this point. In a short piece that reflects on the recovery efforts, the billions of proposed pledges and the need for Haitians to occupy the centre governing role of any rebuilding efforts, the writer(s) drift into the path of Haiti's intractability, lamenting: "The paradox being confronted on Wednesday [at the UN donor conference on rebuilding Haiti] is how to rebuild a country that was never properly built in the first place. Haiti may yet escape the crushing legacy of its tragic history, propelled by the opportunity that this latest tragedy creates."<sup>23</sup> And there is no doubt, for some, that this moment represents a significant opportunity—for capital and political gains.

Hugh Locke, development specialist, president and co-founder of the Haitian-based Smallholder Farmers Alliance and former president and co-founder of Yéle Haiti (with Wyclef Jean and Jerry Duplessis), captures the depths of the financial pull and push in Haiti during the rebuilding phase after the earthquake in his *The Haiti Experiment*. In a passage entitled "Follow the money," Locke notes that over a period of 29 months, foreign governments spent \$6 billion. Donations to NGOs totalled another \$3 billion over the same time period. It typically costs a few billion more to support the UN peacekeeping force over that period of time. Heady sums, indeed, but Locke puts this in perspective in a long critical passage that I will quote in full:

Adding it all up, the total cost of running Haiti for twenty-nine months is roughly U.S.\$13 billion. Of that, U.S.\$11.5 billion, or 88 percent, is foreign aid, both public and private. The government of Haiti had direct control over the disbursement of only slightly less than 30 percent of the money used to run the country, of which 60 percent came from foreign donors [...] There comes a point where common sense trumps any possible explanation or economic theory regarding a situation like that of Haiti. No sane person living in, or visiting the country, could state with confidence that U.S.\$13 billion—which translates to an average of close to U.S.\$15 million a day, seven days a week, over twenty-nine months—has made a significant contribution to improving the lives of the majority of ordinary Haitians [...] So where did the money go?<sup>24</sup>

23 Editorial, "Making Haiti Whole," *New York Times* [International Edition]. 27 March 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/28/opinion/28sunt.html>.

24 Hugh Locke, *The Haiti Experiment* (New York: Hawkeye Publishers, 2012), 177–78.

And to whom? Some political pundits have claimed that the money has gone directly into the pockets of individuals—such as former US Secretary of State and Democratic Presidential Candidate Hillary Clinton. Jonathan Katz, writing in the midst of the 2016 US presidential election, debunks this assertion, making it clear that while instances of influence, cross-merging of sectors and pressuring of Haitian leaders run throughout Bill and Hillary Clinton’s long-term engagements with Haiti, the system was not built by them or for them: “[It’s illogical and ahistorical] to pin the whole sordid tale of Haiti’s relief and reconstruction disasters on one couple, no matter how powerful they have been.”<sup>25</sup> He sees such tactics as a way to dodge the messier issues of economics—such as cheap clothes from Haitian sweatshop labour that proliferate in US markets. He continues: “The Clintons didn’t create the world we live in; they just know how to navigate it better than most of us do. If we want it to change, we have to change it.”<sup>26</sup> He argues that this will be a difficult task—and I agree with him. However, reckoning with how various political and economic systems profit from and eagerly manipulate disaster and instability within Haiti has to take place. This is not just a question about foreign intervention, but also one about manipulation by elite Haitian bodies who see ways to influence and control movement and access to various security and aid markets in the country. As you will recall, this was part of Boyer’s plans in Chapter 2, as well as Curtis’s plans in Chapter 4. Different targeting markets, different players responding and different historical moments—but similar racial logics fuelled fantasies of capital gain. As the twenty-first century emerges, what is the future of Haiti’s black sovereignty?

### Sovereignty under Siege?

Decoding Haiti’s sovereignty means navigating the unequal terrain of aid, development and partnerships while keeping open the possibilities for equitable interactions within systems often purposefully built to obfuscate and deflect accountability and responsibility (much less encourage Haitian involvement in these processes). You will recall earlier discussions in the introduction about the roots of sovereignty containing no place for blackness. There is perhaps a logical follow-up question to this claim: is there any political room within international relations (and aid and development) for blackness that does not treat it as a disease, a defect

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Katz, “The Clintons Didn’t Screw Up Haiti Alone. You Helped,” *Slate* 22 September 2016. [www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/politics/2016/09/the\\_truth\\_about\\_the\\_clintons\\_and\\_haiti.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2016/09/the_truth_about_the_clintons_and_haiti.html).

<sup>26</sup> Katz, “The Clintons Didn’t Screw Up Haiti Alone. You Helped.”

or an intractable problem in need of a (white) sovereign solution? How do we navigate these pasts, presents and futures about black sovereignty while walking “upon ground that has already betrayed you”—to borrow a phrase from Haitian-born, Montreal-based journalist and writer Dany Laferrière—especially for those who hold a space, in whatever tenuous form, within global blackness?<sup>27</sup>

This betrayal may seem evident in the articles mentioned above that discuss Haiti as a land overrun and in need of taming. But it is not just armchair pundits and quick-witted ruminators who have weighed in on this issue. Constitutional law scholar Richard Albert recently waded into the waters of Haiti’s sovereignty, penning an op-ed piece for the *Boston Globe* in which he floats the idea that Haiti should “renounce the power of self-governance” in a new constitution and assign it to another country for a period of time (50 years). The country suggested? Canada, given what he claims are its values of compassion and equality. Casually—as if discussing something fairly trivial and not something steeped in the very meaning of Haiti’s black sovereignty—Albert offers a rationale for Haiti’s submission to a sovereign other:

We live in a post-Westphalian world, but the organizing logic of countries today remains rooted in traditional understandings of the nation-state. We hold sometimes too strongly to the idea that a country is sovereign—all-powerful within its jurisdiction and an independent actor beyond its borders—to fully appreciate that external pressures are not only a reality of our global order but often also a force for good. Haiti would not be alone in surrendering an important marker of national sovereignty in the pursuit of larger objectives.<sup>28</sup>

Albert suggests that those objectives could involve improving Haiti’s infrastructure and Haitian citizens’ quality of life. As the chapters in this book show, there are more than a few people (including Haitians) who have always been willing to trade Haiti’s black sovereignty for something—be it labour, capital, stability or power. Albert, in his op-ed piece, does more than merely solve the problem of Haiti’s sovereignty. By nullifying Haiti’s sovereignty and transferring (selling?) it to Canada, he ostensibly makes Haiti politically palatable by, again, removing the “real” problem of Haiti: its blackness and its purported lack of political capabilities. One can sense

<sup>27</sup> Dany Laferrière, *The World is Moving around Me: A Memoir of the Haiti Earthquake*, trans. David Homel (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2013), 89.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Albert, “Haiti Should Relinquish its Sovereignty,” *Boston Globe* 2 May 2017. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2017/05/02/haiti-should-relinquish-its-sovereignty/LxQmNZivNWI2Nj9DHiiREP/story.html>.

the importance of Laferrière's warning about betrayal in Albert's solution to Haiti's political instability.

Laferrière's quote—"walking upon ground that has already betrayed you"—appears in *The World is Moving around Me: A Memoir of the Haiti Earthquake* (originally published in 2011 as *Tout bouge autour de moi*). Laferrière's account—produced as a series of encounters, impressions and vignettes—captures his life and the world around him in the moments and days after the earthquake. By chronicling his experiences, Laferrière gives shape and voice to the shock after “less than a minute” of tremors, where “some saw their lifelong dreams go up in smoke” while still others spent time riffling through “the dust of their dreams.”<sup>29</sup> Although the narrative form mixes the stylistics of poetry with elements of reporting and novel-writing, this text is not the only one seeking to capture some sense of what happened after the earthquake and consider Haiti's sovereign future.

Writers, journalists, academics, activists and development workers have all produced work after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti that has sought to make sense of the tragedy, account for the lived experiences of communal assistance and support, or provide strong analysis of the rebuilding process. I have already mentioned Katz's book, *The Big Truck That Flew By*, Amy Wilentz's *Farewell, Fred Voodoo*, Paul Farmer's *Haiti: After the Earthquake*, Gina Athena Ulysse's *Why Haiti Needs New Narratives*, Mark Schuller's *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti since the Earthquake* and Laurent Dubois's *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*. Joining these long-form analyses and accounts are writers, artists, curators, non-governmental organisations and others who staged talks, appeared on television and discussed options about Haiti's future. Some of those people ran donation drives on the small scale and on the large scale—such as the Hope for Haiti Now telethon that brought together a global network of celebrities and politicians and raised more than \$60 million for charities.

Many of the discussions and investigations in the days and years after the earthquake brought much-needed clarity and nuance to debates on how best to respond to the recovery efforts. I was invited to join a panel of one of those debates on BBC World Service News Hour Extra with journalist Owen Bennett Jones. I participated in a rousing live conversation that included journalist Jonathan Katz and a taped interview with the head of the Clinton Foundation. Although appreciative of the chance to discuss history and the politics of funding in Haiti with such an engaged community, I was struck by the titling of the show that would appear online: “Haiti Aid: Throwing Good Money after Bad.” Steeped in the rhetoric and logics of intractability, this title worked against the perspective that Katz and I tried to bring to

29 Laferrière, *The World is Moving around Me: A Memoir of the Haiti Earthquake*, 20.

the discussion—such as where did the money go and to whom? And why some of the current players who participate in the system may want it to stay that way.

And this is not just a question about the movement of capital and strategic policy adjustments during and after moments of instability and disaster. There is also the very real issue about narrative framing and attempts to demarcate difference—“the subhumanity trope.” While there have been fantastic and unrealistic tales of zombies, before and since the publication of journalist and traveller William Seabrook’s *The Magic Island* (1929), the enduring fascination with Haitian vodou has encouraged all manner of people to become obsessed with their limited knowledge of and cultural myths surrounding voodoo and apply them to the syncretic spiritual practice that occurs in Haiti. From articulations of “voodoo economics” to horror filmic renditions of spirit possession, this myth has seeped not only into transnational articulations of Haiti but also formulations of Haitian politics. Locke captures this fascination: “Writers invented their own ‘voodoo’ character, patching together snippets of mythology with an invented back story, complete with a zombie ‘handbook’ [...] Some were blind, others sensitive to light [...] complete with] the zombie sorcerer who has the magic potion that revives the dead and makes them into slaves.”<sup>30</sup> Gina Athena Ulysse, in writing about the representations and narratives that circulate and recirculate in Haiti, notes how far too many configurations of Haitians turn them into “bodies without minds, heads without bodies, or roving spirits.”<sup>31</sup> There are repetitions here. Incantations of problems and exchanges of power that have flowed into and out of the unfinished project(s) of black sovereignty: Magic. Neoliberalism. Misrecognition. Bodies without minds. Fungible commodities. Dispossession. Sovereignty under siege.

As this book has shown, people within the African diaspora have played a significant role in forging and responding to Haiti’s black sovereignty. In Chapter 4, and briefly in Chapter 5, I mentioned the speeches of abolitionist, writer and eventual US diplomat Frederick Douglass in his guise as the co-Commissioner to Haiti’s Pavilion at the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893. I presented the work of Prince Saunders, the broker working on behalf of Henri Christophe, in Chapter 1. By looking at the work of these intermediaries, *The Unfinished Revolution* takes seriously the ways that Haiti adds to and troubles black political thought—and reactions to it—by offering concrete examples of the performances of black sovereignty.

<sup>30</sup> Locke, *The Haiti Experiment*, 13.

<sup>31</sup> Gina Athena Ulysse, “Why Representations of Haiti Matter Now More than Ever,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 43, no. 4 (July–August 2010): 37.

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As mentioned in the introduction, the book has not included more comparative examinations across and amongst black nation-states.<sup>32</sup> This is not an oversight. Rather than setting up generalisations about black sovereignty, it became essential that this text's focus should be on the arrival of Haiti—responding to the call offered in the introduction by Paul Gilroy to re-centre black political thought by placing the nation of Haiti at its core. Haiti is key—but even as we do more work on black sovereignty in Haiti, we also need more investigations into the exchanges, some of which are detailed in this book, between black nation-states and their official and unofficial representatives on the international stage. These conversations, framings and figurations of black power and politics deserve greater scrutiny—especially as the continued sovereign presence of black nation-states may suggest important lessons for those invested in considering black futurity.

Due to the time period(s) under investigation within this book, some voices have only made sporadic appearances. Sociologist, writer and social justice advocate W. E. B. DuBois, who would pen pieces critical in *The Crisis* of the USA's intervention/invasion of Haiti from 1915 to 1934, will appear more centrally in later work on black sovereignty. Although cited, the work of C. L. R. James, while influential, informs my later research, especially given his perspective on decolonial and resistance practices of the twentieth century. If there is one thing that *The Unfinished Revolution* has taught me it is how integral black thinkers are for thinking through black political futures and living tenuous and complex black presents. In reading across spaces and people, in thrusting into and out of the lives of people with different goals, aspirations and hauntings, I have been able to chart some aspect of Haiti's performances of black sovereignty as exhibited on the global stage. Missing, though, are the voices of the masses and much of the internal debates. There will be other forms for this. In many ways, this book spoke to me from the archives and demanded construction. Now, I can add to these tropes with other works and others can critique and add to them with additional archives of memory and matter. Charting the terrain of black sovereignty will undoubtedly take many years—and I hope include many perspectives.

Some voices have played a more supportive role in the pages of the book; others have been more central to the ways that I have charted the morphologies and challenges of black sovereignty. Haitian thinkers and artists have played key roles in sustaining my thoughts and challenging my articulations. In earlier chapters, I discussed the historical roles and

<sup>32</sup> My next monograph, tentatively entitled *States of Blackness*, will take up the mantle of thinking through the cross-pollination between and amongst Haiti, Abyssinia and Liberia.

performances of Henri Christophe, Faustin-Élie Soulouque, Anténor Firmin, Charles Preston, Jean-Pierre Boyer, Hannibal Price, Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacque Dessalines. But there have been numerous others. From the Baron de Vastey and Jean Price-Mars to Marie Vieux-Chauvet and Thomas Madiou, Haitian artists and thinkers have offered nuanced considerations of Haiti's history and its revolutionary beginnings. Many have also provided strategies for fighting against black nullification or for obtaining greater political power within the black (and white) Atlantic world. These flashes and challenges of black power and black politics offer clear responses to dehumanising riffs of black inhumanity, just as they also illuminate significant distinctions between elites and the masses.

These divisions and dichotomies, seen in earlier moves to force formerly enslaved persons back onto abandoned plantations under Louverture, Christophe and Boyer as a response to the constraints of black sovereignty, challenge any articulation of black futures that are always already truly open to all. As this book has shown, in attempting to shift the conversation about black sovereignty and instantiate power or reclaim capital, Haitian leaders and officials often turned to labouring black bodies to provide the fungibility that would enable the leaders/officials to manipulate the links between land, security, yields and profit in order to amass greater power and control of the nation's future. In trading the security of the people as a commodity or citizenship as a recruitment tool, various leaders, such as Boyer, tried to control the terms and the figurations of Haiti's unfinished sovereign project.

But, as scholars such as J. Michael Dash, Alex Dupuy, David Nicholls and others have shown, the counter-plantation system within Haiti strongly resisted attempts to enchain the masses. These attempts were not always successful, but, as the sweeping elections that brought in Aristide in the late twentieth century show, change is possible—and the people can lead (and demand) it. It is just as possible that black sovereignty, of the future, will not come from the structures of the nation-state, but from the people—even as they infuse the nation-state and its systems with political form and meaning.

### Conclusion

This book has focused on the ways that race figures in sovereignty amongst and between sovereign entities. In investigating this line of thought, it has offered less commentary on the political history of Haiti. This is not because Haiti's long political history does not matter, but more that the performances of black sovereignty must be read as they appeared on the world stage in order to understand how sovereignty and power between nation-states works when one of those nations is born from a slave rebellion and characterises

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itself—at least for a time—as black. What you have encountered is mainly the first act—the nineteenth century.

In tracing these moments and encounters, I have tried to understand how sovereignty can become a tool, a weapon, a commodity and a problem. Overall, the book has used Haiti as its anchor and moved within and into various channels and currents in which Haiti's sovereignty was either on display or was exchanged for something else. The tropes that I have delineated are complex directives and motivations that structure some sets of conversations and negotiations and at other times, such as at the Fair, sit silently in the background, doing different work.

When I began this project, I pitched it to myself as an examination of nineteenth-century interactions and international relations between and amongst nation-states. Blackness played a role—or, more accurately, racialisms—but I considered capital far more centrally in my analyses. Over time, I began to see the ways that sovereignty's original nullification of difference operated within contemporary sovereign discussions. As talk continued about Haiti's failure, ineptitude and problem status within various media, I realised that what I was charting was less the history of black politics and more its work/struggle. In an earlier passage in this book, I argued that black sovereignty is given meaning through political struggle. I still believe this, but I also now firmly see that there is something immensely generative—and challenging—about keeping open the terms of what black sovereignty means/is.

In the introduction, I positioned this book within the critical conversations within black studies that circle around tragedy, futurity, pessimism, praxis, necropolitics, bare life and power. I have not settled my thoughts on these matters, now that I am at the end of this particular monographic journey, as much as I have firmed my conviction that we need debates and challenges about sovereignty in order to have futures for self-avowed black nation-states and those who feel the pulls and the circuits of global blackness within their national frames. Black sovereignty is not a singular thing that every country must adopt or embrace. Instead, it is a journey of being and performing in the world that has the potential to demand and open space. When it is weaponised or turned against the very people that it is meant to embolden, it constrains living and politics. What I now see as the main challenge to any and all black sovereignty projects is how to maintain their unfinished nature(s).

I am not advocating “unfinishedness” due to any fear of becoming or because I do not think that people of African descent can engage or act politically. On the contrary, my call for the sustainment of being “unfinished” responds to an insistence that the only way that we can *unknow* and *unlearn* the nullifications within sovereignty is by challenging

its very origins—by being present at its antithesis. The trick will be in resisting the seduction offered by sovereignty’s power or other sovereign nations’ carrots of recognition and acceptance that often come with steep price tags—such as the 1825 indemnity to France agreed by Boyer that not only failed to buffer Haiti against foreign intervention but also entangled it with crippling debts and loans that would take until the twentieth century to pay off. Given these tethers, how can black sovereignty grow and develop without being distorted? Hopefully, by thinking carefully about the tropes and configurations embedded within performances of sovereignty. Here are two vastly different contemporary examples of these tropes and figurations in action.

*Example 1.* “Inside Disaster.” Before the 12 January 2010 earthquake, a documentary filmmaker talked with the Red Cross about filming their interactions and experiences during a future global disaster. The joint effort was agreed, and plans formed to create a set of public “knowledge encounters” focused on a particular disaster location. Although, at the time, the team did not know where the next disaster would strike, they continued to prepare for any eventuality that would enable them to capture the reality of humanitarianism. And then came the earthquake in Haiti. In the days and months that followed, the documentary team assembled information about the Red Cross, displaced persons, journalists, aid workers and others who moved into and out of the nation. They filmed, chatted with, listened to, embraced and visualised the disaster from as many perspectives as possible. This cast became part of a multi-platform documentary experience that includes what I will focus on here: a first-person role-playing simulation of the earthquake and its aftermath, “Inside the Haiti Earthquake.”<sup>33</sup>

I first encountered the simulation when I taught a course for fourth-year students at the University of Aberdeen that borrowed its title from Laurent Dubois’s *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*. This course examined disaster, policy, history, race, aid, foreign interventions, economic policies and sovereignty. It tested some of my theories about race and sovereignty while also drawing together all of the recent books, texts, exhibitions, documentaries, historical accounts and media coverage connected to the earthquake. This was a course focused on recent (and unfinished) history, but it was also one formed by a long and contentious set of patterns and tropes regarding foreign engagement within Haiti and sovereign battles for legitimacy, such

33 For more on this, see Inside Disaster’s website <http://insidedisaster.com/haiti/> experience and some of the press coverage, including this piece in the *Huffington Post*, entitled “Disaster: A Serious Game.” [www.huffingtonpost.com/amanda-lin-costa/disaster-a-serious-game\\_b\\_776949.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amanda-lin-costa/disaster-a-serious-game_b_776949.html). The simulation now can only be experienced through a subscription—although there remains a free preview option, by request.

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as the continuing conflict between the USA and Haiti over Navassa Island. In the midst of this course, I had my students interact with the simulation.

Its premise is simple: real footage allows an individual to take on the life of a survivor, a journalist and an aid worker. The camera pans out to convey actual scenes and situations at any given moment and continuously signals that the camera lens is the eye of the participant. This is first-person disaster re-enactment infused with actual footage of people and places on the ground. What tilts the simulation further is its interactive element: periodically, the action freezes and the “player” is faced with a set of multiple options for the next course of action that they must whittle down to one choice. These options involve choices—sometimes difficult ones—about food, housing, help, aid, work and other concerns. There are purportedly no right or wrong answers, just choices, and the action then resumes depending on what course of action the “player” decides, switching scenes, accordingly.

Death and a casual orientation to destruction surround the “experience.” This casualness deeply disturbed my students. Yes, the simulation made clear the realities of a natural disaster, but they also turned the real lives and circumstances of the people of Haiti—and those who arrived to help them—into consumable objects. Gone, throughout the simulation, are any of the negotiations, the meetings, the planning, the organising amongst Haitian community groups and members, the impassioned speeches on the floor of the UN, the radio talks or the powerful pieces that tried to correct older logics and narratives about Haiti, such as the riveting conversation between Colin Dayan and Jonathan Katz that centred on Katz’s book, but covered broader territory, including politics and change.<sup>34</sup> Described as “a simulation for donors, potential aid workers and volunteers,” the experience definitely feels as if its task is to bring people to an elsewhere where other people fix things. The disembodiedness was to be expected as it is a first-person experience, but my students felt uncomfortable with the reduction of Haiti, its history and its culture to only a problem area that needed fixing. After reading about the experiences of people such as Danticat or Laferrière, my students felt that the simulation offered a voyeuristic tour of real people’s lives—not quite disaster pornography, but definitely an oversaturation of collapse and dis-ease. While the simulation may have wanted to capture the reality of life after the disaster, given Haiti’s history, the simulation struggles to raise the encounter above “the problem of Haiti.”

The creators of this project and platform may strongly believe in the educational value of this tool—it has won many educational and gaming

34 See Colin Dayan, “A Secret History of the Haitian Earthquake: A Conversation with Jonathan M. Katz,” *Boston Review* 25 June 2013. <http://bostonreview.net/world-books-ideas/secret-history-haitian-earthquake>.

awards—but my students and I found its structure troubling. The problem is not exactly that disaster is turned into an interactional educational non-game. The real issue is that the choices in front of Haitians, at any time, dance amongst the tropes outlined in this book—tool, commodity, weapon, currency. By not adequately dealing with these topics, the “experience” feels unmoored—grounded in a humanitarian bubble—focused less on Haiti than on the experiences of those tasked to cover or help the nation. Efforts were made by the team to include the history of Haiti and information about its people, but the voyeuristic aspect of the disaster pushes into every frame. I sense the motives of the project and the platform are to counter this reading and assessment. My criticism is not a condemnation of the team’s efforts or their intent. What I am suggesting is that in experiencing the experience, my students—and I—struggled to see how it would address the aftershocks of history and enable Haiti to recover its own future, on its own terms.<sup>35</sup>

*Example 2.* Paolo Woods’s *État*. I first came across an image from Paolo Woods’s three-year photographic project in Haiti a number of years ago. Woods, an Italian photographer who now lives in Haiti, turned his camera lens on Haiti in an effort to explore the country through images. What drew my attention, immediately, was the juxtapositioning within Woods’s photographs of an artistic form of investigative journalism that worked through topics as varied as religious expression, portraiture, festivals and performance. Seeking to go beyond stereotypes about a given place, Woods has produced a collection and assembled an exhibition, *État*, which was on view at the Musée de l’Élysée in Lausanne, Switzerland and at Photoville in Brooklyn Bridge Park in New York in 2014. Although a compelling series, the photos and accompanying text, written by journalist Arnaud Robert, present the media covering it with a conundrum: how to cover a visual and textual exploration of what state means given the general “problems” that publicly circulate concerning the Haitian state?

Woods, during interviews, would try to circumvent journalists’ questions about “failed states” by insisting on not reproducing stereotypes, focusing on daily lives and continually asking, how does one create a state through living? Woods does his part, but his interviewers—from *Slate* to the *New York Times*—do their utmost to keep the focus on Haiti, the “flawed state” or

35 For an example of an ethically guided project that captures the experiences of Haitians after the earthquake, see Claire Payton’s Haiti Memory Project. Over a series of months in 2010, she worked collaboratively to gather over 100 interviews that allowed Haitian people to tell their own memories and stories. The project is now available for reading, teaching and learning at the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History in the University of Kentucky Libraries and is hosted online at <http://haitimemoryproject.org>.

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on its poverty.<sup>36</sup> Nestled within these glossy pages are towering visuals, such as the one of Haitian President and one-time cross-dressing music superstar, Michel Martelly, striding in front of the ruined Presidential Palace that could not escape the power of the earthquake. Woods's photograph shows a determined leader on his mobile phone, dressed in jeans with a baseball cap on his head emblazoned with the word "*Prezidan*." Destroyed presidential palace in the background; determined and modern leader striding towards the viewer in the centre of the frame. It was only once I picked up the book tied to the exhibition, also entitled *État*, and visited the website of the arts management company that represents him, Institute, that I found images and text that none of the outlets included in their coverage.<sup>37</sup> For example, the Institute's website contains one of the more moving tropes of the exhibition that focuses on the proliferation of US cast-off T-shirts with dubious and sometimes silly wording on them. Pulled from bins and surplus, they dot the horizon in Haiti. Woods goes on a hunt to find them and take pictures of people wearing them, but also notes how the accumulation of these garments has pushed out local tailors who might have sold their shirts to the community. It is this critique of globalisation, the circulation of capital and the role and place of Haitians in the process that elevates Woods's exhibition beyond stereotypes. Yet, the coverage of this exhibition in the media still struggles to move considerations of the Haitian state beyond considerations of its problem status and its failure.

Two vastly different situations that illuminate the contours of this book—especially given their non-diplomatic or political positioning. Although some aspects of this book have focused on politicians or their intermediaries, others have found generative ideas and perspectives from unexpected quarters—such as letters, art, newspaper articles and essays. Rather than frame the two examples above as simple errors in judgement or trivial matters, I have included them to highlight the very perniciousness of the framing of black sovereignty—and its constraints—allowing particular sets of tropes to become routine ways of describing, working with or imagining Haiti. In either instance, we can see how the framing of place and the figuration of black politics culturally plays out. What probably needs little stressing is how this framing works politically. Just witness Haiti's last

<sup>36</sup> See David Gonzales, "A Haitian State of Mind," *New York Times* 23 September 2013. <https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/23/a-haitian-state-of-mind/> and David Rosenberg, "Looking Past the Stereotypes of Haiti," *Slate* 5 December 2013. [www.slate.com/blogs/ behold/2013/12/05/paolo\\_woods\\_life\\_in\\_haiti\\_beyond\\_the\\_headlines\\_photos.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/ behold/2013/12/05/paolo_woods_life_in_haiti_beyond_the_headlines_photos.html).

<sup>37</sup> For more on this, see [www.instituteartist.com/feature-Pepe-Paolo-Woods](http://www.instituteartist.com/feature-Pepe-Paolo-Woods) and Woods and Robert, *État*.

presidential election—held during the recovery efforts; Haiti’s rebuilding efforts and the stalled giving of pledges; or the long and formal fight on behalf of Haitians against the UN for the recognition of its role in the spread of cholera in Haiti. In the last instance, it took years, but, finally, in 2016, the UN apologised for its role in the epidemic and pledged to assist in the development of clean water and sanitation and health support through a coordinated international effort. For many, this recognition falls short of a reckoning with its response to the outbreak.<sup>38</sup> There are already signs that the coordination has stalled.

So, where does this leave us? Where are we with the twists and turns of black sovereignty? Part of me hopes that the journey that you have taken with me has illuminated the importance of witnessing black sovereignty and recognising it as a real and vital thing worth considering, studying and critiquing. There is another part of me that hopes that we can quickly move away from documenting and historicising black sovereignty in order to capture the various ways that people may be performing its tropes—and for what purposes. Throughout the book, I have purposefully moved back and forth in time, where appropriate, to give some sense of these hauntings and resonances today.

Although I have signalled a host of patterns in this archive, I am certain that new ones await our discovery. Ultimately, what I hope emerges from this work is a future that enables black nation-states such as Haiti and others to thrive—on their own terms—not as sovereign copies of other nations but as beings in their own right that make clear how and in what way they shall remain sovereign entities. This is more than just legal considerations and the language of rights, but the language and the performance of power that moves under our feet, that lives in our objects and that speaks to our multi-vocality. This book has collected and assembled an archive, but it has also listened to those who have created lived theories of resistance and struggle. As Trouillot notes: “Survivors carry history on themselves.”<sup>39</sup> May we continue to see it.

<sup>38</sup> For more, see UN press release available on the official UN website: “Secretary-General Apologizes for United Nations Role in Haiti Cholera Epidemic, Urges International Funding of New Response to Disease,” 1 December 2016. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sgsm18323.doc.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 149.

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