

AN EXPERIMENT IN SELF-GOVERNMENT:
HAITI IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN POLITICAL IMAGINATION, 1863-1915

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ABSTRACT

Brandon R. Byrd: An Experiment in Self-Government:
Haiti in the African-American Political Imagination, 1863-1915
(Under the direction of W. Fitzhugh Brundage)

In 1804, Haiti, the former French colony of Saint-Domingue, became the second independent republic in the Western Hemisphere and the first governed by men of African descent. African Americans immediately recognized the importance of this stunning conclusion to the Haitian Revolution even as their white counterparts denounced the “Horrors of St. Domingo.” While some enslaved African Americans drew inspiration from the nation born out of anti-slavery rebellion, others, particularly blacks in the urban North, recognized Haiti as an “experiment in self-government” that might vindicate black self-determination and equal rights as well as freedom for men of all races.

This preoccupation with Haitian independence assumed heightened urgency for aspiring class and elite African Americans in the post-Emancipation era. Journalists, politicians, diplomats, missionaries, educators, artists, and other black professionals came to understand a link between black sovereignty in Haiti and the prospect of full political and civil rights during the period of Reconstruction and the tumultuous decades that followed. In their estimation, Haiti’s ability to demonstrate progress according to American standards and refute charges of backwardness leveled against it by white foreigners would determine African Americans’ ability to exercise the rights, responsibilities, and privileges that ostensibly accompanied citizenship.

This dual anxiety about Haitian progress and the status of black citizens of the United States eventually coalesced during the U.S. occupation of Haiti, which lasted from 1915-1934. But, before black leaders articulated staunch Pan-Africanist opposition to the erosion of Haitian autonomy, previous generations of outspoken African Americans demonstrated great ambivalence about Haiti, a symbol of black pride that, nonetheless, often failed to meet their outsized expectations or their understandings of civilization and progress. By examining how African Americans freighted Haiti with importance and regarded it with ambivalence for much of the period between its founding and the date of its “Second Independence,” this dissertation thus reshapes our understanding of a transnational black political and intellectual culture that evolved throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

For the Seays and Byrds, past, present, and future.

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INTRODUCTION

The Haitian Revolution captured the attention as well as the imaginations of African Americans. This much is clear from the extant scholarship that details both enslaved blacks' fascination with the successful slave revolt and free black northerners' interest in the independent black nation formed in its aftermath. Moreover, a number of studies confirm that Haiti and the Haitian Revolution maintained great significance for African Americans long after the antebellum era. In particular, they show that African Americans in the twentieth century protested the United States military occupation of Haiti, promoted Haitian arts, and worked to forge greater economic ties between blacks in Haiti and the United States.

This scholarship tells us a great deal about how African Americans have perceived their relationship with Haiti. But it also omits much. The two most comprehensive overviews of the historical connections between African Americans and Haiti devote scant attention to the five decades after the Emancipation Proclamation. Each contributes one chapter to this period while privileging the views of Frederick Douglass, the most prominent black thinker of the nineteenth century. Their focus is curious but understandable—after all, both studies cover two centuries worth of economic, social, and

intellectual exchange between African Americans and Haitians. Such an ambitious scope necessitates lending greater focus to certain actors and time periods.¹

Perhaps more problematic are the passing references to the postemancipation period found in works that do not attempt such broad coverage. An otherwise excellent treatment of African American literary renderings of Haiti calls the antebellum era the “fleeting . . . heyday of African-American public interest in Haiti.” The assumption that coverage of sovereign Haiti did not find its way into, for instance, the black newspapers that flourished in the postbellum era seems speculative at best.² Equally problematic is the claim in an analysis of the rhetorical impact of the Haitian Revolution on the U.S. Civil War that African Americans in the postbellum era remembered the achievements of Toussaint Louverture in much the same way as preceding generations. Their continued celebration of the Haitian Revolution, the author insists, correlated with continuity in white thought about the “Horrors of St. Domingo.” How, we might ask, did the interpretations of Haiti remain so consistent even as the United States experienced dramatic racial, social, and political transformations.³

To be sure, such peremptory assertions miss the mark. African American interest in Haiti following Emancipation was neither muted nor was it static. Instead, dynamic

¹ The two works are Leon D. Pamphile, *Haitians and African Americans: A Heritage of Tragedy and Hope* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008) and Millery Polyné, *From Douglass to Duvalier: U.S. African Americans, Haiti, and Pan Americanism, 1870-1964* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010).

² Laurie Maffly-Kipp, *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African-American Race Histories* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 153.

³ Matthew J. Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 182-183, 160.

interpretations of Haiti's importance evolved among black men and women who faced the pressing challenge of securing the political and civil rights that ostensibly accompanied their new freedom. In particular, aspiring class and elite African Americans freighted the Western Hemisphere's only independent nation governed by men of African descent with great importance.⁴ As white Americans justified the entrenchment of white supremacy by deriding Haitian cultural and political practices, a wide range of black leaders understood that their transcendence of the enslavement and marginalization of the antebellum era was tied to Haitian progress. In essence, they surmised that a prosperous "Black Republic" would vindicate their capabilities to possess voting rights, serve in public office, and benefit from equal treatment under the law. Conversely, a failed Haiti would embolden those who found the idea of an equal and self-determining black citizenry deplorable or impracticable.

Indeed, the ways that aspiring class and elite African Americans re-narrated the Haitian past, re-considered the Haitian present, and tried to re-shape the Haitian future underscores a longer preoccupation with citizenship. Anxiety about the status of black people in the United States was acute in the decades following Emancipation. Yet it was not exceptional. African Americans in the antebellum era and in the period between the two World Wars strived for political equality and they, too, thought Haiti was relevant to this struggle. For these reasons, this dissertation provides more than the first sustained analysis of African Americans' imagined relationship with Haiti from 1863 to 1915. It also places this relationship within the context of the emigration, abolitionist, and black

⁴ Throughout this work, I will demarcate class in much the same way that other scholars, including Michele Mitchell, have. "Working poor" pertains to sharecroppers, domestics, and other African Americans who earned just enough to live, "aspiring class" applies to teachers, seamstresses, and other workers who saved some money and strived for respectability, and "elite" describes college educated professionals, leaders of national organizations, and successful business owners.

nationalist movements that preceded that period and the anti-occupation and Pan-Africanist protests that came after that era.

By foregrounding one question—how have African Americans conceptualized Haiti, particularly in the five decades after Emancipation—this dissertation disregards some other questions. Although I address how Haitians thought about white and black Americans at times, I do not seek to pose or answer questions about the place of the United States or its people in the Haitian political imagination. Similarly, inquiries into African Americans' imagined relationships with countries such as Liberia, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic are worthy of study but I have not given them sustained treatment here. To do so, I believe, would have detracted from our understanding of the special position that Haiti occupied in the minds of African Americans because of its unique impact on global history. Put simply, no other nation was birthed from a successful slave rebellion, no other nation faced greater scorn from the Western world, and no other nation was so consistently acknowledged by critics and champions alike as *the* “Black Republic.”

It is my hope that addressing the exceptional plaudits, expectations, and, at times, criticisms directed at Haiti by African Americans will clarify the link between black sovereignty in the Caribbean and the possibilities of black self-determination in the United States. This historical issue transcends geographic and temporal boundaries. While it centers on the period from 1863 to 1915 it is not simply about that era. Although it focuses on an idealized Haiti it is not just about the importance of that country to black spokespeople. Instead, this dissertation augments a broader body of knowledge about the ways in which African Americans have affirmed their belonging in the United States by manipulating their connection to the African Diaspora. At its core, then, *An Experiment in*

Self-Government is about the transnational vision of a formerly enslaved people striving for freedom, equality, and full recognition of their humanity.

PROLOGUE:

I HAVE ADOPTED MYSELF A HAYTIAN

In the summer of 1789, longstanding resentment of the unchecked social privilege, economic power, and political might of the French aristocracy and clergy boiled over. Commoners attacked the traditional assumption that birth and divine will sanctioned the authority of elites, first by demanding a written constitution from King Louis XVI and then by storming the Bastille, a Parisian prison that symbolized monarchical power. Rioting throughout the French countryside and ongoing protests in the French capital culminated in August 1789 with the issuance of a remarkable document. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which proclaimed that all “men are born and remain free and equal in rights,” captured the notions of liberty, fraternity, and equality that ignited the passions of the men and women who would form the first French Republic three years later.¹

Observers of the French Revolution worried throughout its duration about the effect of the discourses on freedom and rights outside of France. In particular, they fretted about Saint-Domingue. Since officially becoming a French territorial possession in 1697, the western half of Hispaniola had been transformed into the world’s largest producer of sugar and the most profitable colony in the world. Hundreds of thousands of enslaved men, women, and children lived the most degraded lives in the colony, their black bodies used to

¹ For a useful, concise history of the French Revolution see Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 45-83.

nourish the lucrative crops and their attendant profits. Five to ten percent of these individuals died every year from the incessant punishment and overwork that defined life on the sugar plantations. A small group of powerful white planters and colonial officials replenished this workforce with persistent shipments of Africans from European slavers. Between this ruling class and the enslaved existed thousands of free people of color whose birth or ingenuity allowed them to escape the travails of slavery. The upheaval in France and the circulation of a new rhetoric of natural rights seemed particularly dangerous if employed by this liminal class of people whose perceived racial connection to the enslaved masses circumscribed their rights even if they obtained the same wealth and education as some white colonial elites.²

These concerns proved prescient. Free people of color in Saint-Domingue immediately recognized that the decline of France's central government, the related weakening of French imperial rule, and the circulation of a new language of rights could facilitate their attempts to gain political and social equality in Saint-Domingue. Prominent free people of color first petitioned the French government, arguing that slavery should persist but an egalitarian republic could neither prevent free people of color from becoming doctors, lawyers, or administrators nor prohibit their purchase of luxuries. When the pen failed to persuade Saint-Domingue planters and French government officials, free men of color resolved to use the sword to vindicate their rights. In 1790, Vincent Ogé led an uprising of his peers, many of whom had previous experience serving in the colonial militia or its police force. The rebellion was crushed—Ogé was captured and subjected to a

² Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012), 17-23. The royal census of 1789 listed 500,000 slaves, 32,000 whites, and 25,000 free people of color.

public execution by breaking on the wheel—but his comrades vowed to continue their fight. This time, the leading free men of color reasoned, it would behoove them to increase their numbers by arming the enslaved men who labored on their plantations.³

First conscripted by the free men of color and then by the white planters who opposed them, enslaved men and women soon ceased aiding their masters and began fighting for themselves. Initial plans for insurrection coalesced at a religious ceremony that took place in the woods outside the northern port town of Le Cap in August 1791. The plot, supervised by an enslaved man named Boukman, came to fruition a few days after the ceremony when dozens of slaves launched an uprising on sugar plantations across the north, set fire to the sugarcane fields, and precipitated the flight of terrified planters into Le Cap. Recognizing the vitality of the insurrection, many of Saint-Domingue's free people of color decided that abetting the rebels provided the best chance for obtaining increased rights from the French government. Before long, the potency of the alliance between free people of color who possessed rifles, cannons, and military skills with enslaved blacks who made up nine-tenths of Saint-Domingue's population became apparent.⁴

One man in particular commanded the respect of the rebels' European enemies. Toussaint Louverture was born a slave in Saint-Domingue but he secured an education and his freedom at a relatively early age. As a free man, Louverture attained some material success managing a small plantation. He was even able to purchase a slave. When fighting erupted in Saint-Domingue, however, Louverture sided with those striking against slavery

³ *Ibid.*, 24-25. Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004) remains the definitive work on the Haitian Revolution.

⁴ Dubois, *Haiti*, 26.

and racial discrimination. He quickly proved himself an unparalleled military tactician and a skilled negotiator who used competition among European imperial powers to strengthen the insurrection. For instance, Louverture accepted weapons from a Spanish government intent on using the slave uprising to seize control of Saint-Domingue but he later drove the Spanish from the colony when their help was no longer needed.⁵

Indeed, the knowledge of geopolitical affairs possessed by Louverture and his peers contributed to the stunning outcome of the insurrection. By 1792, there was a clear division between the class of Saint-Domingue planters fighting to preserve the status quo and radical leaders in the Parisian metropole, many of them prominent abolitionists. Numerous planters announced that they would support England's ambitions for Saint-Domingue if the shift in power meant the maintenance of chattel slavery. Recognizing the treasonous proclivities of white planters, representatives of the new French regime in Saint-Domingue appealed to the cosmopolitan sensibilities of their lone, potential allies: the insurrectionists themselves. In June 1793, two French Republican commissioners announced that slave insurgents would receive freedom and citizenship if they fought for the Republican cause. Scores of insurrectionists responded to the overture made by the French leaders, became officers and soldiers in the Republican army and, in doing so, forced further concessions from government officials in France. By February 1794, the National Convention in Paris reaffirmed a commitment to the abolition of slavery in Saint-Domingue, decreed slavery illegal throughout the former French empire, and extended French citizenship to "all men, of all colors."⁶

⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 28-29.



It was not long before news of these developments reached black communities in the United States. From its outset, free and enslaved African Americans monitored newspaper coverage of the slave uprising and solicited reports of its progress by word of mouth. American trading vessels that conducted business in Saint-Domingue—including those staffed by black sailors—proved to be especially vital sources of information about the unfolding events in the Caribbean. Moreover, as the slave insurrection gained momentum, an influx of refugees from Saint-Domingue confirmed the sensational accounts of revolution already received by African Americans. Thousands of planters, slaves, and free people of color fled the former French colony and landed in New Orleans, Philadelphia, Norfolk, Charleston and other U.S. cities where they quickly spread word of the tumult in Saint-Domingue. Those arriving after February 1794 brought with them stories of black insurgents who had won not only freedom but also citizenship and equal standing within a multiracial republic.⁷

African Americans experiencing discrimination or enslavement recognized the relevance of the news from Saint-Domingue. In 1797, Prince Hall, a black Bostonian who battled British forces during the American Revolution, urged his peers at the Boston African Masonic Lodge to “not be cast down under these and many other abuses we at present labour under: for the darkest is before the break of day.” He advised them to

⁷ The various networks of information that supplied African Americans with information about the Haitian Revolution are described in Julius S. Scott, “The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution,” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1986) and Scott, “Afro-American Sailors and The International Communication Network: The Case of Newport Bowers,” in *Jack Tar in History: Essays in the History of Maritime Life and Labour*, eds., Colin Howell and Richard J. Twomey (Fredericton, N.B.: Acadiensis Press, 1991), 37-52.

“remember what a dark day it was with our African brethren, six years ago, in the French West Indies” before they struck against their degraded status.⁸ Three years later, Gabriel Prosser went even further than Hall by trying to replicate the revolution in Saint-Domingue. The enslaved blacksmith drew inspiration from events in the Caribbean when he crafted a plan for black Virginians to eradicate chattel slavery and seize control of Richmond. In fact, Gabriel ordered his troops to leave all Frenchmen unharmed because gossip circulating in Richmond’s foundries and taverns led him to identify French Republicans as allies in his fight for freedom and equality.⁹

Although the state of Virginia executed Gabriel after two slaves exposed the planned rebellion and Hall and his peers continued to face discrimination in Massachusetts, the actions and words of both men demonstrate the ways that the insurrection in Saint-Domingue re-shaped the outlooks of African Americans. For Hall, the ability of the Saint-Domingue revolutionaries to not only secure emancipation but also achieve legal equality within the French Republic foretold a future in which black northerners would no longer be prohibited from juries, polls, or public schools. Likewise, the insurgency in Saint-Domingue convinced Gabriel to envision a future world in which African Americans were not only free but also in which some whites and blacks might be collaborators rather than adversaries.

⁸ Prince Hall, “A Charge (1797),” in Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, and Philip Lapsansky, eds., *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790-1960* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 47.

⁹ Gabriel and his co-conspirators, one of them identified as a French national, also advised the rebels to leave Methodists and Quakers unharmed due to their ant-slavery politics. On Gabriel’s rebellion see Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion: The Virginia Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

In essence, then, African Americans saw in Saint-Domingue proof that blacks should neither suffer enslavement nor face exclusion from the national community.¹⁰



Ensuing developments in Saint-Domingue would raise the hopes of African Americans even further. After the decrees issued by the National Convention, Toussaint Louverture became the governor general and, subsequently, the governor-for-life of Saint-Domingue. He proceeded to rule the colony as if it were an independent nation. For instance, Louverture instituted agricultural policies that required the maintenance of the plantation system, established trade agreements with England and the United States, and fortified his army. These policies tended to privilege Louverture's fellow generals while stifling the ambitions of many formerly enslaved cultivators who yearned for more control over their land and labor. But, at the same time, the revitalization of sugar and coffee economies devastated during the insurrection proved that agricultural productivity could be achieved without slavery.¹¹

Developments in postemancipation Saint-Domingue did not escape the attention of political leaders in France. In particular, Napoleon Bonaparte viewed Louverture as a challenger to his authority and, in 1801, the self-appointed French First Consul decided to remove the former slave from power. He placed his brother-in-law, Victor Emmanuel Leclerc, at the head of a military expedition that was meant to sail to Saint-Domingue,

¹⁰ On citizenship in the early United States see James H. Kettner, *The Development of American Citizenship, 1608-1870* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978); Douglas Bradburn, *The Citizenship Revolution: Politics and the Creation of the American Union, 1774-1804* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); and Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: From Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton & Norton, 2005).

¹¹ Dubois, *Haiti*, 30-35.

eliminate any black generals who offered resistance, and prepare the colony for a re-introduction of slavery. Before departure, Bonaparte gave his brother-in-law a succinct directive: “rid us of these gilded negroes and we will have nothing more to wish for.”¹²

Bonaparte assumed the successful conquest of Saint-Domingue was a *fait accompli* but the difficulty of Leclerc’s task swiftly became apparent. When the French fleet appeared off the coast of Saint-Domingue, Louverture staged a tactical retreat along with his highest-ranking generals, Henry Christophe and Jean Jacques Dessalines. Their troops fled from the port towns to the mountains, slowing the French advance by burning everything in their wake. The tactic was shrewd and effective but Louverture soon found himself fighting not only Leclerc but also André Rigaud, Alexandre Pétion, Jean-Pierre Boyer and other men of African descent who opposed his regime. Fierce, inspired resistance could not prevail against this overwhelming opposition and, in April 1802, Louverture, Christophe, and Dessalines surrendered to the French in exchange for the preservation of their military titles and privileges.¹³

Leclerc wasted little time, however, reneging on the bargain. Soon after Louverture’s surrender, the French general had his chief adversary arrested and deported to France. The Bonaparte regime proceeded to lock Louverture away in the Fort de Joux, a prison in the Jura Mountains that offered scant prospects for escape. Denied a hearing, clothing, and proper sustenance from his captors, the former governor-for-life was left to

¹² *Ibid.*, 35-36.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

die, presumably taking the prospect of black freedom and equality in Saint-Domingue to the grave with him.¹⁴

Too confident in their triumph over Louverture, the French failed to heed a warning issued by their captive. Before his death in April 1803, Louverture told Leclerc's men that "in overthrowing me, you have cut down only the trunk of the tree of liberty of the blacks; it will grow back from the roots, because they are deep and numerous." He was right. In Louverture's absence, former slaves throughout Saint-Domingue continued to lay siege to the French troops from their mountain strongholds. Moreover, Dessalines, Christophe, and Pétion allied themselves with the rebels after realizing the likelihood of French defeat. Facing massive resistance, the defection of black troops, and an onslaught of yellow fever, Leclerc ordered his army wage a war of extermination in which only young children were to be spared. His attempts to eliminate the rebellious population of Saint-Domingue and clear the way for new slave imports proved futile, however. By November 1803, the French general had succumbed to yellow fever, most of his troops were dead, too, and rebels now under the command of Dessalines had effectively vanquished the French invaders of Saint-Domingue.¹⁵



On January 1, 1804, Dessalines and his fellow generals met at the western city of Gonaïves to formally declare their independence from France. The Haitian Declaration of Independence and the establishment of the first republic governed by men of African descent in the Western Hemisphere stunned whites and blacks in the United States. White

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 38-41.

planters and their sympathizers denounced Haiti, inventing the phrase “the horrors of St. Domingo” to describe the violent process by which enslaved black people had risen up, overthrown their masters, and fulfilled the worst fears of a slaveholding nation. African Americans, however, articulated a much different interpretation of the Haitian Revolution. For them, the creation of a sovereign Haitian state with executive, legislative, and judicial branches represented a radical assertion of racial equality, an unprecedented opportunity for blacks in the Western Hemisphere to demonstrate their ability to prosper as citizens and leaders of a modern nation.

It was not long before Haiti became a place where African Americans made claims to citizenship in theory and in practice. Seeking to repopulate Haiti after the Haitian Revolution, Dessalines offered U.S. ship captains forty dollars for every African American they transported to Haiti. His successors continued to encourage a migration of African Americans who could bolster Haiti’s population, strengthen its economy, and man its naval vessels. Alexandre Pétion, who established a republic in southern and western Haiti, appealed to African Americans by publishing and publicizing a new constitution that granted citizenship to all people of African descent, guaranteed religious toleration, and provided universal education. Meanwhile, Henry Christophe, who founded a rival kingdom in northern Haiti, used U.S. newspapers to stress the value that he placed on education and emphasize his affinity for Protestantism and the English language.¹⁶

These emigration appeals found vocal supporters and promoters within black communities in the United States. In early 1816, Prince Saunders, a black educator from

¹⁶ Sara C. Fanning, “The Roots of Early Black Nationalism: Northern African Americans’ Invocations of Haiti in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Slavery and Abolition* 28, no. 1 (April 2007): 68-72.

Connecticut, traveled to Haiti where he met Emperor Christophe. Shortly thereafter, he published the *Haytian Papers*, a collection of official proclamations and documents from the northern Kingdom of Haiti. His supportive tract and impressive manners earned Saunders an appointment as Christophe's official courier. In this position, he traveled about the urban North speaking to black social organizations about the appeal of a black nation where enhanced self-respect and opportunities for economic success surely awaited any African Americans who moved there.¹⁷

Initially political changes in Haiti interfered with the collaboration between Saunders and Christophe but the mass emigration movement both men envisioned eventually came about. After the death of Pétion in 1818, Jean-Pierre Boyer became the president of the southern Republic of Haiti. Two years later, after Christophe committed suicide due to popular unrest against his rule, Boyer seized power in the north and united Haiti. While he ended the immigration plans promoted by Saunders and Christophe, the new Haitian President wasted little time in recruiting African Americans to his country. In U.S. newspapers, Boyer assured African Americans that Haiti's "wise constitution . . . insures a free country to Africans and their descendants." Moreover, he promised that "Providence has destined Hayti for a land of promise, a sacred asylum, where our unfortunate brethren will, in the end, see their wounds healed by the balm of equality, and their tears wiped away by the protecting hand of liberty."¹⁸

¹⁷ Arthur O. White, "Prince Saunders: An Instance of Social Mobility Among Antebellum New England Blacks," *The Journal of Negro History* 60, no. 4 (October, 1975); Elizabeth Rauh Bethel, "Images of Hayti: The Construction of An Afro-American Lieu De Mémoire," *Callaloo* 15, No. 3 (Summer, 1992): 831-832.

¹⁸ *Niles' Weekly Register*, July 1, 1820; Bethel, 832-835.

As many as 13,000 African Americans, including Saunders, responded to the overtures from the Boyer regime and emigrated to Haiti during the 1820s. In addition to the emigration propaganda found in newspapers, prospective émigrés from cities on the Atlantic seaboard learned about potential settlement in Haiti from Haytian Emigration Societies and emissaries sent by Boyer.¹⁹ Besides promises of land and agricultural opportunities, the prospect of attaining the protections and privileges that accompanied citizenship appealed to African Americans who decided to abandon the United States. For example, in a letter published in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, one African American who migrated from Washington, D.C. to the mountains outside of Port-au-Prince wrote:

I have adopted myself a Haytian; and I bid eternal farewell to America. Here I repose under my vine and banana tree, contended with Hayti and all its errors. I fell determined to live and die under the safe-guard of her constitution, with the hope of aiding to open the door for the relief of my distressed brethren.²⁰

In the estimation of this settler, the benefits of life in Haiti were clear. While his “distressed brethren” in the northern United States confronted disfranchising measures even as white universal manhood suffrage spread, black émigrés enjoyed the “safe-guard” of a Haitian constitution that recognized their status as citizens.²¹

¹⁹ Fanning, 74.

²⁰ “Hayti, No. II,” *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, June 24, 1826.

²¹ For instance, New York abolished property requirements for all white male voters in 1821. Black men, however, still needed \$250 worth of property to exercise their right to vote. By 1825, only 68 out of 12,259 African Americans in New York City were eligible to vote. See George E. Walker, *The Afro-American in New York City, 1827-1860* (New York: Garland Press, 1993), 116.

The possibility of being welcomed by a Haitian “mother” proved equally alluring to African Americans living in the slaveholding South. In particular, Boyer’s assurances that those “who groan in the United States in misery and humiliation” would receive freedom and “the invaluable rights of equal laws and citizenship” might have sparked the imagination of Denmark Vesey.²² In the summer of 1822, Charleston authorities charged the free black carpenter—who spent one year of his adolescence enslaved in Saint-Domingue—with conspiracy. According to multiple witnesses, Vesey and other participants in the planned slave insurrection had ready access to news and gossip about events in Haiti. One enslaved man arrested as a co-conspirator testified that Vesey, perhaps emboldened by news about Haiti gleaned from the *Charleston Courier* and more informal information networks, showed him a letter written to Boyer requesting assistance. The allegations left Charleston authorities convinced that Vesey and his fellow insurrectionists expected military support during the rebellion and refuge after its conclusion from a Haitian President who supported black emigration and eliminated slavery in Santo Domingo after occupying that country.²³

The veracity of similar testimonies provided by black witnesses coerced by violence and confronted with the demands of a white supremacist legal structure deserves scrutiny. Yet the records from the Vesey trial provide keen insights into the transnational

²² *Niles’ Weekly Register*, August 14, 1824.

²³ Edward A. Pearson, ed., *Designs Against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy of 1822* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 165-283; Michael P. Johnson, “Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (October 2001), 950, 964-966. Boyer invaded Santo Domingo in February 1822, three months after the colony gained its independence from the Spanish crown. It did not regain its independence until February 1844, a year after the overthrow of Boyer.

worldviews of black southerners even if they pertain to a conspiracy that only existed in the minds of paranoid white planters.²⁴ The allegations of those who sought to save themselves by testifying against their peers reveal the heresy of a black population that rejected prevailing notions of their inherent inferiority by insisting on the emancipation of enslaved blacks and the equal treatment of their free counterparts.²⁵ Moreover, they confirm that Haiti appealed to black Charlestonians as the manifestation of these dreams of universal freedom and racial equality. Indeed, by emphasizing Vesey's eagerness to implicate Haitians in his plot, witnesses effectively verified their community's appreciation of the transgressive potential of a Haitian state abhorred by much of America's white citizenry.²⁶

African Americans in neighboring southern states exhibited a similar proclivity to express their disavowal of the slave power through their veneration of and travels to Haiti. In his biography of Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington noted that enslaved men and women possessed knowledge "of the Haytian struggle for liberty" even if they were

²⁴ Johnson provides a comprehensive overview of the literature on the Vesey conspiracy, particularly the debates produced by Richard C. Wade's "The Vesey Plot: A Reconsideration" which features the central argument that the conspiracy was entirely fictive. Unlike subsequent historians who denounced Wade, Johnson argues that "Vesey and the other condemned black men were victims of a conspiracy conjured into being in 1822 by the court, its cooperative black witnesses, and its numerous white supporters and kept alive ever since by historians eager to accept the court's judgments while rejecting its morality." *Ibid.*, 971.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 967-971.

²⁶ A succinct yet thorough treatment of the negative attitudes about Haiti shaped by Western beliefs about race and nationhood appears in Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Haiti and the United States: The Psychological Moment* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 34-50. The southern response to the Haitian Revolution receives a more extended treatment in Alfred Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 107-147.

“ignorant of everything except [their] master and the plantation.”²⁷ The assertion of the man who would famously document his own rise from bondage was supported not only by the upheaval in Charleston but also by oral traditions on the Tidewater region of Maryland where Douglass experienced enslavement. One bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church born free in Caroline County, Maryland in 1821 recalled “old people speaking about persons going to Hayti” during his childhood. In particular, he remembered that African Americans on the Eastern Shore composed a song about a young boy who, “on account of bad treatment . . . went to the free country” of Philadelphia before finally boarding a ship bound for Haiti. It went:

Poor Moses, poor Moses,
Sailing on the ocean.
Bless the Lord,
I am on the way,
Farewell to Georgia.
Moses is gone to Hayti.²⁸

The recounted song immortalizes an African American who, like Vesey and his co-conspirators, rejected the idea of black inferiority propagated by the southern slavocracy. What is more, though, it exposes the young, cosmopolitan fugitive’s implicit castigation of the urban North. For “Poor Moses,” Haiti represented a striking alternative to a “free

²⁷ Booker T. Washington, *Frederick Douglass* (Philadelphia: G.W. Jacobs & Company, 1907), 144.

²⁸ Alexander Walker Wayman, *My Recollections of African M.E. Ministers, or Forty Years’ Experience in the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: A.M.E. Book Rooms, 1881), 4.

country” where his prospects for meaningful freedom, citizenship, and equality might not have differed fundamentally from those available to his kin who remained in “Georgia.”²⁹

In the end, the free and enslaved black men and women on the Eastern Shore who memorialized Moses did not join him in Haiti. But, like other African Americans who remained in the United States by choice or by force, they contributed to a vibrant culture in which Haiti was an important symbol of black self-government. Their songs and stories about peers who fled to Haiti cohered with the products produced by African Americans who glorified the Haitian past and interpreted the significance of Haitian independence from their printing presses and potteries.³⁰ More specifically, the oral traditions that flourished among black Marylanders complemented the journalistic endeavor of two black abolitionists in New York City.



John Brown Russwurm had displayed an acute interest in Haiti even before he arrived in the largest city in the United States. As a youth, the native of Jamaica had moved

²⁹ Wayman notes that Moses’s former master, George Calahan, promised to “light alongside of him in Hayti before he knows it,” after learning of Moses’s departure from another slave recently returned from Philadelphia. *Ibid.*, 4. The anecdote, even if apocryphal, indicates the constraints that Moses would have continued to face even as a free man in the urban North. The vow to recover Moses from an independent nation where slavery was abolished was a hollow threat. But it does reveal that Calahan and, quite possibly, a number of his allies, might have gone to great lengths to reclaim the planter’s escaped “property” in Philadelphia.

³⁰ In the 1840s, a number of pitchers representing Toussaint Louverture were produced in Medford, Massachusetts and then possibly sold at fundraisers for the abolitionist cause. There is a strong possibility that Thomas and John Sables produced them and their last name would indicate that these two brothers were black. More on these tantalizing links between black material culture, Haiti, and abolitionism can be found in Jonathan Prown, Glenn Adamson, Katherine Hemple Prown, and Robert Hunter, “‘The Very Man for the Hour’: The Toussaint L’Ouverture Portrait Pitcher,” in Robert Hunter, ed., *Ceramics in America* (Milwaukee: Chipstone Foundation, 2002), 110-130.

to Portland, Maine, where he eventually enrolled at Bowdoin College. There he wrote term papers on Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution. At the commencement ceremony where he officially became Bowdoin's first black graduate, Russwurm delivered an address on *The Conditions and Prospects of Hayti*. In a speech highlighting the Haitian struggle for "freedom and a political existence," he argued that the persistence of Haitian independence proved that "degraded man"—a category epitomized by African Americans—would "rise in his native majesty and claim his rights."³¹

In 1827, the year after his graduation from Bowdoin, Russwurm moved to New York where he met Samuel Cornish, a black Presbyterian minister born to free parents in Delaware. That March the two men became the editors of *Freedom's Journal*, the first black-owned and operated newspaper in the United States. Blacks in the North, parts of the South, and even England, Canada, and Haiti soon turned to the unprecedented journal for birth, death, and wedding announcements, current regional, national, and international news, and editorials on black political rights, colonization, and slavery. Moreover, readers of *Freedom's Journal* could find within its pages biographies of Louverture, articles on the Haitian Revolution, coverage of political conditions in contemporary Haiti, and other features that evolved from Russwurm's undergraduate writings. For instance, one of the first issues of the paper vindicated black self-determination by insisting that:

There are very few events on record which have produced more extraordinary men than the revolution in St. Domingo. The Negro character at that eventful period, burst upon us in all the splendor of native and original greatness: And the subsequent transactions in that Island have

³¹ John Brown Russwurm, "The Condition and Prospects of Haiti," in *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1797-1900*, eds. Philip S. Foner and Robert J. Branham (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 102. On the career of Russwurm, see Winston James, *The Struggles of John Brown Russwurm: The Life and Writings of a Pan-Africanist Pioneer* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

presented the most incontestable proofs, that the negro is not, in general, wanting in the higher qualifications of the mind; and that, with the same advantages of liberty, independence and education, as their white brethren of Europe and America, the race would not be found deficient in hearts pregnant with heroic energies, and hands capable of wielding the sword of war, or swaying the rod of empire.³²

The allusions to the equality of “extraordinary [black] men” and “their white brethren” exemplified the masculine language employed in similar treatments of the Haitian past, present, and future found in *Freedom's Journal*. Editors Russwurm and Cornish possessed an acute awareness of antebellum discourses that equated resistance to oppression with masculinity and linked masculinity to citizenship and self-determination. Consequently, they used their paper to stress that the Haitian Revolution placed the ideal qualities of black men beyond any reasonable doubt.³³ In one editorial appearing in December 1828, Russwurm proclaimed that “the Haytiens can look back on the past with great satisfaction; they have fought the good fight of *Liberty*.” Moreover, he emphasized that Haitians can now “look forward to what man, even the descendant of Africa, may be, when blessed with Liberty and Equality and their concomitants.”³⁴ Russwurm would soon sour on the prospects for racial equality in the United States. But, before immigrating to Liberia in 1829, he found it feasible that black men could prove their fitness for citizenship

³² *Freedom's Journal*, May 4, 1827. On the featuring of Haiti in *Freedom's Journal* see especially Bethel, 835-837 and Jacqueline Bacon, *Freedom's Journal: The First African-American Newspaper* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 147-175. A modified version appears in Bacon, “A Revolution Unexampled in the History of Man’ The Haitian Revolution in *Freedom's Journal*, 1827-1829,” in *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution: Selected Essays and Historical Documents*, eds. Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon (New York: Routledge Press, 2010), 81-93.

³³ Bacon, “A Revolution,” 85.

³⁴ John B. Russwurm, “Hayti,” *Freedom's Journal*, December 12, 1828.

in the United States by highlighting their connection to a Haitian people who “taught the world that the African . . . possessed the proper spirit and feelings of a man.”³⁵

Russwurm was not unique in that regard. After he emigrated from the United States and *Freedom's Journal* ceased production, educated African Americans continued to emphasize the contemporary relevance of the Haitian Revolution. In February 1841, New York abolitionist James McCune Smith delivered a lecture on the Haitian Revolution at a benefit for his city's Colored Orphan Asylum. The talk given by the European-trained physician pointed to the “tyranny of caste”—which, in Smith's words, was “the necessary and legitimate fruit of slavery”—as the underlying cause of the Haitian Revolution. In particular, he argued that the white ruling class of Saint-Domingue compounded the error of their slaveholding ways by denying the “rights of citizenship” to refined and intelligent free people of color. That mistake was “not unconnected to the present occasion.” Smith surmised that the exclusion of black children from public educational institutions demonstrated that the United States was infected by the same “incongruous and undermining influence of *caste*” once challenged by free people of color and enslaved blacks in Saint-Domingue.³⁶

Smith proceeded to suggest that these parallels between past caste divisions in Saint-Domingue and current racial discrimination in the United States need not discourage African Americans. He based this assertion on the life of Toussaint Louverture. According to Smith, the devoted husband, loving father, and devout Christian proved his mettle on the

³⁵ J., “Haytien Revolution,” *Freedom's Journal*, April 6, 1827. Before leaving the United States, Russwurm editorialized that it was a “mere waste of words, to talk of ever enjoying citizenship in this country: it is utterly impossible in the nature of things.” James, 44.

³⁶ James McCune Smith, *A Lecture on the Haytian Revolutions: With a Sketch of the Character of Toussaint L'Ouverture* (New York: D. Fanshaw, 1841), 5-6, 28.

battlefield before he “seized the reins of government, reduced . . . conflicting elements to harmony and order, and raised the colony to nearly its former prosperity.” In doing so, the genteel Louverture showed that “this race is entirely capable of achieving liberty and of self-government” and proved “that even slavery cannot unfit men for the full exercise of all the functions which belong to free citizens.”³⁷ Smith concluded that the efforts of Louverture should assuage the fears of white Americans whose “detestation” of the “Horrors of St. Domingo” shaped their understanding of postemancipation societies. Furthermore, he maintained that those who supported the Colored Orphan Asylum and worked to incorporate African Americans into northern civic life could look to Louverture—the “spirit of peace, the patriot, the father, the benefactor of mankind”—for proof that their efforts were not futile.³⁸

Similar writings and lectures on Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution permeated black communities throughout the antebellum era. Frederick Douglass published biographical treatments of Louverture in his Rochester *North Star* that compared the governor-for-life of Saint-Domingue to the first president of the United States.³⁹ His fellow fugitive slave and abolitionist William Wells Brown captivated audiences in the urban North and in England with a lecture on “St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and Its Patriots” that praised “Hayti’s Washington” because “from ignorance he became educated . .

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁹ *North Star*, February 18, 1848.

. from a slave he rose to be a soldier, a general, and a governor.”⁴⁰ In fact, the lessons about the evils of slavery, the potential for black self-improvement, and the prospects of black citizenship and self-government found in his speeches reverberated far beyond the lecture circuit. Two decades after the Civil War, the black editors of the New Orleans *Weekly Pelican* reflected fondly on the panegyrics on Toussaint Louverture found in their “old school reading books.”⁴¹



The veneration of the heroes of the Haitian Revolution would persist throughout the 1840s and the 1850s. But tensions in the present relationship between the United States and Haiti complicated the assessments of the Haitian past offered by black leaders. The United States had decided not to establish diplomatic relations with Haiti in the immediate aftermath of the Haitian Revolution. Now, as debates about national expansion and the future of slavery in the United States intensified, resistance to the recognition of Haitian independence became even more obstinate. Southern politicians were particularly adamant that recognizing Haiti would constitute a tacit endorsement of slave insurrection, abolitionism, and radical concepts of racial equality. They expressed great resentment for “traitors” who overrode the so-called gag-rule against anti-slavery petitions by placing the non-recognition policy towards Haiti on the Congressional agenda. The battle over the diplomatic relations between the United States and Haiti, then, became part of a war over

⁴⁰ William Wells Brown, *St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and Its Patriots* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1855), 36.

⁴¹ *Weekly Pelican*, January 12, 1889.

the fate of the nation being waged among politicians in Washington, border ruffians in Kansas, abolitionists in New England, and slaveowners in the South.⁴²

African Americans inserted themselves into this swirling controversy over a Haitian state whose mere existence challenged the foundations of white supremacy upon which the United States had been built.⁴³ In August 1849, black abolitionist and newspaper editor Samuel Ringgold Ward critiqued the racist underpinnings of U.S. diplomatic policy by writing that:

Now one of the “customs” of our Government is to refuse to acknowledge the independence of a Republic, the majority of whose citizens are black men, lest such an acknowledgement should offend negro haters in Washington by introducing a black minister into the society of the Capitol. This is the reason why our Government has not recognized the independence of Hayti, a Republic half a century old. A Republic, too, that has done more to prove its capacity for self-government . . . than the United States.⁴⁴

Two months later, Frederick Douglass presented a comparable appraisal when he lambasted the “Slave Power” for compelling “the federal government to abstain from acknowledging the neighbor republic of Haiti, where slaves have become freemen, and established an independent nation.”⁴⁵ Like Haitian leaders, these two men understood that Haiti could never reach its full economic and political potential so long as it remained

⁴² Concise treatment of early U.S. policy towards Haiti is found in Don E. Fehrenbacher and Ward M. McAfee, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 112-116. For further reading on the relationship between the U.S. government and Haiti consult Rayford Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776-1891* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941).

⁴³ Compelling analysis of the campaign for Haitian recognition is found in Leslie M. Alexander, ““The Black Republic:” The Influence of the Haitian Revolution on Northern Black Political Consciousness, 1816-1862,” in Jackson and Bacon, 65-70.

⁴⁴ *Impartial Citizen*, August 15, 1849.

⁴⁵ *North Star*, October 5, 1849.

marginalized by global powers. At the same time though, they acted out of self-interest, out of a conviction that African Americans would never obtain respect so long as the gains of the Haitian Revolution remained unrecognized.

Reactions to Haitian political developments further frustrated African Americans who hoped to improve their status by endorsing Haiti. In 1849, after serving as Haiti's president for two years, Faustin Soulouque proclaimed himself emperor. Three years later, his official coronation as Emperor Faustin I completed the shift from republicanism to monarchism. Besides launching a series of attacks against the neighboring Dominican Republic, which gained its independence from Haiti eight years earlier, the newly-christened Haitian monarch created a hereditary aristocracy, established a secret police force, and formed a personal army tasked with crushing his opponents. The policies enacted by a man who foreign pundits lampooned as a barbarian aping royalty or derided as a "big black nigger" in charge of a "nigger population" did not stop black leaders and their allies from insisting on the diplomatic recognition of Haiti. However, the oft-ridiculed rule of Faustin I certainly made it more difficult to argue that sound black self-government and the capabilities of African Americans were on display in Haiti.⁴⁶

Disillusionment with prospects for black citizenship in the United States and concern that Haiti was not fulfilling its immense potential coalesced in a resurgence of emigrationist sentiment. James Theodore Holly, an abolitionist journalist who moved from the United States to Canada following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, was

⁴⁶ A few historians have offered more favorable judgments of Soulouque, casting him as an intelligent and shrewd leader whose ruthlessness was dictated by foreign and internal threats to his authority. For the most part, though, modern scholars have been no more generous to Soulouque than the nineteenth-century foreign observers who lampooned and satirized the Haitian Emperor. See Dubois, *Haiti*, 145-150.

particularly adamant that African Americans needed to abandon the United States if they ever hoped to achieve equal protection under the law and unobstructed voting rights. After championing Haiti as a site for black expatriation at the 1854 National Emigration Convention, the native of Washington, D.C. obtained authorization from the Convention's National Board of Commissioners to assess the conditions of Haiti. A year later, he traveled to Haiti where he presented Faustin I with an ambitious plan for emigration that included requests for land, religious freedom, and citizenship for all African Americans willing to settle there. The Haitian Emperor was less than enthused with the proposal but his tepid initial reaction did not diminish Holly's belief that enterprising black émigrés could simultaneously improve their own status while spearheading the regeneration of Haiti.⁴⁷

Upon returning to the United States, Holly dedicated himself to two tasks: becoming an Episcopal clergyman and inspiring a mass migration to Haiti. A year after his ordination as an Episcopal priest—and in the same year that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that neither Dred Scott nor any other African American was a U.S. citizen—Holly published a lecture entitled *A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro Race for Self-Government and Civilized Progress*. In it, he argued that the “continued advancement” of Haiti could “regenerate and disenthral the oppression and ignorance of the race, throughout the world.” He implied, however, that Haitians were not capable of achieving this desired progress on their own. Although Holly praised Faustin I as the heir of African monarchs who ruled ancient kingdoms unsurpassed in power and prestige, the Episcopal clergyman insinuated that African Americans were best equipped to lead their race into the future. Holly maintained

⁴⁷ Brandon R. Byrd, “James Theodore Holly,” in *Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biography*, eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Franklin W. Knight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); David M. Dean, *Defender of the Race: James Theodore Holly, Black Nationalist and Bishop* (Boston: Lambeth Press, 1979).

that African Americans had accrued knowledge of “the arts, sciences, and genius of modern civilization” from their providential albeit inhumane enslavement under the “hardy and enterprising Anglo-American race.” It was now their “weighty responsibility,” he concluded, to contribute to the ascension of a “powerful and civilized negro sovereignty” in the Caribbean rather than “indolently remain” in the United States “asking for political rights” that might never materialize.⁴⁸

Holly stressed that African Americans had an obligation to strengthen the Haitian state by reforming the religious practices of its people. The devout Episcopalian believed that culture and civilization were interchangeable terms embodied by middle-class Anglo-American Protestants. Consequently, he lamented the prevalence of Catholicism and Vodou in Haiti. While he dismissed the former as a consequence of enslavement under the decadent French, he regarded the rites of spirit possession, music, and dance found in the latter as dangerous vestiges of a barbaric African past.⁴⁹ In his estimation, then, African Americans needed to transfer the elements of civilization accrued from their experience in the United States to Haitians. Indeed, they faced dire consequences if they did not. Holly insisted that Haiti would falter without Protestantism and he predicted that “if Haytien independence shall cease to exist, the sky of negro-destiny shall be hung in impenetrable blackness; the hope of Princes coming out of Egypt and Ethiopia soon stretching forth her

⁴⁸ James Theodore Holly, *A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro Race for Self-Government, and Civilized Progress, as Demonstrated by Historical Events of the Haytian Revolution; and the Subsequent Acts of that People Since Their National Independence* (New Haven, CT: W.H. Stanley, 1857), 45-46

⁴⁹ Maffly-Kipp, 144-150. Wilson Jeremiah Moses provides the best treatment of the cultural absolutism of nineteenth-century black intellectuals. See, for instance, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

hands unto God, will die out.”⁵⁰ Emigration, in Holly’s judgment, had thus become not only the last hope for the vindication of black self-government but also the means by which God would fulfill the promise of the Ethiopian prophecy.

Again, a change in Haitian political leadership provided the momentum needed to transform emigration dreams into reality. By 1858, Faustin I had grown more receptive to emigration proposals, even sending a representative to promote Haiti as a site of resettlement for African Americans from Louisiana, Missouri, and other locations. A year later, though, Fabre Geffrard deposed the Emperor in a coup d’état and re-established republican governance in Haiti. The former general quickly exceeded his predecessor’s gradual support for emigration by advancing prospective émigrés money to cover travel expenses to Haiti and offering them credit to buy land for their settlements. Moreover, he provided \$20,000 for the establishment of a Haytian Bureau of Emigration that facilitated resettlement from U.S. cities including New Orleans, Boston, New Haven, Philadelphia, and New York. Unsurprisingly, its leader, James Redpath, hired James Theodore Holly as his first agent. Together, the Episcopal priest, his fellow agents, and the Haitian President used the allure of citizenship to capture the attention of potential migrants. In 1860, *A Guide to Hayti* produced by the Haytian Bureau of Emigration contained Geffrard’s assurance that:

Hayti is the common country of the black race. Our ancestors, in taking possession of it, were careful to announce in the Constitution . . . that all the descendants of Africans, and of the inhabitants of the West Indies, belong by right to the Haytian family. The idea was grand and generous. Listen, then, all ye negroes and mulattoes who, in the vast Continent of America, suffer from the prejudice of caste. The Republic calls you; she invites you to bring to her your arms and your minds.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Holly, “Thoughts on Hayti,” *Anglo-African Magazine* I, no. 6 (June 1859), 187.

⁵¹ James Redpath, ed., *A Guide to Hayti* (Boston: Haytian Bureau of Emigration, 1861, [c. 1860]).

Like their predecessors in the first wave of emigration, African Americans who responded to these overtures embraced Haiti as a symbolic and actual model of black self-government. By the end of 1861, approximately 3,000 African Americans had left the United States to begin new lives in Haiti. The prospect of achieving political equality in a nation governed by people of African descent animated many of them.⁵² One black Philadelphian who moved to Port-au-Prince with her husband reported that “the government is very good to us,” so good, in fact, that she “could never think of going back to the United States to live.”⁵³ Those who joined Holly on a new “Mayflower expedition” that left New Haven for Port-au-Prince echoed these sentiments. One émigré proclaimed “I am a *man* in Hayti where I feel as I never felt before, entirely free.” Another announced that upon walking the streets of the Haitian capital alongside black politicians, businessmen, judges, and generals, he surely “felt as no colored man in the United States can feel.”⁵⁴ And, at a time when a similar walk around the U.S. capital led to encounters with black slaves rather than black senators, the observant émigré was probably correct.



It appeared, though, that times might be changing. In March 1861, Frederick Douglass agreed to join Holly on a mission to investigate conditions in Haiti. A number of setbacks including the Fugitive Slave Act and the Dred Scott decision had convinced the

⁵² On the second wave of emigration to Haiti see Chris Dixon, *African America and Haiti: Emigration and Black Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000).

⁵³ “Letter from Hayti,” *The Christian Recorder*, April 13, 1861.

⁵⁴ Dixon, 187-190.

famed abolitionist and former opponent of emigration that he could no longer oppose “a measure which may prove highly advantageous to many families, and of much service to the Haytian Republic.”⁵⁵ Before he could set sail for Haiti, however, secessionists in South Carolina fired upon Fort Sumter. The outbreak of the Civil War convinced Douglass that the only appropriate response was to abandon emigration schemes and remain in the United States. In his estimation, his presence was needed in a country that had reached its day of reckoning, the moment when it might finally fulfill its promise of liberty and equality for all.

A number of African Americans who shared Douglass’s opinion joined him in recruiting black soldiers to fight in the Union Army. In doing so, they frequently invoked the name of Toussaint Louverture. Black abolitionist Robert Hamilton’s *Weekly Anglo-African* advised black men to seize the “opportunity to display those qualities which the experience of this war, as well as the history of Toussaint’s Battles, has shown him to possess.”⁵⁶ A correspondent of that newspaper further implored African Americans to replicate the feats of their Haitian predecessor. The black southerner wrote:

Men of color, my fellow-citizens, do not stop to ask the question: “What are we going to fight for?” but enlist, buckle on your armour, and with strong arms and brave hearts go into this war and fight for your rights. Did Toussaint L’Ouverture stop to ask that question? Did his followers stop to ask that question? No, no, not at all. They rose up with all their strength and struck blow after blow for freedom, and this day their posterity are enjoying the fruits of their victories.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Douglass’ Monthly*, March 1861.

⁵⁶ “The Colored Regiments of Massachusetts,” *Weekly Anglo-African*, December 19, 1863.

⁵⁷ Bob Logic, “Letter from Washington,” *Weekly Anglo-African*, August 1, 1863.

The possibilities introduced by the Civil War thus seemed to exceed black freedom. For the editor of the *Weekly Anglo-African* and his correspondents, the Haitian Revolution and contemporary discourses on violence, masculinity, and citizenship indicated that black “fellow-citizens” could seize their “rights” only by taking up arms against slaveholding Confederates.⁵⁸

Thousands of African Americans did enlist in the Union Army, many of them embracing the chance to reenact the Haitian Revolution. A Union Army chaplain stationed at Port Royal, South Carolina remarked that “the result of the insurrection in St. Domingo has long been known among the contrabands of the South—the name of Toussaint L’Overture has been passed from mouth to mouth until it has become a secret household word—and a love of liberty, fed by a love of arms, has been rendered universal and almost omnipotent.” His subsequent claim that African Americans “felt it was right for the colored Haytiens to fight to be free [so] it is equally right for colored Americans” received tacit confirmation from the men of the famed 54th Massachusetts Regiment.⁵⁹ The members of the black military unit would have found it difficult to forget the connection between the Civil War and the Haitian Revolution as they fought alongside black nationalist Martin Delany’s son, Toussaint L’Ouverture Delany. In fact, most needed no reminder. As they proved their valor and spurred further recruitment of black soldiers with an ill-fated

⁵⁸ On African American invocations of Louverture during the Civil War see Clavin, “American Toussaints: Symbol, Subversion, and the Black Atlantic Tradition in the American Civil War,” *Slavery and Abolition* 28, no. 1 (April 2007): 87-113.

⁵⁹ “Will the Contrabands Fight,” *Washington National Republican*, quoted in *Weekly Anglo-African*, February 15, 1862.

assault on South Carolina's Fort Wagner, one company of the regiment proudly went by the name of the "Toussaint Guards."⁶⁰

To be sure, even African Americans who did not don the blue understood their moment of liberation in relation to the Haitian past. While members of the 54th replicated the feats of their Haitian predecessors, as many as 10,000 contrabands in New Bern, North Carolina paid homage to the Haitian Revolution by establishing a community called "New Hayti."⁶¹ The Haitian Revolution also provided inspiration for the names of hospitals and other public buildings in black communities as well as the numerous "Toussaints" born to black parents who envisioned a future of racial equality. As these namesakes of the Haitian hero entered the world, some escaped slaves informed northern white newspaper correspondents that they were veterans of the Haitian Revolution or descendants of exiles from Saint-Domingue.⁶² It is unclear to what extent such stories are reliable. Yet, regardless of their veracity, alleged connections to Louverture or Dessalines demonstrate the immediacy of Haitian history for many African Americans who hoped to create a facsimile of the freedom and political autonomy that existed in Haiti.



In the summer of 1862, Abraham Lincoln further increased these hopes by authorizing two dramatic shifts in U.S. foreign and domestic policy. On June 5, bowing to arguments from Senator Charles Sumner that recognizing Haiti would help weaken slavery in the South, the Republican President appointed the first commissioner to Haiti.

⁶⁰ "The 54th Regiment," *New Bedford Mercury*, March 23, 1863.

⁶¹ "The Government and the Negroes," *New York Herald*, January 6, 1863.

⁶² Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture*, 138-139.

Abolitionists who insisted that the act meant “that this Government henceforth recognizes Blacks as citizens, capable of a National life” soon had more reason to rejoice.⁶³ Three months later, Lincoln issued a preliminary proclamation declaring his intention to emancipate all slaves in any Confederate state that remained in rebellion by January 1, 1863. When the deadline passed, the Emancipation Proclamation took effect with the Confederacy still united.⁶⁴

Among others, Frederick Douglass would attribute great significance to the two acts. During a speech delivered at a gathering of black Philadelphians, he attempted to secure enlistments in the Union Army by assuring the young black men in attendance that they would be fighting for a government that respected their rights. According to Douglass, the recent actions taken by Lincoln proved his assertion. “Events more mighty than men, eternal Providence, all-wise and all-controlling,” he thundered, “have placed us in new relations to the Government.” Douglass boasted that “slavery in ten States of the Union is abolished forever” and “the independence of Haiti is recognized.”⁶⁵ For the venerable abolitionist, the establishment of diplomatic relations with Haiti and the Emancipation Proclamation were interconnected portents of imminent biracial democracy in the United States.

The idea that the events of late 1862 and early 1863 had drastically improved the relationship between African Americans and the U.S. government would, however, prove

⁶³ *The Liberator*, July 4, 1862.

⁶⁴ On Lincoln’s wartime measures see Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and the End of Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010).

⁶⁵ Frederick Douglass, “Address for the Promotion of Colored Enlistments,” in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 536.

too hopeful. As Douglass and his contemporaries who shared this optimism quickly realized, the path towards a more inclusive definition of U.S. citizenship would be a twisting one filled with hardships and setbacks. Still, African Americans had developed a transnational political culture during the antebellum era that they could now employ in the struggle for political and civil rights in the postemancipation period. In fact, leading African Americans faced with the challenge of making freedom meaningful would revise longstanding discourses on the Haitian Revolution and independent Haiti while also introducing new ways of interacting with citizens of the “Black Republic.” It was the hope of these black educators, artists, missionaries, politicians, journalists, authors, and even students that their re-narrating of the Haitian past, re-assessment of the Haitian present, and re-shaping of the Haitian future would vindicate their claims to a host of rights that accompanied citizenship and fit within an all-encompassing term: self-government.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE HOME OF FREEDOM, OF GOVERNMENT, AND OF TRUE RELIGION

While Frederick Douglass considered the significance of Lincoln's wartime measures, African Americans in Chicago anticipated an annual day of revelry. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, they had come together each August to celebrate the anniversary of emancipation in the British West Indies, a milestone in black freedom and progress. Hundreds—sometimes more than a thousand—black men and women typically paraded through the city before traveling to a suburban grove. There they enjoyed an afternoon picnic accompanied by live music and orations by speakers of national renown. Finally they returned to the city, reconvening at a banquet hall for an evening of dancing and dining that sometimes lasted into the next day. The festivities were certainly lively and a great cause of excitement yet, to the oft-repeated surprise of the city's white newspaper editors, they normally ended without a hint of recklessness, criminality, or inebriation.¹

On August 3, 1863, black Chicago once again gathered for the orderly celebration. This year, however, the enthusiasm reached a fevered pitch because of the changes in U.S. foreign and domestic policy. That summer morning, scores of black Chicagoans crowded

¹ For contemporary accounts of the celebrations see, *Chicago Tribune*, August 4, 1857; "Grand State Celebration," *Chicago Press and Tribune*, July 31, 1860; "Emancipation in the West Indies Celebration," *Chicago Press and Tribune*, August 1, 1860; "Emancipation Day," *Chicago Press and Tribune*, August 2, 1860; "Emancipation Day," *Chicago Tribune*, August 2, 1861; and "The Chicago Liberty Club Excursion to Canada," *Chicago Tribune*, August 7, 1862.

onto six railroad cars bound for a suburban grove where they were joined by large delegations of African Americans from Detroit, St. Louis, and Milwaukee. After arriving at the festival grounds, the attendees listened to speeches, sung hymns, and played various recreational sports. The jubilation was palpable as the substantial crowd celebrated not only the anniversary of emancipation in the British West Indies but also the Emancipation Proclamation and the diplomatic recognition of Haiti by the U.S. government. These recent acts carried great symbolic import for the excursionists. They understood that just as enslaved African Americans had for centuries fought to gain their freedom, Haitians had struggled to secure international recognition of the independence won during the Haitian Revolution. With these historical travails rectified, the African Americans gathered in Forest Bay Grove joyously filled the air with cries claiming 1863 as the year of jubilee and thanksgiving.²

Their joyous celebration was just one manifestation of a broader impulse permeating black communities throughout the United States. In the immediate wake of Emancipation, a wide-range of African Americans eagerly drew connections between their seemingly improved status and the past and contemporary advancements made by Haitians. They voiced their support for the extension of diplomatic relations to Haiti, celebrated the arrival of the first Haitian diplomat sent to Washington, and produced and

² "Annual Excursion and Picnic to Forest Bay Grove, August 3rd," *Chicago Tribune*, August 3, 1863; "The Emancipation Celebration," *Chicago Tribune*, August 4, 1863. On African American emancipation celebrations, see Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003). Kachun notes that, despite occasional calls to commemorate the Haitian Revolution, African Americans in the nineteenth century often could not incorporate Haiti into their emancipation celebrations. This omission was due to white Americans' revulsion regarding the violent, rebellious means by which blacks secured their freedom in that former French colony. Kachun, 92, 57.

consumed sympathetic accounts of the Haitian Revolution. The efforts made to link the experiences of blacks in the United States to those of blacks in Haiti reflected a providential and transnational view of history shared by myriad African Americans. Regardless of their former status or place of birth, African Americans understood the Haitian Revolution, the recognition of Haitian independence, and the Emancipation Proclamation as related developments that foreshadowed the deliverance of the black race from bondage and oppression to a state of freedom and political equality.

These celebratory assessments of black progress, the Haitian Revolution, and independent Haiti would, however, dwindle over the course of Reconstruction. Black leaders, especially those in the urban North, welcomed unprecedented federal action on behalf of African Americans including the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Gradually, though, they worried about the extent to which the freedom, citizenship, and voting rights now codified in law would exist in practice. Recognizing that white supremacists disparaged African Americans by pointing to Haitian religious practices and political upheaval as proof of black inferiority, leading African Americans attempted to reform the “Black Republic” through missionary work. By 1877, aspiring class and elite black Protestants crafted a Haitian mission field that they hoped would vindicate African Americans by making Haitians conform to bourgeoisie Anglo-American standards of piety and domesticity.

In many respects, then, evolving interpretations of Haitian progress demonstrate the confidence and competing apprehension of African Americans contemplating the postemancipation future. Prominent black urbanites claimed that they had ascended to the vanguard of the black race, surpassing Haitians who worshipped a pantheon of deities and

expressed their political discontent through revolution. Yet, over time, such declarations became laced with anxiety. Unsure whether their new ascendant status would prove fleeting, black leaders freighted the much-maligned Haitian “experiment in self-government” with great importance. In essence, African Americans speaking and acting on behalf of their communities attempted to strengthen fragile political fortunes and reinforce an uncertain relationship with the U.S. government by affirming their connection to Haiti, a nation that they sometimes embraced, otherwise critiqued, but ultimately needed.



The feeling that 1863 was a watershed moment for black people resonated far beyond suburban Chicago. In March of that year, ordinary African Americans in Washington, D.C. showed their enthusiasm for the diplomatic recognition of Haiti by welcoming Colonel Ernest Roumain to their city. They sent religious leaders to greet him and anticipated their own opportunity to meet the Haitian consul general and chargé d'affaires who they considered kin.³ Yet, to the chagrin of these admirers, Roumain apparently rejected all visitors and confined himself to the company of his diplomatic peers and fellow communicants at St. Matthew’s Catholic Church.⁴ Henry McNeal Turner sympathized with the popular anticipation surrounding Roumain’s arrival even as he justified the reclusiveness of the Haitian official. On the one hand, the African Methodist

³ “News from Washington,” *New York Herald*, March 17, 1863; “The Minister from Hayti,” *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, May 15, 1863.

⁴ White newspapers alleged that Roumain’s reluctance to accept visitors caused a rift between the Haitian diplomatic representatives and African Americans. Various newspapers repeated a white correspondent’s quotation of one contraband who allegedly cursed Roumain and his entourage as “niggers tink demselbs better dan de President.” See, “The Minister from Hayti,” *The Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, May 15, 1863, *The Vincennes Weekly Western Sun*, April 4, 1863, and “The Minister From Hayti,” *The (Jackson, MS) Daily Southern Crisis*, March 28, 1863.

Episcopal (AME) minister understood that the representative of the Haitian government needed to conduct his designated duties without being inundated with social requests. At the same time, though, he acknowledged that the bevy of contrabands who identified Roumain as another welcome arrival to wartime Washington had it correct: it was, undoubtedly, the appropriate moment to give “all hail and honor to Hayti.”⁵

Douglass, the most famous fugitive slave in Washington, had an equally difficult time suppressing the joy produced by the acknowledgment of Haitian independence. Besides informing potential black soldiers from Philadelphia that Haitian recognition reflected the hand of “eternal Providence,” Douglass used his editorial influence to lavish praise on Haiti’s new international standing.⁶ In the March 1863 edition of *Douglass’ Monthly*, the “Sage of Anacostia” opined that the diplomatic recognition of Haiti was one of the most remarkable developments “in the history of the relation of this Government to the colored part of mankind.” For Douglass, this heightened respect for black people embodied by the reception of the Haitian diplomat in Washington represented an “unmistakable sign of the doom of caste and dawn of higher civilization.”⁷

To be certain, the editorial offered by the veteran of the abolitionist lecture circuit was based on widespread rhetorical traditions that encouraged hyperbole and

⁵ “The Haytien Minister,” *The Christian Recorder*, March 28, 1863; Henry McNeal Turner, “Washington Correspondence,” *The Christian Recorder*, March 28, 1863. Newspaper reports indicating that some of Roumain’s callers were former slaves are corroborated by demographic data. During the course of the war, as many as 40,000 freedmen and women made their way to the nation’s capital. Leon Litwack, in *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).

⁶ Douglass, “Address for the Promotion of Colored Enlistments.”

⁷ *Douglass’ Monthly*, March 1863.

argumentation.⁸ Nonetheless, it conformed to a burgeoning view that the ascension of African Americans in the postemancipation era was inextricably linked to the fate of Haiti, the only independent black nation in the Western Hemisphere. In the same month that Douglass offered his reflections on Haitian recognition and “the dawn of higher civilization,” W.J. Davis penned a letter to the *Christian Recorder*, the official organ of the AME Church. The former slave who had since become a minister told readers that he once called on Abraham Lincoln at his Springfield law office. He maintained that, after hearing about Davis’s multiple encounters with the auction block, the future president offered a strong condemnation of the “wretched system” of slavery. Davis was thus unsurprised by what Lincoln had “done to free so many millions of our poor down-trodden people in the South.” Indeed, his previous encounter with Lincoln shaped Davis’s perception of the potential impact of a politician who not only commiserated in private with a former slave and issued the Emancipation Proclamation but also authorized the diplomatic recognition of Haiti. He asked readers of the AME newspaper whether any president had ever considered the prospect of general emancipation or entertained the thought of acknowledging the independence of a nation governed by black men. Certainly not, he replied. Implying that the recent acts of his old acquaintance were just the beginning of a new era in U.S. race relations, he proceeded to declare that “Ethiopia [was] stretching out her hands to God.”⁹

⁸ Nan Johnson, *Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric in North America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991); Shirley Wilson Logan, *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

⁹ W.J. Davis, “Bloomington Correspondence,” *The Christian Recorder*, March 21, 1863.

The prediction found in Psalm 68:31 that “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God” seemed to explain the abrupt acceptance of black freedom and national independence.¹⁰ But, with the apparent dawning of a period foreshadowed by the Ethiopian Prophecy, African Americans now attempted to ensure that the promised renaissance of black political life would have the desired transformative effect on U.S. society. In particular, African Americans who saw themselves as part of an ascendant community worthy of an equal standing in national life crafted and consumed new narratives about the outcomes and heroes of the Haitian Revolution.



In 1863, William Wells Brown completed *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements*. The former bondsman described his work as a repudiation of “the calumniators and traducers of the Negro” who claimed that individuals of African descent “were destined only for a servile condition, entitled neither to liberty nor the legitimate pursuit of happiness.” He intended to show that blacks could meet all the expectations placed on free citizens of a modern nation by presenting biographical sketches of “individuals who, by their own genius, capacity, and intellectual development, have surmounted the many obstacles which slavery and prejudice have thrown in their way.”¹¹ Brown could have relied solely on the achievements of African Americans to prove his point. Yet, in his attempt to convince white Americans that blacks could prosper in a

¹⁰ On the prevalence of this passage in black literature and thought see, Roy Kay, *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012) and Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978).

¹¹ Brown, *The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (Boston: James Redpath, 1863), 5-6.

postemancipation society, he placed particular importance on the leading figures in Haitian history.

The Black Man contains biographies of Toussaint Louverture, Jean Jacques Dessalines and six other men possessing Saint-Dominguan or Haitian roots. The account of Louverture describes the governor-for-life of Saint-Domingue as a man of great “humanity, generosity, and courage” who attained leadership positions due to his unsurpassed “genius.” Moreover, it contends that Louverture achieved success not only because he possessed “high qualities of mind” but also because he had great capacity for self-development. Brown’s treatment of the Haitian hero points out that “from ignorance he became educated by his own exertions” and “from a slave he rose to be a soldier, a general, and a governor.”¹² Louverture, then, did not merely demonstrate individual black genius and achievement. Instead, he made obvious the broader capacity of the black race to ascend from slavery, achieve the highest levels of civilization, and exercise one of the greatest expressions of citizenship, political leadership.

While his description of Louverture complemented standard treatments of the “first of the blacks,” Brown’s interpretation of Dessalines was rather exceptional.¹³ The slave insurrectionist who became the first ruler of independent Haiti gained a reputation for brutality based on his unrelenting military tactics during the Haitian Revolution and his harsh treatment of the population that remained in Haiti after independence. According to Brown, though, the “untamed ferocity” that drove Dessalines to authorize the deaths of

¹² *Ibid.*, 99, 105.

¹³ In December 1861, abolitionist Wendell Phillips began delivering a lecture on Toussaint Louverture to sold-out crowds in New York and Boston. The oration quickly gained fame and African Americans, including Brown and Douglass, soon began delivering their own talks on the Haitian Revolution. Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture*, 77-78, 86-94.

thousands of whites also made him a representative figure of black intellectual capacity and achievement. In particular, the “savage” and “barbarous” tactics employed by Dessalines matched the “ferocious and sanguinary spirit” of the French and proved vital to the defense of independent Haiti. Brown thus concluded that Dessalines’s violent vindication of “the rights of the oppressed in that unfortunate island” was simply evidence that a free and autonomous black people could replicate the force and cunning that their white counterparts considered acceptable and effective elements of political and military culture.¹⁴

Although the interests of a white publisher likely influenced *The Black Man*, the biographies found within it confirm that African Americans found lessons for their future within the Haitian past. As the head of the Haytian Emigration Bureau, James Redpath had hired Brown as one of his agents. With the decline of emigrationist sentiment during the Civil War, he now turned his energies to publishing *The Black Man* and other works that presented Haitian history in a manner that would justify emancipation and the northern recruitment of black soldiers.¹⁵ It stands to reason, then, that the Scottish abolitionist might have shaped how his former employee wrote about Louverture, Dessalines, and their peers. Nonetheless, the representations of Haitian history found in Brown’s work ultimately reflect the experiences of a former slave attempting to navigate the treacherous path from slavery to freedom to full citizenship. Brown made it clear that noteworthy

¹⁴ Brown, *The Black Man*, 111, 116-117. Dessalines had long assumed a nightmarish quality in the American imagination, as the nineteenth century version of the black bogeyman later embodied by Richard Wright’s Bigger Thomas. See Hunt, 90-91.

¹⁵ On Redpath, see John R. McKivigan, *Forgotten Firebrand: James Redpath and the Making of Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

Haitians had become remarkable statesmen—even leaders of nations—despite feeling the callous whip of slavery or suffering from the residual effects of white racism. As he looked to a future in which African Americans might have to fight for full political and civil equality after transcending bondage, Brown asked white Americans a simple question: If Haitians could rise to such greatness then what might be the potential of blacks within the United States?

While often aimed at white audiences, *The Black Man* and similar works found a receptive readership among literate blacks in the United States. Throughout 1863 and 1864, the *Christian Recorder* placed *The Black Man* on its list of recommended books while *Douglass' Monthly* maintained that “it should find its way into every school library—and indeed, every house in the land.”¹⁶ At the same time, the *Recorder* also included a biography of Louverture on its list of recommended books for sale and the paper soon indicated that the demand for it had exceeded the available supply.¹⁷ In January 1864, the AME organ capitalized on this evident interest in Haitian history by offering a copy of the “work that every colored lady and gentleman ought to have” to the first individual who could guarantee the paper twenty-five new subscribers.¹⁸ Three months later, a black

¹⁶“Books for Our Times,” *The Christian Recorder*, January 2, 1864 and “The Black Man, His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements,” *Douglass' Monthly*, January 1863. In 1865, James Meriles Simms, a former slave and Union soldier, even published an edition of *The Black Man* in Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁷ “Books for Our Times,” *The Christian Recorder*, January 2, 1864; “Prize,” *The Christian Recorder*, January 30, 1864. Although the name was not listed, the biography advertised was likely John Rely Beard’s *The Life of Toussaint L’Ouverture: The Negro Patriot of Hayti*. Like Brown’s *The Black Man*, this work was also published in 1863 by James Redpath.

¹⁸“Get Subscribers,” *The Christian Recorder*, January 16, 1864.

Missourian proselytizing on the Mississippi River won the prize that was predicated upon African Americans' widespread interest in the Haitian Revolution.¹⁹

To be sure, the life of Toussaint Louverture was particularly relevant to a minister working in a state where the transition away from slavery remained contested. But African Americans in other parts of the country—in fact, the world—expressed a similar yearning for literature on Haiti. Daniel and James Adger were the sons of a former slave who had moved from South Carolina to Philadelphia and become a successful furniture dealer. After receiving an education at the renowned Bird school for colored pupils, the two brothers decided to venture to Australia rather than join their father's business.²⁰ James opened a successful hairdressing salon in Melbourne while Daniel wrote as the *Christian Recorder's* "Australian Correspondent" when he found time away from his shop-keeping job. In May 1864, Daniel ended one of his earliest reports on his experiences in Australia with a request for books on Toussaint Louverture, Fabre Geffrard, and "many others of distinguished negroes, and any pertaining to Liberia, Africa, and St. Domingo, written by colored men, or of Hayti."²¹ It is possible that Daniel intended to sell the books to a settler community of African Americans who had been attracted to Australia by the discovery of gold and promises of "better rights." Or, perhaps, Daniel, who advised blacks still in the United States to "remember that the darkest hours are but the preludes to brighter

¹⁹ "Rev. Page Tyler, on the Mississippi, Takes the Premium," *The Christian Recorder*, April 16, 1864.

²⁰ Daniel R. Biddle, *Tasting Freedom: Octavius Catto and the Battle for Equality in Civil War America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 101, 185, 201-202.

²¹ Daniel P. Adger, "Letter from Australia," *The Christian Recorder*, May 7, 1864.

sunshine,” intended to keep them for himself.²² In either case, the request further suggests that African Americans understood emancipation and the pursuit of political equality outside of conventional notions of time and space, as processes that connected blacks in Australia to their peers in the United States and their forbearers in Haiti.

Books were far from the only sources available to African Americans who found relevance in the Haitian Revolution. Following Emancipation, Haitian history was a popular topic for public lecturers who visited black communities throughout the United States. In the winter of 1864, an “octoroon orator” named William Jefferson Harlin traveled throughout Colorado delivering a lecture entitled “Toussaint l’Ouvreture; or, the Hero of Hayti.” According to one audience member, Harlin’s lectures were well-attended and much “appreciated by the intelligent people of color . . . on account of the prejudice existing in the mountain cities against men of color.”²³ Black Virginians found lectures on Louverture timely as well. As the Civil War reached its final stages, African Americans in Alexandria heard Eliza Wood recount her harrowing escape from slavery before concluding with a “glowing tribute to the memory of the *Negro hero, statesman, and martyr, Toussaint L’Ouverture*.” One attendee noted that the admission fees for the address went towards the establishment of a school for young women in Gonaïves, the Haitian “City of Independence” that Wood now called home. Although he did not indicate the amount raised by Wood, it is likely that her lecture achieved not only “great applause” but also financial profit.²⁴ By linking resistance to slavery in the United States, slave insurrection in Saint-Domingue, and

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *The Daily Miners’ Register*, October 21, 1864; Rover, “Letter from Denver City, Col.,” *The Christian Recorder*, December 10, 1864.

²⁴ J.H.H., “Alexandria Correspondent,” *The Christian Recorder*, April 25, 1863.

black independence in Haiti, Wood attended to the intellectual needs of African Americans contemplating life in a postemancipation society.



By the end of the Civil War, the transnational visions of freedom articulated in festivals, newspapers, books, and lectures found further expression in official political gatherings. At colored state conventions, a burgeoning leadership class consisting of freeborn blacks, veterans of the Union Army, formerly enslaved preachers, independent businessmen, and skilled artisans pressed for full political and civil rights for African Americans. They frequently did so by alluding to the recognition of Haitian independence. In October 1865, the leaders of North Carolina's Colored State Convention hailed "the event of Emancipation, the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau . . . [and] the recognition of the independence of Hayti."²⁵ Leading black Pennsylvanians and Californians subsequently echoed the sentiments of their southern counterparts. While a speaker at Pennsylvania's State Equal Rights Convention hailed the fact that Haiti was now "placed in the same category with other nations of the earth," participants at the California Colored State Convention called for the extension of the franchise to all African Americans. They held out hope that a federal government that abolished slavery in Washington, D.C., employed black troops in the Union Army, and formally recognized Haiti would heed their call for voting rights and continue to demonstrate a commitment to racial equality.²⁶

²⁵ "Colored Convention in North Carolina," *The Christian Recorder*, October 28, 1865.

²⁶ "Proceedings of the State Equal Rights Convention of the Colored People of Pennsylvania," (Philadelphia: Printed for and by the order of the Convention, 1865), 22, in *From Slavery to Freedom: The African American Pamphlet Collection, 1822-1909*, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress; "Colored State Convention," *The Christian Recorder*, November 25, 1865.

Despite their geographical separation, the participants in these conventions articulated similar goals through a shared transnational language. As the 13th Amendment garnered sufficient support for adoption into the U.S. Constitution, leading African Americans drew connections between their changing fortunes and the contemporary and historical signs of black progress they saw in Haiti. In particular, they derived inspiration from the diplomatic recognition of a nation founded by former slaves. From North Carolina to California, black leaders posed a common question: if the U.S. government acknowledged an independent black nation, how could it deny African Americans the rights and protections needed to evolve from an oppressed people into a self-determining community?

A question meant to function as a rhetorical validation of black progress soon proved more complex than perhaps expected. Black spokespeople who desired the same political autonomy achieved by Haitians confronted the obduracy of Andrew Johnson, a former slave-holding president who warned Congress that extending the franchise to African Americans would be a mistake because the black race had never formed a successful independent government in Haiti or anywhere else.²⁷ At the same time, they could not ignore the vitriol of white Americans who foreshadowed the demise of a South that would surely become a dreaded imitation of Haiti once African Americans were given

²⁷In his third annual address to Congress, Andrew Johnson defended his stance against black suffrage by arguing, “negroes have shown less capacity for self-government than any other race of people. No independent government of any form has ever been successful in their hands. On the contrary whenever they have been left to their own devices they have shown an instant tendency to relapse into barbarism.” Kenneth Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (New York: Knopf, 1965), 87. On Johnson and broader views on African Americans during Reconstruction see George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), 165-197.

voting rights to augment their undeserved freedom. In one representative piece from January 1868, the editors of the *Charleston Courier* insisted that “the black Government of Hayti seems to answer the end of its existence by warning this republic of the danger of extending the privilege of the ballot to great masses of the blacks without reference to any preliminary qualifications whatever.”²⁸ In essence, concerned African Americans could not escape a truth that has eluded contemporary historians: Reconstruction and the specter of racial equality had clearly transformed, not simply encouraged, the memory of the “horrors of St. Domingo” among white citizens.²⁹

These racist renderings of Haiti were intertwined with continued attempts to restrict black freedom since the defeat of the Confederacy. Nonetheless, they could not obscure the demonstrable progress made by African Americans in the years after the Civil War. As white Democrats alleged that “negro anarchy” in Haiti proved the absurdity of the “atrocious negro supremacy policy of our radical Congress,” thousands of black citizens realized the promises of the 14th and 15th Amendments, voted for public officials, assumed elected office themselves, and helped create a biracial democracy for the first time in U.S. history.³⁰ For the moment, aspiring class and elite African Americans, particularly those in the urban North, did not express undue concern about the condemnations of Haiti offered by foreign observers. Instead, they attempted to reinforce their “Americanness” and strengthen their position in national life by reconceptualizing Haiti as a site of African American political acumen and religious refinement.

²⁸ “The Warning From Account,” *The Charleston Daily Courier*, September 3, 1868.

²⁹ Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture*, 160.

³⁰ “Serious Troubles in Hayti – The Negro a Disturbing Element Everywhere,” *New York Herald*, January 27, 1868.



At the outset of 1869, black politicians increased their efforts to secure the job of U.S. minister resident and consul general to Haiti. Attempts to attain diplomatic positions in preceding years had faltered but leading African Americans now felt confident that they had accrued enough goodwill with Ulysses S. Grant to benefit from the patronage politics of the era.³¹ A letter written by a committee of black Republicans from Baltimore presented the Republican President with a number of black leaders deemed suitable for diplomatic positions in the Caribbean, Africa, and Central and South America. While the committee looked favorably on the posts in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Columbia and other countries, it preferred that black leaders including Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett, George T. Downing, Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, John Mercer Langston, and Robert Morris first receive consideration for an appointment in Haiti or Liberia. In their estimation, sending any of these men to one of the “black republics” would affirm the position of equality “occupied by our people” and prove “the competence of the leading men of our race.”³²

³¹ In 1867, after receiving the encouragement and endorsement of Frederick Douglass, John Mercer Langston, George T. Downing, and other prominent citizens, Ebenezer Bassett formally requested the position with William Seward, President Andrew Johnson’s Secretary of State. Christopher Teal, *Hero of Hispaniola: America’s First Black Diplomat, Ebenezer D. Bassett* (Westport, CT: Praeger Press, 2008), 49-50. Langston had previously declined an invitation to accept the position due to his desire to aid emancipated black southerners and, possibly, because he did not wish to align himself with a Democratic administration. See, John Mercer Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol* (New York: Arno Press, 1969): 276; “The Mission to Hayti,” *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*, February 12, 1869.

³² Republican Committee of Baltimore, Maryland, letter to Ulysses S. Grant, May, 1869 in Letters of Application and Recommendation During the Administration of Ulysses S. Grant 1869-1877, National Archives Microfilm Publication M968, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59 (hereafter cited as Letters of Application).

The pursuit of the Haitian post was competitive but Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett, the principal of Philadelphia's Institute for Colored Youth, received widespread support from his peers.³³ Outspoken black Republicans in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and other eastern cities petitioned Grant, asking him to give the prominent black Philadelphian a job that, in their opinion, a white man could not ably fill. George T. Downing, President of the National Executive Committee of Colored Men, informed Grant that African Americans would view Bassett's appointment as an acknowledgement of their enhanced political status.³⁴ Bassett echoed these sentiments when he submitted a petition on his own behalf. He notified the Republican President that his appointment or that of an equally qualified "representative colored man" would "be hailed by them [African Americans], especially by the recently enfranchised colored citizens, as a marked recognition of our new condition in the Republic and an auspicious token of our great future."³⁵

With the support of Downing, Douglass, Langston and other would-be competitors, Bassett eventually became the minister resident and consul general to Haiti. His appointment received an enthusiastic reception among African Americans, particularly in the urban North. In May 1869, the Philadelphia Bethel AME Church held a banquet at which a band played in honor of the local hero who had become the first African American

³³ One black newspaper reported that New Orleans resident F.E. Dumas was Bassett's primary competition for the post. Grant seems to have offered Dumas the position of minister resident and consul general to Liberia but Dumas declined. "The Haytien Mission," *The Elevator*, April 23, 1869.

³⁴ The National Executive Committee of Colored Men, letter to Ulysses S. Grant, March 15, 1869 in Letters of Application.

³⁵ Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett, letter to Ulysses S. Grant, March 17, 1869 in Letters of Application.

appointed to a U.S. diplomatic post.³⁶ Later that month, AME officials invited Bassett to deliver a speech at their Annual Conference. They reported that his address met all expectations as it captured the attention of the many attendees at the Philadelphia event who had supported Bassett's campaign and now felt confident that the respected educator would "reflect credit upon his race and government."³⁷

Bassett received a comparable reception in New York City. Shortly after the events hosted by black Philadelphians, black New Yorkers held a celebration in the new minister's honor at Shiloh Church. Reverend Charles B. Ray introduced Bassett to the energized crowd by stressing the importance of his appointment for all African Americans. The reverend told the audience that he felt "a deep sense of no ordinary pride and heartfelt gratification in being selected to preside over the deliberations of one of the most auspicious events with the history of American civilization." He proceeded to welcome Bassett to the stage and proudly proclaim that Grant's appointee was going to Haiti as a U.S. citizen as well as "one of the colored race."³⁸ The audience burst into a sustained applause and emitted thunderous cheers in order to show their confidence that Haiti would become a place for African Americans to showcase their ascending status. Bassett, overwhelmed by the support, assumed his place at the podium, thanked the audience, and expressed his

³⁶ "City Items," *The Christian Recorder*, May 1, 1869.

³⁷ Charles Spencer Smith, *A History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: Book Concern of the A.M.E. Church, 1922), 87. "Minister to Hayti," *The Christian Recorder*, March 27, 1869.

³⁸ "Public Reception of the Hon. Ebenezer D. Bassett, Minister and Consul General to Hayti, at Shiloh Church New York," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, June 19, 1869.

pleasure that seemingly every African American in the United States was praying for his success.”³⁹

If some African Americans relied on God to help Bassett, others mobilized the black press in his support. Although Haitians welcomed Bassett—the black educator later wrote that nearly all of Port-au-Prince greeted him at the city’s docks or visited him during his first two days in Haiti—white Americans cast immediate doubt upon his qualifications.⁴⁰ George T. Downing countered these critics by assuring black newspaper readers that “the proud representative of the whole people” was already demonstrating impressive skill in his initial dealings with Haitian President Sylvain Salnave.⁴¹ A correspondent of the *Elevator* concurred with Downing’s assessment and opined that Bassett was proving “weak-kneed [white] Republicans” wrong by ably fulfilling his responsibilities in Haiti. He assured readers of the leading black journal in San Francisco that they should only expect exemplary performance from a black diplomat who was also a professor of mathematics, a “thorough student of history and literature,” and a polyglot who possessed “high intellectual, moral, and diplomatic qualifications.”⁴²

To those who believed this assessment, the anticipation and eventual realization of Bassett’s appointment confirmed a new stage in the relationship among African Americans, the U.S. government, and Haiti. Once a haven for free and enslaved blacks seeking refuge

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Ebenezer D. Bassett, letter to Frederick Douglass, July 3, 1869 in The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series: General Correspondence, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., hereafter cited as Douglass Papers.

⁴¹ George T. Downing, “Mr. Editor,” *The Elevator*, October 29, 1869.

⁴² W.H.H., “The Negro in a New Attitude,” *The Elevator*, July 16, 1869.

from slavery and oppression, Haiti had become a proving ground for black leaders eager to validate their political capabilities and solidify their place within the Republican Party. Even though Bassett and subsequent appointees to the Haitian post would still need to perform up to the prejudiced standards of white Americans, African Americans cognizant of domestic and international politics could point to potential and, subsequently, actual black diplomats as the embodiment of their citizenship rights and more equitable standing in national public life. These signs of progress and their community's longstanding exposure to Anglo-American culture imbued leading African Americans with a belief that they, not Haitians, now stood at the vanguard of the black race.



Benjamin Tucker Tanner captured this chauvinism in editorials that heaped praise upon African Americans while excoriating Haitians. Just before Bassett accepted his appointment, the editor of the *Christian Recorder* argued that African Americans had become the “best type” of their race due to their exposure to “the cool, aspiring, all-conquering Saxon.” Furthermore, they had “learned the *modus operandi* of Republican government, of Protestant faith,” from Anglo-Americans and could now demonstrate their political acumen and cultural refinement in the nation’s public sphere. Conversely, “the land of Toussaint” was incapable of fulfilling its promise as “the home of freedom, of government, and of true religion” because it was plagued by civil strife and Vodou.⁴³ While

⁴³ “The American Negro,” *The Christian Recorder*, November 21, 1868. While exaggerated, the *Recorder’s* charges of Haitian political instability were not entirely unfounded. In his first months in Haiti, Bassett had to negotiate the violent transition from the Salnave regime to the new government led by Nissage Saget. See Teal, 60-64. The second half of the nineteenth century was particularly tumultuous for Haiti, which had twelve presidents and eight different constitutions between 1843 and 1889. Change almost always came as a result of military action. Dubois, *Haiti*, 168. Of course, American condemnations of Haitian

conceding that Haitians were a “noble race,” Tanner possessed little faith that Haiti could produce a stable example of black self-government. The editor thus called on African Americans to mentor Haitians and embrace the responsibilities that came with their position as a “candle in the great house of Negro darkness and barbarity.”⁴⁴

Tanner’s steadfast conviction that African Americans had surpassed Haitians reflects his conformity with broader trends in nineteenth-century black thought. The freeborn native of Pittsburgh accepted dominant discourses of Western material and moral achievement and felt comfortable in defining civilization by the same standards as middle-class white Americans. Merging the “fortune fall” doctrine with a belief in the “black man’s burden,” he insisted that slavery had prepared African Americans to introduce Anglo-American culture to benighted black people abroad. Martin Delaney, Alexander Crummell, and Henry McNeal Turner articulated similar ideas. These black nationalists promoted the development of African culture through Christianity and commerce while emphasizing the special responsibility that African Americans possessed as leaders of this proposed redemption of Africa. Much attention has been given to the complexities of these black nationalists who combined affection for Africa with a commitment to ideals rooted in their American experience. But this ideological conflict had ramifications for Haiti, too.⁴⁵

politics seem hypocritical in hindsight. During that same period, the United States fought its own Civil War, assassins took the lives of Abraham Lincoln and James A. Garfield, and white supremacists staged a violent campaign to solidify their political power.

⁴⁴ “The American Negro.”

⁴⁵On Tanner and these developments in black thought see August Meier, *Negro Thought in America 1880-1915* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1963); William Seraile, *Fire in His Heart: Benjamin Tucker Tanner and the A.M.E. Church* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998); Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought: Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey*

In January 1869, an AME Colored Men's Convention held in Tanner's home city advocated for the annexation of Haiti by the United States. The *Recorder* editor immediately lauded this suggestion, arguing that the annexation spirit "should predominate in the heart of every civilized and Christian Negro of the world." Moreover, he stressed that "we Christian Negroes are to act the mother to our race, to bring it up to a well developed manhood."⁴⁶ Whereas free and enslaved blacks once exalted the masculinity of Louverture or welcomed the appeals of Haitian officials who insisted that Haiti would "become . . . a tender Mother" to them, at least one prominent advocate of annexation now transposed this familial metaphor and claimed a patriarchal place at the forefront of the black race.⁴⁷

Efforts made by Grant to annex the Dominican Republic intensified Tanner's desire to incorporate an infantilized Haiti into a nurturing U.S. and African American political sphere.⁴⁸ In February 1869, Tanner asked readers of his *Recorder* whether "the

(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Tunde Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ *The Christian Recorder*, January 30, 1869.

⁴⁷ *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, 3:4 (June 1824). Benjamin Inginac, President Boyer's secretary general, made particular use of familial rhetoric in his appeals to émigrés published in newspapers along the East Coast.

⁴⁸ In the late 1860s, Dominican President Buenaventura Báez attempted to improve his country's foreign trade relations, primarily by attempting to annex it to the United States. Ulysses S. Grant and Wall Street investors saw annexation as beneficial because of the Dominican Republic's rich natural resources, geographic proximity, and budding potential for U.S. investors. Grant also felt that the Dominican Republic would provide a favorable destination for African Americans who did not wish to remain in the United States. In 1870, the U.S. Congress effectively thwarted the goals of Grant and his political allies by voting against an annexation treaty. See Eric T.L. Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 27-72.

countrymen of Toussaint” should join the Dominicans, “be taken by the hand, and be accounted American citizens?” “With all our heart,” came his immediate reply, “we say, *Yea Lord, and Amen.*”⁴⁹ The editor maintained that “the annexation of Hayti is but a continuation of the good work which God has begun to do for the Negro and for the word.” The purported benefits of annexation included the cessation of civil strife, the expansion of international trade, the construction of better schools, and, perhaps most significantly, the unencumbered spread of Protestantism in Haiti.⁵⁰

In fact, Tanner felt that missionary work would provide an appropriate complement to U.S. intervention in Haitian affairs. As Tanner contended that foreigners should control Haitian political life, he lamented that the AME Church had “never yet risen to the high work imposed upon the Christian Church—even the conquest of the world to Christ.” The prospect of annexation, however, gave the AME community renewed opportunity to fulfill its foreign mission. Tanner asserted that church bishops were ready to “reap our missionary conquest” as the “drum of the Lord” could be “heard beating up volunteers” to go to Haiti. He asked those in charge of church finances whether they would respond to the drumming and “send one or more missionaries to Hayti along with the starry flag.”⁵¹ By anticipating the militant expressions of imperialism and evangelism that became more

⁴⁹ “Hayti at Dominica,” *The Christian Recorder*, February 13, 1869. A year later, the *Recorder* apparently received an erroneous report that the United States had annexed the Dominican Republic. The paper greeted the news enthusiastically and proclaimed, “Haiti will inevitably follow; and once in possession . . . its regeneration will be assured, while our own influence will be greatly enhanced.” “Annexation of Dominica,” *The Christian Recorder*, April 2, 1870.

⁵⁰ “Hayti at Dominica.”

⁵¹ “Our Mission Work,” *The Christian Recorder*, February 13, 1869.

prominent in subsequent decades, Tanner implied congruence between the spiritual renewal of Haiti and an aggressive policy of national expansion in the Americas.⁵²

While some black leaders denounced foreign intervention in colored nations, the declarations of the Pittsburgh Colored Men's Convention and Benjamin Tucker Tanner demonstrate the appeal of Haitian annexation for others.⁵³ These black elites either ignored or remained ignorant of the attitudes of Haitians who scrutinized U.S. interest in the neighboring Dominican Republic and fretted about a potential encroachment on Haitian sovereignty.⁵⁴ They were not alone, however, in thinking that all nations could find opportunity under the U.S. flag during Radical Reconstruction. Tanner and his ilk found themselves in agreement with Hiram Revels, John Rainey, the delegates of two National Conventions of Colored Men, and Frederick Douglass, who was an official representative on Grant's investigative commission on Dominican annexation.⁵⁵ In many respects, then, support for U.S. expansion complemented a broader outlook on citizenship. By insisting that an army of black missionaries could help mold Haitians into Protestant republicans fit for integration into U.S. life, Tanner essentially implied that aspiring class and elite African

⁵² The best treatment of the rise of foreign missionary work by American Protestants remains William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁵³ In fact, several African American leaders were among those who, during a reception at New York's Cooper Institute, credited Bassett with helping avert Dominican annexation and supporting black independence. "Reception of Hon. E.D. Bassett, the Colored Minister to Hayti," *New York Times*, September 23, 1870.

⁵⁴ On the reaction of the Salnave and Saget governments to U.S. incursions in the Dominican Republic see Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations*, 332-347. According to Logan, Stephen Preston, Haiti's minister to Washington solicited the support of American newspaper editors and even resorted to bribery in an attempt to defeat the U.S. government's annexation scheme.

⁵⁵ On Frederick Douglass, Pan-Americanism, and Dominican annexation see Polyné, 25-56.

Americans had already placed their own fitness for citizenship as well as their quintessential “Americanness” beyond any reasonable doubt.



The moment of hope in racial equality and national democracy proved fleeting, however. Between 1869 and 1875, Congress repealed the “ironclad oath” that restricted the voting rights of ex-Confederates and Democrats returned to power in North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, Texas, Arkansas, and Alabama. Moreover, white vigilantes drove black political officials out of office in South Carolina, threatened black voters in Kentucky with whippings, maiming, and hanging, and brought Mississippi and Louisiana to the brink of civil war. At the same time, northern Republicans grew less committed to the idea of racial equality and more willing to allow white southerners to govern their own affairs. In short, by the mid-1870s, white Democrats could defiantly claim that they had stifled the progress of African Americans, restored white supremacy to the South, and successfully “redeemed” the region.⁵⁶

Those who sanctioned the overturn of black political gains disparaged Haitian culture at every opportunity. As economic depression, political corruption, and paramilitary groups devastated the South, even liberal white northerners began to speculate that the cultural backwardness of Haitians showed that blacks were not yet ready to assume political responsibility. For instance, Horace White, a Republican who had supported emancipation and helped Lincoln gain office, decried the “sad state of Hayti.”

⁵⁶The best treatments of Reconstruction in all its phases and the responses of African Americans in this era remain Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) and Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South From Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

Citing the alleged prevalence of infanticide and cannibalism among Vodou practitioners, the editor of the *Chicago Tribune* lamented that the condition of most Haitians was “that of barbarism.” Moreover, in his estimation, pervasive superstition seemed to explain the inability of Haitians to maintain a stable republican government.⁵⁷ These perceived failures in Haiti offered insights into the supposed mistakes of Reconstruction. For white Americans who ascribed to romantic racist views of blackness, the ascension of ignorant, childlike African Americans to political power would have the same undesired results as “negro rule” in Haiti.

Such scrutiny of and attacks upon black citizenship affected the ways in which leading African Americans perceived themselves in relation to Haiti. Although aspiring class and elite African Americans remained confident in the correctness of their bourgeoisie Protestant culture, they found it difficult to make unequivocal claims that they were at the political or social vanguard of the black race. For some, the discrepancy between their travails and the independence of Haiti was increasingly glaring. One black Republican noted that while African Americans struggled to establish themselves as equal citizens Haiti had solidified its “place among the nations.”⁵⁸ In fact, in order to affirm their right to the ballot and self-government, African Americans now needed to rely on Haitians. If they could somehow confirm the material and cultural advancement of their country, Haitians would disprove white supremacists who argued that the cultural inferiority and technological incompetence of the black race justified the political subjugation of African Americans.

⁵⁷ “Sad State of Hayti,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 15, 1873. On White, see Joseph Logsdon, *Horace White, Nineteenth Century Liberal* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971).

⁵⁸ Thomas S. Malcolm, “The Republic of Haiti,” *The Christian Recorder*, May 8, 1873.

The collision of African American cultural chauvinism and the mounting anxiety caused by the redemption measures intensified calls for the reform of Haitian society. Black leaders believed that a sound representation of black self-government needed to be capitalist, republican, and, most importantly, Protestant. Emboldened by their preference for Anglo-American culture, aspiring class and elite African Americans thus committed themselves to missionary work in Haiti. Desperate to use the Western Hemisphere's only independent black nation to confirm their political capabilities, they often struggled to perceive how their attempts to replace notions of inherent racial inferiority with evolutionary views of cultural assimilation often replicated the very racist ideology that they opposed.⁵⁹



Black Protestants had looked at Haiti as an inviting missionary field for decades but they did not commit themselves to that country until Reconstruction. Many of the African Americans who flocked to Haiti during the antebellum era were AME members but their communities maintained loose connections to Haitians as well as the AME leadership in the United States. By 1866, James Theodore Holly had established Holy Trinity Church in Port-au-Prince, organized missions at Cap-Haïtien, Les Cayes, and Caribaret-Quatre, and secured three native converts to the clergy. Even so, his Protestant Episcopal denomination lacked a sizeable black influence. Although leaders within the AME Church argued that Haiti was a

⁵⁹ For the best treatment of the intersection of race and class in racial uplift ideology see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Gaines stresses that a notion of uplift that emphasized “self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth,” prevailed among elite African Americans in the post-Reconstruction era. The words and actions of AME members show that this strategy for achieving social mobility despite economic and racial barriers surfaced during Reconstruction.

promising site for missions because it “demonstrated the truth that colored men are capable of self-government,” proposals to augment Holly’s work tended to fall upon deaf ears.⁶⁰ Even as Benjamin Tucker Tanner lauded the evangelical benefits of annexation, the AME devoted its limited resources to the missions established among former slaves in the South.⁶¹

Missionary work in Haiti achieved heightened salience as the AME infrastructure and financial state improved and African Americans saw their political rights challenged. In 1872, Theophilus Gould Steward asked the AME General Conference to invigorate the church’s long-dormant missionary work in Haiti with new life. Steward had established missions in Georgia and South Carolina since entering the ministry nearly a decade earlier but he came to the Philadelphia convention with a proposal to aid a people who were in his estimation even more benighted than the southern freedman. The *Christian Recorder* reported that “the heart of the whole [Conference] body seemed to throb with renewed life” after the minister introduced his resolution.⁶² Like tens of thousands of other Americans during the late-nineteenth century, the men and women who heard Steward’s appeal felt compelled to take an active role in the foreign missionary movement, save heathen souls abroad, and strengthen their churches at home. These goals finally seemed

⁶⁰ Charles Spencer Smith, *A History*, 444.

⁶¹ On the mixed success of the AME’s mission to the formerly enslaved men and women of the South during the course and immediate aftermath of the Civil War, see Clarence E. Walker, *A Rock in a Weary Land: The African Methodist Episcopal Church During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

⁶² “Our Missionary Work,” *The Christian Recorder*, May 11, 1872.

attainable when, after a year of fundraising, the AME Church amassed enough money to send Steward to Haiti.⁶³

The native of New Jersey born to free black parents was an admirer of Haitian history but his disdain for contemporary Haitian society quickly surfaced following his arrival in Port-au-Prince.⁶⁴ After enjoying the company of minister Bassett and various émigrés from the United States, Steward traveled about the Haitian capital, using a journal to record his observations of the customs and habits of its occupants. He noted the “dirty” food found in Haitian markets and remarked that elite Haitians were polite but “very ostentatious, superstitious and overbearing in their manners.” Even when Steward attempted to identify positive aspects of Haitian life he struggled to transcend his prejudice. Within a day of arriving in Port-au-Prince, the AME missionary felt that he had enough evidence to identify Haitians as a thrifty and enterprising “nation of traders” who were “the only people who can beat the Jews.”⁶⁵

These disparaging views on Haitian culture persisted throughout Steward’s time in what he considered a “military establishment” masquerading as a republic. His journal contains scathing denunciations of Haitian women’s alleged lack of modesty, condemnations of public sanitation in Port-au-Prince, and shock at evidence of interracial

⁶³ Seraile, *Voice of Dissent: Theophilus Gould Steward (1843-1924) and Black America* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1991), 49.

⁶⁴ See Theophilus Gould Steward, *How the Black St. Domingo Legion Saved the Patriot Army in the Siege of Savannah, 1799* (Washington, D.C.: American Negro Academy, 1899), *The Haitian Revolution 1791 to 1804; or Sidelights on the French Revolution* (New York: Cromwell, 1914), and “The Message of San Domingo to the African Race,” in *Papers of the American Negro Academy 18-19* (Washington, D.C.: American Negro Academy, 1916).

⁶⁵ Steward, *Journal of the Voyage to Port-au-Prince from New York, June 14-16, 1873* in Theophilus Gould Steward Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, hereafter cited as Steward Papers.

marriage. The proliferation of the creolized religion of Vodou further infuriated Steward. He argued that other nations might not be able to conquer Haiti but “liquor, licentiousness, and superstition” certainly would. In sum, Steward concluded that Holly, his primary confidant in Haiti, was that country’s lone example of Christian virtue.⁶⁶

Negative assessments of Haitian life reflect a broader perspective on racial advancement as well as a common religious worldview. To a great extent, Steward’s reaction to perceived cultural deficiencies in Haiti cohered to a civilizing impulse that animated many conservative evangelicals and liberal Protestants in ensuing decades.⁶⁷ At the same time, though, the propagation of Anglo-American culture in Haiti served a practical purpose. As Steward extolled the superiority of Protestantism abroad, African Americans faced allegations that they exhibited the same proclivity for immoral behavior as Haitians. Steward understood that these charges of cultural backwardness could negate any claims for black political autonomy in the United States. So, while contemporary black nationalists found it necessary for African Americans to become the bearers of civilization in heathen Africa, Steward represented the interests of black political leaders by identifying Haitian cultural deficiencies and proposing reforms of them.

This adherence to Anglo-American notions of civilization make the subsequent actions taken by Steward appear contradictory. Although all missionaries needed to raise interest in their field by stressing its importance, Steward’s public insistence that the work of black Protestants in Haiti would have “mighty consequences” suggests his understanding of the political implications of Haitian uplift. Yet, even as he acknowledged the significance

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, June 15, June 20-23, July 1-4, July 5-8.

⁶⁷ Hutchison, 91-124.

of Haitian missions, Steward abandoned his post after six months. In the end, the efforts to acquire more funding while reconciling the troubling discrepancy between Haiti as a symbol of black self-government and Haiti as an imitable social model proved too much for him to handle.⁶⁸

In the wake of Steward's flight from Port-au-Prince, Benjamin Tucker Tanner demanded the creation of a "Women's Missionary Society" that would make sure that enthusiasm for Haitian missions did not wane. He would ultimately get more than he bargained for. While ostensibly advocating for heightened female authority within the AME community, the editor of the *Christian Recorder* wanted women to take a greater role in church affairs because he thought they were idle, indolent, and irresponsible parishioners. Moreover, the future bishop envisioned a missionary society that would operate as a dependent part of a larger, patriarchal church structure rather than an autonomous site of female organizing. Ordinary female members of the AME Church, however, denounced Tanner's views and emphasized their support of temperance and home missions as evidence of their commitment to their churches. Upon agreeing to organize foreign missionary work, the wives of church bishops and leading clergymen made it clear that they too rejected the editor's paternalism. Their Woman's Parent Mite Missionary Society (WPMMS)—the first national organization established by black women—would respond to gender and racial concerns.⁶⁹

Indeed, WPMMS members understood their organization not only as a continuation of the work begun by Steward but also as a means of addressing women's issues and

⁶⁸ Steward, "Hayti," *The Christian Recorder*, October 3, 1874; Maffly-Kipp, 152.

⁶⁹ Bettie Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 152-154.

proving the centrality of black women to racial advancement. The primarily educated and northern-born women of the WPMMS recognized that all African Americans were invested in the fate of Haitians, inhabitants of an “historic island . . . whose blood flowed so freely for the emancipation of our race.”⁷⁰ Nevertheless, WPMMS President Mary A. Campbell implored black women to embrace a leading role in reforming Haitian society. The mother of four from Philadelphia spoke directly to the perceived concerns of her peers when she accentuated the plight of her “Haytian sisters,” characterized other Haitians as “sable children,” and highlighted allegations of rampant infant sacrifice in Haiti.⁷¹ Anticipating subsequent representations of missionary work in Africa, Campbell implied that black churchwomen had a “special mission” to save Haitian children from terrible fates and redeem the women responsible for raising future generations of Haitians.⁷² Once Haitian domestic life improved, political stability would follow. In this view, female missionaries could address the needs of Haitian women and assume positions of racial leadership even as they focused on strengthening Haitian self-government and improving claims to black voting rights, increased political participation, and integration into U.S. public life.⁷³

⁷⁰ Mary Quinn, Eliza Payne, Harriet A.E. Wayman, Mary A. Campbell, Maria Shorter, Mary L. Brown, and Mrs. Bishop Ward, “An Open Letter,” *The Christian Recorder*, May 14, 1874.

⁷¹ Mary A. Campbell, “An Address to the Auxiliary Mite Societies and the Women in General of the A.M.E. Church,” *The Christian Recorder*, June 29, 1876; Richard R. Wright, *Centennial Encyclopaedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: Book Concern of the AME Church, 1916), 59.

⁷² By the turn of the twentieth century, the AME Church had an established missionary presence in Africa. On the rise of AME missions in South Africa, for instance, see James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁷³ Collier-Thomas, 188-190.

Campbell's male counterparts demonstrated less interest in female empowerment but an equal proclivity for stressing the immediate need for reforms in Haitian society. In September 1874, AME minister T.A. Cuff delivered a speech on temperance before the Preacher's Association of the Western District of New Jersey. While decrying the corrosive impact of intemperance on the human soul, he paid particular attention to its tangible effect on black populations. Black Protestants, Cuff argued, needed to stop spending money on spirits and invest in sending missionaries to Haiti. If not for intemperance in the black community, "the gospel of Christ, religion, science and literature would flourish" in Haiti while "heathenism would disappear as the snow before the sun."⁷⁴ The expected benefits for African Americans needed little explanation. As other church leaders asked Haiti's competing political factions to "simmer down . . . for the sake of the race," AME members understood that Cuff hoped to elevate the status of blacks in the United States by ensuring that an evangelized Haiti solidified its position among the world's independent nations.⁷⁵

Within this understanding of racial uplift possessed by male AME leaders, the performances of female Haitian lecturers also assumed particular importance. During the mid-1870s, a Haitian woman known simply as Madame Parque traveled throughout states including Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland, Tennessee, Louisiana, Georgia, and Alabama speaking to audiences at courthouses and churches on the subject of "Hayti and the Haytiens."⁷⁶ The black men in attendance surely found interest in the subject matter but

⁷⁴ T.A. Cuff, "Temperance," *The Christian Recorder*, November 12, 1874.

⁷⁵ *The Christian Recorder*, June 11, 1874; "Quit You Like Men," *The Christian Recorder*, November 4, 1875.

⁷⁶ J.W. Randolph, "Letter from Savannah," *The Christian Recorder*, November 16, 1874; *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*, November 23, 1875; "Madame Parque," *Weekly Louisianan*, April

their reports on the lectures focused on the Haitian woman's demeanor and speaking abilities. AME Bishop Daniel A. Payne characterized Parque as "the Haytien lady of high culture and great eloquence" while two other AME ministers highlighted her "intelligent" and "eloquent" elocution.⁷⁷ Payne and his colleagues further noted that whites who attended Parque's talks acknowledged her admirable qualities, too. Consequently, one AME minister concluded that, "with such an example as this woman . . . the colored people should be inspired to a tempt (sic) at least, to demonstrate the capability of the race to attain more than it has ever yet done."⁷⁸

The refinement demonstrated by Parque and acknowledged by her white observers assuaged the patriarchal anxieties of black leaders and confirmed the link between Haiti and black progress. On the one hand, responses to her lectures occurred at a moment when black audiences placed great importance on elocution. At the same time, they indicate growing assumptions made by black men about the relationship between femininity and black progress. The public activities of black women challenged conventional definitions of racial progress that were based on a Victorian notion of separate spheres. In the minds of aspiring class and elite black men, public lectures by a black woman could damage their race's ability to conform to a patriarchal ideal that assigned men dominion in politics, the economy, and the military while confining women to the home. Parque, however, was exceptional. AME leaders pleased with her

18, 1874; R. Harper, "A Note From Dalton," *The Christian Recorder*, December 23, 1875; F.M. Henderson, "Madam Parque," *The Christian Recorder*, February 17, 1876.

⁷⁷ "Madame Parque," *Weekly Louisianan*; Harper, "A Note From Dalton"; Henderson, "Madam Parque."

⁷⁸ Henderson, "Madam Parque."

comportment and impressed that white audiences deemed her respectable concluded that Haitian women had the capacity to confirm black progress, even as actors in the public domain.

Prominent AME officials assumed that their influence would ensure that all Haitians achieved the same level of cultural refinement needed to vindicate African Americans. By August 1876, the male leadership of the AME Church was moving to strengthen its oversight of the Haitian mission field and a Ladies' Mite Missionary Society in Port-au-Prince that claimed twenty-four members.⁷⁹ To a certain extent, the AME churchwomen in Port-au-Prince welcomed a greater association between their community and the church body in the United States because it might ensure enhanced prestige and financial support for their endeavors. This attitude did not, however, mean that they were willing to leave the selection of a lead resident missionary to the men back home. Eventually, conversations between WPMMS members and AME officials resulted in the selection of Reverend Charles W. Mossell as the appropriate man to assume leadership in Haiti. Upon departing for Port-au-Prince, the native Marylander and graduate of Lincoln University made sure that he had enough provisions and sufficient prayers that Jesus might grant him "great success" in his "efforts to assist in making the Haytians a great nation" and a model of black self-government.⁸⁰

While Mossell placed ample faith in the power of prayer, he also recognized that certain material elements of the missionary project required immediate attention. Shortly

⁷⁹ Isabella Noel, "The Letter From Port-au-Prince Hayti," *The Christian Recorder*, October 5, 1876.

⁸⁰ Daniel Alexander Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville: Publishing House of the A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1891) 479.

after arriving in the Haitian capital, he reported that none of the church literature accessible to him was published in “the tongue that is vernacular” to Haitians.⁸¹ That Mossell assumed French, not the Kreyòl spoken by most Haitians, to be the local vernacular indicates the shortcomings of a missionary movement shaped by a mixture of prejudice and compassion, politics and faith.⁸²

In fact, the lack of resources was so disheartening precisely because Mossell did not distinguish between the political and spiritual dimensions of his task. The new leader of AME missions in Haiti maintained that “every American Negro ought to be deeply interested in the republic of Haiti” and he devoted some of his energy to writing a report on Haitian history and contemporary life that the *Recorder* published in a seven part series. While presenting a rather positive view of the economic initiatives of various Haitian presidents, he lashed out at the reign of “Roman Catholicism, French Infidelity, and Voudouism” in Haiti. Relying on the racist accounts of Haiti provided by Martinique-born slaveholder Moreau de Saint Mery and other white Europeans, Mossell reserved special condemnation for the alleged proliferation of cannibalism in the “Black Republic.” The evidence of the “painful and present moral status of the Haitian people” troubled a black

⁸¹ Charles Spencer Smith, *A History*, 123; Llewellyn L. Berry, *A Century of Missions of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1840-1940* (New York: Gutenberg Printing Co., 1942), 78; “Brevities,” *The Christian Recorder*, August 16, 1877.

⁸² The exclusive use of French and English indicates, perhaps, more of a class and geographic bias as well as a manner of practicality. Other missionaries, including Holly also relied on French when attempting to reach Haitians. Holly demonstrated understanding of the overwhelming use of what he termed a French *patois* (Haitian Creole) throughout the country but he still favored French, particularly in the curriculum of training schools and in catechisms, Bibles, and other texts made available to congregants in Haiti. He primarily catered to congregants in Port-au-Prince, Haitians trained to become Episcopal clergy also found converts among those already literate in French, and French texts were relatively accessible to missionaries.

missionary who was convinced that “the religion of a people . . . determine (sic) not only their future destiny; but their present and comparative worth.”⁸³ For Mossell, the absence of French bibles in heathen Haiti could have damning repercussions for the advancement of an entire race.



As Reconstruction ended with the election of Rutherford B. Hayes and the removal of federal troops from southern state capitals, Mary Ella Mossell took a trip around Port-au-Prince. The educator and product of Baltimore’s well-known Colored Normal School would soon take on the responsibilities associated with her position as principal of the AME mission school but for now she was preoccupied with absorbing the unfamiliar sights and sounds of the Haitian capital.⁸⁴ Mary Ella left her husband, Charles, to his work and traveled alongside a member of the Mite Missionary Society who introduced her to the central market, a bustling place congested with stalls, abundant produce, ornate architecture, and a ceaseless stream of pedestrians.

Overwhelmed by the exotic scene, Mary Ella soon gave voice to disapproving views on Haitian life. In a report published in the *Recorder*, she characterized the observed Haitian mode of transportation—horses and donkeys—as “very inferior to that of our own country.” Mary Ella further decried the lack of men in the marketplace and identified the efforts of the Haitian market women as “amusing” rather than indicative of female social and economic empowerment. To her, the language and decorum of these women and their children was even more alarming. She lamented “the current and peculiar customs, the

⁸³ Charles W. Mossell, “Haiti,” *The Christian Recorder*, January 4 and February 1, 1877.

⁸⁴ Daniel Alexander Payne, 479.

unintelligible and musical dialect of the natives” and remarked with astonishment that “children are seen running hither and thither; naked.”⁸⁵

Mary Ella was certain that her peers needed to rectify this situation. Apart from James Theodore Holly, black Protestants did not seem to be allotting sufficient attention to the cultural improvement of the Haitian people. The Haitian response to these inadequate efforts had, however, convinced Mary Ella that an increased presence of genteel African Americans in Haiti could bear fruits. By the time she arrived in Haiti, Holly’s Haitian Orthodox Apostolic Church boasted of eleven Haitian clergymen, ten adequately attended parishes throughout Haiti, and dozens of confirmations and baptisms each year.⁸⁶ The burden now rested on other aspiring class and elite African Americans to join Holly and provide resources for Haitians who identified Protestantism and other aspects of Anglo-American culture as appropriate antidotes to poverty, superstition, and political turmoil.⁸⁷ Mary Ella thus challenged Mite missionaries in the United States to join the ongoing struggle for racial uplift in Haiti. She reiterated the declarations of other WPMMS leaders

⁸⁵ *The Christian Recorder*, August 16, 1877.

⁸⁶ James Theodore Holly, Triennial Report for the Haitian Mission for the Years Ending August 1875-1877, Haiti Mission Papers 1855-1967, The Archives of the Episcopal Church (hereafter cited as Haiti Mission Papers).

⁸⁷ Holly argued that “some of the best thinking men, seeing their country so long a prey to revolutions, begin to feel that the dissemination of the Gospel is just the ballast needed in the body politic, in order to right the Ship of State. Holly, “Missionary Notes from Haiti,” *The Spirit of Missions* 32 (September 1867). Haitian clergy corroborated Holly’s statement, frequently citing their country’s political instability as an impetus for their conversion and the conversion of others. For instance, in 1869, Julien Alexandre, a Haitian clergymen leading the Episcopal mission in Cabaret Quatre, reported that “the troubles that Providence has sent upon this country, has produced such a searching of hearts, that at the last visitation made to this congregation in the mountains ten men, heads of families presented themselves to be enrolled as members of the Church.” Alexandre, Annual Report, Church of the Good Shepherd Cabaret Quatre, May 12, 1869, in the Haiti Mission Papers.

and declared, “Women of America, this work of moral elevation concerns you!” Only the strength of black mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters could assure that the cultural standards of leading African Americans prevailed in Haiti.⁸⁸

Mary Ella’s outlook demonstrates that much had changed in the years since African Americans at the Chicago Emancipation Day festivities drew comparisons between the diplomatic recognition of Haiti and the Emancipation Proclamation. Mary Ella and her contemporaries faced the increasingly difficult challenge of realizing the promise of Emancipation and, in their opinion, a Haitian state lacking in moral and material progress did not appear capable of vindicating African Americans. The proposed solution to this vexing problem was to take up the mission of “moral elevation.” As white Americans derided the notion of black self-government, African Americans speaking on behalf of their communities articulated the belief that the salvation of Haitian souls could resurrect their political prospects. This optimism was misguided. In the ensuing decade, developments in U.S. social, cultural, and political life would increase the uncertainty that black leaders felt about their prospects for political and civil equality and, subsequently, lead them to reconsider their assessments of Haiti and its people.

⁸⁸ *The Christian Recorder*, August 16, 1877.

CHAPTER TWO:

HOPE FOR HAYTI YET

In the summer of 1877, as Mary Ella Mossell offered her assessment of Haitian life to readers of the *Christian Recorder*, Rutherford B. Hayes attempted to appease black Republicans who worried about the party's commitment to racial equality. The President did so through the time-honored practice of patronage. Hayes tried to conciliate black voters and reward John Mercer Langston for his loyalty to the Republican Party by offering the prominent abolitionist, educator, politician, and attorney the position of minister resident and consul general to Haiti. Langston readily accepted. But before he set sail for the Haitian capital, Langston was made the guest of honor at a gathering hosted by his peers in Washington, D.C.

On the night of October 24, 1877, Richard Theodore Greener entertained Frederick Douglass and the rest of the attendees with a poem that paid homage to Haiti as well as Langston. The work of the college professor who was also the first black graduate of Harvard University read:

Across the darksome waves of Carib's gentle sea,
Proud Hayti lifts her dark-browed, beauteous head,
Crowned with stately palm and fitting laurel-tree,
For Liberty's brave defenders wide o'erspread.

There first our brothers proved their val'rous steel
Then, made they Negro manhood long respected
By doughty deeds, such as stout Saxons feel
In tawny bosoms brilliantly reflected . . .

Such, the far-famed island our Langston seeks,
All radiant still in song, in cheering story;
Worthy Tell's renown and Switzer's snow clad peaks
Aglow with civic pride and martial glory . . .

The native shore he leaves, alas, 'tis one where,
Freedom's fetters still impede the newly free,
But warmest welcomes wait yet to greet him there,
Where National Freedom means Equality.

Long may the memory of the sturdy blows,
Struck quick and sharp and hard for Race and Right,
Linger like stirring music in hearts of those,
Who've heard his ringing voice and felt its might.

We, too, are of the race from Afric's burning sun,
Whose noblest triumphs lie unattained before,
The trophies of manly arm were long since won,
On Hayti's plain and on Carolina's shore.

Higher glories still of mind must surely come
To mark proud entrance into Race-like life,
Science's lofty height and Art and Verse when won,
Conquer the bigot's sneer and Prejudices strife . . .¹

Greener's poem confirms that African Americans viewed Haiti as a unique symbol of black autonomy in a hostile world dominated by powerful white nations.² The Harvard graduate and his contemporaries fondly remembered the Haitian Revolution and credited that event with setting the precedent for black freedom and racial equality in the Western Hemisphere. Some defended the progress achieved in contemporary Haiti and juxtaposed

¹ *The Daily Inter-Ocean*, October 24, 1877; Richard Theodore Greener, "'Our Honored Guest' – Read at the Banquet given by the Citizens of Washington, D.C., October 24, 1877, to Hon. John M. Langston," in The John Mercer Langston Collection, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University (hereafter cited as Langston Collection).

² Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden 1898-1903* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 12. Although Gatewood cites instances of African American criticism of Haiti, he places emphasis on African Americans' efforts to condemn U.S. imperialistic policies towards Haiti and counter popular critiques of its perceived lack of material and political development during the 1890s.

the degree of liberty that existed in Haiti with the racial discrimination that pervaded the United States. Moreover, leading African Americans identified Haiti as a nation where black citizens had a secure place within electoral politics. They paid close attention to the evolving relationship between the U.S. and Haitian governments, monitored the actions of black diplomats in Haiti, and championed Haitian sovereignty because of their conviction that events on “Hayti’s plain” and “Carolina’s shore” were inextricably linked.

This impulse to sympathize with Haiti and emphasize its promise would become more pronounced with the escalation of lynching, Jim Crow, and imperialism. But Greener’s poem also hints at the basis of an overlooked, less optimistic attitude towards Haiti articulated by aspiring class and elite African Americans in the years immediately following Reconstruction.³ Even as they viewed Haiti as a symbol of hope and black progress, some African Americans recognized Haiti as a potential liability due to white supremacists’ persistent tendency to cite its alleged cultural backwardness and political instability as proof that blacks did not deserve full civil and political rights. Missionaries and diplomats were among those who built upon previous reform efforts in Haiti, insisting that their aid was critical to the achievement of “Science’s lofty height and Art and Verse” and the subsequent conquering of the “bigot’s sneer and Prejudice’s strife.”

³ Along with Gatewood’s work, Lawrence Little’s *Disciples of Liberty: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Age of Imperialism, 1884-1916* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000) provides useful insights into how African Americans interpreted their relationship with Haiti in the late nineteenth century. He argues that the AME leadership viewed Haiti as concrete proof of “the black capacity for self-government” and made consistent efforts to “counter racial arguments in the mainstream American press on the failure of “Negro governments.” Little, 134-135. Similarly, Leon D. Pamphile has argued that, during the late nineteenth century, “Haitians and African American intellectuals devised strategies to combat racism.” He insists that African Americans and Haitians worked together, using “historical, sociological, and anthropological evidence” and “education in both societies” to “promote the rehabilitation of the race” and “elevate their status.” Pamphile, 80.

An emerging consensus among aspiring class and elite African Americans on the transnational nature of white supremacy and black political progress produced both responses towards Haiti. Whether to vindicate or critique Haiti and its alleged failings was a dilemma that surfaced frequently in black public life, sometimes within the same diplomatic decision, newspaper editorial, missionary activity, or even poem. Despite their ambivalence, many black spokespeople shared the opinion that the salvation of their political rights was intertwined with the fortunes of Haiti, the historical embodiment of racial equality and a contemporary paradigm of black self-government. In many respects, African Americans' efforts to reconcile these divergent attitudes towards Haiti sheds further light on their broader reaction to the arduous descent into the "vale of tears," an apt descriptor for the period of institutionalized disfranchisement, segregation, and economic inequality that crested at the close of the nineteenth century.⁴ While they struggled to identify an effective solution, African Americans interested in Haitian affairs sought to remedy a clear and common problem: the rising tide of white supremacy that threatened to engulf black populations at home and abroad.



Following Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett's departure from Port-au-Prince, black leaders expected to receive more prestigious federal appointments, particularly in diplomatic service. Benjamin Tucker Tanner praised the departing diplomat for reflecting "so much credit upon his country and upon the race with which he is especially identified." His *Christian Recorder* suggested that the federal government should reward Bassett's

⁴ Pioneering African American scholar Benjamin Brawley coined this term in his work *A Social History of the American Negro* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 297.

service by appointing him to a smaller European court such as Belgium or Switzerland.⁵ Later, perhaps after realizing the unlikelihood of a European appointment for an African American, Tanner issued another call for Bassett's re-appointment. The *Recorder* editor expressed his hope that Langston's selection as the new minister resident and consul general in Port-au-Prince did not mean that the U.S. government believed the substitution of one African American for another in limited federal appointments was an appropriate practice. Instead, he maintained that the fairest policy would result in Langston assuming the Haitian post provided that Bassett received an appointment to Brazil or another country in South America.⁶

The desire for increased and higher profile diplomatic placements for black leaders would go unfulfilled. Still, Langston's selection as minister resident and consul general to Haiti did satisfy African Americans who clamored for a black diplomat who not only represented their partisan interests but also sympathized with Haiti. Langston garnered the praise of the prominent black citizens of Washington, D.C. as well as the approval of the black press, which regarded him as "scholarly," "experienced," and fully capable of handling the "responsibilities of the position."⁷ For those who identified racial pride as one of the post's demands, Langston represented an ideal replacement for Bassett. The future congressman from Virginia who named his son after Jean Jacques Dessalines later recalled that he had "familiarized himself in youth with the history of the people who, emancipating themselves under Toussaint, had under Dessalines declared and established their

⁵ "Personals," *The Christian Recorder*, December 21, 1876.

⁶ "General Mention," *The Christian Recorder*, July 12, 1877.

⁷ "General Mention," *The Christian Recorder*, July 26, 1877.

sovereignty founding for themselves a republican form of government.” His affinity for contemporary Haiti appeared to be just as strong as his appreciation for Haitian history. In his autobiography, Langston recalled thinking that his diplomatic appointment was the realization of a lifelong dream to “behold . . . negro nationality in harmonious, honored activity.”⁸

Langston’s initial experiences in Haiti solidified his belief in that country’s unique value to African Americans. Upon arriving in Cap-Haïtien in November 1877, Langston had his first opportunity to interact with Haitians. After his ship entered the harbor of the northwestern port city, several Haitian professionals came aboard. A doctor arrived first and he was quickly received by the white captain “as a person of character and authority.” A Haitian pilot then joined them and, “taking full command, issued his first order, in obedience to which, at once, the vessel was put under way and carried to her place of anchorage within the harbor.” Langston marveled that “these officers both were extremely black men; and yet, appearing in uniforms of official character and demeaning themselves with intelligence and propriety, they made a remarkably good impression.” Until that point, the U.S. diplomat “had never seen . . . men of their complexion holding such positions and performing such duties.” When he indicated his surprise at the leadership positions assumed by Haitians, he received a simple explanation: “You are now, Mr. Minister, in a negro country.”⁹ For Langston, the everyday manifestations of Haitian sovereignty produced understandable amazement and strengthened his hope that African Americans might hold similar responsibilities and rights in the immediate future.

⁸ Langston, *From the Virginia Plantation*, 355-356, 358.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 359-360.

A subsequent visit to the Haitian National Palace provided further proof that Haiti was a model of black civic and political participation. At the conclusion of his brief introduction to Cap-Haïtien, Langston traveled to Port-au-Prince to begin his official diplomatic duties. Although he took note of nearly every new sight and sound in the Haitian capital, one experience particularly piqued the interest of the former abolitionist. While attending his official reception at the National Palace, Langston recognized the portraits of John Brown and Charles Sumner hanging on a wall. He interpreted the artwork as evidence that the “negro patriots” of Haiti “loved John Brown because he stuck (sic), against every odds, for the freedom of the slaves of the United States” and immortalized Sumner because “besides being the bold, fearless, eloquent champion of negro liberty, he opposed the annexation of Santo Domingo to the United States.”¹⁰ As Langston finished viewing the palace’s décor and bid goodnight to Haitian President Pierre Boisrond-Canal, the national band played “John Brown’s Body,” the popular marching song about the martyred abolitionist that had reverberated in Union encampments during the Civil War.¹¹ Langston did not record his response to the musical selection. Nevertheless it is plausible that the minister resident and consul general felt in that moment that Haitian self-determination represented the desired end of abolitionism.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 371-372. Additionally, Langston remarked, “in all the houses there [Haiti], where there is any pretension to ornament the walls, but three portraits are to be seen – those of Sumner, John Brown, and Von Humboldt.” “The Sumner Club – Professor Langston’s Address – A Fine Eulogy of Charles Sumner,” *Hartford Daily Times*, n.d., Langston Collection. Langston likely knew that part of Sumner’s appeal to Haitians was due to the deceased senator’s introduction of the bill calling for the diplomatic recognition of Haiti, which Abraham Lincoln eventually signed into law on June 5, 1862.

¹¹ Langston, 372.

In many respects, Langston's satisfaction with his early reception in Haiti and his perceived bond with Haitians manifested itself during his ensuing diplomatic tenure. James Theodore Holly, by then the first African American Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church, reported that "open and undisguised sympathies" for Haiti and a desire to see it achieve "distinction among the great civilized nations" shaped Langston's relationship with his Haitian hosts.¹² On one occasion, after Haitian President Lysius Salomon called Langston "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh," the son of a slaveowning father and his black mistress stated that he represented five million African Americans "who were proud of him and his people, who sympathized with him and prayed for him."¹³ At times, Langston even let his appreciation of Haitian independence influence his diplomatic policies. For instance, he refused asylum to Haitians during periods of revolution because he thought that assuring protection to political factions eroded Haitian political stability and hampered the development of stable self-government there.¹⁴

Langston's public speeches and his engagement with U.S. newspapers further demonstrate his understanding of Haiti as a singular example of black political progress. During his time as the U.S. minister resident and consul general to Haiti, Langston promoted positive depictions of Haiti among African Americans. On one visit home, he told black attendees at a banquet in Washington, D.C. to take pride in their accomplishments. At

¹² *Ibid.*, 400.

¹³ *The Nashville Banner*, October, 1880, Langston Collection.

¹⁴ Langston, 385. On the other hand, as some of Langston's contemporaries and the historian Rayford Logan noted, the practice of granting asylum to Haitians during periods of revolution could reflect a humanitarian desire "to protect Haitians from Haitian mobs rather than any wish to interfere in Haitian political affairs." Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations*, 365.

the same time, however, he advised them to not overlook the similar progress being made by black people elsewhere. Langston assured the African Americans in attendance that just as “our advancement has been wonderful . . . in the Island of Hayti we are demonstrating our capability of self-government.”¹⁵ He trusted that this parallel development would further inspire African Americans who hoped to achieve a comparable ability to influence the governance of their own communities.

Unlike the African Americans who heard Langston speak, most white Americans valued neither the reality nor the potential of black self-determination in Haiti or the United States. Consequently, Langston went to even greater lengths to convince them that Haiti was a respectable nation that reflected positively on the civic and political capabilities of African Americans. In published interviews, he told reporters from national newspapers including the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Baltimore Sun*, and the *Washington Post* that revolutions would soon cease in Haiti because Haitians had concluded that “constitutional methods” were the preferred means of affecting political change. Additionally, he praised many Haitian institutions, including schools that were “numerous, fairly attended, and . . . conducted, if not with the greatest efficiency, with commendable success.”¹⁶ Langston also made sure to present a favorable picture of social life in Haiti, insisting that Haitians were better off than their kin in the United States, the British West Indies, and other locations where racism intensified black political and economic dependency. By arguing that Haiti was “capable of great developments” and proving “the

¹⁵ “Washington Letter: Grand banquet to Hon. John Mercer Langston,” *New York Globe*, October 7, 1882.

¹⁶ “The Black Republic,” *The Washington Post*, September 8, 1883; “Mr. Langston on Hayti,” *The Washington Post*, August 15, 1881.

power of the colored race to govern themselves,” Langston prodded white Americans to develop more enlightened ideas about race and citizenship in their own country.¹⁷

Such statements were much more sympathetic and beneficial to Haitians than any commentary emanating from other foreign observers. Still, Langston’s public statements and his views on appropriate diplomatic policies demonstrate the proclivity of black leaders to define Haitian development on their own terms. According to Holly, Langston was “profoundly convinced that the American standpoint of reviewing things . . . is the best adapted to a rising people” and he did not hesitate to make this view apparent in his dealings with Haitian government officials. Moreover, Langston believed that Haitian political stability would come not only as a result of disincentivizing revolution but also through the establishment of “constitutional self-government” modeled upon U.S. republicanism and “Christian civilization” provided by Protestant missionaries.¹⁸ From his perspective, the best way to strengthen foreign perceptions of Haiti was to ensure that Haitians adhered to a notion of progress that most white Americans and some of their aspiring class and elite black counterparts found exemplified by their own country.

Indeed, Langston’s interviews with U.S. journalists indicate a desire to convince skeptical white audiences that Haitians already recognized the superiority of Anglo-American values and institutions. During his diplomatic tenure in Port-au-Prince, he

¹⁷ “Minister Langston,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 12, 1883; “A Rosy View of Hayti,” *The Baltimore Sun*, September 9, 1885. Besides transcripts of Langston’s interviews and published articles written by the black diplomat, coverage of Haiti remained overwhelmingly negative during this period. However, on at least one occasion, Langston’s favorable reporting on Haiti’s establishment of diplomatic affairs with Liberia did produce an admission from the American press that Haiti showed “the capacity of the negro race for self-government.” “Hayti and Liberia,” *The New York Times*, September 11, 1877.

¹⁸ Langston, 400.

assured a reporter from the *Washington Post* that “the form of government in Hayti is republican, and the constitution of the country framed after our own.” Furthermore, he noted that Haitians embraced religious freedom and readily accepted the presence of Episcopal, Methodist, and Baptist congregations in their country. Finally, Langston characterized Haiti as a capitalist society. Ordinary Haitians, he stressed, cultivated the country’s rich agricultural products for domestic sale while the Haitian government engaged in international commerce, particularly with U.S. lumber and denim merchants.¹⁹ Langston did not see the potential harm in judging Haiti according to an Anglo-American standard of civilization that he and other black intellectuals thought was the *only* valid standard of civilization. Instead, he remained convinced that the ability of black people to replicate the political, religious, and economic values of their white peers would affirm racial equality and validate black citizenship, whether in the “Black Republic” or the United States.²⁰

Black religious leaders demonstrated similar ambivalence as they struggled to alter negative perceptions of Haiti and vindicate black self-government. James Theodore Holly had long argued that Haiti was the sole place where blacks could fulfill their racial destiny so he defended it against charges of political backwardness. For instance, the naturalized

¹⁹ “Mr. Langston on Hayti,” *The Washington Post*, August 15, 1881. Some of Langston’s contemporaries demonstrated a similar line of thinking regarding the impact of international trade on Haitian development. Millery Polyné notes that before recognizing the detrimental impact of U.S. imperialism in Haiti, Frederick Douglass adhered to black Pan-Americanism, a “North American-centered foreign policy designed to complement U.S. financial, military, and political goals.” He believed that international trade and U.S. financial and technical assistance could benefit the underdeveloped Caribbean and assumed that the “interests of Washington and the virtues of marginalized blacks” in that region were not adversarial. See Polyné, 27, 53.

²⁰ On Langston’s assimilationism, see Moses, *Creative Conflict*.

Haitian reported that his adopted country's periodic political upheavals were no worse than a contentious election day in New York City.²¹ Additionally, his efforts to create an independent Haitian Orthodox Apostolic Church led by Haitian clergy stemmed from a desire to create a Haitian religious life separate from the influence of European priests. When reaching out to potential converts, Holly stressed this point, arguing that the Episcopal Church was the only public organization apart from the government and the Masonic fraternity that relied on Haitian leadership. At a time when white religious officials dismissed the political and cultural development of Haiti's "irresponsible Negroes," Holly was a welcome advocate for a growing number of Haitians who embraced Protestantism on their own terms and claimed authority within their own religious institutions.²²

Nevertheless, the Episcopal Bishop was an ardent critic of Haitian social and cultural norms. For the greater part of Langston's time in Haiti, Holly believed that the minister resident and consul general was exerting a "salutary effect" on Haitians. In particular, he insisted that the black politician "imbued with the spirit of American institutions and the genius of the American people" was especially fit to assist Haitians in "the perilous task that they have undertaken to carve out for themselves a high and noble destiny."²³ He viewed

²¹ Holly to Samuel Denison, March 8, 1876, Haiti Mission Papers.

²² Skeptical attitudes towards Haiti and the potential for Episcopal success there made fundraising consistently difficult for Holly. Holly biographer David Dean notes that revolutions frequently led to grumblings among church leaders in the United States who cited Haitians' alleged penchant for destructive behavior as a reason for withholding funds from Holly's mission. While Holly's ultimate aim was complete autonomy for his Episcopal community in Haiti, he knew that a lack of monetary support at such an early stage in development would cripple his efforts. See Dean, *Defender*.

²³ Langston, 400.

his own mission in Haiti in a similar fashion. While Holly appreciated that every conversion achieved by his Haitian clergymen strengthened the autonomy of the Haitian Orthodox Apostolic Church, he also believed that each one brought him another step closer to eradicating Vodou, a cultural “vice” derided by the same white foreigners from whom Holly sought organizational independence. At times, this uncompromising stance on “African fetishism” brought Holly into conflict with potential converts in rural Haiti. Although a number of Haitian elites also condemned popular religious practices that foreign observers considered savage, most ordinary Haitians did not see why Christian conversion or the prejudices of outsiders should hinder their ability to serve the spirits.²⁴

Though seemingly contradictory, Holly understood his assessments of Haiti to be coherent and he sometimes presented them simultaneously. In the winter of 1880, an African American from South Carolina wrote Holly to ask about the prospects of emigration to Haiti. Holly’s response, published in the *Christian Recorder*, began with a description of Haiti as the land of the “free, independent, disenthralled and sovereign [black] citizen,” the antithesis of the United States where full black citizenship proved illusory in practice. After this initial praise, though, Holly shifted tone and initiated a lengthy critique of Haiti. He argued that Haitians had not developed industry, formed a stable government, or funded internal improvements. The Episcopal bishop maintained that an influx of intelligent and industrious African Americans could rectify this problem by exporting the “industry,

²⁴ Dean, 69. During the 1870s and 1880s, Janvier, the son of a Protestant tailor, and other radicals within the Nationalist Party maintained an attack on the Roman Catholic church in Haiti. They argued that the Catholic ecclesiastical system in Haiti, largely staffed by white foreigners, was detrimental to Haitian independence. They favored the development of an indigenous Protestant church that would facilitate the growth of capitalism, industry, and liberal thought. David Nicholls provides clear insights into this facet of nineteenth-century Haitian life in *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 108-141.

religion, and education” needed to carry Haitians “onward to their high destiny.” With the guidance of black émigrés, Holly predicted, “revolutions would cease in our midst, and Hayti [would] enter fully into the career of the highly civilized nations of the earth.”²⁵

AME members who worked alongside Holly were similarly resolute in their belief that Haiti required reform before it could vindicate the political capabilities of African Americans. Throughout her time in Haiti, Mary Ella Mossell maintained her efforts to instruct African Americans in the United States on the dire state of her mission field. The AME missionary informed readers of the *Christian Recorder* that Haitians deserved more immediate attention than African Americans in the U.S. South, insisting that:

We are aware that the demands of the home mission are of equal importance with those of the foreign mission; there must be met also. This however is the difference: The Gospel is needed at home to strengthen and perpetuate our free, liberal and republican institutions; the Gospel is needed here to give birth to such institutions. The Gospel is needed in America to prevent the return of ignorance and superstition; it is needed here to break the spell which these twin evils have brought over the people. The Gospel is needed in America to back up the temperance sentiment . . . but it is needed here to create a temperance sentiment.²⁶

As a missionary in an impoverished field, Mossell faced the constant challenge of raising public awareness of and support for her work. To that end, she used public orations and writings to appeal to African Americans in Georgia, Louisiana, and other locations throughout the South who rewarded her tenacity by funding Haitian missions despite their

²⁵ James Theodore Holly, “Emigration to Hayti,” *The Christian Recorder*, February 3, 1881.

²⁶ Mary Ella Mossell, “Father Forgive Them, For They Know Not What They Do,” *The Christian Recorder*, May 16, 1878.

own poverty.²⁷ Consequently, her emphasis on generating “liberal and republican institutions” in Haiti while ridding it of “ignorance and superstition” suggests that many African Americans fretted about Haitian political development even as they worried about saving Haitian souls.

Mossell wanted her financial supporters to understand fully the secular advantages that Haitians and African Americans would accrue from AME missionary work. During her time in Port-au-Prince, Mossell tried to make Haitian women better housewives as well as devoted Christians. She taught girls needlework, discussed other elements of housework with them, and made home visits to ensure that the girls and their mothers were putting their instruction to good use. Such work, Mossell informed AME members, was fundamental to the progress of blacks in Haiti and the United States. At a time when middle-class white Americans defined civilized women as fragile, spiritual homemakers and identified civilization as a precursor to self-government, she implored her fellow churchwomen to help their Haitian sisters “improve” their lives and vindicate their race by embracing “the art of making home attractive and cheerful.”²⁸

The importance of AME missionary work in Haiti received further confirmation from Mossell’s husband. In Columbus, Georgia, Buffalo, New York, and countless locations in-between, Charles gave audiences a “picturesque view of the inner and outer life of Hayti”

²⁷ G.B. Reid, “Hayti—Our Church and School,” *The Christian Recorder*, March 31, 1881; J.R. Grimes, “A Meeting for the Iron Church in Hayti,” *The Christian Recorder*, December 20, 1883.

²⁸ Mary Ella Mossell, “Domestic Life in Hayti,” *The A.M.E. Church Review* (April 1887): 393-398. On these prevailing notions of domesticity, civilization, and self-government see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 25, 31-35.

in the hopes of securing the finances needed to construct new schools and churches in Haiti and achieve the “conquering of the Island for Christ.”²⁹ Moreover, in editorials complementing his lecture tour, he emphasized the growth of the Haitian mission field, boasting that the dozens of Mite missionaries, preachers, and teachers who now labored in Port-au-Prince often held public meetings that attracted thousands of attendees.³⁰ Charles further pointed out that the financial contributions given by innumerable laypersons had even helped the AME Church send Haitians to Wilberforce University.

Education assumed a particularly important role for black Protestants who valued the symbolic importance of Haitian independence. In 1881, Bishop Benjamin F. Lee, President of Wilberforce, confirmed that the first private university for African Americans had raised scholarships for and enrolled two “active and faithful young gentlemen” from Haiti. Lee expected that Solomon G. Dorce and Adolph H. Mevs would leave Wilberforce after completing the school’s liberal arts curriculum and become missionaries in their native country.³¹ Charles Mossell shared these expectations. He viewed the Haitian students as key contributors to missionary work that would “preserve Haytian independence and perpetuate the sovereignty of the nation.” Other AME members proved receptive to his idea that Haitians educated in the United States could help “bring about marvelous results in Hayti” and “put beyond question the safety of the people’s sovereignty

²⁹ “Arrival of Our Missionary,” *The Christian Recorder*, October 17, 1878; “Appointments of Rev. C.W. Mossell, Missionary from Hayti,” *The Christian Recorder*, December 12, 1878.

³⁰ Charles W. Mossell, “Will We Succeed,” *The Christian Recorder*, March 10, 1881.

³¹ Benjamin F. Lee, “University News,” *The Christian Recorder*, March 10, 1881. “1883-1884 Educational Department: Wilberforce University,” *The A.M.E. Budget*, ed. Benjamin W. Arnett (Dayton, Ohio: Christian Publishing House Print, 1883): 103-104.

and national independence.”³² By the date of Dorce and Mevs’s graduation from Wilberforce, the AME treasury had secured annual scholarships for and enrolled three additional Haitian students.³³

The financial support of Haitian scholars was connected to a belief that African Americans could improve perceptions of Haitian independence and black self-determination. Charles Mossell informed African Americans that they were “bound to this Negro Republic by the ties of race.” Furthermore, he insisted that Haiti held “a claim upon us that no other country has” because the Haitian Revolution had altered the “civilization of the new world . . . precipitating a new era and a new condition, particularly in the status of the unrecognized brother in black.”³⁴ These racial bonds obligated African Americans to either become educators and missionaries in Haiti or support those who did. He implored readers of the *AME Budget*:

Let others in their hatred of the African race forget the Hayti nation; but let us ever hold Hayti and her people in grateful remembrance; let others rejoice

³² Charles W. Mossell, “Haytian Work,” *The A.M.E. Budget*, ed. Benjamin W. Arnett (Dayton, Ohio: Christian Publishing House Print, 1882): 99, 103. Holly made similar efforts to secure American education for interested Haitians. In 1866, after years of unsuccessful requests for funding, Holly finally managed to secure the financial report necessary to send the first Haitian boy to the Episcopal theological training school in Philadelphia. He would succeed in sending a steady stream of Haitians to study there over the remainder of his lifetime.

³³ In 1884, John J. Guilleotte, Emanuel Day, and John Hurst all studied at Wilberforce. They had varying degrees of success in their educational pursuits. Day apparently finished his studies at Wilberforce but became a clerk upon returning to Haiti. Guilleotte experienced great health difficulties at Wilberforce during his final year of coursework, returned to his home in Port-au-Prince, and died shortly thereafter. Hurst became a Bishop and leading figure in the AME Church. Funding these students was not inexpensive. Arnett’s *Budget* reported that the Church raised \$481 for Haitian scholarships in 1883 and \$486.59 in 1884. For a denomination with approximately 215,000 laypeople, many not even a generation removed from slavery, those figures represented a substantial financial commitment to Haitian education.

³⁴ Charles W. Mossell, “Haytian Work,” 100-101.

at her failures, point the finger of scorn and speak reproachfully of her effort at self government; but let our tongues be employed, if not in strains of praise, in prayer and supplication in her behalf.³⁵

In Charles's estimation, the reform efforts, prayers, and public rhetoric of black Protestants would prove invaluable to the advancement of African Americans and Haitians bound by historical oppression, blackness, and the contemporary scorn that came with both.

While less intent on supporting reform efforts in Haiti, black lecturers and journalists expressed similar ambivalence about the "Black Republic." After Reconstruction, readers of T. Thomas Fortune's *New York Globe* learned that Haitians' propensity for political upheaval distinguished them from African Americans who were thoroughly "Americanized" and fully capable of possessing political rights.³⁶ Conversely, those who subscribed to Harry C. Smith's *Cleveland Gazette* found flattering histories of Toussaint Louverture and arguments that Haiti's current troubles were linked to the misguided visions of grandeur held by post-Revolution leaders rather than the innate racial characteristics of its people.³⁷ Moreover, attendees at lectures typically encountered sympathetic accounts of Haiti's historical and contemporary leadership including panegyrics on "Hayti and the Haytien Patriot, Toussaint L'Ouverture" and alluring tales of European-educated Haitian elites. At one meeting of the Bethel Literary and Historical

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *New York Globe*, April 28, 1883; "Democratic Absurdities," *New York Globe*, June 2, 1883.

³⁷ Paul Gaston, "L'Histoire Des Heros D'Afrique," *Cleveland Gazette*, November 10, 1883; "Hayti," *Cleveland Gazette*, March 8, 1884.

Society, a popular forum for racial issues in Washington, D.C., one essayist even argued that African Americans should continue to consider expatriating to Haiti.³⁸

African Americans attuned to the attitudes of white racial moderates as well as black leaders could, in fact, find some confirmation that the appropriate response to Haiti lay somewhere between criticism and vindication. In the wake of Reconstruction, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that Haitian leaders demonstrated a commitment to religious toleration. Besides recognizing that the Haitian government adhered to a fundamental characteristic of U.S. republicanism, the Republican paper lauded African Americans for helping to spread Protestantism in Haiti.³⁹ The *Inquirer* supported the emigration of more black southerners who, “carrying civilization, the spirit of our institutions and the knowledge and acceptance of our common law practice” would “plant such reforms there as will make the country powerful and the people happy and prosperous.”⁴⁰

The assessment was grounded in several problematic strains of nineteenth-century race-thinking. Yet its overall conclusion validated the efforts of African Americans who placed their hopes in Haiti even as they insisted on its reform. The *Inquirer's* allusions to the civilizing consequences of black emigration indicate a commitment to a neoabolitionist paternalism that equated black progress and civilization with the attainment of the Protestant ethic, industrial skills, good hygiene, and moral character.⁴¹ In addition, the

³⁸ “Bethel Literary,” *People's Advocate*, March 1, 1884.

³⁹ “Religious. Growth of Toleration in Hayti,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 9, 1877.

⁴⁰ “Hope for Hayti Yet,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 9, 1877.

⁴¹ In *Up From History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), Robert J. Norrell provides outstanding analysis of the

article demonstrates the lingering power of the “colonizationist dream” of white northerners who wanted the undesirable masses of freed men and women to leave the United States.⁴² Despite this underlying cynicism, however, the popular newspaper declared that there was “Hope for Hayti yet.”⁴³ With that pronouncement, the Philadelphia newspaper affirmed the tenuous stance of black leaders who embraced Haitian autonomy while emphasizing the need to rehabilitate Haiti’s image, change discourses about its potential, and prove that blacks could exercise the responsibilities of citizenship.

The contradictory ideas about Haiti expressed or received by African Americans cohere with a broader interpretation of a transitional period in U.S. politics and race relations. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, many African Americans did not foresee or refused to concede the impending onslaught of *de jure* segregation and disfranchisement. Instead, to borrow C. Vann Woodward’s famous expression, they visualized what soon became “forgotten alternatives.”⁴⁴ Optimistic diplomats, missionaries, and intellectuals

influence of this worldview, particularly on black education in the South during Reconstruction and ensuing decades.

⁴² Frederickson, 166.

⁴³ During the Civil War, the *Inquirer* had a circulation of 70,000. This number fell during Reconstruction, primarily due to Harding’s health problems. By 1888, the paper had reached its lowest point but it still counted 5,000 subscribers. Edgar Williams, “A History of *The Inquirer*,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 20, 2003; “Hope for Hayti yet,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 9, 1877; An editorial written on November 16, 1878 described a meeting of the AME community in Port-au-Prince. While emphasizing the role of AME missions in Haitian life, the paper described Haitians as industrious, welcoming, and possessors of “a great future.” “Port-au-Prince, Hayti,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 16, 1878.

⁴⁴ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

insisted that a future existed wherein black citizens would reclaim the promises of Reconstruction and establish a permanent stake in U.S. political life.

Black leaders concerned with Haitian affairs were certainly not alone in believing that African Americans could salvage their prospects for meaningful citizenship. As leading figures within black social and political communities tried to strengthen their status in the United States by manipulating their relationship with Haiti, other African Americans used western migration or parades to the same end.⁴⁵ At the same time, black Virginians managed to wield electoral power as part of the interracial Readjuster Party and their influence remained strong enough to secure the election of John Mercer Langston to Congress years later.⁴⁶ Informed by these instances of persistent political behavior, it stands to reason that some black leaders insisted on transforming Haiti from an icon of black misrule used to justify Redemption into a symbol of stable black self-government capable of prompting a new era of racial egalitarianism.



Aspiring class and elite African Americans might have persisted in prioritizing the reformation of Haiti as a path to domestic political power. But the publication of a scathing denunciation of Haiti helped change the ways that black leaders talked about that country

⁴⁵ In recent decades, historians have increasingly attempted to characterize the political behavior of African Americans in the period following Reconstruction. Nell Painter's pioneering *Exodusters* identified the mass migration of African Americans from Louisiana and the Mississippi Delta to Kansas in 1879 as a decidedly political action. Along with "voting with one's feet," Shane and Graham White noted that parades became an established form of political expression in urban African American communities. See Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977) and Shane and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ On the Readjuster movement see, Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

and interacted with its people. In 1884, Sir Spenser St. John published *Hayti; or the Black Republic*. The former British minister-resident and consul general to Haiti claimed that the book was a disinterested account of his time in Port-au-Prince. St. John even insinuated that, if anything, it might be too sympathetic to Haitians because he did not look down on his “fellow-creatures” even if they possessed “a difference of complexion.” For those who read *Hayti; or the Black Republic*, the absurdity of these claims to objectivity and racial liberalism became readily apparent.⁴⁷

In a book that became the standard text on Haiti well into the twentieth century, St. John condemned all aspects of Haitian character, life, and culture. The career diplomat lampooned “the awkward figure, the heavy face, the bullet head, the uncouth figure, the cunning blood-shot eyes” of the Haitian and informed readers that these features “inherent to the blacks” shattered any illusion of civilization in Haiti.⁴⁸ Haitian professionals, he argued, simply masked the superstitions, witchcraft, and cannibalism that prevailed among the Haitian masses. Furthermore, St. John admitted that he grew more skeptical of “the capacity of the negro to hold an independent position” during his time in Haiti. To the chagrin of African Americans he concluded that:

As long as [the negro] is influenced by contact with the white man, as in the southern portion of the United States, he gets on very well. But place him free from all such influence, as in Hayti, and he shows no signs of improvement . . . I now agree with those who deny that the negro could ever originate a civilization, and that with the best of educations he remains an inferior type of man. He has as yet shown himself totally unfitted for self-government, and incapable as a people to make any progress whatever. To judge the negroes

⁴⁷ Spenser St. John, *Hayti; or, The Black Republic* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1884), viii.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 134. On the impact of St. John’s work see James Leyburn, *The Haitian People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

fairly, one must live a considerable time in their midst, and not be led away by the theory that all races are capable of equal advance in civilization.⁴⁹

White newspapers lauded the criticisms of Haitians that implicated African Americans. In November 1884, the *Atlanta Constitution*, a paper that boasted a circulation of more than 100,000, wondered “what might have been the effect upon fair-minded people in our northern states if Sir Spenser St. John’s account . . . could have been published simultaneously with “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” While lamenting that the book appeared too late to correct the ills of abolitionism and emancipation, the paper hoped that it would “arouse the public mind to the gravity of the problem presented by the preponderance and alarmingly disproportionate increase of the black population in several of the southern states.”⁵⁰ A month later, the *Chicago Tribune* reprinted a review of St. John’s “remarkable, terribly honest, and ruthlessly realistic book” from the *London Spectator*. The review, which ran under the headline “Haiti: The Fairest and Richest Island in the World in the Hands of Vaudoux Savages,” promised readers that *Hayti; or, The Black Republic* proved “that Hayti is sunk in misery, bloodshed, cannibalism, and superstition . . . that, as an experiment in negro self-government, it is a hideous failure.”⁵¹ The implication of this “failure” was clear: African Americans should not be allowed to transcend their current

⁴⁹ St. John, 131-132.

⁵⁰ M.W.H., “The Black Republic: A Terrible Arraignment of Haytien Life,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 24, 1884.

⁵¹ “Hayti: The Fairest and Richest Island in the World in the Hands of Vaudoux Savages,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 13, 1884.

subjugation to Bourbon Democrats as long as Haitians continued to “regress” without the dominant influence of whites.⁵²

For some African Americans, who may not have been attuned to the controversy created by St. John, refuting critics was less important than affirming their connection to Haiti. As white newspapers surmised that *Hayti; or, The Black Republic* proved the absurdity of extending equal rights to African Americans, one black public school teacher from Washington, D.C. commemorated the Haitian Revolution. In December 1884, Sarah A. Shimm sent a couch embroidered with six scenes from the life of Toussaint Louverture to the Colored People’s Department of the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition held in New Orleans. The scenes depicted Louverture in the following capacities: as “The First of the Blacks” posing for a portrait, as an enslaved man receiving a delegation of free people of color at the outset of the Haitian Revolution, as a loyal servant helping his master’s family find refuge amid the outbreak of war, as a popular military leader in battle, as a governor bravely riding out to meet French vessels coming to re-enslave the Haitians, and, finally, as a prisoner maintaining his strength even in the face of

⁵² On February 2, 1885, *The Atlanta Constitution* offered further confirmation African Americans’ understanding of white racial prejudice. In an editorial titled “The Negro in Hayti: A Study of His Life and Government by an Impartial Witness,” the paper reported that the book was still creating “a profound sensation.” Moreover, it had clearly shown readers “that the only safety for the negro is in close association with white people, in a great government in which the white man clearly and unmistakably dominates.” The *Constitution* did not underestimate the book’s popularity or the appeal of its claims. In 1889, a New York publishing house released a second edition of St. John’s bestseller.

death. On the edge of the sofa, Shimm added the U.S. flag, situating it between the flags of Haiti and Saint-Domingue.⁵³

In addition to the embroidered flags and depictions of Louverture, Shimm incorporated words that clarified the connection between African Americans and Haitians. Underneath the first scene of Louverture's life, Shimm stitched the following poem:

When Albion, from her snowy cliffs,
The air with Hampden rends,
And France with drooping fleur-de-lis,
Bewails the Orleans Maid,
When Austria tells from ramparts high
Of Louis Kossuth's fame,
And Italy wafts through cloudless skies
Her Garibaldi's name:
When Scotia sighs o'er Wallace's grave,
And Freedom weeps the martyred brave:
When patriot hands for country's sake
From Emmet's tomb the shamrocks break,
And o'er the fanes of other lands
The storied radiance shines,
We turn to thee, O sun-kissed isle,
And on thy peaks see Freedom smile—
Ah, Hayti, sea-girt island gem,
'Twas Toussaint won thy diadem.⁵⁴

The "wonderful sofa" thus demonstrated much more than the enduring appeal of the Haitian Revolution for African Americans. With her distinctive contribution to the New Orleans Exposition, Shimm showed that African Americans would embrace Haiti as a black nation and cherish Louverture as a national hero no matter what images of Haitian savagery sprung forth from the minds of white supremacists.

⁵³ "A Wonderful Sofa," *Cleveland Gazette*, January 10, 1885; *Practical Common Sense Guide Book Through the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition at New Orleans* (Harrisburg, PA: L.S. Hart, 1885), 44.

⁵⁴ "A Wonderful Sofa," *Cleveland Gazette*.

A similar expression of Pan-African thought and black nationalist pride surfaced two years later at an event held by a group of students in Baltimore. In front of a packed auditorium at the local Samaritan Temple, the St. John's Sunday School performed an "Homage to Africa." A girl playing the role of Africa sat upon a throne. In one hand, she embraced another student representing the United States and, in the other, she held tightly the hand of a student embodying Haiti. Meanwhile, classmates representing England, Portugal, Spain, France, and Italy circled around them, supplicating themselves to the Motherland and her Diaspora. Lauded by the audience members and a reporting black journalist, the St. John's students articulated a belief that African Americans and Haitians shared a common ancestry and, consequently, a common fate. Moreover, rather than lamenting their connection to a nation lampooned or disparaged by their white peers, the students identified their relationship with Haiti as something worthy of unequivocal celebration.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, the public disparagement of Haiti did produce an increased anxiety among black leaders who recognized that black self-determination was essentially on trial. In July 1885, the Haitian government held a reception to mark the conclusion of John Mercer Langston's term in Port-au-Prince and introduce the new U.S. minister resident and consul general. When the time for an official statement by the honored guest arrived, Langston departed from standard diplomatic pleasantries and offered a candid assessment of the difficult burden assumed by the Haiti. He called Haitian President Lysius Salomon, whose portrait hung at Lincoln University, the "chief representative of the black race" in an era when the "race must present itself before" and pass the scrutiny of "the most civilized

⁵⁵ "Labor Demonstration," *New York Freeman*, March 20, 1886.

powers.” Salomon’s country, Langston continued, was the only nation where “the black man can find a place for displaying and perfecting an independent and sovereign nation, his force, his capacity, his wisdom, his virtue, his faith, his patriotism, his courage, his true character.” At a time when St. John and his fellow white supremacists presented their prejudices with renewed vigor, Langston had only one suggestion for Salomon: “guard [Haiti], protect it!”⁵⁶

The Haitian President made it clear to Langston that he embraced this responsibility. But, following the publication of St. John’s diatribe, even black leaders who had critiqued Haitian life now felt that they too had a mandate to protect Haiti.⁵⁷ For example, James Theodore Holly assured editor T. Thomas Fortune and the Episcopal Foreign Secretary that St. John lacked credibility. At the same time, he informed the English press that their former representative in Haiti raised some valid points but generally presented an unfair and inaccurate picture of Haiti. Holly explained that generations of

⁵⁶ “The New Haytian Minister,” *New York Freeman*, August 15, 1885 translated from *Le Moniteur*, July 4, 1885, in Langston Collection. The *Cleveland Gazette* reported that Salomon’s portrait hung at the leading institution for African Americans originally chartered in Pennsylvania in 1854. “Doings of the Race,” *Cleveland Gazette*, January 2, 1886.

⁵⁷ In response to Langston’s remarks at the banquet in July 1885, Salomon replied: “For my part, I feel it is my duty, as head of a Republic composed of descendants of Africa, to spare no effort that Hayti, far from being a blot on the new world, may have a conspicuous place with the great powers which advance rapidly to the summit of civilization.” Haitian intellectual Anténor Firmin also challenged the racism of his era and embraced Haiti’s unique capability to demonstrate the abilities of the black race. His book *The Equality of the Human Races* refuted the theories presented by the Comte de Gobineau in his famous *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*. Firmin argued that slavery and colonialism had naturalized an irrational belief in black inferiority. In reality, he maintained, there existed only one human race, bound by equality. Firmin further asserted that Haiti, a nation of remarkable statesmen, intellectuals, artists, and professionals, provided clear support for his beliefs. Unfortunately, his work did not attract the attention of Americans, either white or black. The first English translation of the pioneering work would not appear for more than a century after its initial publication in 1885. See Anténor Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*, trans. Asselin Charles (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

slavery, racial oppression, and international neglect explained what he perceived as shortcomings in Haitian culture. In fact, he surmised that those who wanted to find cultural backwardness in Haiti needed to look no further than the “profligacy” of foreigners who lived and worked there.⁵⁸

Holly’s son made sure that white and black Americans received this message. Alonzo P. Holly, then a student at the New York Homeopathic Medical College, criticized Fortune’s *New York Freeman* for an editorial that gave credence to St. John’s work and the related anti-Haitian propaganda disseminated by a prominent Boston newspaper. The future doctor questioned the veracity of a book produced by an author with “questionable motives” who relied on “questionable sources,” including the work of Moreau de Saint-Méry. While admitting that superstition and heathen practices lingered among Haiti’s “lowest strata,” Alonzo argued that foreigners, particularly African Americans, should not cast aspersions on all Haitians due to the actions of a few. He insisted that African Americans should recall their historical debt to Haiti, a nation that “first gave proofs of the ability of the Negro race” when blacks in the United States were “groveling in ignominy.”⁵⁹ The public letter had its desired effect. When the *New York Evening Post* later repeated St.

⁵⁸ Dean, 83.

⁵⁹ Alonzo P. Holly, “Haytians Not Cannibals,” *The New York Freeman*, August 28, 1886. Saint-Méry was a Creole colonist born in Martinique who became a lawyer, planter, and civil servant in Saint-Domingue. He is best known for his publications on life in the French Caribbean and St. John made liberal use of his descriptions of Vodou and cannibalism in Saint-Domingue.

John's claims, Fortune responded with an emphatic editorial condemning the white newspaper for substantiating the infamous "inventions" peddled by a charlatan.⁶⁰

Similar sentiments emanated from the leadership of the AME Church. Shortly after her death in 1886, the AME *Church Review* published Mary Ella Mossell's account of "Domestic Life in Hayti." In some respects, the article by the lifelong educator confirmed the most insidious criticisms leveled against Haiti by St. John. For instance, Mossell claimed personal knowledge of human sacrifices and characterized a Vodou ceremony that she purportedly attended as "terrible," "abominable," and "degrading"—an event that would "strike all right-minded people with horror, filling their souls with sadness and sorrow." Despite these allegations, Mossell challenged the orthodoxy that Haiti proved black inferiority. She noted sardonically that Haitians had "*lost the sympathy of the Christian world*" for committing the "*unpardonable sin (?) of cutting the throats of their masters and freeing themselves.*" While explaining that slavery and subsequent neglect had harmed Haitian political and social development, Mossell identified evidence of Haitian material progress while predicting more in the years to come. Likely revealing her broader interest in the fate of African Americans navigating their own transition from slavery to freedom, Mary Ella concluded that Haiti's struggles were due to the country's origins and relative youth rather than the innate racial characteristics of its population.⁶¹

These attempts to shield Haiti from the worst charges leveled against it had little discernable effect, however, as the invectives found in *Hayti; or the Black Republic* gained

⁶⁰ T. Thomas Fortune, "Browbeating Hayti," *The New York Freeman*, April 23, 1887. In 1884, the *New York Globe* changed its name to *The New York Freeman*. In the fall of 1887, it again changed names, this time to *The New York Age*.

⁶¹ Mossell, "Domestic Life in Hayti," 400, 392.

traction among white Americans. A December 1886 edition of the *New York World* published the harrowing account of a white businessman in Haiti who claimed he had donned blackface and attended a Vodou ceremony. The other worshippers, apparently unable to distinguish between a black man and an imposter wearing burnt cork, allegedly proceeded to murder a young boy. Perhaps realizing the need to provide “proof” for his sensational story, the informant noted that he was well acquainted with St. John’s book and its comparable accounts of Haitian barbarism.⁶²

Months later, the St. Louis *Globe Democrat* published a similar report produced by a white resident of Kingston, Jamaica. The correspondent presented more allegations that Haitians routinely cooked and ate children. Curiously, he also lamented that not a single church existed in Haiti to save the population from a steady lapse into barbarism. Facts were irrelevant, however, as evidenced by an editorial in a subsequent edition of the *Baltimore Sun*. The newspaper informed readers that St. John’s account and dispatches from Port-au-Prince proved the irrationality of the “humanitarian principles” that allowed for the existence of Haiti or any other location where blacks possessed too much independence and political influence. These damaging allegations proliferated despite the best efforts of black leaders to counter them. The *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Chicago Tribune* re-printed disparaging reports about Haitian life, a New York publishing house released a second edition of *Hayti; or the Black Republic*, and white readers continued to

⁶² “An Awful Story: Man-Eaters Within Two Days Journey of Our Coast,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 16, 1886; “Cannibalism in Hayti: Man-Eaters Within Two Days Journey of Our Coast,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 16, 1886.

encounter incredible tales of black degeneracy that raised questions about the capabilities of black citizens in the United States.⁶³

The struggle to vindicate Haiti became even more difficult due to growing civil unrest in that country. In August 1888, an alliance of regional military forces staged a revolt against Lysius Salomon, who they accused of attempting to make himself president for life. The overthrow of the Salomon regime brought about the establishment of a provisional government that included General François Denys Légitime, General Séide Télémaque, and General Florville Hyppolite. Before Haitians could organize a permanent government, Télémaque was assassinated and Hyppolite's supporters laid the blame for the act on Légitime. While Légitime became president and strengthened his hold on Port-au-Prince in the aftermath of the assassination, Hyppolite launched an insurrection meant to defeat his rival and establish more economic hegemony for his native northern region.⁶⁴

U.S. officials and white journalists did not immediately identify the Haitian unrest as a pressing matter. U.S. Secretary of State Thomas F. Bayard gave Alvey A. Adey, the second assistant secretary of state, the task of formulating the U.S. response to the early stages of the revolution. Even after Adey reached the conclusion that the Haitian situation was "becoming intolerable," he still characterized Haiti as a mere "nuisance."⁶⁵ At the same

⁶³"Cannibalism in Hayti," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 13, 1887; "A Retrograding Population," *The Baltimore Sun*, March 15, 1888. White newspapers mostly related St. John's book and similar works as objective fact but, on at least one occasion, the *New York Times* used *Hayti; or the Black Republic* to provide readers with a bit of crude, racial humor. The paper relayed an anecdote where the daughter of a German merchant, attempting to get a monkey to dance in front of an audience, stated loudly that they needed to "beat the little negro there." "The Monkey in Hayti," *The New York Times*, November 2, 1884.

⁶⁴ Dubois, *Haiti*, 184-185; Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations*, 397-400.

⁶⁵ Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations*, 398-399.

time, white newspapers throughout the United States depicted the most recent Haitian political upheaval as a curiosity or an indication of the barbarism that typified Haitian life. One newspaper in South Dakota even speculated that Salomon had been “voodooed . . . unseated by the discontent of the more ignorant blacks who are snake-olaters, or “voodooists.”” Preoccupied with citing other instances of Haitian political upheaval and conflict with the neighboring Dominican Republic, the paper offered no explanation for why Vodou practitioners would revolt against a man who the paper claimed was actually a “nominal Christian” and a true practitioner of the “faith which seems natural to the untaught African.”⁶⁶

Black journalists chafed at the coverage of the ongoing Haitian unrest in white newspapers. They were especially perturbed that white Americans remained fascinated with exaggerated reports of revolution in the Caribbean while mounting violence perpetrated against African Americans in the United States was excused or ignored. M.E. Bryant, managing editor of the AME’s *Southern Christian Recorder*, condemned journalists who showed this proclivity to focus too much on Haiti to the detriment of black citizens in the United States. Those hypocrites, the editor opined:

Talk about the rebellion in Hayti but where on earth can there be found worse state of affairs than reigns in parts of Louisiana now . . . Part of Louisiana is now in the hands of outlaws, murderers, thieves, cutthroats, assassins, and these scourges of humanity are Anglo Saxon white men.⁶⁷

For Bryant, it was clear that neither Haitians nor the black race held a monopoly on political violence. In fact, he could reasonably conclude that the increase in lynching suggested that savagery was actually endemic in Anglo-American culture.

⁶⁶ “President of Hayti,” *Aberdeen Daily News*, August 31, 1888.

⁶⁷ *Cleveland Gazette*, September 29, 1888.

The indignation of the AME editor would only increase as white Americans began to identify the Haitian unrest as a national threat rather than a mere nuisance. Hyppolite and his minister of exterior relations, Anténor Firmin, had long recognized the benefits of securing the support of the U.S. government through promises of trade concessions and ambiguous discussions of territorial cessions. For their part, U.S. government officials courted Hyppolite and supplied his insurgency with arms shipments and naval support in the hopes of securing a naval station and increased diplomatic influence in Haiti. The realization of an alliance between his rival and the United States created a pronounced anxiety in Légitime and on October 20, 1888 the French-supported Haitian President ordered the seizure of the *Haytian Republic*, a U.S. merchant ship that he correctly suspected of providing transportation for and selling arms and ammunition to the northern insurgents.⁶⁸

White newspapers condemned the seizure and denounced Haitians who evidently could neither govern themselves nor recognize the superiority of a white nation. While the *Philadelphia Inquirer* attributed Haiti's wrongdoing to the self-evident fact that it was not a "decent republican state," the *New York Times* questioned whether Haiti could even be said to have a government, comparing the failed "republic of freedmen" to the unsuccessful "oligarchy of slaveholders" envisioned by the Confederacy. The paper insinuated that the capture of the *Haytian Republic* demonstrated the senselessness of Haitian leaders and it called on the U.S. government to hold them accountable for their impudence.⁶⁹ In an article detailing the diplomatic dispute, the *Chicago Tribune* seconded these points, arguing

⁶⁸ Dubois, *Haiti*, 184-186; Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations*, 398-400.

⁶⁹ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 8, 1888; "The Republic of Hayti," *New York Times*, December 1, 1888.

that the racial inferiority of the Haitian population had placed the United States in an untenable position. Although civil war was endemic within “a race of people . . . volcanic and unsettled in temperament,” on this occasion the United States had been forced to issue a robust diplomatic and military response, protect its citizens abroad, and subdue a people “fully as black as the Southern negro.”⁷⁰ The *Columbus Enquirer-Sun* provided perhaps the most succinct summation of popular opinion. As the Haitian government exercised the rights of any sovereign nation, the Georgia newspaper expressed hope that the actions of the “savages inhabiting that little island” would result in a “good drubbing at the hands of the United States Government.”⁷¹

African Americans responded quite differently to the seizure of the *Haytian Republic*. In November 1888, incumbent Democratic President Grover Cleveland lost re-election despite winning the majority of the popular vote. Leading black Republicans maintained that the triumph of Republican Benjamin Harrison in the Electoral College could be attributed to more than the politician’s progressive stance on domestic race-relations or his interest in maintaining high tariff levels to protect the interests of industrialists and factory workers. In fact, William Calvin Chase contended that the mounting tensions with Haiti helped swing the election. The Republican editor of the *Washington Bee* insisted that Harrison’s black supporters feared that a Democratic victory would mean a heavy-handed response to the Haitian situation, the erosion of Haitian

⁷⁰ “The Black Republic: Full Description of Hayti, Its People and Wars,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 16, 1888.

⁷¹ *Columbus Enquirer-Sun*, December 8, 1888.

autonomy, and, perhaps, greater challenges to black political and civil rights in the United States.⁷²

However effective they may have been in helping usher Cleveland out of office, black Republicans proved less successful in shielding Haiti from conflict with the U.S. government. Even after his electoral defeat, Cleveland heeded incessant calls for action against Haiti's purported impudence. On December 10, 1888, U.S. Secretary of State Thomas F. Bayard sent a naval force to Haiti to demand the return of the *Haytian Republic*. Ten days later, faced with the prospect of bombardment from the U.S. naval force sent to its shore, the Haitian government restored the vessel.⁷³

Indignant black journalists denounced the act as proof that Democratic officials held little respect for black self-government. Calvin Chase found a glaring discrepancy between Cleveland's unwillingness to protect black citizens from lynching at home and his eagerness to defend the property rights of white citizens abroad. The *Washington Bee* editor argued that the "aggressive steps to suppress the little negro government of Hayti . . . confirms what we have often said, that when the negro is involved . . . the democratic administration cannot find law to protect him, but it certainly can find law to suppress him." Cleveland, he continued, "could not find law enough to defend" the African Americans recently murdered by white vigilantes at a Mississippi courthouse. Yet he found

⁷² "Didn't Want a War With Hayti," *Washington Bee*, November 10, 1888. Throughout his campaign Harrison used personal anecdotes that conveyed his past commitment to abolitionism and promises of increased educational opportunities and an open ballot to appeal to black voters. During his tenure in office, he advocated for the Federal Elections Bill, the Blair Education Bill, and antilynching legislation. In the estimation of one historian, these efforts made Harrison the most progressive president on matters of race from the end of Reconstruction to the twentieth century. See George Sinkler, "Benjamin Harrison and the Matter of Race," *Indiana Magazine of History* 65, no. 3 (September 1969): 197-213.

⁷³ Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations*, 400.

ample time to rush to the aid of “a little old ship that did something that it had no business of doing and was captured by a negro government.”⁷⁴ Chase surely realized the dire predicament implied in his editorial. Without political equality, African Americans could not stop atrocities like the Carroll County Courthouse Massacre or end the use of gunboat diplomacy against Haiti. But the increasing frequency of such events indicated that blacks’ prospects for full citizenship and the influence that should accompany it might remain bleak in the foreseeable future.

Other editors agreed that racist critiques of Haiti, the handling of the *Haytian Republic* controversy, and efforts to restrict black civil and political rights were interrelated phenomena. In an editorial appearing in a January 1889 edition of his *Cleveland Gazette*, Harry S. Smith maintained that while Haiti seemed to verify “the old story that Negroes are incapable of self-government . . . we are by no means despairing of the Negroes in Hayti, nor the Negroes in America.” He refused to accept the picture of Haiti painted by St. John as fact and questioned the repetition of his lies by another newspaper in Ohio. Haitians, Smith maintained, should be the accepted authorities when it came to their own affairs and they universally rejected the baseless claims found in *Hayti; or, the Black Republic*. Moreover,

⁷⁴ “Cleveland vs. Hayti,” *The Washington Bee*, December 15, 1888. The incident referred to by Chase occurred on March 17, 1886. On that date, a trial took place at the Carroll County courthouse. Two black brothers took a local white citizen to court on charges of attempted murder following an exchange of gunfire that resulted from a previous disagreement between the two parties. White vigilantes, incensed that blacks would dare take a white citizen to court, burst into the courtroom and fired a barrage of shots at the plaintiffs and the black attendees. By the end of the attack, ten African Americans lay dead and another thirteen would later die from their wounds. Despite national newspaper coverage and calls for an investigation from black politicians, no action was forthcoming from governing officials in Carroll County, Mississippi, or Washington. As of May 2012, the case still remained cold. Rick Ward, “The Carroll County Courthouse Massacre, 1886: A Cold Case File,” *Mississippi History Now* (May 2012).

<http://mshistorynow.mdah.state.ms.us/articles/381/the-carroll-county-courthouse-massacre-1886-a-cold-case-file>

Smith condemned the role played by the U.S. government during the controversy over the *Haytien Republic*. He implied that the Haitian officials were justified in seizing a vessel implicated in subversive activity. Conversely, the aggressive tactics used by the U.S. government to recover the ship were “foolish” and grounded in racial prejudices.⁷⁵

In conclusion, the editor called on the U.S. government and ordinary white citizens to amend their ways. Smith noted that white supremacists criticized and conflated black life in Haiti and the United States. At times, white supremacists pointed to contemporary Haitian political upheaval to justify the political suppression of African Americans. On other occasions, they argued that the ascendancy of black citizens in the United States would replicate the “Negro supremacy” of the Haitian Revolution. Smith, however, did not ask Haitians or African Americans to meet the expectations of Anglo-Americans. Instead, the Cleveland journalist placed the burden of change upon the critics of the black race. Those detractors, Smith surmised, needed to understand a simple truth: African Americans and Haitians would shape their own destinies and neither would be put down in doing so.⁷⁶



The defiant public stances of black journalists coincided with the beginnings of an ominous period for blacks throughout the globe. By the onset of the 1890s, the number of black lynching victims throughout the United States rose, Mississippi succeeded in disfranchising black voters, and white nationalists ascended to political power throughout the South. At the same time, the U.S. government used gunboat diplomacy to force concessions from Haitian officials who they considered innately inferior due to their

⁷⁵ “The Haytien Trouble,” *Cleveland Gazette*, January 5, 1889.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

blackness. Concurrent encroachments by European imperialists in Africa made the delineation of a global color line that distinguished subject colored people from white rulers all the more glaring.

The recognition of these simultaneous developments by black observers heightened their commitment to unambiguous and subversive expressions of sympathy with Haiti. A degree of cultural chauvinism would linger in the words and actions of some African Americans who continued to view culture and civilization in absolutist terms. But journalists, ministers, authors, artists, diplomats, and other aspiring class and elite African Americans began to overlook Haitian cultural differences and emphasize the common ground shared by African Americans and Haitians. Doing so, they surmised, was the only way to contest a rising tide of white supremacy that threatened to erode black political gains in the United States and engulf a singular example of black self-determination in Haiti.

CHAPTER THREE:

LIKE THE STAR OF THE NORTH

Madame O. Esperanza Lois Jeys was constantly on the move. In her youth, she left Haiti to attain an education in England. Decades later, she ended her life as a Christian missionary in Africa. Between those two sojourns, Jeys lived in the United States. Here she worked as a consultant for Charles E. Waterman, an author whose *Carib Queens* recounted the lives of several Haitian women. Her contribution to the novel indicates that she remained connected to her homeland even as she traveled about the globe.¹

At the same time, Jeys developed a Pan-African sensibility during her peripatetic life. Besides assisting Waterman, she became an ardent reader of black newspapers.² Accounts of the social and political difficulties facing African Americans found in them seem to have garnered her empathy. In January 1890, she gave a talk on “The Negro, his Past, Present, and Future” at the Mount Zion AME Church in Battle Creek, Michigan. While the contents of the lecture are ambiguous, its desired outcome is clear. Proceeds from the talk given by the native Haitian went to the National Afro-American League (NAAL), a new organization led

¹ Charles Elmer Waterman, *Carib Queens* (Boston: Bruce Humphries, Inc., 1935); “Carib Queens is New Book from Mechanic Falls Author,” *Lewiston Evening Journal*, December 12, 1932.

² “A Native of Hayti,” *The Freeman*, March 5, 1892.

by T. Thomas Fortune and Bishop Alexander Waters that sought full citizenship and equal rights for African Americans.³

Perhaps owing to her shared commitment to the goals of African Americans, Jeys soon received more invitations to speak before northern black audiences. Jeys gave several additional talks on Haiti and the “reforms of the hour” before leaving Michigan. She next traveled through western New York and northern Pennsylvania. Throughout the spring and summer of 1890, large audiences in each location flocked to AME churches and rural campgrounds to hear her discuss “Hayti and the Haytians,” express pride in being called “Negro,” and lament that Republicans had not done more to empower black women loyal to their party or secure the promise of Reconstruction. In the fall, Jeys went to New York City. There she continued to captivate audiences while also becoming a coveted guest at the dinner parties hosted by the city’s black elite.⁴

At the same time that Jeys found a warm reception among African Americans in the North, a musical group led by two black southerners solidified their bond with Haitians. In the spring of 1890, Matilda and David Jones formed the Star Tennessee Jubilee Singers with the intention of embarking on an international tour. The troupe led by the married couple from the Chesapeake soon departed the United States for Jamaica where they gave their

³ “Battle Creek Chat,” *The Plaindealer*, January 10, 1890. No direct evidence exists to corroborate this link but it is likely that Jeys relied on her consulting work with Waterman and her speaking engagements to fund her future endeavors in Africa. If true, that makes the contribution to the NAAL all the more remarkable.

⁴ *The Plaindealer*, January 24, 1890; “No Cakewalk on the Program,” *New York Age*, May 3, 1890; “Elmira Notes,” *New York Age*, May 17, 1890; “Syracuse Siftings,” *New York Age*, July 12, 1890; “Elmira Notes,” *New York Age*, August 23, 1890; “Brooklyn Briefs,” *New York Age*, October 25, 1890.

first performances. After David returned briefly to the United States to recruit new members, they next proceeded to Haiti.⁵

The highlight of their months spent in the “Black Republic” was a performance given at the Haitian National Palace. In November 1890, President Florvil Hyppolite sent invitations for the event to the “best people” in Port-au-Prince. Palpable excitement quickly swelled among the Haitian elite. On the night of the much-anticipated concert, well-dressed escorts brought the performers into a music hall adorned by palms, ferns, and roses as well as patriotic flags, buntings, and rugs. After the African Americans enjoyed a spread of wine, fruit, and perfumes, the national band struck up a song in their honor. The troupe did not disappoint when it came time for their performance. At its conclusion, the enraptured audience serenaded Matilda with impassioned cries of “star” and “angel.”⁶

More commendations followed the rousing act. Haitian officials presented Matilda with a gold medallion and gave her and another female member of the troupe bouquets of red roses. Attendees then offered the entire group their compliments and toasts during a reception. Most prominent was the address given by Hyppolite. He informed the performers that:

I feel a pride in complimenting you all upon the great advancement and intelligence you have acquired. I feel proud to see the enlightenment my

⁵ John Graziano, “The Early Life and Career of the “Black Patti”: The Odyssey of an African American Singer in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 561-563 and Lynn Abbot and Doug Seroff, *Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889-1895* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 27-40.

⁶ “Journalistic and Personal,” *New York Age*, September 13, 1890; “The Stage,” *The Freeman*, November 1, 1890; “Of Race Interest,” *Cleveland Gazette*, December 27, 1890; Florence Williams, “Guests of Gen. Hyppolite,” *New York Age*, December 27, 1890; “Stage,” *The Freeman*, January 17, 1891

people are making throughout the world. I say my people because we all have sprung from the African race.⁷

The transnational journeys of Jeys and of the Jubilee Singers traversed common cultural terrain. Black northerners accentuated the political saliency of their relationship with Haiti as they encouraged a Haitian speaker who aided the cause of the NAAL, addressed the failings of the Republican Party, and offered her perspective on black progress. In a similar vein, the Star Tennessee tour was much more than a confirmation of black business acumen or proof that black musicians could eschew minstrel stereotypes. Instead, by solidifying their racial kinship with Hyppolite and giving extensive reports on that experience, the singers effectively linked black art in the United States with black culture in Haiti, and black autonomy here with black independence there.

The enthusiastic reception of Jeys and the international travels of the Star Tennessee Jubilee Singers also demonstrate a broader trend in black political culture and public life. During the 1890s, aspiring class and elite African Americans forged ties with Haitians and drew comparisons between black life in Haiti and the United States. This impulse resulted from a conviction that there were clear connections between the plight of African Americans, who faced a rising tide of disfranchisement, lynching, and *de jure* segregation, and the misfortune of Haitians, who confronted the intensified antagonism of the U.S. government and the condescension of white foreigners. The inclination to link developments in Haiti and the United States only strengthened when Jeys, Hyppolite, and

⁷ Williams, "Guests of Gen. Hyppolite." The troupe left Haiti on January 5, 1891. After touring in St. Thomas, Barbados, Grenada, British Guiana, Antigua, St. Kitts, Montserrat, and Nevis, they returned to the United States on July 6, 1891.

other prominent Haitians appeared willing to draw explicit parallels between the two communities of the African Diaspora.

To be certain, perception was reality for black leaders. Scholars have made a compelling case that U.S. racism could limit imperial policy as well as buttress it. But for African Americans experiencing the “nadir” of U.S. race relations all evidence suggested that anti-black attitudes reinforced affronts to Haiti. In turn, they surmised that those affronts strengthened the very anti-black attitudes that caused them. So, although ambivalent about U.S. expansion in general, they unequivocally rallied to the defense of Haiti.⁸ The numerous African Americans who crafted new narratives about the Haitian Revolution, justified Haitian independence, and extolled the prospect of Haitian progress could not ignore the relationship between the Haitian struggle for political autonomy and the African American effort to attain it. Indeed, they insinuated that Haiti was the final battleground on which blacks would contest white supremacy—rhetorically and, at times, quite literally. A cohort of aspiring class and elite African Americans thus insisted that transcending Jim Crowism at home required the triumph of Haiti over those who threatened her existence in word and in practice.



During the first months of 1889, the connection between racist critiques of Haiti and threats to its sovereignty grew clearer to black newspaper editors. White journalists and editorialists in every region of the United States perpetuated sensational tales of wanton violence, human sacrifice, cannibalism, sexual depravity, and degenerate Vodou rituals in

⁸ Along with Love and Gatewood, on race and empire in U.S. history see especially Michele Mitchell “The Black Man’s Burden: African Americans, Imperialism, and Notions of Racial Manhood 1890-1910,” *International Review of Social History* 44 (1999): 77-99.

Haiti.⁹ Some detractors explicitly linked their negative assessments of Haitian life to their support for intervention by white Americans in Haiti. An editorial in a January edition of the *Kansas City Gazette* complained that the consistent reports on Haitian savagery were becoming tiresome and it called on fellow “white folks and Christians to step in and put an end to the dirty muddle” caused by a “degraded race” in need of soap and civilization. In response, John L. Waller, editor of the *Topeka American Citizen*, drew attention to the hypocrisy of those white Americans who imagined themselves as agents of civilization. The former slave denounced his journalistic counterpart, arguing:

It seems to us that the white folks and Christians have a broad field for missionary operations here at home. For a more dirty, savage and muddled state of affairs never existed than is to be found in Christian America . . . we feel quite sure that the “white folks and Christians” will never civilize the Haytians with a Bible in one hand and a shot gun in the other; and therefore have no need of shipping a “lot of soap.” The Negroes of Hayti, are not stuck on Yankee and British religion.”¹⁰

Concurrent developments in the Pacific reinforced the opinion that an increased presence of white Americans in Haiti would be problematic at best. During the late 1880s, the Samoan Islands came under the imperial gaze of the United States, Great Britain, and Germany. At the height of diplomatic tensions, U.S. and German warships engaged in a tense standoff in a Samoan harbor that only ended when a storm wrecked them. Dozens of U.S. citizens lost their lives as a result of a natural disaster that temporarily made the senselessness of the hostilities clear to the contending nations. In the wake of the storm,

⁹ The list of negative assessments of Haiti permeating white America, even in one month, is extensive but for a representative sample see “Hayti’s Despot,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 9, 1889; “Horrible Atrocities in Hayti,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 12, 1889; and “Cannibals in Hayti: The Blood-Curdling Religious Rites of the Paplois,” *The Daily American*, January 18, 1889.

¹⁰ “White Folks and Christians in Hayti,” *The American Citizen*, January 25, 1889.

Germany, the United States, and Great Britain met in Berlin, where they agreed to a wide-ranging treaty that ensured the persistence of foreign landholding and foreign judicial and governmental influence in an ostensibly sovereign Samoa.¹¹

The black press decided that the Samoan issue confirmed the hypocritical and oppressive nature of U.S. foreign policy. In January 1889, Waller asked whether “Cleveland and the American people feel proud of his great and brave act in bullying the feeble republic of Hayti when Canada and the German Empire have for the last year been . . . shaking their fists in our face.”¹² After another black newspaper opined that consistency should mandate a swift response to the German affronts, editor Charles Hendley of the *Huntsville Gazette* advised his peer to remember that “Germany is nearer Uncle Sam’s equal in strength than little Hayti” and thus would likely suffer no repercussions for its challenges to U.S. interests abroad. In Hendley’s estimation, the dichotomous actions in the Caribbean and the Pacific had proven beyond doubt that the United States was a “cowardly bully.”¹³

Partisan interests undoubtedly accounted for much of the criticism leveled at an inconsistent and racist U.S. foreign policy. Waller and Hendley both identified themselves as Republicans, secured federal appointments from Republican presidents, and used their newspapers to trumpet their party. Subscribers of their papers could expect to read consistent critiques of the Democratic Party, including on those occasions when the interests of Haitians seemed to be under siege. At times, recipients of black Republican publications voiced their own displeasure with a Democratic Party that seemed to show

¹¹ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle: A Study in Anglo-German-American Relations, 1878-1900* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1974).

¹² *The American Citizen*, January 18, 1889.

¹³ *Huntsville Gazette*, January 26, 1889.

little interest in respecting the rights of blacks at home or abroad. On one occasion, a reader of the *Washington Bee* wrote the editor claiming that the treatment of Haiti was in “striking contrast” to the diplomatic relations between the United States and Germany. In the letter, the writer asserted that “in the one case they pursue a bulldozing, intimidating policy, born of the knowledge of superior strength, in the other a weak, vacillating, cowardly course.” The unjust treatment of Haiti and the perceived cowardice in the face of German impudence led the writer to lament: “Oh! Democrats why were you ever made.”¹⁴

At the same time, leading black Republicans alleged that their government’s focus on dominating colored people abroad exacerbated racial injustice at home. In February 1889, Harry C. Smith told readers of his *Cleveland Gazette* that he could not muster any outrage over perceived challenges to U.S. interests in Haiti, Samoa, or elsewhere when “our American citizens, colorless, are *insulting* our American citizens, colored, within their very own borders.” The Republican editor noted that while white Americans became incensed over the *Haytien Republic*, countless “defenceless and offenceless (sic) colored people are *shot down* in cold blood . . . driven from their homes regardless of sex or innocence.” Smith argued that “Hayti and Samoa have offered no grosser insult to America and her citizens than America is inflicting on them every day” and he called on white Americans to be “*shamed* that open rapine and fratricide under their very noses haven’t been given the effective attention of the proper authorities.”¹⁵ For Smith, U.S. imperialism not only endangered the sovereignty of Haitians and Samoans but it also deflected needed attention from the ongoing efforts to restrict black civil and political rights.

¹⁴ Jay-Kay, “American Diplomacy,” *The Washington Bee*, February 9, 1889.

¹⁵ “America—Hayti—Samoa,” *Cleveland Gazette*, February 23, 1889.

Even those African Americans who were skeptical of the Republican Party raised questions about the treatment of Haiti by Democratic officials. Edward Cooper, a self-proclaimed political independent, founded the Indianapolis *Freeman* in part due to his dissatisfaction with the Republican Party in Indiana.¹⁶ He also campaigned for Cleveland and criticized Harrison. Despite his political leanings, Cooper expressed doubt about the outgoing Democratic administration's dedication to a uniform and consistent foreign policy. Specifically, he noted that "there was no danger in knocking a chip off little Hayti's shoulder but how about tackling big Germany's right shoulder."¹⁷ Given Cooper's later support for U.S. expansionism, his question likely had less to do with protecting the sovereignty of what he admitted was "the greatest and foremost black republic" and more to do with ensuring that the U.S. government protected its foreign interests no matter the adversary.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the *Freeman* editor brought attention to the ways in which U.S. foreign policy replicated a domestic agenda that increasingly entailed separate and unequal treatment for blacks and whites.

When Benjamin Harrison took office, African Americans who had voiced unease with Cleveland's foreign policy faced a new set of concerns. The transition to a Republican administration produced a scramble for the limited federal appointments still available to African Americans. Some prominent black Republicans attempted to gain the diplomatic

¹⁶ George L. Knox, *Slave and Freeman: The Autobiography of George L. Knox*, ed. Willard B. Gatewood, Jr. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1979), 26; Aleen J. Ratzlaff, "Illustrated African American Journalism: Political Cartooning in the *Indianapolis Freeman*," in *Seeking a Voice: Images of Race and Gender in the 19th Century Press*, eds., David B. Sachsman, S. Kitrell Rushing, and Roy Morris, Jr. (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2009), 132.

¹⁷ "Scintillations," *The Freeman*, February 2, 1889.

¹⁸ *The Freeman*, July 13, 1889.

post in Port-au-Prince for themselves while black journalists nominated a number of politicians, educators, veterans, journalists, and pastors as potential successors to diplomat John E.W. Thompson.¹⁹ A diverse range of personal and regional interests made a consensus on the ideal candidate unattainable but African Americans widely agreed that the Haitian post should be filled from their ranks.

In June 1889, the Harrison administration produced contradictory responses in Haiti and the United States by offering the diplomatic post in Port-au-Prince to Frederick Douglass. Following his appointment, 1,500 black Washingtonians gathered at the Metropolitan AME Church for a special service held in the new minister's honor. The congregation presented Douglass with a Bible bound in morocco leather "as a token of their esteem prior to his departure."²⁰ Haitians held an even more favorable view of Harrison's selection. While the Haitian minister to Washington predicted that Douglass's presence in Port-au-Prince meant the end of any attempts to annex Haitian territory, Alonzo P. Holly asserted that Haitians hailed the appointment of a former slave who could "appreciate the heroic efforts of a nation whose past history influenced . . . his own career."²¹ In their estimation, Douglass's appointment was the beginning of a new era in U.S.—Haitian relations.

¹⁹"Hayti 'Serves Notice,'" *Cleveland Gazette*, April 6, 1889; "The Race's Doings," *Cleveland Gazette*, February 9, 1889; "Personal," *The Freeman*, February 23, 1889; *Cleveland Gazette*, March 2, 1889; "Possible Minister to Hayti," *Weekly Pelican*, April 2, 1889; "Hon. John L. Waller," *The Freeman*, February 16, 1889.

²⁰ "Mr. Douglass' Bible," *The Washington Post*, September 2, 1889.

²¹ Dubois, *Haiti*, 187; Alonzo P. Holly, "What Hayti Has Done," *New York Age*, July 27, 1889 in Box 17, Reel 11, Frederick Douglass Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (hereafter cited as Douglass Papers).

Other leading African Americans, who were concerned with dwindling black participation in national politics, reacted with ambivalence. Some editors who opposed Douglass's politics or disagreed with his marriage to a white wife expressed regret over his nomination. Edward Cooper articulated a popular view that the appointment of Douglass was fitting albeit insufficient. His *Freeman* printed a political cartoon that depicted Harrison, dressed as a Roman emperor, tossing a plum labeled "Haytian Mission" to Douglass, who stood aboard a boat bound to Haiti as other African Americans strained to catch the fruit. The caption of the cartoon read, "Frederick gets the 'Plum' while the Score of other Applicants Must Look for Something Else."²²

Other editors joined Cooper in lamenting the scarce options left available to the less illustrious yet equally gifted individuals among "the score of other applicants." Harry C. Smith made clear his regret that Harrison had not chosen to select one of "the more deserving and more intelligent young men of the race" who were "restless and heartily sick of the appointment to office every four years of the same chronic office seekers and holders of color."²³ William B. Townsend was a bit more tactful in voicing his displeasure. Even though the editor of the *Leavenworth Advocate* admitted that Douglass was an individual who "certainly demands recognition," Townsend expressed disappointment that fellow Kansan Waller had been overlooked despite his relative youth, "valuable services to the Republican Party," and "unsurpassed qualifications."²⁴ John L. Waller's *American Citizen* simply remarked that Douglass's appointment would likely not garner "general approval,"

²² *The Freeman*, July 20, 1889 quoted in Ratzlaff, 135.

²³ *Cleveland Gazette*, July 6, 1889.

²⁴ *Leavenworth Advocate*, July 6, 1889.

an unsurprising view given the editor's own desire for the Haitian post.²⁵ Although unfair to Douglass, the critiques of Harrison's decision demonstrate the importance that African Americans placed on their relationship to Haiti at a time when avenues to black political influence in the United States constricted.

Douglass was initially unenthusiastic about assuming the position. But, once he did, he quickly confirmed his standing as an ally of the Haitian people and a worthy appointee to the coveted post. Douglass previously had most desired the positions of Recorder of Deeds in Washington, D.C. or minister resident and consul general to Egypt. After receiving neither and accepting the Haitian appointment, Douglass set about distancing himself from his past support of U.S. annexation of the Dominican Republic and began stressing his hopes for Haiti's future.²⁶ A few weeks after his appointment, Douglass submitted a letter to the *Washington Post* in which he assured skeptics that Haiti was "in the process of evolution, not of decay or of retrogression." In fact, Haitians were emulating their counterparts in the United States, transcending their civil unrest, and emerging "a stronger, wiser, happier, and more united people." Douglass stressed further that he was going to Haiti "with a view to advance the interests of the people likely to be most benefited by the wise, peaceful, and orderly government of what is called "The Black Republic.""²⁷ The meaning of this statement was unambiguous to Douglass's contemporaries. Even white

²⁵ *American Citizen*, July 5, 1889. While disappointment was pervasive, some editors expressed publicly their contentment with Harrison's appointment. Charles Hendley argued that Douglass's acceptance of the position would "give dignity to the mission to the black Republic." *Huntsville Gazette*, July 6, 1889.

²⁶ In his biography of Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington noted that some detractors "urged that Douglass would not be well received because at one time he favoured the annexation of San Domingo." Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 298.

²⁷ "Minister Douglass Has Faith in the Future of Hayti," *Huntsville Gazette*, July 13, 1889.

journalists surmised that the venerable race leader wanted to ensure “the peace, well-being, and happiness of Hayti” not only for the sake of Haitians but also for the benefit of African Americans “much in need of an example of [black] self-government.”²⁸

The public statements issued by Douglass appeased his black critics while also reflecting his sincere belief that the fates of African Americans and Haitians were intertwined. Douglass knew that white Americans had long “cited [Haiti] against the cause of freedom in the United States.” Now, as widespread disfranchisement loomed, he acknowledged that white supremacists continued to point to Haiti “as an argument against the ability of the colored race to govern itself.” Douglass noted that contemporary detractors tended to say, “‘Look at Hayti! Torn and rent by division and revolution,’ and ask us what we can expect of the American Negro” who desired full political and civil equality.²⁹ He understood that these persistent and exaggerated comparisons between black life in the United States and Haiti would continue so it behooved African Americans to address their relationship with Haitians in optimistic terms.

Consequently, Douglass chose not only to cite the potential of future Haitian progress but also accentuate the positives of contemporary Haitian life. He described Haiti as a decidedly cosmopolitan nation that participated in international commerce even though foreign powers tried to isolate it.³⁰ At the same time, Douglass celebrated the fact that no foreign invader had succeeded in conquering Haitian territory since that nation won its independence. Even after encountering endemic poverty following his arrival in

²⁸ “Frederick Douglass and Hayti,” *New York Morning Journal*, July 26, 1889 in the Douglass Papers, 17:11.

²⁹ “Minister Douglass Has Faith in the Future of Hayti.”

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Port-au-Prince, Douglass surmised that the Haitian masses were far from hopeless because they were free.³¹ He further insisted that the material condition of ordinary Haitians would only improve under the wise governance of Hyppolite. His interest in Haitian history as well as his faith in contemporary Haiti led Douglass to inform the Haitian President that he had received no higher honor than his current diplomatic appointment.³²

Although hyperbolic, the new minister's words reveal a common commitment to a nation that was critical to black hopes for equal citizenship. Other black leaders voiced similar understandings of Haiti's symbolic importance and offered comparable expressions of sympathy with the "Black Republic." As Douglass left the United States for Haiti, the Detroit *Plaindealer* acknowledged that Haiti provided "stock arguments" for the "negrophobic repressionists" who insisted on the black race's proven "incapacity for self government." The paper, which was edited by Benjamin and Robert Pelham, Jr., Walter H. Stowers, and W.H. Anderson, admitted that Haiti's political culture had produced some "terrible examples of repression" but maintained that governing officials in Haiti were no more authoritarian than some of their European counterparts, including the Spanish rulers of Cuba.³³ Readers of the editorial were thus encouraged to conclude that political disorder or, conversely, political stability could not be attributed to racial traits.

³¹ "The Sage Waxes Eloquent," *The Plaindealer*, November 8, 1889.

³² Louis Martin Sears, "Frederick Douglass and the Mission to Haiti, 1889-1891," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 21, no. 2 (May 1941): 225; "Welcomed to Hayti," *The Plaindealer*, December 6, 1889.

³³ *The Plaindealer*, October 11, 1889.

AME leaders also rallied to defend Haiti from white critics.³⁴ In a letter published in black newspapers, Solomon Porter Hood departed from his church's past ambivalence on Haitian progress. He began by rejecting the notion that Haitians acquiesced to white supremacy and desired a white minister resident and consul general from the United States. The superintendent of AME missions in Haiti maintained that Haitians were the "proudest and most self-respecting people" that he had met and their appreciation of their "dearly bought liberty" and racial pride made them receptive to but not desirous of a white representative of the U.S. government. The AME minister proceeded to deny the most sensational accounts of the latest political upheaval in Haiti. For instance, he refuted the rumor that Haitian insurgents armed women, instead implying that Haitians adhered to the same attitudes about gender roles that prevailed in the West. Hood concluded his public correspondence by rejecting the racial prejudice that seemed to justify the U.S. government's treatment of Haiti. He insisted that Haiti possessed "many brave men, many highly educated" individuals capable of leading a country "with possibilities so vast that they can not be calculated."³⁵

Hood's faith in the grand possibilities of a Haitian state led by accomplished black men faced considerable resistance. In the United States, rumors proliferated that Secretary of State James G. Blaine intended to establish a protectorate over Haiti or simply annex the country. This supposed scheme to establish U.S. control over Haiti resonated with many Americans. Some advocates of U.S. expansion championed the annexation of Haiti as an act that would prove profitable to U.S. investors and rid Haiti of its cultural backwardness and

³⁴ On the relationship between AME leaders and Haiti during the Age of Imperialism see Little, 134-146.

³⁵ Solomon Porter Hood, "Haytians Libeled," *Cleveland Gazette*, November 2, 1889.

incessant instability. Others proposed an annexed Haiti as a site where black workers could emigrate and provide cheap labor for white businessmen.³⁶ Even some prominent African Americans voiced their support of annexation. Edward Cooper was among those who insisted that Haitian instability was not a reflection of black capabilities and called on the U.S. government to establish the peace and stability that seemingly eluded Haitian officials. In short, presaging the beliefs of a later generation of black leaders, the editor and his allies had surmised that an independent Haiti did more harm than good.³⁷



By 1890, the prospects for the annexation of Haiti seemed to increase. As already established by Ulysses S. Grant's attempts to annex the Dominican Republic during the 1870s, Republican administrations had previously endorsed imperialist expansion. Upon taking office, Harrison made clear his intention of building upon this legacy and solidifying the Republican Party's commitment to an aggressive foreign policy. For instance, the new president informed Americans that the demands of the U.S. navy required convenient coaling stations and he promised to build a larger navy, create an international canal zone in Central America conducive to U.S. interests, and support a federally subsidized merchant marine.³⁸

³⁶ For a representative sample of newspaper editorials on this subject see, "An American Protectorate for Hayti," *Chicago Tribune*, October 18, 1889; "The Only Hope for Hayti: White Men Must Develop the Country," *New York Times*, October 24, 1889; "The Acquisition of Hayti," *Chicago Tribune*, November 1, 1889; "Uncle Sam's Designs," *Daily American*, December 24, 1889.

³⁷ "Hayti's Deliverance," *The Freeman*, October 12, 1889; M.W. Caldwell, "Letter to a White-Liner," *New York Age*, June 21, 1890; Alonzo P. Holly, "What Hayti Has Done," *New York Age*, July 27, 1889, in the Douglass Papers, 17:11.

³⁸ Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations*, 411-414.

The implications of this imperialist impulse for Haitians soon became apparent. The Harrison administration subscribed to a long-standing belief that Haiti's Môle St. Nicolas was a particularly desirable prize because of its location at the northern entrance to the Windward Passage, its ample harbors, and its defensible geographical features. Eight months after Harrison's inauguration, the *Yantic*, an unauthorized U.S. naval warship, arrived at the Môle to ascertain the distance from the Haitian port to other Caribbean islands where Europeans had established telegraph cables. By the winter of 1890, James G. Blaine received authorization to employ forceful diplomatic tactics to acquire the Môle while Rear Admiral Bancroft Gherardi, Commander-in-Chief of the North Atlantic Fleet, closely monitored the political situation in Haiti to assess the prospects for U.S. territorial gains there.³⁹

As the U.S. government pursued its imperial initiatives, black leaders showed growing sensitivity to persistent criticisms of Haiti. Harry C. Smith used what was becoming a common strategy among black journalists when he pointed to the hypocrisy of the exaggerated reports of Haitian disorder. In February and March 1890, the *Cleveland Gazette* editor chastised the Associated Press for producing its "monthly batch of lies about Hayti," advising the influential news source that rising reports of lynching proved that "less in proportion transpires in Hayti than in the United States to disgrace the country."⁴⁰ In a similar fashion, T. Thomas Fortune rebuked a southern newspaper that broadcast disparaging accounts of Haitian life found in Sir Spencer St. John's notorious memoir and *The English in the West Indies, or the Bow of Ulysses*, a recent travelogue written by a

³⁹ Myra Himelhoch, "Frederick Douglass and Haiti's Mole St. Nicolas," *The Journal of Negro History* 56, no. 3 (July 1971): 161-170.

⁴⁰ *Cleveland Gazette*, February 15 and March 29, 1890.

protégé of Thomas Carlyle.⁴¹ The editors of the Detroit *Plaindealer* joined their counterparts in defending a country that was, in their estimation, unfairly “pointed to as an example of the failure of the Negro to govern.” After imploring Haiti’s detractors to acknowledge the “prowess and bravery which had made that little island an independent nation,” the editors again insisted that civil unrest throughout Europe, South America, and the United States showed that race was not a determinant of political instability. Haiti, they argued, thus could be considered “no example of anything save . . . its peculiar disadvantages.”⁴²

These rebuttals of anti-Haitian criticism assumed a more urgent quality because black spokespeople identified a link between Jim Crowism and imperialism. One contributor to the Detroit *Plaindealer* responded to rumors that Douglass was being tasked with securing the annexation of Haiti by expressing his hope that “such a thing will never be under the present state of affairs.” The correspondent surmised that if the U.S. government refused to protect its “loyal citizens” and condoned the abhorrent treatment of black southerners then there could be no rationale for the annexation of Haiti.⁴³ Other black commentators would subsequently express a fear that the racism that abetted domestic anti-black violence *was* the rationale for threats to black autonomy abroad.

⁴¹ *New York Age*, October 11, 1890. On the publication of and response to James Anthony Froude’s *The English in the West Indies* see Winston James, “Culture, Labor, and Race in the Shadow of US Capital,” in *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and Its Peoples*, eds., Stephan Palmié and Francisco A. Scarano (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011): 445-459.

⁴² *The Plaindealer*, August 8, 1890.

⁴³ W.H.H.J., “His Pet Plan,” *The Plaindealer*, January 11, 1890.

Douglass attempted to assuage this mounting anxiety by stressing the cordial state of U.S.—Haitian relations. In the fall of 1890, Douglass returned to the United States on a leave of absence from his post in Haiti. His homecoming was of interest to both white and black Americans eager to hear his assessment of the “Black Republic.” In published correspondences and interviews given during that time, Douglass insisted that Haiti’s progress was remarkable given its humble origins and subsequent diplomatic isolation. Moreover, he assured Americans that the Haitian government was “free from internal strife,” well-liked by an industrious and independent Haitian populace, and on the “most amicable terms” with the U.S. government.⁴⁴ Those willing to accept Douglass’s appraisal could thus assume that Haitians faced no internal or external impediments to national prosperity.

Such reassurances, however, did not satisfy African Americans who harbored skepticism about U.S. foreign policy. Harry C. Smith chastised Douglass for telling an interviewer that he had “come to the conclusion that Hayti has a future.” The journalist accused Douglass of being late in acknowledging that “any country . . . that has produced such men as Toussaint . . . and has outlived such internal dissensions as Hayti has for eighty or ninety years, ‘has a future.’”⁴⁵ Douglass had long been a staunch advocate for Haiti even if his appraisals of that country betrayed a cultural absolutism that equated progress with the moral, technical, and material advancements achieved by Anglo-Americans. This fact

⁴⁴ “Hayti and the South,” *Biddeford Daily Journal*, August 16, 1890 in the Douglass Papers; “Hayti Getting Better,” *The Boston Daily Globe*, August 19, 1890 in the Douglass Papers; “Fred Douglass Heard From,” *Torchlight Appeal*, February 22, 1890; *The Plaindealer*, April 18, 1890; *Washington Bee*, August 2, 1890.

⁴⁵ *Cleveland Gazette*, August 2, 1890. While focused on Douglass’s commentary on Haiti, Smith’s critique was also personal. The editor had criticized Douglass’s appointment to the Haitian post in the previous year.

was lost on Smith, however. As disregard for black self-determination seemed to intensify, any commentary on Haiti that contained a hint of disparagement was bound to catch the attention of the *Cleveland Gazette* editor.

J. Gordon Street held Douglass to a similarly lofty standard. The Jamaican-born editor of the *Boston Courant* took exception when Douglass told a reporter that the isolation forced upon Haiti by the United States and various European nations was a critical factor in its turbulent political history. While intended to shield Haitians from their detractors, Douglass's assertion failed to adequately vindicate the project of black self-government. Street fumed that Douglass should have "shown that the Haytians are no more prone to revolution than the peoples of Central and South America" whose political upheavals did not "provoke the same unfavorable notice that invariably attends similar contests in Hayti." In chastising Douglass for not effectively countering "the enemies of the black man" who cried out "'Look at Hayti, colored men can't govern themselves,'" the *Courant* editor communicated a common perspective on the precarious relationship between Haiti and black progress.⁴⁶

Public statements that implied interventionist motives on the part of Douglass and the U.S. government received even more scrutiny from the black press. While speaking to yet another reporter during his visit to the United States, Douglass remarked that "Port-au-Prince is a beautiful city, too, and I can hardly imagine the possibilities of that land under the hands of thrifty Americans."⁴⁷ T. Thomas Fortune immediately admonished the esteemed race leader for a comment that seemed to reflect the desires of U.S. officials for

⁴⁶ *Boston Courant*, undated, in the Douglass Papers 17:11.

⁴⁷ "Minister Douglass at Home," *New York Age*, August 2, 1890.

increased influence over Haiti. The *New York Age* editor, who previously cautioned that Haitians should fear their leaders more than foreign powers, educated Douglass on the “possibilities” of a Haitian state controlled by “thrifty Americans.” “Race prejudice,” Fortune opined, “would soon reduce the [Haitians] to the same condition of government and peonage in the industrial system which prevail in Bermuda, Jamaica, Barbados, and . . . to a greater extent in every one of our own Southeastern and Southwestern States.” Putting the shared struggle of Haitians and African Americans in biblical terms, he continued:

Let us hope and pray that the heroic blacks of Hayti will work out a grand and enduring destiny without the selfish and inhuman assistance of “thrifty Americans,” who believe in and practice this doctrine that God created the black Samson to be kicked and cuffed and robbed and “kept in his place” by the white Philistines.⁴⁸

Fortune’s editorial offered a resounding denunciation of white supremacy, whether it prevailed in the United States, the Caribbean, or anywhere else. Contrary to the opinions of white Americans who lacked humanity and, apparently, a sound reading of Scripture, God had not created Samson to “be kicked and cuffed and robbed and “kept in his place.”” Instead, Samson was given to his parents by the Angel of the Lord and appointed to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. After being captured and blinded by the Philistines, God answered Samson’s prayers and gave him the strength to tear down the temple in which he was imprisoned, in the process killing everyone in it.⁴⁹ For a black readership that already identified with the Israelites, the subversive nature of the editorial was surely clear.

As Fortune insisted that God sided with oppressed black people, other black intellectuals reinforced their connection to embattled Haiti in different ways. While

⁴⁸ ““Thrifty Americans” and Hayti,” *New York Age*, August 2, 1890; “Hayti’s Misfortunes,” *New York Age*, July 27, 1889 in the Douglass Papers.

⁴⁹ Book of Judges. 13-16. (New International Version)

Archibald H. Grimké advocated for greater economic ties between African Americans and Haitians, one ambitious black Floridian reported his success in cultivating oranges and shipping them to buyers in Haiti.⁵⁰ At the same time, black writers and lecturers continued to give black newspaper readers, attendees at church gatherings and campground meetings, and participants in literary societies reflections on the past accomplishments of Louverture, Dessalines, Henri Christophe, Jean Pierre Boyer and other Haitian leaders.⁵¹

Black bibliophiles also paid attention to the writings of Haitian descendants of black émigrés. Arthur Bowler was a lawyer by trade but he spent much of his career writing and speaking in defense of his parents' adopted homeland.⁵² While most of his books and lectures were published in French by Parisian presses, the translation of his *Une Conference Sur Haiti* reached educated African Americans. T. Thomas Fortune and Frederick Douglass were among those who appreciated a work that firmly rebuked racist caricatures of Haiti by highlighting the country's sound educational system, republican form of government,

⁵⁰ "Condition, Not Color," *New York Age*, January 11, 1890; "Items of the Age," *New York Age*, January 4, 1890; *The Freeman*, January 18, 1890.

⁵¹ "Brooklyn Briefs," *New York Age*, January 25, 1890; "A Few Great Leaders," *New York Age*, July 5, 1890; "The Church," *The Freeman*, August 23, 1890; "Look at Hayti," *The Plaindealer*, September 19, 1890.

⁵² See Léo Quesnel, Jules Auguste, Clément Denis, Arthur Bowler, Justin Dévost, and Louis Joseph Janvier, *Les Detracteurs de la Race Noire et de la République D'Haiti* (Paris: Marpon et Flammarion, 1882); Bowler, *Une Conference sur Haïti: En Réponse aux Détracteurs de ma Race, Notamment à Sir Spenser-St-John, Ministre Plénipotentiaire de S.M.B. au Mexique* (Paris, E. Dentu, 1888); and Bowler, *Haïti: Étude Économique et Politique* (Paris: C. Bayle, 1889). In January of 1891, Bowler started *Haïti en Europe*, a newspaper that the U.S. press reported was to be published in Paris for the express purpose of "informing Europeans as to the character of the Haytian people and the resources of the country." "Haitee en Europe," *New York Age*, January 10, 1891; *Cleveland Gazette*, January 17, 1891.

and participation in global diplomacy and commerce.⁵³ In Bowler's book readers discovered an "able defence of his people and the institutions of his country," along with evidence of the "strength and vitality" that had been the "preserving force" of African Americans as well as Haitians.⁵⁴

The lessons in black resiliency offered by Haitians were timely. During a thirty-year period beginning in 1890, white vigilantes lynched two or three black victims every week.⁵⁵ Moreover, in March 1890, the U.S. Senate defeated the Blair Education Bill. Black leaders chastised the Republican senators who joined with southern Democrats in opposing legislation that had come to represent their greatest hope for equal educational opportunities.⁵⁶ Months later, the 51st Congress further eroded the country's commitment to black citizens when it defeated a Federal Elections Bill that would have deterred the intimidation of black voters by strengthening federal oversight of congressional elections. Afterwards, Democrats and their sympathizers claimed they had thwarted the rise of

⁵³ Arthur Bowler, *A Lecture Upon Hayti: In Reply to the Detractors of My Country, Particularly to Sir Spenser St John, Plenipotentiary Minister of H.R.M. to Mexico* (Paris: A. Fagandet, 1890) in the Douglass Papers 17:11. The copy found in the Douglass Papers is signed by Bowler and contains a brief note to Douglass.

⁵⁴ "Recent Publications," *New York Age*, March 14, 1891.

⁵⁵ On lynching see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002); and Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

⁵⁶ See Daniel W. Crofts, "The Black Response to the Blair Education Bill," *The Journal of Southern History* 37, no. 1 (February 1971): 41-65.

“another Hayti.”⁵⁷ The negligence of national officials left African Americans at the mercy of local politicians, including Mississippians whose poll taxes, literacy tests, and other disfranchisement measures soon spread to other southern states. African Americans would continue to resist political domination by joining grassroots agrarian organizations and advocating for the Populist Party. But, to paraphrase one black Alabamian, the tide appeared to be setting in strongly against them in whatever direction they looked.⁵⁸

Indeed, black spokesmen assumed that this heightened commitment to white supremacy was not only a domestic reality but also a transnational threat. After affirming African Americans’ “brotherly interest” in Haiti, T. Thomas Fortune admonished a Port-au-Prince correspondent of the New York *Evening Post* who alleged that blacks were incapable of self-government. Calling the disparaging remarks a “white man’s dictum,” Fortune asserted that white newspapers and their correspondents were “constitutionally incapable of making an honest estimate of the capacity of the black in Hayti or the United States or Africa.” Still, the editor advised Haitians to unify because perceptions of Haitian backwardness increased the danger of “some grasping power” seizing control of their country. As other black newspapers extolled Haiti as a land of “millions of independent, self-governing Negroes,” Fortune warned that the disregard for black political participation

⁵⁷ See Richard E. Welch, Jr., “The Federal Elections Bill of 1890: Postscripts and Prelude,” *The Journal of American History* 52, no. 3 (December 1965): 511-526; “Hayti in America,” *New York Age*, May 9, 1891.

⁵⁸ William Henry Harrison Hart to Frederick Douglass, February 14, 1890 in the Douglass Papers, General Correspondence.

showed by white lynch mobs, politicians, and journalists could lead to the “degradation” of Haitians.⁵⁹ Events would soon prove him all too prescient.



In December 1890, Douglass returned to Haiti with verbal instructions to begin negotiations for U.S. possession of Môle St. Nicolas. His first opportunity to broach the subject with Haitian officials came on New Year’s Day when Haitian Minister of Foreign Affairs Anténor Firmin paid the U.S. minister resident and consul general a visit. On that occasion, Firmin denounced a U.S. newspaper for repeating the allegation that Hyppolite had promised the Môle to the United States as recompense for their assistance in bringing him to power. Douglass agreed that the claim was baseless but he stressed the U.S. government’s willingness to lease, rent, or purchase the Môle according to “proper means . . . consistent with the peace and welfare of Hayti.” Although their conversation was interrupted, Firmin’s icy reaction to Douglass’s proposal reinforced the U.S. diplomat’s belief that there was “no one point upon which the people of Haiti are more sensitive, superstitious, and united, than upon any question touching the cession of any part of their territory.”⁶⁰

Undeterred, U.S. officials intensified their efforts to attain the Môle. On January 25, 1891, Rear Admiral Bancroft Gherardi arrived in Port-au-Prince with instructions to effectively supplant Douglass and assume the lead role in direct negotiations for the port. Three days later, he, Douglass, Firmin, Hyppolite, and an interpreter sat around a

⁵⁹ “Haytian Troubles,” *New York Age*, February 8, 1890; “Clippings, Here & There,” *The Freeman*, December 6, 1890; “News of Interest,” *Washington Bee*, December 20, 1890.

⁶⁰ Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations*, 438-439; Frederick Douglass to James G. Blaine, January 6, 1891 in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass Vol. 4*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: International Publishers, 1955), 460.

conference table discussing the U.S. acquisition of territory that contemporaries suggested had become “mystically bound” to national autonomy in the Haitian imagination.⁶¹ Gherardi stressed the Haitian government’s indebtedness to the United States and insisted that the Môle was the U.S. government’s rightful possession in return for its services rendered. Douglass tried to moderate the admiral’s discomfiting candor by appealing to Haitian sensibilities. He insisted that “the concession asked for was in the line of good neighborhood and advanced civilization, and in every way consistent with the autonomy of Haiti.” Moreover, while sympathetic to their suspicion of foreign powers, he informed Haitian officials that national isolation was an antiquated policy no longer necessitated by Haiti’s previous circumstances in a world dominated by slaveholding nations.⁶²

Hyppolite and Firmin found Gherardi combative and Douglass unpersuasive. Firmin denied that the Môle had been promised to the U.S. government, pointing out that U.S. officials did not possess original documentation to support their claim to Haitian territory. Incensed, Gherardi shouted that Hyppolite was “morally bound” to concede the Môle. At this point, Douglass interceded. The diplomat recoiled at the admission that the U.S. government had affected regime change in a sovereign nation. He stated bluntly that he would “not accept this as a foundation upon which I could base my diplomacy.” Firmin

⁶¹ C.H. Hollister to William H. Seward, September 7, 1868, *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1869), part 2, p. 362.

⁶² Logan, *The Diplomatic Relation*, 440-441; William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 348-349; Frederick Douglass, “Haïti and the United States: Inside History of the Negotiations for the Môle St. Nicolas I,” *North American Review* 153, no. 418 (September 1891): 343-344.

subsequently terminated the meeting and asked that the United States put a coherent request for the Môle in writing.⁶³

Ensuing negotiations followed a similar discordant course. Gherardi blustered at the unwillingness of Haitian officials to cede a part of their territory and chafed at Firmin's insinuation that he did not possess proper diplomatic credentials. For his part, Douglass vacillated between his support for the U.S. government and his respect for the wishes of Haitian officials. In the end, he was not surprised when Firmin finally declined to lease the Môle and closed negotiations on April 24, 1891. For the astute student of Haitian history, the decision reflected a rational preoccupation with protecting the gains of the Haitian Revolution.⁶⁴

While black leaders did not regret the collapse of the objectionable negotiations, white Americans roundly accused Douglass of betraying his country. T. Thomas Fortune spoke for many of his peers when he condemned the United States for using "the methods of the bulldozer or the highwayman" in its attempts to secure Haitian territory.⁶⁵ White journalists, however, did not find such heavy-handed diplomacy problematic and held Douglass responsible for dashing their imperialistic hopes. Newspapers loyal to both major national parties repeated their longstanding conviction that the United States required a white diplomat in Haiti. In a representative editorial, an April 1891 edition of the *Chicago Tribune* opined:

There is no question . . . that Mr. Douglass's administration of our interests has been a failure and that he is incompetent to hold the position. The

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 344-345.

⁶⁴ McFeely, 350-351; Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations*, 442-451.

⁶⁵ "American Interference in the Affairs of Haiti," *New York Age*, January 4, 1890.

cession of the St. Nicholas Mole is of the utmost importance to this Government, as it is needed for a coaling station in connection with American interests . . . While, all other things being equal, a colored man would be preferable at the Haytian court, commercial reasons must be paramount in this case, and if a colored man cannot be found who is competent then a white man should be sent.⁶⁶

The assumptions regarding race and foreign relations that girded these views were obvious to Douglass. In an interview with the *New York Age*, Douglass remarked that calls for a white diplomat in Haiti were grounded in the belief that “more can be won from the fears of Hayti than can be obtained from [its] reason and good will and on the still further assumption that a white man will command compliance with his demands upon a black man.” To the detriment of those who most maligned Douglass, this attitude was grounded in a U.S. experience and did not account for Haiti’s unique history. Haitians, Douglass asserted, “demonstrated by the assertion of independence that they could look a white man squarely in the eye and never lower their chin an inch.”⁶⁷ For Douglass and other black spokesmen, the failed negotiations for the Môle thus affirmed the central lesson of the Haitian Revolution: foreign powers would make no inroads into Haiti without the invitation of Haitians.⁶⁸

In fact, the black press generally viewed the Haitian government’s denial of U.S. claims to Haitian territory as rational expressions of independence and race pride. As the negotiations collapsed, some black journalists correctly surmised that Hyppolite and Firmin feared a backlash and potential uprising if they failed to guard their country’s

⁶⁶ “The Haytian Complication,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 18, 1891.

⁶⁷ “Fred Douglass on Hayti,” *New York Age*, undated, Douglass Papers, 17:11.

⁶⁸ *Cleveland Gazette*, June 13, 1891.

independence.⁶⁹ Other editors noted that Douglass was not given the lead diplomatic role that the minister resident and consul general deserved and speculated that this slight adversely impacted the negotiations.⁷⁰ Haitians, Charles Hendley asserted, took offense to the condescension directed towards African Americans by their white counterparts. His *Huntsville Gazette* cited a Port-au-Prince correspondent who alleged that the obstinacy of the Haitian government was influenced by U.S. officials' treatment of Douglass and Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett, who worked as Douglass's secretary in Haiti. Furthermore, Hendley's paper repeated the correspondent's insinuation that widespread disapproval of U.S. racism among the Haitian masses affected their government's stance on the Môle.⁷¹ The editor of the St. Paul, Minnesota *Appeal* subsequently articulated the conclusion reached by leading African Americans. In his estimation, it was clearly Haitians' rejection of "color prejudice" and not any failings on Douglass's part that "prevented the United States from securing the Môle St. Nicolas."⁷²

These observations did little to appease critics so Douglass took further measures to rebut speculation that his difficulties proved the unfitness of blacks for diplomatic service. After returning to the United States and resigning his post on July 30, 1891, Douglass shared his perspective on the negotiations for the Môle in a two-part article published in the *North American Review*. In "Haïti and the United States: Inside History of the Negotiations for the Môle St. Nicolas," Douglass reaffirmed his support of a Pan-American

⁶⁹ "News of the Week," *State Capitol*, May 2, 1891.

⁷⁰ "Minister Douglass Insulted," *Cleveland Gazette*, April 18, 1891.

⁷¹ "Môle St. Nicolas," *Huntsville Gazette*, May 16, 1891.

⁷² *The Appeal*, May 28, 1891.

network of trade dominated by the United States. Rather than recognizing his approval of U.S. hemispheric hegemony, however, Secretary of State Blaine had given Gherardi diplomatic authority based on an assumption that Haitians would defer to a white man. Douglass argued that this belief was absurd, pointing out that Haitians were familiar with U.S. racism and thus apt to reject any hypocrite who subjugated African Americans while professing to deal equitably with Haitians. Moreover, Douglass maintained that even if a white diplomat could exploit Haiti such tactics would be unbecoming of a nation that should “ask nothing of Haïti on grounds less just and reasonable than those upon which they would ask anything of France or England.”⁷³

The failure in U.S. diplomacy thus lay with white policymakers, not black diplomats. Douglass concluded that Haitians’ “well-known, deeply-rooted, and easily-excited” sensitivity to foreign threats and their knowledge of white Americans’ “peculiar and intense prejudice against the colored race” were the principle reasons for the collapse of the Môle negotiations. Secure in the knowledge that he performed his “honorable duty” as a federal officeholder even as U.S. officials treated Haiti unfavorably, Douglass offered a succinct message of racial pride. “I am charged with sympathy for Haiti,” the former minister resident and consul general maintained,” but “I am not ashamed of that charge.”⁷⁴

In the aftermath of the Môle negotiations and the publication of “Inside History,” Douglass and other black spokesmen advocated for Haiti with renewed vigor. Following his defiance of the United States, Hyppolite quelled an attempted coup before ordering the

⁷³ Douglass, “Haïti and the United States, I,” 338-340.

⁷⁴ Douglass, “Haïti and the United States, II,” *North American Review* 153, no. 419 (October 1891): 452-453; Douglass, “Haïti and the United States, I,” 340.

deaths of all conspirators as well as their friends and families. When the actions of the Haitian President produced a new round of critiques from white Americans, African Americans rallied to the defense of the “Black Republic.” Douglass told a black reporter that Hyppolite’s actions were justified and he predicted that peace would soon reign in Haiti. He further insisted that widespread representations of an anarchic or declining Haitian state were incorrect. Instead, Douglass stressed that Haiti was making “wonderful progress” in several regards, particularly by welcoming telegraph and cable technology, building electric plants, bridges, and railroads, and maintaining strong schools and churches. In conclusion, he denied that Haitian revolutions proved the incapacity of the black race for self-government. Upon hearing the optimistic assessment of Haitian progress, the Washington correspondent of the *New York Age* felt inclined to “burst . . . into a joyous acclaim and applause.”⁷⁵

Racial affinity was not the only factor shaping black perspectives on Haiti. Unlike their white counterparts, leading African Americans valued the thoughts of Haitians who typically did not despair of their country’s future. For example, in informing his readers about Haiti, T. Thomas Fortune relied on information provided by Roche Grellier, a former Haitian Minister of Agriculture and Public Instruction. Fortune’s *New York Age* featured lengthy reviews of two works by Grellier, *Haïti: Son Passé, Son Avenir* and *Études Économiques sur Haïti*. The former rejected racist arguments about black self-government by attributing Haitian political instability to partisan squabbles while the latter emphasized Haitians’ ability to surmount those disagreements and achieve commercial success. Fortune shared the opinion of his reviewer that Grellier’s books were a triumph of reason

⁷⁵ E.L. Thornton, “Mr. Douglass on Hayti,” *New York Age*, July 11, 1891; “Minister Douglass Interviewed,” *The Freeman*, July 18, 1891.

over prejudice. After reading both examples of Haitian scholarship and spending hours with his “good friend” Grellier, the *New York Age* editor concluded that *Haïti: Son Passé, Son Avenir* and *Études Économiques sur Haïti* provided “the truth about Hayti.”⁷⁶

African Americans with first-hand knowledge of Haitian social and political conditions corroborated Grellier’s assessment of his country. Even as his church shifted its attention to missionary work in Africa, Solomon Porter Hood tried to correct the “erroneous ideas” about a Haitian people “looked upon as savages . . . as an illustration of the Negro’s incapacity to govern himself.”⁷⁷ In a two-part article published in the *A.M.E. Church Review*, the resident of Port-au-Prince argued that Haitian political turmoil was a result of the conflict between a Liberal Party that favored light-skinned candidates and a National Party that praised past black rulers while blaming mulatto contemporaries for Haiti’s ills. Hood explained that the roots of this color prejudice in Haiti could be found in the colonial era when the French created divisions between whites, free people of color, and the enslaved black masses. He lambasted white supremacists who ignored this history while standing “in cold criticism of the Negro—whether struggling alone, as in Liberia, Haiti, or San Domingo, in a manly independence . . . or, in the United States battling against desperate odds.” These critics seemed to forget that “the faults they now condemn in the race are but the scars of their inhumanity,” their infliction of wounds on the enslaved that

⁷⁶ Roche Grellier, *Haïti: Son Passé, Son Avenir* (Paris: Arthur Rousseau, 1891) and *Études Économiques sur Haïti* (Paris: Arthur Rousseau, 1891); Paul Drayton, “Hayti’s Past and Future,” *New York Age*, July 11, 1891 and “Haytian Economic Studies,” *New York Age*, August 29, 1891; “The Truth About Hayti,” *New York Age*, July 11, 1891; “Personal and Pertinent,” *New York Age*, June 20, 1891; Fortune, “Men Worth Talking About,” *New York Age*, January 2, 1892.

⁷⁷ Hood, “Haiti: Paper I,” *The A.M.E. Church Review* 8, no. 1 (July 1891): 11.

might take generations to heal.⁷⁸ By rejecting theories of innate black inferiority and examining the role of class and color politics in Haitian society, Hood did more than identify the residual effects of historical oppression. He also subverted the racialized distinction between civilization and savagery that prevailed in the Western world.

Some of Hood's peers added to this assessment, insisting that the persistence of racism in the United States invalidated criticisms of Haitian life and culture. M.W. Caldwell had previously decried Haitian political upheavals and tried to distinguish African Americans from Haitians. Now the porter from New York City contrasted Haitian civility with southern barbarity. Haiti, Caldwell remarked, far surpassed the United States in maintaining law and justice. He chastised white Americans who condemned Haiti without recognizing that there was no parallel to their own country's "brutal and fiendish murdering in any civilized and Christian country in the entire world."⁷⁹ The editors of the *Plaindealer* elaborated on this point. Although admitting that Hyppolite's harsh suppression of revolutionaries was shocking, they asked "how often would the civilized world be shocked by equally barbarous crimes in the South if all the facts could be known."⁸⁰ Their paper lambasted Haiti's critics, inquiring whether there was "any more of Christianity, of civilization, of refinement in the almost daily outrages committed by chivalrous (?) bourbons against defenseless Afro-Americans (men, women, and children) than there is in the reported outrages in Hayti?" The answer to these questions was

⁷⁸ Hood, "Haiti: Paper II," *A.M.E. Church Review* 9, no. 1 (July 1892): 35.

⁷⁹ Caldwell, "The Record of Shame: Appalling List of Victims Lynched Last Year," *The Plaindealer*, February 3, 1893; Caldwell, "A Terrible Example: Will the Government Persist in Refusing to Defend and Protect Its Citizens," *The Plaindealer*, April 8, 1892.

⁸⁰ *The Plaindealer*, June 19, 1891.

obvious. For the Detroit journalists, the “fiercer cruelty of those reputed to be civilized” rendered them incapable of speaking intelligently about Haiti.⁸¹

T. Thomas Fortune affirmed the suggestion that beaten and burned black bodies hanging from southern trees were the results of true barbarism. In response to a northern paper that argued that Haitian political upheaval justified the defeat of the Federal Elections Bill, the *New York Age* editor pointed out that the “administration of affairs in Hayti is as orderly as in any one of the Southern States.” It was the South, not Haiti, where “lynch law, a corrupt administration of the civil law, a universal denial of civil rights and a suppression of . . . legal electors under the Federal Constitution prevail.”⁸² Fortune suggested that white southerners look to Haiti for lessons on proper governance. After a Louisville journal argued that developments in Haiti validated the suppression of black voters, Fortune insisted that southern governments could learn from Hyppolite’s proper use of “the function of every State to maintain its authority against mobocracy and insurrection.” In the future, he advised, southern policymakers and journalists should devote more attention to “Southern butcheries” that perpetuated lawlessness and concern themselves less with “Haytian massacres” that upheld law and order.⁸³

Some African Americans found the imperialistic ambitions supported by these anti-Haitian diatribes even more galling. Even after Haiti demonstrated its tenacity during the Môle affair, black leaders fretted that exaggerations of Haitian political violence reinforced the interventionist proposals of U.S. and European policymakers. Several black

⁸¹ *The Plaindealer*, September, 4, 1891.

⁸² “Hayti in America,” *New York Age*, May 9, 1891.

⁸³ “Hayti and the South Compared,” *New York Age*, June 21, 1891.

newspapers speculated that European nations had designs on acquiring Haitian territory through the use of force.⁸⁴ Fortune was sure “that the menacing tone of American newspapers towards the Haytian Republic . . . emboldened the European cabinets” pondering collective action to “restore order” in Haiti. U.S. officials, he argued, could rectify the situation by treating Haiti as a sovereign power, compelling Europeans to do the same, and allowing Haiti to “work out its own destiny.”⁸⁵ In no way should white Americans contemplate increasing their own influence in Haitian affairs, though. Fortune opined that until “the South is made, forced, compelled, to live up to the Constitutional provision of according equal and exact justice to all citizens . . . we shall have no time to look after the disorders . . . of sister governments.” Americans, he concluded, “have as much as they can manage at home.”⁸⁶

Despite this admonition, many African Americans found the distinction between “home” and “abroad” increasingly arbitrary. In particular, the visual arts that some produced and consumed demonstrate a heightened identification with a Haitian people whose struggles paralleled their own travails. After the passage of a Separate Coach Law in neighboring Arkansas, a black Texan decided to emigrate to the Dominican Republic. His only concern about the potential move was whether or not Dominicans had any interest in buying the life-sized portraits of Toussaint Louverture that he sold “at sight” in the United

⁸⁴ *The Plaindealer*, July 3, 1891.

⁸⁵ “European Intervention in Hayti,” *New York Age*, June 27, 1891.

⁸⁶ “We Have Enough to Do At Home,” *New York Age*, July 11, 1891.

States.⁸⁷ At the same time, thousands of African Americans flocked to the annual North Carolina Negro State Fair, an occasion that was not only a premier social event but also a mass political gathering. Speeches by North Carolina Congressman Henry P. Cheatham and former Louisiana Lieutenant Governor P.B.S. Pinchback were meant to establish the tone of the festivities. Yet, as the two men echoed typical New South oratory by urging black economic advancement and interracial cooperation, ordinary fair participants made their own statements about black identity and progress. One group of black women from Wilmington submitted an exhibit that included a basket made entirely of shells found on the beaches of Haiti. For them, African Americans aspiring to a higher status should affirm their bond with Haitians, not court the favor of their white counterparts.⁸⁸

Emancipation celebrations provided another opportunity for African Americans to reinforce their relationship with Haiti. In August 1891, an estimated quarter of the black population in Kansas gathered to celebrate the anniversary of emancipation in the West Indies. Rather than emphasizing the Slavery Abolition Act that ended slavery throughout the British colonies, the black celebrants placed Haiti at the forefront of their event. They honored Toussaint Louverture for firing “the first gun that broke the backbone of African slavery” and commemorated the independence of Haiti, “the most advanced negro government on earth.”⁸⁹ Months after thousands of black Kansans testified to Haiti’s

⁸⁷ Sumner Welles, *Naboth’s Vineyard: The Dominican Republic 1844-1924* (New York: Payson & Clarke, 1928), 467.

⁸⁸ Maggie Whitman to Charles Hunter, Hunter Scrapbook, Charles N. Hunter Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. On the NCIA and the Negro State Fair, see John H. Haley, *Charles N. Hunter and Race Relations in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 46-49, 85-86.

⁸⁹ “Our National Holiday,” *Historic Times*, August 1, 1891.

bearing on their progress, African Americans in Delaware gathered for the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Hundreds of celebrants packed the Bethel AME Church where they enjoyed songs of jubilee and a reading of the Emancipation Proclamation. Along with these staples of Emancipation celebrations, the event featured a speech by Frederick Douglass. The great orator's lecture on "Hayti and its Relations to the Colored People of the United States" helped attendees visualize themselves not as isolated victims of racism but as part of an ongoing struggle for black political autonomy occurring in Haiti, too.⁹⁰

Black journalists attempted to capitalize on this heightened affinity between African Americans and Haitians. In the fall of 1891, Edward Cooper hired an agent in Port-au-Prince. Joseph Desce, a Haitian convert of the Episcopal church, reported success in selling the *Freeman* to his countrymen who felt "proud of a journal" that advertised "the best that the race is and does."⁹¹ He even managed to place copies of the Indianapolis paper into the hands of President Hyppolite, insisting that the Haitian leader take note of a publication that reflected African Americans' "fraternal feelings" and "sympathy" for a nation whose struggles led them "into the broad, free air of liberty, peace, progress and happiness."⁹² As he secured subscribers for the *Freeman* among educated African Americans and Haitians in Port-au-Prince, Desce also served as a correspondent for Cooper's paper. With his help, blacks in the United States gained access to first-hand accounts of Haitian society. Articles

⁹⁰ "Mr. Douglass in Delaware," *New York Age*, July 9, 1892.

⁹¹ J. Montague Simpson, *Six Months in Port-au-Prince* (Philadelphia: G.S. Ferguson Company, 1905), 78; *The Freeman*, October 3, 1891; "Port-au-Prince, Hayti," *The Freeman*, October 24, 1891; Desce, who was fluent in English, worked as an agent for several other American companies in Port-au-Prince. *The Freeman*, November 14, 1891 and December 19, 1891.

⁹² "President Hyppolite," *The Freeman*, July 9, 1892.

of interest included descriptions of the social gatherings of the Haitian elite, interviews with minister resident and consul general John S. Durham, and news of other African Americans who made Haiti their temporary or permanent residence.⁹³

The transnational circulation of the *Freeman* was significant but no event linked African American and Haitian public life more than the World's Columbian Exposition. Known colloquially as the Chicago's World Fair, the event possessed multiple meanings. Officially, it was a commemoration of the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas. Unofficially, the fair showcased the material and cultural progress of the United States and cemented its status as an imperial power. Over the course of a three-year planning and construction process, thousands of people paid to watch the erection of fair buildings that testified to their greatness. Not all Americans were enthused, however. African Americans objected to their exclusion from the fair's planning process, the rejection of their proposed exhibits by all-white state committees, and the caricatures of black life that were authorized by fair officials. Some prominent African Americans including anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells even called for a boycott of an event that reflected a broader attempt to control the black presence in national politics and public life. Wells would remain a vocal critic of the Columbian Exposition but she eventually joined Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Paul Laurence Dunbar and other black leaders who advised African Americans to use their limited participation in the fair to their advantage. African Americans who heeded this advice did not identify the hiring of black janitors and waiters or the creation of a separate day for black attendees as endorsements

⁹³ "A Gala Day in Hayti," *The Freeman*, May 21, 1892; "Port-au-Prince, Hayti," *The Freeman*, October 24, 1891; "The Freeman in Hayti," *The Freeman*, April 9, 1892.

of their progress. Instead, they relied on Haiti to demonstrate black achievement to the twenty-seven million people who would attend the fair.⁹⁴

African Americans who placed this burden on Haiti were vindicated throughout the months leading up to the Columbian Exposition. Each nation represented at the fair had the opportunity to erect a national pavilion and appoint an official representative. In March 1892, the Haitian government honored Frederick Douglass by appointing him as its official commissioner in Chicago. Sol Johnson remarked that the Haitian government had “come to the aid of the colored people of the United States” with its recognition of Douglass. The editor of the *Savannah Tribune* argued that his appointment was “surely a slap in the face” of the organizers of an event that minimized the progress of African Americans. For their subversive action, Johnson gave the Haitian government a hearty “bravo.”⁹⁵

At the same time, educated blacks throughout the United States noted the efficient planning and construction of the Haitian Pavilion.⁹⁶ Charles Sumner Dixon argued that the organizing efforts of “the little republic of Hayti, one of the grandest existing” demonstrated its “energy, patriotism and punctuality.” As Haiti moved towards becoming the first country to complete its national structure, the future student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology claimed that Haiti’s accomplishment would “go down in history to its ever-

⁹⁴ On the Columbian Exposition see Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire and American International Expositions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 38-72.

⁹⁵ *Savannah Tribune*, March 12, 1892.

⁹⁶ “Hayti at the World’s Fair,” *Wisconsin Afro-American*, August 13, 1892; “Hayti at the Fair,” *The Plaindealer*, August 19, 1892; *Washington Bee*, January 14, 1893; “News and Sentiment,” *Huntsville Gazette*, January 21, 1893.

lasting credit.”⁹⁷ Charles Hendley elaborated on this point. The leading black journalist in Alabama reprinted a report that linked the completion of the Haitian Pavilion to black progress. To his liking, the early dedication of a structure that would display Haitian “progress in the arts of civilization” persuaded some white Americans that black self-government could succeed.⁹⁸

In fact, the Haitian Pavilion appealed to black observers because it undermined the representation of civilization and progress intended by fair organizers. The World’s Fair was divided into two sections—a clean, well-organized arrangement of neoclassical buildings known as the “White City” and a Midway Plaisance dedicated to a variety of amusements. On the Midway Plaisance, a mile-long avenue running through the fairgrounds, visitors were treated to mock representations of “primitive” people from foreign countries. The exoticized Dahomey Village, for example, gave attendees the opportunity to measure their own progress and define their whiteness as the opposite of black backwardness. One popular souvenir book of the World’s Fair appended a picture of the Fon occupants of the Dahomey Village’s thatched huts with the following report:

If you were on the Midway and heard wild thumping of a drum and harsh shouting, and a parting of the people right and left, you were sure to see a large white man born on a palanquin by half-dressed Negroes, who went by on a sort of canter. These were a detachment from the Dahomeyan village, carrying their master . . . Though they were not handsome, people flocked into the village and witnessed the rites and ceremonies of the villagers. Though they were representatives of Cannibal tribes they restrained their appetites for human flesh while at the Exposition.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ “Deadlocked by a Negro,” *The Freeman*, August 20, 1892.

⁹⁸ “Hayti’s Pavilion,” *Huntsville Gazette*, January 7, 1893.

⁹⁹ Christopher Robert Reed, “*All the World is Here!*” *The Black Presence at White City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), Appendix III.

While Frederick Douglass recoiled at the portrayal of “the Negro as repulsive savage,” the reaction of white fairgoers to the West African spectacle is more difficult to ascertain.¹⁰⁰ Still, it is conceivable that some fairgoers noticed the delineation between white masters and black servants and experienced feelings of nostalgia for antebellum racial relations.

Haiti’s presence at the fair, however, did not comply with any ideal of black subservience. The Haitian Pavilion stood in the northwest section of the fairgrounds alongside the pavilions of European and Latin American nations whose independence anteceded Haiti’s. Its Greco-Colonial architecture confirmed the country’s cultural refinement while manufactured goods and samples of coffee showcased Haitian material growth and commerce. White Americans flocked to the pavilion to greet Frederick Douglass and leading African Americans such as Alexander Crummell made it their chosen location to mingle with one another, socialize with Haitians, and meet other foreign dignitaries. Moreover, poet Paul Laurence Dunbar found employment at the Haitian Pavilion while Ida B. Wells used it to distribute ten thousand copies of *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in The World’s Columbian Exposition*, a pamphlet that critiqued lynching and the convict lease system, described the achievements of African Americans since Emancipation, and condemned the politics of exclusion at the fair. Reflecting on the remarkable amount of activism flourishing there, Wells captured the prevailing sentiment of her peers when she characterized the edifice as “one of the gems of the World’s Fair.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass, Irvine Garland Penn, Ferdinand L. Barnett, *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not at the World’s Columbian Exposition: The Afro-American’s Contribution to Columbian Literature*, ed. Robert W. Rydell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 13.

¹⁰¹ Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Alfreda Duster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 116. For previous treatment of African

On January 2, 1893, Frederick Douglass made two speeches that confirmed the importance of the Haitian Pavilion to African Americans. At midday, Haiti's commissioner gave the keynote address for the dedication of the building to a biracial audience that was quite small on account of poor weather. This initial speech was fitting for a representative of the Haitian government speaking at an official ceremony. It emphasized the remarkable triumph of the Haitian Revolution, suggested the equality of all races, and advocated for Haiti's place within "the sisterhood of nations."¹⁰²

Douglass's second speech, however, deviated from this moderate tone. In an oration delivered that evening before 1,500 African Americans at Chicago's Quinn Chapel, Douglass detailed the advancement of "the only self-made Black Republic in the world" and emphasized the historical debt owed to Haiti by African Americans. He proceeded to inform audience members that racism had reinforced similarities between black life in Haiti and the United States. As vigilantes and politicians challenged black masculinity through lynching and disfranchisement, Douglass noted that white Americans refused to recognize the "manhood" of Haitian citizens because they had "not yet forgiven Haiti for being black."¹⁰³ Yet, to the great pleasure of the audience, Douglass reassured them that

Americans' use of the Haitian Pavilion see Reed, 172-179 and Barbara J. Ballard, "African-American Protest and the Role of the Haitian Pavilion at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair," in *Multiculturalism: Roots and Realities*, ed. C. James Trotman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002): 108-120.

¹⁰² "Remarks of Mr. Douglass on the Occasion of the Opening of the Haitian Pavilion at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago," Douglass Papers, Speech, Article, and Book File.

¹⁰³ "Lecture on Haiti," Douglass Papers, Speech Article, and Book File, "Haiti," Folder 9, 9-10. On the rhetorical difference between and publishing histories of Douglass's two January 2 speeches see Glen McLish, "Frederick Douglass and the Consequences of Rhetoric: The Interpretive Framing and Publication History of the 2 January 1893 Haiti Speeches," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 30, No. 1 (Winter 2012): 37-73.

just as African Americans refused to accept political dependency, the Haitian government was not willing to supplicate before white supremacists. Consequently, the great orator's re-telling of tiny Haiti's refusal to cede the Môle St. Nicholas to the mighty Americans assumed an allegorical quality for African Americans in attendance.¹⁰⁴

Douglass concluded his speech with a metaphor that foreshadowed Haiti's endurance as an exemplar of black self-government. The most famous escaped slave in the United States surmised that Haiti:

Still lives and grows, and I predict, will yet be tall and strong. Her wealth is greater, her population is larger, her credit is higher, her currency is sounder, her progress is surer, her statesmen are abler, her patriotism is nobler, and her government is steadier and firmer than twenty years ago . . . I will not, I cannot believe that her star is to go out in darkness, but I will rather believe that whatever may happen of peace or war Haiti will remain in the firmament of nations, and, like the star of the north, will shine on and shine on forever.¹⁰⁵

Erupting in sustained applause, the audience endorsed Douglass's understanding of their freedom struggle and Haiti's integral place in it. Just as fugitive slaves once used the North Star to guide them towards freedom, so too did black citizens now look to Haiti as a new "star of the north" capable of guiding them towards true self-determination.



Unfortunately, the Haitian "star" appeared increasingly isolated. Months after Douglass affirmed the connection between African Americans and Haitians, black leaders took part in a weeklong Congress on African Ethnology held at the Chicago fairgrounds. Nearly a decade after European powers met to partition Africa at the Berlin Congress of 1884-1885, Henry McNeal Turner, Alexander Crummell, Frederick Douglass, John Mercer

¹⁰⁴"Lecture on Haiti," 12.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

Langston, and T. Thomas Fortune joined white imperialists and missionaries in discussing how best to transform African culture. Some scholars have mistakenly described the participation of African Americans as a defiant stance against “racist imperialism” but, in reality, black leaders condoned an agenda that focused on establishing civilization, Christianity, and commerce in Africa. For instance, Turner’s discourse on the African origins of humanity and his subsequent emphasis on the obligation to uplift contemporary Africans was meant to inform, not challenge, white reformers who extolled the “civilizing agencies and influences of Christendom . . . founding lighthouses of civilization amid inland seas of savagery.”¹⁰⁶

Black participation in the Congress reflected not only cultural biases but also an understanding of broader geopolitical developments. By the late nineteenth century, most of Africa, including the homeland of Chicago’s Fon visitors, was under European control. To numerous black elites, it thus appeared that African colonization was a *fait accompli* that they could better moderate than oppose. Indeed, even the autonomy of the “black republics” of Ethiopia and Liberia seemed precarious or questionable. While the Liberian commissioner to the World’s Fair advocated for more trade between Liberia and its “parent country,” observers noted that U.S. influence on Liberian development was evident in the similarities between those countries’ flags. These signs of dependency in the former colony

¹⁰⁶ *The Daily Inter-Ocean*, August 16, 1893 and *The Chicago Times*, August 16, 1893; Frederick Perry Noble, “Africa at the Columbian Exposition,” *Our Day: A Record and Review of Current Reform* 9, No. 59 (November 1892): 774. Another contemporary account of the Congress can be found in Noble, “The Chicago Congress on Africa,” *Our Day* 10, No. 70 (October 1893): 284-293. Christopher Robert Reed’s argument that African American participants made the Congress a precursor to the first Pan-African Congress of 1900 by collaborating with Africans to contest racist imperialism in Africa fails to engage the broader worldviews of Turner, Crummell, or their peers. Reed, 179-191.

of the American Colonization Society led one black speaker at the Congress on African Ethnology to lament that Liberia “depended too little on herself.”¹⁰⁷

As the scramble for Africa proceeded with minimal resistance from non-Africans, African Americans reinforced their support for and affinity with Haiti. Black journalists continued to denounce the treatment of Haiti by the United States and European governments, noting the presence of racism in the insults offered to Haitian officials.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, more prosperous African Americans devoted their leisure time and disposable income to cultural events and products pertaining to Haiti. Black Texans attended readings of a play about Dessalines produced by black playwright William Edgar Easton while African Americans in the eastern states heard lectures on the present and future progress of Haiti including those given by Frederick Douglass during the final months of his life.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, African Americans who wanted to decorate their homes, businesses, or educational institutions with pictures of prominent Haitians had the opportunity to do so. Throughout the mid-1890s, *The Freeman* sold pictures of Hyppolite and Louverture among its “Portraits of Distinguished Afro-Americans.”¹¹⁰

The representations of Louverture assumed a particular importance for African Americans searching for examples of black resistance to white oppression. In the same

¹⁰⁷ “Liberians at the Fair,” *Cleveland Gazette*, April 29, 1893; “How Liberia Came to the World’s Fair,” *Cleveland Gazette*, September 16, 1893; “The Chicago Congress on Africa,” 290-293.

¹⁰⁸ *Savannah Tribune*, January 28, 1893.

¹⁰⁹ “Public Reading of the Book of Dessalines,” *The Freeman*, April 22, 1893; “Frederick Douglass,” *The Parson’s Weekly Blade*, April 7, 1894; “Literary Work,” *The Freeman*, November 7, 1896.

¹¹⁰ *The Freeman*, February 24, 1894.

month that the Supreme Court upheld the legality of racial segregation in public facilities, a correspondent of *The Freeman* implored African Americans to demonstrate the same resiliency as their Haitian predecessors. The writer called on his peers to refute racist arguments with facts, devote their energies to correcting “prejudice and wrong,” and subsequently drive “Negro haters from the field” just as “Toussaint beat down the strongest arms of Europe and made Hayti free.”¹¹¹ A year later, editor Julius F. Taylor of the Salt Lake City *Broad Ax* gave his readers a biography of “the greatest negro that the world has ever produced.” The final installment of the weekly series echoed the enduring sentiment of abolitionist Wendell Phillips by arguing that Louverture’s greatness surpassed that of Napoleon Bonaparte, Oliver Cromwell, and George Washington.¹¹² For readers of the popular journal, the assessment of the Haitian hero served as a timely reminder that blacks possessed a history of surmounting impossible odds.

Indeed, the example of Louverture became an invaluable resource for aspiring class and elite black men. By the middle of the 1890s, economic transformations, women’s rights activism, and working class labor movements led middle class white men to re-conceptualize manhood. Besides ridiculing women’s suffragists, introducing “sissy” into the vernacular, leading the Boy Scouts, and participating in boxing, they equated male power with white supremacy.¹¹³ African Americans recognized the consequences of new discourses that ultimately defined [white] manliness as the highest form of manhood,

¹¹¹ Ruben Ray, “What Does it Mean,” *The Freeman*, April 4, 1896.

¹¹² *The Broad Ax*, March 27, 1897 and “Toussaint L’Ouverture and the Republic of Hayti,” *Broad Ax*, May 15, 1897. The installments of the Toussaint biography were published every week beginning on April 3.

¹¹³ These transformations are best captured in Bederman, 1-45.

associated manhood with civilization, and characterized civilization as a precursor to self-government. Unwilling to accept the disfranchisement, lynching, and low-economic status legitimized by their purported lack of manhood, black men devised strategies to demonstrate their manliness. While many identified the surge of U.S. imperialism as an opportunity to confirm their manly qualities, other professionals pointed to Haitians for proof that blackness and manhood were not incompatible.¹¹⁴

Black educators and journalists were among those who accentuated the manliness of Louverture and his successors. In August 1896, the principal of a black secondary school delivered an address titled “Will the Negro Be a Man?” before a crowd in Palestine, Texas. Undaunted by the attempts to deny African Americans the political, social, and economic prerogatives of manhood, he answered the question in the affirmative. After all, Louverture “caused the proud Napoleon to bow low his haughty head . . . overthrew the French yoke from Hayti and established a government amid the chaotic ruins of an ignorant people.”¹¹⁵ Calvin Chase noted that Haitians still possessed the aggressiveness and physical force that middle class whites increasingly associated with manliness. Three years after U.S. military forces helped overthrow Queen Lili’uokalani of the Hawaiian Kingdom, the *Washington Bee* editor reflected on that imperial conquest. He challenged those who created the opportunity for the annexation of Hawaii to “attempt to depose the President of Hayti and see what would be the result.”¹¹⁶ By juxtaposing the actual

¹¹⁴ For the best treatment of race, manhood, and imperialism in black discourse see Mitchell, “The Black Man’s Burden.”

¹¹⁵ H.L. Price, “Will the Negro Be a Man? What He Has Achieved as a Soldier and a Citizen,” *The Freeman*, August 29, 1896.

¹¹⁶ “Liliuokalani,” *Washington Bee*, December 19, 1896.

overthrow of the Hawaiian Queen with the theoretical resistance of Haitian President Tirésias Simon Sam, Chase not only vindicated black manhood but questioned the manliness of white males who were only fit to conquer the purportedly weaker sex.

Black missionaries established similar claims to manhood by memorializing the feats of Haitians, past and present. In 1896, Charles W. Mossell completed *Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Hero of Saint Domingo*, an expansive book that chronicled the Haitian Revolution, detailed Haitian political, diplomatic, and religious history, presented a number of Haitian proverbs, and recounted Haiti's presentation at the recent Columbian Exposition. Throughout the work, the AME minister associated Haitian achievements with manliness. For instance, he identified the Haitian Revolution as a "remarkable and successful assertion of liberty and manhood" and characterized subsequent Haitian leaders as men whose authority contrasted popular depictions of effeminate black men in the United States. Moreover, Mossell implied that the material evidence of Haitian civilization available at the recent Columbian Exposition had undermined fair organizers who hoped that the Dahomey Village would link blackness with barbarism and unmanliness. In fact, the Haitians of generations past and those who represented that country in Chicago confirmed that blacks were manlier than their white counterparts who hoped to subjugate them through legal and extralegal means. Mossell maintained that his book proved that "while the noblest qualities of heart and mind do not at all enter into the character of the whites . . . they most assuredly ornament the lives of the blacks who are civilized."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Charles W. Mossell, *Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Hero of Saint Domingo, Soldier, Statesman, Martyr, or Hayti's Struggle, Triumph, Independence, and Achievements* (Lockport, NY: Ward & Cobb, 1896), xxii, 328-333, 473-475. On the representations of manliness at the World's Fair see Bederman, 31-41.

In an essay for the *A.M.E. Church Review*, John Hurst corrected misrepresentations of Haitian history while corroborating Mossell's assessment of manhood. The Haitian son of African American émigrés and a bishop in the AME Church analyzed the American and Haitian Revolutions and concluded that comparisons between the two republics that emerged from these events were misleading. While George Washington's "army of citizen-soldiers" rallied against "unjust taxation" and fought for "political freedom," Louverture's "horde of slaves" took up arms for "human liberty" and "manhood." Hurst acknowledged American success in forming a government based on their colonial experience as free citizens but lauded Haitians who epitomized manly self-reliance and vigor by making "themselves citizens by means of brute force" and becoming "self instructors in the art and duties" of government. The descendants of those architects of Haitian independence, the AME Bishop argued, had further asserted their manliness by disproving the claim that self-government was a trait possessed only by men of Anglo-Saxon descent. Accordingly, Hurst surmised that the "American Negro" needed to use Haiti "to prove just what he is and what he has done."¹¹⁸

Some aspiring class African Americans went even further by insisting that they needed to emulate Haitian men if they hoped to secure their civil and political rights. Charles Remond Douglass possessed great respect for a Haitian people who would later raise \$1,000 for a statue of his late father in Rochester, New York. In a letter written to the *Colored American*, the son of Frederick Douglass and a former consul to the Dominican Republic argued that Haitians were superior to African Americans. He reported that the Haitian had "the manhood to assert his freedom and the power to protect it" and "was

¹¹⁸ John Hurst, "Hayti and the United States I," *The A.M.E. Church Review* 13, no. 4 (April 1896): 436-439.

especially proud . . . of his country and his manhood rights.” While “long years of servitude” made African Americans “humble and lacking in manhood,” a Haitian “fears no man” and would assert his manliness “as quickly in Georgia as he would in Port-au-Prince.” Consequently, the solution to the problems facing African Americans was to become more like Haitians. In the estimation of Charles Douglass, black men terrorized by an epidemic of lynching could learn from Haitians who would never accept a practice meant to reinforce white manliness and suppress black claims to the prerogatives of citizenship.¹¹⁹

Calvin Chase was even more emphatic about using Haiti as a model of manliness for aspiring class black men. In 1893, the *Washington Bee* editor printed a letter from an African American in Minnesota who lectured black southerners about the need to study “the lessons of Toussant Le Overture (sic)” and make a “good manly stand” against lynching.¹²⁰ Four years later, Chase used his position as the lead orator at the annual celebration of emancipation in Washington, D.C. to again criticize those African Americans who faced the full brunt of racial oppression. The 10,000 attendees of the festive occasion might have expected to hear encouraging words about their communal progress or strong condemnations of the wave of white supremacy that threatened to curtail it. Chase, however, assumed a different tone. He told the crowd that there was “something in the American negro that not only makes him a political but a physical coward.” Haiti, Chase thundered, “never obtained her independence by cowardice.” Frustrated by the entrenchment of Jim Crow, the prominent journalist demanded that African Americans take heed of the example set by Haitians, assert their manliness, and achieve their “manhood

¹¹⁹ Charles Remond Douglass, “The Negro in the West Indies,” *Parsons Weekly Blade*, January 5, 1895. On representations of lynching and manhood see Bederman, 45-76.

¹²⁰ Robert E. Anderson, *Washington Bee*, October 28, 1893.

rights” by whatever means necessary.¹²¹ For Chase, reflecting on the feasibility of this command was far less important than promoting the symbolic value of resistance as demonstrated in Haitian history.

Nonetheless, as African Americans knew all too well, the Haitian model of black self-government and black manhood was not beyond reproach. In October 1897, a Haitian court sentenced Emile Lüders to one year’s imprisonment on charges of assault and battery as well as resisting arrest. The German chargé d’affaires immediately demanded the release of the German national, the removal of the presiding judge in the case, and the dismissal of the arresting officers. Although displeased with this affront to the integrity of their justice system, Haitian officials relented to international pressure and pardoned the convicted criminal before deporting him to Germany. The Haitian capitulation still did not appease German officials, however. A month later, two German warships entered the harbor of Port-au-Prince. One of the captains gave the Haitians four hours to consider the following ultimatum: the Germans would not bombard the capital if Haitian officials produced a \$20,000 indemnity and permission to return to Haiti for Lüders, a formal apology to the German government and a twenty-one gun salute to the German flag, and a state reception for the German chargé d’affaires. Faced with the prospect of devastation, the Haitian government complied with Germany’s demands and raised a white flag of surrender above the presidential palace.¹²²

Black leaders immediately denounced the insult to Haitian honor and independence. Calvin Chase lamented that “Germany, with her great and powerful navy, was anxious to

¹²¹ “Our Freedom,” *Washington Bee*, April 24, 1897.

¹²² Robert Debs Heintz, Jr. and Nancy Gordon Heintz, *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People: 1492-1971* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), 324-325.

attack poor, little Hayti” whose “people would have rather died than submitted to the tyranny of a German monarchy.”¹²³ Moreover, Sol Johnson argued that the actions of Germany “reminded us of the large boy and small boy” while George L. Knox opined that Germany was taking “exasperating extremities” when it could “be lenient to this vastly weaker power without suffering in dignity.”¹²⁴ Besides describing the unequal power dynamics between global powers and the nations that suffered their wrath, journalists also highlighted the racism that pervaded imperialism. Knox stressed that African Americans were “a unit in protesting against the insult Germany has offered Hayti” in part due to the accusation of German Emperor Wilhelm II that Haitians were “impudent niggers with a smattering of French civilization.”¹²⁵ In fact, his peers still seethed at the racist affront to Haitian independence more than a year after the event. By the final year of the nineteenth century, Chase continued to pledge that African Americans would “Remember Hayti” and avenge the “outrageous treatment of our [Haitian] brothers” if the United States went to war with Germany.¹²⁶



Months after the *Washington Bee* editor clamored for the opportunity to come to Haiti’s defense, Madame O. Esperanza Lois Jeys found herself in the editor’s city. After her initial entrance onto the U.S. lecture circuit, Jeys had traveled to Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Jersey. In each location, “the most cultured speaker of her

¹²³ “Poor Hayti,” *Washington Bee*, December 11, 1897.

¹²⁴ *Savannah Tribune*, December 11, 1897 and “Germany Defiant,” *The Freeman*, December 11, 1897.

¹²⁵ “Hayti,” *The Freeman*, December 18, 1897.

¹²⁶ “They May Be Needed,” *Washington Bee*, December 11, 1897.

race” cultivated a reputation that now preceded her.¹²⁷ Black Washingtonians who held Jeys in high esteem even before making her acquaintance gained more admiration for her once they met the “woman of culture and refinement.” Jeys became a prominent figure in the capital as she joined Chase, educator Nannie Helen Burroughs, and other black leaders at the Congressional Lyceum, a group formed to debate issues affecting African Americans. Her contributions to discussions on black leadership and African missions further demonstrated her commitment to the values held by her distinguished hosts.¹²⁸

Following her appearance in Washington, D.C., word of the remarkable Haitian woman continued to spread throughout black communities in the United States. Audiences in Ohio and other locations enthusiastically received Jeys after her Washington visit and corroborated previous accounts about the lecturer. By the time she left the United States to assume her missionary work in Africa, many African Americans were convinced that the educated, race-conscious, well-traveled, and articulate Haitian embodied racial progress.¹²⁹

The embrace of Jeys by black audiences reflects a fleeting link between black communities in Haiti and the United States during the final decade of the nineteenth century. As Jim Crow shaped the experiences of African Americans and the imperialist designs of the United States and Europe loomed over Haitian life, leading African Americans came to perceive Haitians as allies in a shared battle against white supremacy. Their subsequent support of Haiti assumed both practical and emotional qualities. African

¹²⁷ “A Native of Hayti,” *The Freeman*, March 5, 1892; “Race Gleanings,” *The Freeman*, April, 16, 1892.

¹²⁸ “This Week in Society,” *The Washington Bee*, March 25, 1899; “Our New Leadership,” *Washington Bee*, April 29, 1899; “Talks on Africa,” *The Colored American*, March 17, 1900.

¹²⁹ “Col. Pinn on Madam Jeys,” *Cleveland Gazette*, July 4, 1903; “Ohio News,” *Cleveland Gazette*, September 19, 1903.

Americans wanted to shield an increasingly exceptional example of black self-government from criticism and foreign threats but they also possessed a heightened affinity for a Haitian people whose leaders acknowledged the challenges confronting diasporan blacks. This common struggle against racism would persist into the twentieth century but the insistence of black leaders on vindicating Haiti through their actions and words would dwindle. Ultimately, a shift in black political culture and evolving responses to racial oppression in the United States dictated a new course in the imagined relationship between African Americans and Haiti.

CHAPTER FOUR:

HAYTI WILL NEVER BE WHAT IT SHOULD

Booker T. Washington was on the brink of a physical breakdown. In 1895, the head of Alabama's Tuskegee Institute emerged as the preeminent black spokesman following his performance at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition and the death of Frederick Douglass. Washington had since spent much of his time traveling throughout the United States raising funds for his school, speaking before white and black audiences, and performing other tasks befitting a national leader. He embraced these responsibilities but the physical toll of constant travel exacerbated the emotional stress of managing racial tensions during the Jim Crow era. A group of white philanthropists in Boston worried that Washington's weary face and the weight gain caused by these pressures might portend an eminent collapse. So, in the summer of 1899, they encouraged their friend to take a European vacation with his wife despite Washington's insistence that he could not stop working.¹

True to his character, Washington refused to neglect his duties even after he crossed the Atlantic Ocean. One of his first excursions in Europe was a tour of Holland's farms, which struck him as models of efficiency because they generated great amounts of produce despite using few acres of land. Washington concluded that the work of Dutch farmers sent a clear message to black southerners: care and organization were more important to the

¹ Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 238-243; Norrell, 173-179.

success of rural laborers than large amounts of land or capital. Relaxation subsequently became a secondary concern as Washington found the observation of European life useful to his ongoing attempts to improve the social and economic condition of African Americans.²

Washington's next chance for ethnographic research came in Paris. There he met a number of "well educated and cultured" Haitians studying the liberal arts in the French capital. As his peers in the United States heaped praise upon Madame Esperenza Lois Jeys, Washington questioned the utility of the academic knowledge sought by elite Haitians. In an article published in popular black newspapers, the Tuskegee Principal lamented that Haitians in France did not "take advantage of the excellent training which is given here in the colleges of physical sciences, agriculture, mechanics, and domestic science." He suggested that they would be "in a position to return home and assist in developing the agricultural and mineral resources of their native land" only if they received an education similar to the type available at his Alabama school. Washington finished with a warning: "Hayti will never be what it should" until its citizens reconsidered their educational choices.³

His view that Dutch farmers provided a better example for African Americans than Haitian expatriates found a receptive audience. Most black leaders shared Washington's belief that African Americans seeking to transcend Jim Crow needed to augment politics and protest with a greater emphasis on race consciousness, self-help, group solidarity, and economic growth. Moreover, many aspiring class and elite African Americans embraced a

² Washington, *Up From Slavery* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1901), 360-368.

³ Washington, "On the Paris Boulevards," *New York Age*, July 13, 1899.

materialist approach to education. They insisted that white racism would wither away and broader political participation would become possible in accordance with the willingness of uneducated blacks to undertake vocational training, learn a specific trade, and prove their worth through the production and accumulation of money and goods.

Proponents of this strategy, as well as a number of purported critics, joined Washington in critiquing Haiti. From their perspective, Haitian material backwardness, immorality, educational preferences, and political activity reinforced the beliefs of white supremacists and offered African Americans a poor model of racial advancement. In essence, it appeared that independent Haiti was more of a detriment than a benefit to the goals sought by African Americans. To the chagrin of black leaders, however, they seemed to possess a connection to Haiti that could not be disclaimed despite earnest efforts to do so.

Consequently, the reform of Haitian life and culture emerged as the logical conclusion of this assessment. Some black leaders argued that the emigration of African Americans from the United States to Haiti was needed to help the Caribbean country achieve material and cultural progress. At the same time, recognizing the unpopularity and impracticality of emigration schemes, black educators brought Haitians to the United States to receive training in domestic and industrial science so that they could spread the gospel of uplift in their homeland. Gradually, the annexation of Haiti by the United States became the preferred means of achieving Haitian progress.

Favorable perspectives on Haiti would certainly linger within black America. Nonetheless, critiques of Haitian life were just as popular as Washington's insistence that African Americans need not remain pariahs in their own country. In the end, the desire to

achieve meaningful citizenship and prove themselves Americans led many African Americans to question their relationship to Haiti and support an occupation that put an end to Haitian independence for two decades.



At the turn of the century, accounts of Vodou and revolution in Haiti still appealed to foreign observers. Yet allegations of rampant cannibalism among Vodou practitioners and reports of political violence no longer divided black and white Americans. Black spokesmen who believed that their moral and material improvement would help their communities transcend second-class citizenship abandoned the desperate defenses of Haitian life and culture produced in previous decades. Instead they challenged widespread theories that blacks had no future in the United States and affirmed their ability to assimilate into U.S. society by legitimizing the misrepresentations of Haiti created by white Americans.

Black journalists were particularly conspicuous in their efforts to distinguish African Americans from Haitians. In February 1901, Calvin Chase's *Washington Bee* reprinted an account of Haitian life. The story was presented as the first-hand description of Vodou ceremonies witnessed by Robert T. Hill, a white geologist employed by the U.S. government. Hill's report describes "demonic" rituals where infanticide, orgies, spirit-possession, and cannibalism featured prominently. It concludes by describing Haitians as "unmodified savages" who retain the "ancient customs and institutions" of Africa. There is no indication that Chase questioned Hill's qualifications for ethnographic analysis or found it curious that the scientist's report plagiarized Sir Spenser St. John's *Hayti; or, the Black Republic*. Indeed, the reproduction of "Savagery in Hayti" presaged the *Washington Bee's*

subsequent presentations of Haitian culture as part of a barbaric African past that African Americans had long abandoned.⁴

At the same time that Chase supplemented tales of Vodou worship with allegations that seventy percent of Haitians were born out of wedlock, revolution rocked Haiti.⁵ Haitian President Tirésias Simon Sam abdicated on May 12, 1902, three days before the scheduled election of his successor. Simon Sam's action, caused by popular discontent with his regime, was meant to place the burden of choosing a new Haitian leader upon an incumbent assembly that was overwhelmingly aligned with him. A devastating civil war erupted between presidential hopefuls after an armed crowd stormed the meeting of the assembly and refused to allow the sham election process. Hostilities, which resulted in the burning of several towns and the deaths of many combatants, did not abate until December 21, 1902 when the Haitian army acclaimed Pierre Nord Alexis as the new president and escorted him to the National Palace.⁶

Rather than scrutinizing the underlying causes of the civil unrest, black journalists characterized the recent revolution as a symptom of Haitian temperament and culture. Throughout 1902, the *Wisconsin Weekly Advocate* ran reports of developments in Haiti that exaggerated casualties and material devastation but ignored the tension between elite corruption and popular democratic yearnings that produced the conflict.⁷ Sol Johnson of

⁴ "Savagery in Hayti," *Washington Bee*, February 23, 1901; "Voodoo Mausoleum," *Washington Bee*, October 4, 1902.

⁵ "Some Facts About Hayti," *Washington Bee*, January 30, 1904.

⁶ Heinl and Heinl, 326-332.

⁷ For instance, see "Reign of Terror in Hayti Republic," *Wisconsin Weekly Advocate*, June 26, 1902.

the *Savannah Tribune* lamented that revolutions prevented Haiti from “taking a high place in the march of civilization” while Julius F. Taylor opined that the current “reign of terror” in Haiti constituted the “normal condition down that way.”⁸ Taylor’s anti-Haitian commentary brought the editor into agreement with an avowed opponent. Even as his *Broad Ax* gained notoriety for its repeated attacks on Booker T. Washington, Taylor substantiated the Tuskegee President’s view of Haiti by insisting that its “frequent revolutions . . . [tend] decidedly toward opera bouffe.”⁹

Black playwrights agreed that Haitian life belonged on the stage but they quibbled with Taylor’s recommendation of a farcical genre. In 1902, A. Lincoln Harris of Columbus, Ohio completed *Hayti’s Bogus Prince*, a four-act tragedy about the Haitian aristocracy. The play was subsequently staged by troupes of black performers at fairs, theatres, and AME churches throughout the United States. Contemporary reviewers found it agreeable, writing that the play produced by the founder and manager of the Harris Dramatic Company confirmed “the advancement of the Negro in legitimate drama.”¹⁰

Although Harris and his reviewers were eager to prove the artistic acumen of African Americans, both parties failed to acknowledge that the validation of black achievement came via the caricaturing of Haitians. In *Hayti’s Bogus Prince*, black actors reinforced prevalent stereotypes of Haitian immorality, superstition, and greed. The play

⁸ “Beacon Lights for Negroes,” *Savannah Tribune*, November 1, 1902; *Broad Ax*, July 12, 1902.

⁹ “Volunteers for the Front,” *Broad Ax*, November 6, 1902.

¹⁰ “Hayti’s Bogus Prince,” *The Freeman*, November 29, 1902; *The Colored American Magazine* 5, no. 1 (May 1902): 66; A. Lincoln Harris, “The Bogus Prince of Hayti—Why I Wrote It,” *The Freeman*, May 6, 1911.

opens with the appearance of Clarisse, a woman who was abandoned by her husband and left to care for her daughter Thelma alone. A subsequent scene features Mother Simpson. Amidst her wailing, the “hoodoo witch” foreshadows the downfall of the play’s villain. The ensuing demise of Frank Christophe, the treacherous and ambitious brother of the Haitian Emperor, brings the play to its dramatic conclusion. Those who witnessed these scenes might have recognized the influence of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* on Harris’s *Bogus Prince*. It is even more likely that audiences observed links between the fictional depictions of abandoned wives, strange witches, and bogus princes and the descriptions of illegitimate Haitian children, Vodou priestesses, and insurgents that pervaded the black press.¹¹

William Edgar Easton exploited similar themes of Haitian degeneracy in his own work. Almost two decades after producing *Dessalines*, the Los Angeles-based playwright completed *Christophe: A Tragedy in Prose of Imperial Haiti*. Whereas *Dessalines* presents the title character as a genteel and Christian embodiment of black leadership and manhood, *Christophe* reinterprets Dessalines as a tyrant who incurred the hatred of General Henri Christophe. After plotting the assassination of the authoritarian emperor, however, Christophe demonstrates a similar proclivity for despotism. When the forces of Jean-Pierre Boyer threaten his regime, Christophe flees to his mountaintop fortress of Sans Souci only to discover that the insurgents have used a secret passageway to breach the sanctuary. With Boyer’s troops bearing down on him, Christophe finds himself alone in a hall with his primary confidant, Pere L’Avenge. The priest convinces Christophe to commit suicide and, after the king stabs himself with a poignard, L’Avenge reveals herself as the vengeful fiancée of a man executed by Christophe’s troops. Christophe manages to stagger over to

¹¹ “National and Local Theatrical and Stage Notes,” *Broad Ax*, November 11, 1911; “Musical and Dramatic,” *The Freeman*, November 18, 1911.

L'Avenge, pull the poignard from his breast, and stab the transvestite traitor who told Boyer how to enter the castle. The play ends with the insurrectionists finding the two dead bodies after storming the hall.¹²

Easton hoped that his four-act tragedy would offer an alternative to the comedic, grotesque, servile, or criminal representations of blacks that prevailed in American theatre. Yet it is difficult to ascertain whether *Christophe* did more to confirm the humanity of the African Americans who produced and performed it or denigrate the Haitians whose inhumanity featured prominently in its plot. African Americans who viewed *Dessalines* during the 1900s praised the “realistic portrayal of the worship of Cabala by the ignorant of the interior of the island” even as they acknowledged instances wherein a “race feeling” prevailed.¹³ It stands to reason, then, that the less favorable interpretation of Haitian life in *Christophe* produced heightened feelings of estrangement from Haiti. One black reviewer of Easton’s script found the “reign of terror, intrigues, treason, and war” appropriate for a play set in “that tumultuous and stormy Black Republic where there has ever been “war and rumors of war,” intrigue, treason, and assassinations.”¹⁴ *Christophe* thus complemented popular exaggerations of Haitian political culture, in the process confirming judgments of Haiti as a pitiable site that bore little resemblance to black communities in the United States.

¹² William Edgar Easton, *Christophe: A Tragedy in Prose of Imperial Hayti* (Los Angeles: Press Grafton Publishing Company, 1911).

¹³ “Dumas Dramatic Club,” *The Colored American*, April 12, 1902.

¹⁴ D.W. Johnson, “Books and Those Who Write Them,” *The Chicago Defender*, March 20, 1912.

In fact, *Hayti's Bogus Prince* and *Christophe* garnered public attention because they appealed to cresting attitudes about Haitian backwardness, U.S. race relations, and black advancement. By observing what Haitians were not—moral, rational, and willing to concede political leadership to others—aspiring class blacks like the aforementioned reviewer could define who they were. And, as Protestant, law-abiding members of patriarchal households, it was clear that they were not only different from Haitians but also fit for full and equal citizenship in the United States. In essence, the interpretations of Haitian religious and political culture offered by Harris and Easton augmented an assimilationist impulse, becoming one of many ways that African Americans used the explosion of commercialized mass entertainment to claim a more desirable status.¹⁵

Yet, despite their best efforts, African Americans found it difficult to convince whites of the differences between themselves and Haitians. They could neither stop white travelers from using observations of Haitian “laziness and filth and general worthlessness” to prove pseudoscientific theories of black inferiority nor prevent national newspapers from printing editorials that pointed to Haiti’s “travesty upon a government and . . . utter mockery of civilization” as evidence of “the full effect of negro rule” in the United States. Even when black leaders insisted on their exceptionalism white Americans continued to draw parallels between their ‘simian’ features and ‘bestial’ tendencies and the “strange and grotesquely impossible” visages of “half-civilized” Haitians.¹⁶ For concerned black citizens,

¹⁵ On black popular culture at the turn of the twentieth century see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

¹⁶ Frances Drake, “What a Woman Saw in Hayti,” *Louisville Courier Journal*, March 18, 1900; R.S.T., “Shall the Negro Rule,” *Baltimore Sun*, October 29, 1901; “Hayti’s Ruler Half-Civilized,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 27, 1908.

it was clear that all 'coons' did look alike to white observers no matter their country of origin.

Some black spokespeople remained committed to abetting black progress by challenging these negative evaluations of black life in Haiti as well as the United States. Best known for exploring race and racism in her romantic novels, Pauline Hopkins also used her craft to vindicate Haitians. Between 1900 and 1904, the editor of Boston's *Colored American Magazine* wrote or published several essays on Toussaint and his presidential successors that presented Haitian leaders as intelligent men who resisted slavery, refuted notions of black inferiority, and proved their capacity for self-government.¹⁷ Moreover, the *Colored American Magazine* under Hopkins's editorship included a series of articles on contemporary Haitian life in which Theodora Holly, the daughter of James Theodore, described the traditions of meticulous courtship employed by Haitian gentlemen.¹⁸ Both treatments offered black readers the chance to view their relationship with Haiti in a constructive light. Whether as revolutionaries who defied slavery, imperialism, and racial inequality or refined suitors who upheld the sanctity of marriage, Haitians exhibited intellect, race pride, and moral values that empowered and reflected well on the black race.

¹⁷ Pauline Hopkins, "Toussaint L'Ouverture," *Colored American Magazine* 2, No. 1 (November 1900): 9-24; Frederick Douglass, "Toussaint L'Ouverture," *Colored American Magazine* 6, No. 7 (July 1903): 487-492; S.E.F.C.C. Hamedoe, "General Tiresias Simon Sam: President of the Republic of Hayti," *Colored American Magazine* 3, no. 6 (October 1901): 460-467; Colleen C. O'Brien discusses these representations of Haitian leaders in the *CAM* in "'Blacks in All Quarters of the Globe': Anti-Imperialism, Insurgent Cosmopolitanism, and International Labor in Pauline Hopkins's Literary Journalism," *American Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (June 2009): 245-270.

¹⁸ Theodora Holly, "The Haytian Girl: How She Is Wooed And Won," *Colored American Magazine* 3, No. 3 (July 1901): 203-210

Nevertheless, some African Americans found their inescapable comparisons with Haitians to be onerous. J. Max Barber captured prevailing attitudes when he worried that:

If the confusion continues in Haiti and San Domingo where Negroes have full control of the government, this very condition of things will further prejudice the world against our cause. If we want to count on the moral support of civilization in our efforts to secure even-handed justice, we must not have the bad example of this little Negro Republic flaunted before the face of the world. What must be done?¹⁹

By asking *what* must be done, the managing editor of the *Voice of the Negro* assumed that it was obvious that *something* needed to be done. Implied, too, was the clear need for aspiring class and elite African Americans to be the agents of change in Haiti. Understanding this, black leaders who also wanted “order down there for our own sakes” speculated that critiques of Haiti were best augmented with proposals to improve it.²⁰



As his peers fretted about the “bad example” of the “little Negro Republic,” John S. Durham completed his first work of fiction. In 1902, *Diane, Priestess of Haiti* appeared in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, a Philadelphia publication that catered primarily to a white readership. Newspapers that promoted it reminded readers that the black Philadelphian was well positioned to write a novella set in Haiti because he was a former minister resident and consul general to Port-au-Prince. For his part, Durham conceived of his romance as a “complete study” of Haitian life and culture presented in the form of a “native love story.”²¹

¹⁹ “The Voice of the Negro for April,” *The Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 2 (February 1904).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Brian Russell Roberts, *Artistic Ambassadors: Literary and International Representation of the New Negro Era* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013); Dickson D. Bruce,

The novella features two star-crossed lovers who find themselves implicated in an international conspiracy. Alcide is a cosmopolitan polyglot who hopes that his employment as the servant of the German diplomatic minister will help him become a European scholar rather than a Haitian soldier. In contrast, Diane is the illiterate daughter of Haiti's most influential *papa loi* or Vodou priest. She loves Alcide but struggles to reconcile his disdain for Vodou with her desire to become a *mama loi*. As they strive to resolve their differences, the two youths become victims of a plot to overthrow the Haitian president and establish a government more conducive to German commercial interests. The lead conspirator, the Haitian minister of war, covets not only political power but also Diane. Consequently, he has Alcide separated from his love and placed in the Haitian army. All ends well, however, when Alcide helps the German minister and the Haitian president thwart the insurrection, declines an opportunity to pursue his studies in Europe, and reunites with Diane, who has since renounced her allegiance to Vodou.²²

Diane: Priestess of Haiti provided a sympathetic view of Haiti—or, more precisely, a Haitian society improved by foreigners. Alcide eschews a career in Europe to remain in Haiti but his deference to the German diplomat underscores the overriding influence of European culture on his worldview. It is his cosmopolitanism and exposure to Teutonic gentility that allows Alcide to see the flaws in Haitian culture and convince Diane to abandon Vodou. Moreover, foreign aid proves instrumental to the eradication of Haitian militarism and the strengthening of Haitian autonomy. In particular, the German diplomat

Jr., *Black American Writing from the Nadir: The Evolution of a Literary Tradition 1877-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 133.

²² John S. Durham, "Diane, Priestess of Haiti," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* (April 1902): 387-467.

gives invaluable assistance to Alcide and the Haitian president in thwarting the coup and saving their country from subjugation to a German syndicate. Through Alcide's journey of self-realization, Diane's redemption, and the Haitian government's salvation, *Diane* certainly encouraged white Americans to develop optimism about the Haitian future. Yet its plot demonstrates a belief that Haiti and its people needed to embrace the cultural values and political influence of Anglo-Americans and Europeans before they could realize their potential.

Durham tried to clarify these assumptions about Haiti in a subsequent article published in the *Voice of the Negro*. In "The Hidden Wealth of Hayti," the author speculated that Haiti was neither as well-off as her admirers claimed nor as destitute as her detractors asserted. Instead, Durham insisted that Haitians possessed immense potential for future development in public transportation, agricultural production, and education. He was, however, undecided on the means by which this national growth would be achieved. On the one hand, Durham criticized Haiti's educated "fortunate few" for exploiting the peasantry while characterizing the ordinary "Haytian man-primitive" as an indifferent worker who could benefit from contact with "Teutonic civilization." On the other hand, he derided Anglo-Americans for "unman[ing] the Negro" and applauded Haitians for their fierce desire to be the standard by which others would judge the "Negro in the possibilities of self-government."²³

If elite Haitians were too corrupt, ordinary Haitians too backwards, and white foreigners too racist then who did Durham expect to lead Haiti into the future? An indication of the former diplomat's answer came at the end of the article. Durham

²³ Durham, "The Hidden Wealth of Hayti," *Voice of the Negro* I, no. 4 (April 1904): 144

suggested that Haitian agricultural production “would be helped by the introduction of the best agricultural implements and the employment of capable, sympathetic, directors, such as Tuskegee could readily furnish, to demonstrate the use of the tools.” In short, leading African Americans were to play a crucial role in improving a nation that, in Durham’s estimation, was “barbaric, but surely pregnant with civic possibilities.”²⁴

Other black leaders embraced the idea that they bore responsibility for reforming a nation whose development could be entrusted neither to Haitians nor white Americans. In the early 1900s, *New York Age* editor T. Thomas Fortune revitalized a strain of emigrationism that had waned since the antebellum era. Even more influential as a spokesperson and catalyst for emigration was William F. Powell. His position as the envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to Haiti gave him access to Haitian government officials who he spoke with to gauge their willingness to accept black émigrés. As he solicited the approval of Haitian leaders for emigration schemes, Powell consulted with James Theodore Holly. The Episcopal Bishop’s experience in abandoning the United States to become a Haitian citizen made him a helpful source of information about the transition to life in Haiti and an effective propagandist for emigration. The pledges of moral support offered by leading Haitians and the knowledge gleaned from Holly reinforced Powell’s conviction that his emigration scheme was a useful way for African Americans to change Haiti for the better.²⁵

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 144, 146.

²⁵ “Home for Blacks,” *Louisville Courier Journal*, May 12, 1901; “Afro-Americans’ Destiny,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1901; “Favor Hayti for Negro Colonies,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 12, 1901; William F. Powell, “Hayti as a Refuge,” *Cleveland Gazette*, June 6, 1901.

He subsequently set about convincing others of what he knew to be true. Powell took to the pages of black newspapers, urging aspiring class African Americans to consider the benefits of leaving the United States for the sovereign black nation in the Caribbean. In one article published in Fortune's *New York Age*, he described Haiti as a land rich in natural resources but lacking in civilization. He criticized Haitians whose crude farming tools and inability to create manufacturing facilities left them unable to capitalize on their country's abundant coffee, cocoa, logwood, and mahogany. Powell rejected the idea that improvements could come from indigenous initiatives and claimed that African Americans bore responsibility for assisting Haitians "in the great struggle of life." He recommended that a class of agriculturalists and manufacturers go to Haiti with "improved farming utensils" and "labor-saving machines." Along with Fortune and Holly, Powell concluded that an influx of entrepreneurial African Americans would inject Haiti with a welcome dose of enterprise and consequently increase that country's wealth.²⁶

This proposal appealed to leading African Americans who agreed that Haiti was in dire need of the skills and leadership of black émigrés. Sol Johnson argued that "if a few thousand of our intelligent Negroes would emigrate to that country, they would be of great service to their race."²⁷ Monroe Work concurred. While obtaining his philosophy and sociology degrees from the University of Chicago, the future employee of the Tuskegee Institute took time to elaborate on the *Savannah Tribune* editor's claim that black émigrés could alleviate the ignorance that plagued Haiti. He conceded that the "wholesale deportation" of African Americans faced too many logistical and cultural obstacles to

²⁶ Powell, "Hayti as a Refuge."

²⁷ "Beacon Lights for Negroes," *Savannah Tribune*.

succeed but presented the emigration of a “select few” individuals as a desirable alternative. This cadre of educated African Americans, Work suggested, would establish permanent residence in Haiti, “help develop [its] resources,” and “enlighten and evangelize the people.” He ended his appeal by stressing that such work was incumbent upon African Americans because they had a duty to bring the “knowledge and culture” gained by living “in the midst of a high degree of civilization” to their “less favored brethren.”²⁸

Elite African Americans acknowledged the self-interest that underlay such proposals. Emigrationists stressed that Haitians would never vindicate the black race if left to their own devices. In the words of T. Thomas Fortune, any ability to thrive “in the ways of self-reliance and government” died along with Toussaint Louverture.²⁹ Black émigrés were therefore charged with uplifting an inferior people whose deficiencies reflected poorly on a more advanced black population in the United States. Powell insisted that prospective migrants needed to consider that if Haiti “should lose the independence that it has won . . . we in the states add to ourselves another load to the many we are now hearing of the failure of the Negro to maintain a system of government.”³⁰ By prioritizing the needs of African Americans, Powell, Fortune, and other emigrationists gave little thought to the possibility that an influx of foreigners in Haiti might pose a greater challenge to Haitian autonomy than agricultural inefficiency or material deficits.

In the end, ordinary African Americans exhibited scant interest in proposals to leave the United States for Haiti, West Africa, or any foreign land. While his contemporaries

²⁸ Monroe Work, “Negro Emigration from America,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 26, 1901.

²⁹ Fortune, “Haytian Revolutions,” *The Voice of the Negro* 1, No. 4 (April 1904): 139.

³⁰ Powell, “Hayti as a Refuge.”

urged that blacks emigrate to Haiti, Henry McNeal Turner led an effort to repatriate African Americans in Liberia. His movement rested on the belief that racial equality was impossible in Jim Crow America and the competing assumption that African Americans could improve their status in the United States by taking up the “black man’s burden” and lifting the shroud of “heathen darkness” from Africans.³¹ Some found Turner’s arguments persuasive but the enforcement of vagrancy and labor contract laws, debt peonage, and a lack of financial resources hampered their ability to leave the South for the Midwest, let alone Africa. Those émigrés who did manage to sail across the Atlantic Ocean often came back to the United States with stories of poverty, disease, and African savagery.³²

Their disillusionment confirmed Charles Spencer Smith’s assessment of the proposed repatriation of African Americans in Haiti. After returning to the United States from a trip through the Caribbean, the AME minister told a reporter from the *Detroit Journal* that mass emigration to Haiti was infeasible because most African Americans were “too loyal Americans.” In other words, what they desired was acceptance in the country of their birth not expatriation to a foreign land, even one governed by black men.

Consequently, black leaders who acknowledged the unwillingness of their peers to

³¹ On Turner’s emigrationism see Meier, 59-82; Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus: Black Nationalists and Back-to-Africa Movements 1890-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, 197-220; and Adeleke, 92-111.

³² The best treatments of the experiences of black migrants in the United States and abroad remain Painter’s *Exodusters* and Claude A. Clegg, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

abandon a country built on their unfree labor looked for another way to make Haiti conform to the cultural values and political needs of African Americans.³³



While emigration schemes floundered, educational reform in Haiti emerged as a primary concern of black leaders who worried that Haitian backwardness lent credence to white justifications for Jim Crow. At the turn of the twentieth century, Haitian governments committed themselves to the improvement of national education. Their efforts led to a dramatic rise in the number of private and public schools, greater enrollment of rural and urban pupils, and the strengthening of *lycées* that surpassed the quality of high schools in the U.S. South.³⁴ These facts were, however, lost on some black leaders who surmised that Haitian intellectualism did little to disprove the argument that blacks were incapable of contributing to or even surviving in an industrialized age. George L. Knox advised that Haitians “educated in Paris to better learn how to break up their governments” would do better to “stay at home and saw wood.” Sol Johnson elaborated on Knox’s opinion when he alleged that Haitians did a disservice to their race by not building “good schools” that would end the pursuit of academic study in Europe.³⁵

³³ Charles Spencer Smith, “The Negro is by Nature Harmless,” *The Colored American*, June 6, 1901. Three years later, Sol Johnson and George L. Knox reported that Smith advised African Americans to immigrate to Haiti. See “Negroes Needed in Haiti,” *Savannah Tribune*, January 23, 1904 and “Haiti, Says Bishop Smith,” *The Freeman*, January 30, 1904. Smith’s writings, however, do not suggest that he ever supported a mass migration to Haiti, Africa, or elsewhere. For his most vocal anti-emigration sentiments, see Charles Spencer Smith, *Glimpses of Africa, West and Southwest Coast* (Nashville: A.M.E. Publishing House, 1895).

³⁴ Logan, “Education in Haiti,” *The Journal of Negro History* 15, No. 4 (October 1930): 427-428.

³⁵ Frederickson, 253-255; *Freeman*, August 9, 1902; “Beacon Lights for Negroes,” *The Savannah Tribune*.

When Knox and Johnson equated agricultural and industrial know-how with progress and dismissed other forms of education, they reached troubling conclusions. Besides responding to criticisms directed at blacks throughout the world, African Americans who recommended change in the Haitian educational system found themselves in agreement with various Haitian officials. For instance, Haitian Minister of Public Instruction Dantés Bellagarde attempted to provide for increased vocational schools for boys who would help develop their country's agricultural economy.³⁶ Less reasonable, though, was the assumption that African Americans should dictate Haitian schooling, that industrial and agricultural training should dominate the curriculum for Haitian students, and that a transformed educational system would culminate in a sweeping alteration of Haitian society.

William Hooper Council was one black educator who professed these ideas and assumed responsibility for the 'proper' instruction of Haitian students. The former slave of an Alabama planter acquired an education, became a lawyer, taught public school, edited a newspaper, served as secretary of the National Equal Rights Convention, and held appointive office as a Republican during Reconstruction. Council adjusted his public image after Democrats seized control of Alabama politics. Once an exemplar of the progress made by freedmen and women and a proponent of political protest, he became an avowed Democrat and the extreme embodiment of a new strain of conservative thought among black leaders. Besides criticizing black political participation, condemning black criminality and immorality, and romanticizing race relations in the South, Council led the Alabama State Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes. His promotion of

³⁶ Logan, "Education in Haiti," 425.

vocational training certainly strengthened his standing among white Americans willing to accept African Americans as subordinate laborers or teachers in segregated schools. Yet within Council's opportunism lay a transnational strategy of racial advancement.³⁷

The Agricultural and Mechanical College became a testing ground for the theory that the vocational training of Haitians could serve the interests of African Americans. In May 1901, Reverend George Dorce, one of Wilberforce University's Haitian graduates, brought Francis and Faurel Boisson to Normal, Alabama. The two sons of a Haitian judge were characterized as "bright" and their elite background had likely afforded them previous access to some study in the liberal arts. Nevertheless, they were now meant to repress intellectual pursuits that might enable them to follow in their father's footsteps. The Boissons joined African Americans at the Agricultural and Mechanical College in classes on carpentry, printing, mattressmaking, shoemaking, farming and horticulture, and dairy and livestock.³⁸ The motivations of the black administrators who insisted on this curriculum are perhaps more discernable than the expectations of the Haitian adults who sent the Boissons to the United States. In an era when white Americans lampooned erudite Haitians as "niggers speaking French," the transformation of Haitians into "practical men"

³⁷ Meier, 209-210; "William Hooper Council," in *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, eds. Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winson (New York: Norton, 1982), 138; Richard David Morrison, *History of Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University, 1875-1992* (Huntsville: Liberal Arts Press, 1994), 95.

³⁸ "Normal Notes," *The Freeman*, May 11, 1901; "A Distinguished Haitien," *The Colored American*, May 11, 1901; Morrison, 41-47.

capable of producing “useful articles for home use or for the market” appealed to black educators who assumed that classical education was of limited benefit to black progress.³⁹

Councill was not the only, or even the most famous, black Alabamian to make the connection between Haitian education and racial advancement. Booker T. Washington competed with Councill for Haitian students at the same time that the two men vied for funding from the northern philanthropists and Alabama legislators who helped define the terms upon which African Americans could improve their condition. He did so because he found Haitian education deficient. Haitians, Washington argued, exemplified “what must happen to any people who lack industrial or technical training.” He chastised Haitians for relying on foreign engineers and agronomists because they had “not yet learned the lesson of turning their education toward the cultivation of the soil and the making of the simplest implements for agricultural . . . labour.” The Tuskegee President shuddered to think what would become of uneducated African Americans if they imitated their Haitian counterparts and exhibited a similar proclivity to shun industrial education in favor of *belles lettres*.⁴⁰

Washington attempted to eliminate this risk by assuming responsibility for altering the education received by Haitians. In 1901, he and William F. Powell discussed the possibility of bringing two Haitian students to the Tuskegee Institute where they would take courses in “agriculture and mechanics” before returning home to “be of some practical

³⁹ The most famous utterance of that phrase is purported to have come from William Jennings Bryan; On the broader changes in attitudes regarding black education see Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Morrison, 45.

⁴⁰ Washington, *The Future of the American Negro* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1899), 70-72.

assistance to their people.”⁴¹ The black press expressed its approval two years later when the Haitian government deemed the Tuskegee proposal favorable, provided enough money to send Frank Weiner Rouzier and Leon Lilavois to Alabama immediately, and promised to increase the appropriation for foreign education annually until twenty additional students could join the two youths from Port-au-Prince at Washington’s school.⁴² George L. Knox concluded that the recent development signaled that Haiti was developing “fields more consonant with the progress of progressive countries” after “spending its energies . . . in the art of government snatching” for far too long. Haiti, the *Freeman* editor exclaimed, was finally “waking up to her necessities.”⁴³

For Knox, Powell, and Washington, the “necessities” of Haiti were analogous to the needs of African Americans. Washington was not trying to simply give young Haitians employable skills by exposing them to basketry and blacksmithing or instructing them in the arts of harnessmaking and horticulture. Instead the foremost black man in the United States regarded industrial and moral training at Tuskegee as a crucial step in molding Haitians into models of progress worthy of emulation by ordinary African Americans and deserving of respect from their white counterparts. The latter goal was especially important. As he struggled to convince white Americans that African Americans should not suffer the violent excesses of southern negrophobia, Washington highlighted the potential of Haiti. He wrote in academic journals and declared in public speeches that Haitians could

⁴¹ *The Freeman*, June 8, 1901.

⁴² “Race Gleanings,” *The Freeman*, May 2, 1903; “Haiti Recognizes Tuskegee,” *The Colored American*, April 18, 1903; *Twenty-Fourth Annual Catalogue of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1904-1905* (Tuskegee: Tuskegee Institute Press, 1905).

⁴³ *The Freeman*, April 4, 1903.

“take their rightful place as the leaders of all the black people of the New World” and “become a wealthy and respected Negro community.” This possibility, however, depended on their willingness to embrace education on “a practical basis” and disavow “distant and unpractical” subjects deemed irrelevant for many blacks.⁴⁴

These burdens placed on Haitians distinguished them from their African American, West African, and West Indian peers schooled in the Tuskegee tradition. The “little colony” of Haitians praised by the *Tuskegee Student* were a small percentage of the hundreds of foreigners that Washington welcomed to his institution.⁴⁵ Moreover, his proposal to introduce new agricultural and technological methods to Haiti coincided with a Tuskegee expedition sent to Togo to help transform the German colony into a cotton economy modeled after the U.S. South.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Haitians occupied a unique place in Washington’s mind. Whereas the Tuskegee President tasked the Togolese with demonstrating black industriousness and becoming useful parts of the German colonial

⁴⁴ Washington, review of *The Negro in the New World*, by Harry H. Johnston, *Journal of the African Society* 10, no. 38 (January 1911): 174-175.

⁴⁵ *Freeman*, October 31, 1903. The annual catalogue for 1903-1904 shows twelve Haitians among sixty-seven foreign students. In 1904-05 that percentage dwindled to two Haitians among the seventy-one foreign students. The catalogue for 1911-1913 counts four Haitians among ninety-two foreign students while the catalogue for 1913-1914 records three Haitians among ninety-four foreign students. See *Twenty-Third Annual Catalogue* (Tuskegee: Tuskegee Institute Press, 1904); *Twenty-Fourth Annual Catalogue*, *Thirty-First Annual Catalogue: The Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1911-1912* (Tuskegee: Tuskegee Institute Press, 1912) and *Thirty-Third Annual Catalog: The Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1913-1914* (Tuskegee: Tuskegee Institute Press, 1914).

⁴⁶ Andrew Zimmerman provides an excellent treatment of Washington’s work with German imperialists in West Africa in *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, & the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

economy, he believed that Haitians could prove the capacity of an “independent Black people to develop themselves.”⁴⁷

Washington’s work inspired other black educators who envisioned self-determination even as they deemphasized African Americans’ defense of the franchise and political rights. Eight years after the first Haitian students arrived at Tuskegee, Nannie Helen Burroughs opened the National Training School for Women and Girls (NTS) in Washington, D.C. The curriculum established by the Virginia native who would become known as the female Booker T. Washington had two primary components. First, the predominantly working poor and aspiring class students who attended the NTS gained employable skills through training in domestic science. At the same time, they practiced public speaking, read about current events, and took courses in civics, history, economics, and other academic subjects that emphasized racial pride, self-help, and Christian philanthropy.⁴⁸

Female students who received this combination of vocational training and academic learning ostensibly profited in several regards. Ideally, recipients of a NTS education grew to disdain idleness and to take greater pride in their work as domestics in white

⁴⁷ Washington, review of *The Negro in the New World*, 176.

⁴⁸ Sarah D. Blair, “Educating Black Girls in the Early 20th Century: The Pioneering Work of Nannie Helen Burroughs (1879-1961),” *Theory and Research in Social Education* 36, No. 1 (Winter 2008): 9-35; Evelyn Brooks Barnett, “Nannie Burroughs and the Education of Black Women,” in *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images*, eds., Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (New York: Kennikat Press, 1978): 97-108; Opal V. Easter, *Nannie Helen Burroughs* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “Religion, Politics, and Gender: The Leadership of Nannie Helen Burroughs,” in *This Far by Faith: Readings in African-American Women’s Religious Biography*, eds., Judith Weisenfeld and Richard Newman (New York: Routledge, 1996): 140-157; Karen A. Johnson, *Uplifting the Women and the Race: The Educational Philosophies and Social Activism of Anna Julia Cooper and Nannie Helen Burroughs* (New York: Garland, 2000).

households. Their increased satisfaction in providing quality domestic service was meant to produce a heightened conviction that they and other black female workers were skilled professionals, not menial laborers. Finally, NTS graduates who met the expectations of their teachers possessed a more pronounced understanding of a collective African American cause that their professionalization served. The NTS experience thus mirrored and reinforced a belief that African Americans would improve their social and political status when the most degraded members of the race commanded greater respect. In Burroughs's estimation a coalition of skilled black workers and educated black women would do more to solve the problems facing their race than a small group of black professionals and intellectual elites trying to solve racial discrimination in isolation.⁴⁹

From its inception, Burroughs encouraged Haitians to take part in the NTS program. During the school's first decade of operation, Clarice Gooding and two cousins, Alice Pierre Alexis and Christina François, obtained training in the domestic sciences, studied a wide range of academic subjects, and joined their peers in weekly Sunday school classes. Grade books show that all three women received good reviews for their scholarship, deportment, laundering skills and other aspects of academic and social life upon which NTS teachers evaluated students.⁵⁰ Alexis, in particular, did much to distinguish herself. The granddaughter of a Haitian president earned certificates in subjects ranging from hairdressing and manicuring to millinery and domestic training during her time at the

⁴⁹ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 213.

⁵⁰ Student Records, Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Boxes 147 and 165 (hereafter cited as Burroughs Papers)

NTS.⁵¹ At her commencement ceremonies, she was even awarded a cash prize for exemplary performance in the domestic science curriculum and given the platform to ably explain “Why We Teach Practical Housekeeping and Home Making.”⁵² Alexis’s performance and the comparable achievements of Gooding and François earned them the approval of their benefactors in the Woman’s Convention of the National Baptist Convention. These churchwomen felt that the performance of Haiti’s “brilliant stars” justified the one hundred and fifty dollars in annual scholarship money raised to offset the cost of tuition and clothing for the foreign students.⁵³

Although recognized as fully integrated members of the NTS capable of matching the accomplishments of their classmates, the Haitian women at the Washington school possessed a unique set of expectations. Burroughs wanted most African Americans at the NTS to focus on becoming respectable representatives of their own communities but she anticipated that Haitian pupils would vindicate African Americans by uplifting benighted black populations abroad, particularly in Haiti. Completion of the certificate program in missionary training was the means of accomplishing this implicit task. In reports given to the Woman’s Convention, Burroughs lauded the transformation of the Haitian students into

⁵¹ “National Training School Closing a Brilliant Affair,” *Washington Bee*, June 10, 1916; “The Closing Week,” *Washington Bee*, June 15, 1912; Graduate Certificates, Burroughs Papers. Alexis was the granddaughter of Pierre Nord Alexis. Pierre Nord was the President of Haiti from 1902 until his ouster from power in 1908. He died in exile two years later.

⁵² “National Training School Closing a Brilliant Affair,” *Washington Bee*, June 10, 1916; “The Closing Week,” *Washington Bee*, June 15, 1912; Graduate Certificates, Burroughs Papers. The Haitian women also stood out due to their socioeconomic backgrounds. Alexis, for instance, was the granddaughter of recently exiled Haitian President Pierre Nord Alexis.

⁵³ Journal of the 19th Annual Session of the Woman’s Convention (September 10-15, 1919), p. 230, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives (SBHLA), Annuals/Journals of Black Baptist (National) Conventions in America, Microfilm Reel 14 (hereafter cited as SBHLA).

“cultured, consecrated, faithful” women capable of disseminating an “American spirit of energy and aggressiveness” overseas.⁵⁴ Gooding fulfilled the potential that Burroughs saw in her by serving the West African missionary field while Alexis and François assumed positions with the African American-led Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention in Haiti. The efforts of the latter two women to instill the value of housework and Protestantism in their countrywomen met the approval of black Baptist women who were convinced that cultural backwardness might expedite the “final destruction” of the “land of Toussaint L’Ouverture” and generate heightened scrutiny of black political autonomy in the United States.⁵⁵

The experiences of the Haitian graduates of the NTS demonstrate the transnational dimensions and the conservative and progressive elements of the politics of respectability. Burroughs validated traditional notions of gender norms and the cultural values of white America by helping Alexis, Gooding, and François become Christian homemakers. She and her peers in the Women’s Convention fully expected their Haitian protégés to embrace the value of domesticity and spirituality and propagate these central tenets of “civilized” Anglo-American culture among foreign black communities, particularly in Haiti. At the same time, though, Burroughs and other black Baptist women believed that respectable Haitian graduates would erode the cultural justification of Jim Crow era segregation and

⁵⁴ Nannie Helen Burroughs, “Our Foreign Students,” *Journal of the 11th Annual Session of the Woman’s Convention* (September, 1911), 20, SBHLA, *Annuals/Journals*, Reel 14. *Journals of the Woman’s Convention* show that the Haitian students were joined by a number of other foreigners from the West Indies and Africa, many of them also prospective missionaries.

⁵⁵ *Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual Session of the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention and of the Women’s Auxiliary Convention* (September, 1919), in the SBHLA, Reel 14; *Journal of the 11th Annual Session of the Woman’s Convention* (September, 1911), 20, in the SBHLA, Reel 14.

disfranchisement by reforming the manners and morals of their countrywomen. In turn, Alexis, Gooding, and François would also verify the centrality of black women to the potential success of the black freedom struggle. The contradictions of these expectations are now clear, namely that Burroughs and her peers attempted to improve their political and social status while employing the same racialized assumptions that girded patriarchy and white supremacy. Yet the domestic and missionary training of Haitian pupils was ultimately a coherent element of black political culture and an important part of the ideological and institutional platform from which black churchwomen could challenge racial inequality in the United States.⁵⁶

To be sure, a number of Haitians saw education in the United States as an avenue towards individual and collective uplift. The students who left Haiti to study at the Alabama State Agricultural and Mechanical College, Tuskegee Institute, and the National Training School perceived vocational training as a means of personal advancement. In a letter to the instructor of electrical engineering at Tuskegee first published in the *Technical World Magazine*, one Haitian who entered the Institute in September 1903 explained that:

While in school, I desired to come to America to study practical science and learn a trade. After finishing I heard that Tuskegee was a place which afforded excellent opportunities to the Negro for acquiring practical knowledge . . . When I leave Tuskegee I shall attend some other school to pursue my studies still further, and shall then return to Port-au-Prince, Haiti . . . for work at my trade.⁵⁷

As Haitian officials “showed more interest than ever before in industrial education” by offering funding to students like the prospective engineer, other elites tried to learn about

⁵⁶ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 185-229.

⁵⁷ Charles W. Pierce, “How Electricity is Taught at Tuskegee,” *Technical World Magazine* 1, no. 2 (April 1904): 426

and emulate Washington's institution.⁵⁸ One Haitian doctor told a reporter that he was traveling to Alabama "in the interest of an educational project to be run along Tuskegee lines." Mirroring the words of Washington, he elaborated that "such a school would be a blessing to the republic" because "the average Haitien aims too high and is too impractical."⁵⁹

Nevertheless, many Haitians either ignored agricultural and industrial training schools intended for African Americans or regarded them with skepticism. The ideas of black educators failed to reach or persuade Haitian students who later objected to the contention of U.S. occupation officials that vocational training was the only type of schooling that Haitians should receive.⁶⁰ At the same time, a large number of Haitian elites remained convinced that intellectualism was the means by which Haitians would disprove theories of black inferiority and eradicate racial prejudice.⁶¹ Even those who were interested in industrial education expressed an unwillingness to expose themselves to U.S. racism. Dantès Bellegarde argued that if Haiti was to have "good skilled workers, good agriculturalists, good foremen, let us direct them without fear to the French schools . . .

⁵⁸ *Freeman*, October 31, 1903. Minister to the United States H. Pauleus Sannon, AME Bishop John Hurst, and public intellectual Jean Price-Mars were among the Haitians who visited Tuskegee and consulted with Washington about his educational philosophy. See "Haitian Minister to go to Tuskegee," *Freeman*, January 14, 1911 and Magdaline W. Shannon, *Jean Price-Mars, the Haitian Elite, and the American Occupation, 1915-1935* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 19-20.

⁵⁹ "Haytiens Need Tuskegee Ideas," *The Afro-American*, June 3, 1911 and "Haitiens Need Tuskegee Ideas," *Cleveland Gazette*, July 1, 1911.

⁶⁰ Dubois, *Haiti*, 280-285. Indeed, in 1907 the Haitian government opened the country's first agricultural school at Turgeau. It lasted only four years. Heintz and Heintz, 338.

⁶¹ Auguste Magloire, *Etude Sur Le Tempérament Haitien* (Port-au-Prince: Impr-Librairie du "Matin," 1908), 196.

where they will not be exposed, because of their color, to the hazing and despising invectives of their little mates.”⁶²

Despite their significant differences, Haitian supporters and skeptics of the Tuskegee model of black education shared a commitment to national sovereignty. Whether they traveled to Alabama to learn from Booker T. Washington or emphasized the benefits of a liberal arts education, Haitians demonstrated a pragmatic desire to evaluate and benefit from a wide-range of educational options.⁶³ Few if any Haitians voiced the opinion that their society or its educational system was beyond repair without wholesale change dictated by foreigners, white or black. In fact, the educational reforms proposed by Haitians were rooted in a desire to strengthen national life and a belief that they possessed the abilities to do so. For example, Haitian intellectual Jean Price-Mars argued that the Haitian Kreyòl vernacular should supplant French as the language of education in Haitian schools at the same time that he voiced his admiration of Washington.⁶⁴ This nuanced vision of educational reform and national progress would, however, remain unfulfilled. In the end, the struggle to balance useful foreign intelligence with cultural autonomy became

⁶² Dantès Bellegarde, *Pour Une Haiti Heureuse, Vol. 1* (Port-au-Prince: Chéraquit, 1929), 86. On Bellegarde’s ideas about Haitian education and European culture consult Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, *In the Shadow of Powers: Dantès Bellegarde in Haitian Social Thought* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1985).

⁶³ This is perhaps evidenced by the level at which many of Tuskegee’s Haitian students entered that institution. In 1903-1904, eight of the twelve Haitians at Tuskegee were in the post-graduate class. Post-graduate training resembled a sort of apprenticeship in which students chose their course of study and mastered a trade under the direction of a professor. Their introduction to Tuskegee life at this level indicates that Haitians were augmenting, not supplanting, other educational options available in Haiti, France, or elsewhere. *Twenty-Third Annual Catalogue of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute*, 115.

⁶⁴ Michale Largey, *Vodou Nation: Haitian Art Music and Cultural Nationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 45-46.

a casualty of outside forces that threatened indigenous leadership in all of Haiti's institutions.



Proposals for emigration and debates about educational reform coincided with a period of great self-reflection for Haitians. Throughout 1903, Haitian President Pierre Nord Alexis focused his energies on planning celebrations for the upcoming centenary of Haitian independence. He did so despite the misgivings of some Haitian elites who worried that the proposed festivities would distract from needed contemplation of their past hardships and draw outside attention to their present travails.⁶⁵ These concerns soon escalated. In January 1904, while 250,000 celebrants flocked to the *Palais du Centenaire* at Gonaïves, their nationalistic feelings stirred by a centennial march and a new national anthem, political dissidents in Port-au-Prince plotted to overthrow Nord Alexis.⁶⁶ Foreign press correspondents readily disregarded the joyous celebrations taking place in northern Haiti and drew attention to the widespread arrests and executions of conspirators ordered in the Haitian capital. These developments provided unwanted affirmation of the centennial jeremiads imploring Haitians to “ask forgiveness from Dessalines, from Toussaint . . . for our ingratitude . . . for our follies.”⁶⁷

Haitian jeremiads were not an abandonment of sovereignty. After all, Rosalvo Bobo, the harshest critic of the *centenaire* celebrations, later became a fierce opponent of the U.S.

⁶⁵ Heintz and Heintz, 334-336.

⁶⁶ “One Day Revolt in Hayti,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 7, 1904; “Letter of Marquise de Fontenoy,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 30, 1904.

⁶⁷ Rosalvo Bobo, *À Propos de la Fête du Centenaire*. (Port-au-Prince: Impr. La Conscience, 1903).

occupation. Yet leading African Americans speculated whether Haitian political turmoil and disputes about national progress indicated that piecemeal reform was an incomplete remedy to the ills that plagued Haiti and kept it from fulfilling its promise as a model of black self-government. When President Theodore Roosevelt insisted that the United States had a duty to police the Western Hemisphere, some black leaders attempted to bring about a U.S. intervention in Haiti.⁶⁸ Despite the misgivings of their peers, they suggested that a century had provided more than enough time for Haitians to display their political incompetence, cultural inferiority, and detrimental effect on the black freedom struggle in the United States.

The call for U.S. control over Haitian affairs came from a young college student. William Pickens was a child of former slaves who was born in post-Reconstruction South Carolina but spent much of his youth in Arkansas working in cotton fields and sawmills. After completing his primary and secondary education at local black schools, he attended and graduated from Talladega College in Alabama. Not content with ending his education at the private black college, Pickens endeavored to continue his studies at Yale University. In the fall of 1902, he enrolled there and immediately set about trying to distinguish himself among his white peers. He was able to do just that and more early in his second semester.

In February 1903, Yale held its annual “Ten Eyck Prize” oratorical competition. Among the ten topics that students could choose from, and the one ultimately selected by Pickens, was Haiti. His oration, later published in the *Yale Literary Magazine*, began with an explanation of that country’s relevance to Americans. Haiti, Pickens asserted, commanded

⁶⁸ Serge Ricard, “The Roosevelt Corollary,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36 (2006): 17-26.

the attention of U.S. policymakers pursuing an imperialist agenda and its history shed light “upon the much-mooted questions which involve the welfare of the whole southern section of our country.” Pickens then proceeded to give his audience a brief lesson about Haiti’s colonial and revolutionary past. After recounting the colonization of Saint Domingue by the French and describing the course of the Haitian Revolution—pausing to commend Louverture for avoiding the “suicidal race-hatred” that plagued his successors—Pickens went on to disparage the results of the successful slave insurrection. He argued that “with the gain of absolute independence the uncivilized horde gained the most efficient weapon of self-destruction.” Rather than subjugate themselves to more educated Europeans, the former slaves “destroyed every trace and hope of internal civilization” and rapidly relapsed “into a savagery and cannibalism comparable to any state of their African ancestry.”⁶⁹

These were the unstable foundations of Haiti’s present misfortunes. Pickens marshaled various pieces of anecdotal evidence in support of his claim that “revolution and decline” remained the central characteristics of Haitian life on the eve of its centennial. He described the Haitian government as despotic, reduced Haitian religious life to “fetish-worship and voodooism,” and maintained that “reliable reports of human sacrifices and cannibalism” showed the ignorance of Haitians. Moreover, Pickens labeled Haiti’s agricultural methods “primitive” while asserting that the country’s commerce was “hampered by dishonesty” when “not prevented by war.”⁷⁰ Haiti, he surmised, was a failure.

⁶⁹ William Pickens, “Hayti,” *The Yale Literary Magazine* 68, No.7 (April 1903): 234-235.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 236.

Yet the Yale student was careful to note that Haiti's faults did not incriminate African Americans. Pickens followed his damning assessment of Haiti with a disclaimer that the "Black Republic" was not "a demonstration of the incapacity of the *negro* race for self-government." Instead Haiti provided "historical proof of the inability of any *uncivilized* race for maintaining a civil community with no outside constraining force." He pointed out that African Americans committed to material and moral improvement had already learned this lesson. Replicating the prevailing reasoning of contemporary white historians, Pickens asserted that Reconstruction had shown African Americans that "the savage and the child to rise to higher things must feel the power of a stronger hand."⁷¹ A good deal of shrewdness thus underlay Pickens's callousness. By distinguishing autonomous yet uncouth Haitians from cultured, albeit politically dependent, African Americans, the young orator hoped to make a case for political rights and self-determination.

Nevertheless, his cause was diminished by a simple truth: within the context of U.S. racialism African Americans and Haitians were wholly and irrefutably linked by their blackness. Recognizing this, Pickens concluded his essay not with an explicit denunciation of Jim Crow but with a proposal to bring Haitians under the same "power of a stronger hand" experienced by African Americans. In fact, he argued that U.S. policymakers were peculiarly suited to assume a humanitarian subjugation of Haitians because they were

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 236-237. Prominent white historians who promoted this idea included John W. Burgess, William Archibald Dunning, Woodrow Wilson, and Thomas Nelson Page. To a lesser extent, these attitudes were reflected in the writings of George Washington Williams, Booker T. Washington, and other leading African Americans who characterized Reconstruction as a period that proved the volatility and futility of politics for black people. See Meier, 26-41. The idea that Reconstruction was a failed experiment in black rule would receive its first substantive challenge from W.E.B. Du Bois, who published the revisionist arguments from an earlier paper given at the American Historical Association in the 1935 publication *Black Reconstruction in America*.

“schooled as no other in the problems of the negro race.” Pickens implied that Haitians would accrue innumerable benefits from this foreign intervention, asserting that “under American institutions the blacks as a race have reached the highest plane of civilization of which the negro’s history has record—a fact sometimes obscured by the remonstrances against injustice and oppression.”⁷² Faced with the challenge of making the bond between African Americans and Haitians useful, Pickens thus attempted to extend a domestic solution to racial advancement into a foreign context. And in the complex logic of Jim Crow era black intellectualism, white Americans would relinquish their power over blacks after the material and moral progress of those blacks proved their political dependency effective.

“Hayti” garnered Pickens more notoriety than the young student ever expected. After winning first-place in the “Ten Eyck” competition, Pickens’s essay was the subject of newspaper headlines and gossip throughout the entire country. John Edward Bruce was one of the hundreds of thousands of Americans who learned of Pickens and his opinion of Haiti. In a column appearing in an April 1903 edition of *The Colored American*, the former slave turned journalist and political activist argued that Pickens mistook “the temper of the Haitians” when he assumed that they “ought to submit to a benevolent assimilation.” The testimony of Haitians verified this point. Bruce’s opinion piece quoted at length a Haitian resident of New York City who was “greatly astonished” that an African American would vilify a country that had “maintained a Negro government . . . without the aid or consent of any outside nation” for a century. “I am very sorry,” the Haitian confidant was reported as saying, “to see that Hayti is a subject of criticism even by the Negroes of this country, seeing that they have so much of their own trouble to mind.” How could an African American not

⁷² Pickens, “Hayti,” 237-238.

realize that “in putting down our people he has equally spoken against the people of his own race in this country?”⁷³

Other members of the northern black intelligentsia agreed that Haiti “should have the unstinted commendation of every Negro.”⁷⁴ In April 1903, the members of the black branch of New York City’s Young Men’s Christian Association resolved that the Yale orator “was wrong in declaring Hayti incapable of self-government.”⁷⁵ Their conclusion meshed with the editorializing of William Monroe Trotter. In an article that caused Pickens to contemplate a lawsuit against Trotter for libel, the editor of the Boston *Guardian* and Booker T. Washington’s most outspoken opponent characterized Pickens as the “first Negro ever to have won . . . oratorical honors at Yale by surrendering his self-respect, sacrificing his pride, emasculating his manhood, and throwing down his race.” The Boston firebrand saw the young Arkansan’s blind acceptance of the “white man’s estimate of the Negro” as a reflection of the “servile” tendencies of Washington’s followers. He insisted that praise of Pickens was simply a reflection of white America’s tendency to exalt those African Americans who wallowed “in the mud and mire of American prejudice.”⁷⁶

These critics of Pickens faced a conundrum: they needed to verify an affinity between African Americans and Haitians and rebuke Pickens precisely because a growing number of African Americans disavowed Haiti. William F. Powell was among those who worried that Pickens’s oratory created an unfavorable impression of African Americans

⁷³ John Edward Bruce, “Bruce Grit’s Melange,” *The Colored American*, April 18, 1903.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ “New York Letter,” *The Colored American*, April 25, 1903.

⁷⁶ Sheldon Avery, *Up From Washington: William Pickens and the Negro Struggle for Equality, 1900-1954* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 16-17.

among Haitians who read about the inflammatory speech in their country's newspapers. He complimented Bruce for rebuking Pickens and set about reassuring his Haitian hosts in Port-au-Prince that "all [African Americans] desire to see this Republic retain autonomy and independence." Yet even as Powell ignored the implications of his own emigration proposals and insisted that "we look with pride toward the centenary," the diplomat admitted that Americans were "bestowing great praise" upon Pickens for his prescription for misgoverned Haiti.⁷⁷ Many of these admirers were white Americans conditioned to view blackness and nationhood as antithetical. But, as Powell surely recognized given his attempts to rebut Pickens in black newspapers as well as in Haitian society, a number of those who wrote laudatory letters to the Yale student, procured copies of his essay, and requested interviews from him were African American.⁷⁸

An organization of black Kentuckians who dreamed of empire provided the most enthusiastic reception of Pickens's ideas. In the early 1900s, N.L. Musgrove served as the secretary of the Sons of Freedom, a lodge organized in a small community in the northwestern part of the Bluegrass State. Musgrove noted that white Americans were unwilling to share political power with blacks, a population that they regarded as a "failure and a nuisance to civilization." Consequently, his group, "looking for a safe place to fall when the inevitable storm breaks," identified Haiti as a more desirable site to shape their future. Musgrove explained that the Sons of Freedom planned to storm Haiti, supplant that country's despotic leaders, and establish a more stable republic of African Americans. He claimed that his group was already receiving support from one hundred subsidiary

⁷⁷ Powell, "The Black Republic," *The Colored American*, July 25, 1903.

⁷⁸ Pickens, *Bursting Bonds* (Boston: The Jordan & More Press, 1923), 122-127.

branches located throughout the South and he anticipated that their members would help the Sons of Freedom make their Haitian republic the seat of a trans-Caribbean empire.⁷⁹ Besides prudence, all that was missing from the filibuster scheme was a leader.

The “junta” of black Kentuckians concluded that Pickens was the ideal man to help “carry out the noble dream of empire.”⁸⁰ The Yale orator would first raise money for the warship and munitions needed to conquer Haiti by making speeches throughout the country. He would then become president after the successful overthrow of the incumbent Haitian government. Under his leadership, African Americans would create a nation founded on a curious amalgamation of republican, socialist, capitalist, and utopian principles. In the new Haiti, the government would administer all land titles and businesses and function as a large corporation in which all members of society held stock. At the same time, the conquering African Americans would seek a U.S. protectorate over their country and endeavor to make Port-au-Prince a commercial mecca for U.S. investors. The social dynamics of the new Haiti would prove attractive to these foreign interests as the Sons of Freedom would expel all criminals from their country and promote public education, agriculture, and manufacturing.⁸¹

Pickens appears to have found the imperial pursuit intriguing. After becoming implicated in the international conspiracy, the young student clarified the reasoning behind his essay and his opinion of the Sons of Freedom. Haiti, newspapers quoted Pickens as

⁷⁹ “Negroes Plan to Establish Black State,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 17, 1903; “Plan a Negro Empire in Hayti,” *New York Tribune*, June 7, 1903.

⁸⁰ “Form a Republic for the Negroes,” *The Nashville American*, May 5, 1903.

⁸¹ “Would Found Negro Empire,” *The Baltimore Sun*, May 5, 1903; *The Morning Oregonian*, April 6, 1903.

saying, had long captured his attention and he initially intended to make “a plea for the Haytian nation” at the Yale oratory competition. His purpose changed, though, with the acquisition of more knowledge about the country.⁸² Pickens soon reached the conclusion that Haiti “needed the influence of some great restraining power” because its people were “the most uncivilized nation in the vicinity of the United States” and “absolutely unable to govern themselves.” In his estimation, the imperial scheme presented to him in a letter from Musgrove was thus an unsurprising, earnest, and logical attempt “to bring order out of chaos in Haiti.”⁸³ Even after denying the group his support, Pickens insinuated that the Sons of Freedom were “eccentric” rather than misguided. In his autobiography, he explained that it would have been irresponsible to join a movement that might have added to “the volcanic little government’s already too numerous chief executives” despite its commendable intentions.⁸⁴

Other black leaders were less magnanimous in their appraisals of the outlandish plot. George L. Knox was no admirer of the Haitian government but he found the “proposition . . . to seize Hayti and establish a government for and by the colored people of the United States” objectionable because it implied a reliance on emigrationism. While he argued that “no one thinks seriously of any movement having a general exodus in mind,”

⁸² “Juniors’ Oratorical Champion Worked for His Board and Saved His Tuition,” *The Colored American*, April 18, 1903.

⁸³ *Ibid*; “Plan a Negro Empire in Hayti.”

⁸⁴ “Story of Pickens,” *The Freeman*, May 23, 1903; Pickens, *The Heir of Slaves* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1911), 127. His description of the controversy remains the same in *Bursting Bonds*.

Sol Johnson attributed the scheme to “imaginative brains presenting queer tales.”⁸⁵ Some of his peers advised African Americans to address their own problems before crafting proposals to solve Haiti’s. An editorial in the Wichita *Colored Citizen* informed Pickens and Musgrove “that it will be more fitting and far more profitable” to “equip an army South and help to free our people from the murderous hands of the Southern American and restore quiet THERE and stay away from Hayti.” Besides, the paper opined, anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of Haitian history knew that “all who wish to go to Hayti had better learn to swim, for those Haytians will drive any man . . . into the Caribbean Sea that ever attempts to trample upon their God-given rights.”⁸⁶

The desperate plea to “take care of the negroes of America and let the sons of Toussaint L’Overture alone!” belied the anxiety of those who scorned Haiti’s critics.⁸⁷ Their apprehension was justified. At the same time that the Sons of Freedom plotted to gain control of Haiti, black proponents of Haitian independence confronted the interests of U.S. foreign policymakers who did not think that Haiti deserved her autonomy. During the meeting of the 58th Congress, Republican Senator Weldon B. Heyburn introduced a Senate resolution for the annexation of Haiti that mirrored some of the arguments for intervention articulated by Pickens. Annexation, according to the Idahoan, was warranted because of the U.S. government’s investment in the Panama Canal Zone, Haiti’s geographical proximity

⁸⁵ *The Freeman*, May 23, 1903; *The Savannah Tribune*, May 30, 1903.

⁸⁶ “An Afro-American Republic,” *The Colored Citizen*, May 23, 1903.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

to the canal property as well as the United States, and the general political chaos that reigned in Haiti.⁸⁸

Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett denounced this proposal that threatened to turn the wishes of Pickens and the fantasies of Musgrove into a reality. In an article published in the May 1904 edition of *The Voice of the Negro*, the first black minister resident and consul general sent to Port-au-Prince articulated four reasons why the United States should not pursue the annexation of Haiti. First, Bassett argued that U.S. foreign policy had never sanctioned the acquisition of non-contiguous territories, excepting the recent annexation of Hawaii. Second, he noted that the current Assistant Secretary of State had indicated an unwillingness to adjust this traditional policy by speaking out against a proposed annexation of Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. Third, Bassett suggested that unresolved debates about the citizenship status of annexed peoples should make overseas expansion more of a future possibility than a present concern.⁸⁹ Finally, in a concluding point worth quoting at length, Bassett insisted that discussions of annexation, whether in the present or at a future time, should omit Haiti. The veteran of the Môle St. Nicolas negotiations explained that:

The government and the people of Haiti, are, and for one hundred years have been, an inflexible, indivisible unit against every possible scheme insidious and otherwise, for the alienation of any part of their territory and independence. It can be safely set down as positive fact that Haiti does not now and in all probability never will desire or consent to share her sovereignty with any other power whatsoever. Furthermore, Haiti is by far the most advanced, the most important and the best established of the only three Republics in the world, where alone the Negro race has full and

⁸⁸ Charles E. Wynes, "Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett, America's First Black Diplomat," *Pennsylvania History* 51 (1984): 238.

⁸⁹ Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett, "Should Haiti be Annexed to the United States?" *The Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 5 (May 1904): 196-197.

untrammelled liberty to develop its faculties and its possibilities. As a general rule, American publications speak only evil of Haiti. This is wholly unfair. If we look back at the real condition of things existing in Haiti at the time when she achieved her independence, her cities and villages, her roads, her industries, her aqueducts, her mills, her plantations, her commerce, her families and fortunes, all in ruins from the desolations of several years of war, so that she had to begin her life from nothing—if we look back at all this and then turning to her as she is today, consider the gigantic difficulties which she has had to meet and overcome in order to maintain her independence, I think that there can be no question that her growth and development intellectually, morally and materially have been in every way remarkable and merit at least the considerate and generous judgment of mankind.⁹⁰

Bassett's concerns were assuaged—at least temporarily. The resolution presented by Heyburn received a cool reception in the Senate and it became buried in the Committee on Foreign Relations. For the time being, Bassett felt some assurance that his government might heed his wishes and “let [Haiti] alone to work out her mission for the children of Africa in the New World.”⁹¹ Nonetheless, the peril of the proposed Senate resolution was difficult to ignore. In isolation, the pro-annexation argument presented by Pickens and the imperial scheme crafted by the Sons of Freedom would likely amount to nothing more than a bit of sound and fury. But what happened if Haiti's black critics gained a sympathetic audience among foreign policymakers? Then their bluster would surely signify something.



In the ensuing decade, deliberations on annexation and Haitian independence persisted. A significant number of working poor, aspiring class, and elite African Americans from across the country venerated the leaders of the Haitian Revolution and voiced their approval of the independence maintained since that seminal event. Formerly

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 197-198.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 198.

enslaved men and women were among those who flocked to emancipation day festivities in Missouri where orations on Haitian independence were featured alongside readings of the 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.⁹² Black panegyrists in Detroit, Chicago, and Baltimore recounted the feats of the Haitian revolutionaries, praising them for resisting enslavement, lauding their creation of an independent black nation, and expressing hope that similar figures would emerge in the United States to deliver African Americans from their current oppression.⁹³ J. Robert Love provided John Edward Bruce and readers of the *Voice of the Negro* with a translation of the Haitian Declaration of Independence, a document that he described as a “monument of the Negro’s inherent greatness, and perpetual testimony to his *constitutional* fitness for all duties, requirements and responsibilities of human existence.”⁹⁴ The children of black émigrés made similar efforts to vindicate the independent existence of their parents’ adopted Haitian homeland as both Alonzo P. Holly and John Hurst traveled throughout the eastern United States delivering lectures on Haiti’s achievements and progress.⁹⁵

Despite their optimism, black advocates of Haitian sovereignty had reason to doubt whether African Americans and Haitians remained allies in a common struggle for self-determination. In September 1909, approximately one hundred African Americans

⁹² *St. Louis Palladium*, July 29, 1905.

⁹³ Carmouchi, “Haiti, the Beautiful,” *Washington Bee*, November 29, 1913; “Extract From the Lecture Recently Delivered By C.L. Agnew On The Negro As A Soldier,” *Broad Ax*, April 15, 1913; “Louverture Died 109 Years Ago,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 4, 1912.

⁹⁴ J. Robert Love, “The Proclamation of Haitian Independence,” *The Voice of the Negro* 2, no. 9 (September 1905): 640.

⁹⁵ “Dr. Alonzo P. Holly,” *Cleveland Gazette*, October 28, 1905; “Rev. Hurst on Hayti,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, February 2, 1907.

gathered at a banquet in Washington, D.C. to honor Hurst and mark his return from a two-month visit to Port-au-Prince. When it came time for Hurst to respond to the various addresses given on his behalf, he used the occasion to reflect on mounting tension between African Americans and Haitians. The financial secretary of the AME Church told the attendees that educated Haitians increasingly viewed the condition of African Americans with alarm. Persistent accounts of lynching and diminished black political participation found in the national and foreign newspapers distributed throughout Haiti were the cause of this distress. Hurst reported that the response of leading African Americans to their deteriorating status was even more puzzling to Haitian readers. They thought it “inexplicable, almost baffling” that black leaders seemed to have abandoned their historical commitment to protesting “infringements upon the rights of [their] race” in favor of a current policy of “negation and acquiescence.”⁹⁶ Where, concerned Haitians wondered, was the heir to Frederick Douglass, that fearless champion of racial equality?

Hurst found the search for another “lion” symptomatic of a larger problem. As the AME reverend and current resident of Baltimore tried to convince his Haitian friends that African Americans were not “retrograding” or “thinking of ever making a surrender of their rights,” African Americans encountered a wealth of misinformation about Haiti. Hurst told his audience in Washington that the U.S. press was responsible for giving black readers the impression that Haitians were a “very turbulent, restless and war-like people” or, even worse, “Voudou worshippers and Cannibals.” He suggested that African Americans and Haitians should transcend these misperceptions by making an effort “to get together and study each other more closely, and . . . share the view-point of each other in facing the great

⁹⁶ “Rev. John Hurst Guest at Banquet,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 25, 1909.

questions affecting the race as a whole.” In Hurst’s opinion, a transnational network of newspapers “published by the race in those countries” would facilitate this goal. The distribution of Haitian newspapers in the United States would help African Americans see that Haiti represented “the millions of Negroes on this continent” at the same time that exposure to the “old Negro organs” like the *Cleveland Gazette*, *New York Age*, and *Indianapolis Freeman* would familiarize Haitians with the realities of life in black America.⁹⁷

Hurst’s proposal rested on the sound assumption that information erodes ignorance. Yet placing the burden of transnational understanding upon African American and Haitian journalists might have exacerbated the very issue that Hurst hoped to alleviate. The editors of the AME reverend’s preferred black newspapers harbored unfavorable attitudes about Haiti and were unprepared to shield that country from her detractors. Some were even foremost among Haiti’s critics. For instance, George L. Knox consistently devoted space in the *Freeman* to mandates for Haitian educational reform and criticisms of Haitian political culture. The ardent supporter of Booker T. Washington urged his readers to measure their success against the failures of Haitians, reminding them that African Americans might not have much to be thankful for but few would trade places with the Haitian president at any given moment.⁹⁸

Indeed, Knox gradually came to view African Americans who sympathized with Haitians as idealists ignorant of current events. In September 1911, Knox published “The Status of Haiti,” an editorial in which he speculated that optimistic assessments of the “prospects of peace” and sustainable independence in Haiti were misguided. The *Freeman*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *The Freeman*, November 28, 1908.

editor opined that Haiti's "record of interrupted "reigns"" and political violence did not lend itself to "any such hope for the future" especially because "civilized" nations including the United States were committed to a "universal effort to reduce the horrors of war." Knox clarified that his sympathy lay not with Haitians but rather with those world powers whose commitment to a "peace sentiment" would somehow give way to a war of unprecedented scope and devastation three years later. He rebuked "race men" who questioned the humanitarianism of American and European leaders, feared a U.S. intervention in Haiti, and hoped "to see the island yet dominated by Negroes, maintained for Negroes." Haiti, he assured romantics, would only have herself to blame if it was "gobbled up" by another nation. Knox asserted that Haiti needed to "subscribe to the tenets of today's civilization" and "conform to the agreements of its own society—that of nations—or else pay the awful penalty." Rather than defend a nation "persistent in giving offense to civilization," the Indianapolis journalist thus found it more valuable to deliver a final rebuke: "[Haiti] knows how it is regarded by other nations. It should not fail to take a hint."⁹⁹

Knox continued to lambast Haiti in ensuing years, finding little merit in claims that he and other outsiders exaggerated its backwardness. In August 1914, he chastised an African American living in Haiti who claimed that his current country of residence suffered from a "campaign of misrepresentation" in the United States. Knox assured readers of his paper—one of the most popular and widely circulated in black America—that nothing could be further from the truth. The *Freeman* editor noted that he had "tried hard to think of the island as in keeping with its reputation for great prospects," implying that his attempts to find something positive to say about Haiti had been futile. Moreover, he

⁹⁹ "The Status of Haiti," *The Freeman*, September 2, 1911.

reaffirmed his belief that Haitians were entirely to blame for negative appraisals of their country's progress. Knox wrote that Haiti "should read between the lines. If its condition is exaggerated it should see to it that it comes up to the level of men's expectations."¹⁰⁰

In fact, Knox wondered whether Haiti's inability to meet the "expectations" of outsiders might warrant more than scorn. As a younger man, he once denounced speculation that the United States might assume control over Haiti by arguing that "annexing revolutions is worse than buying lawsuits."¹⁰¹ But, by August 1914, his affinity for annexation surpassed even the support evident in "The Status of Haiti." As rumors swirled that Haiti had become "a very tempting morsel" for the U.S. government and the many Americans "who would just as soon annex Hayti as not," the *Freeman* editor speculated that "perpetual turbulence" and "internal dissension" might justify that type of intervention. To be fair, Knox did surmise that Haiti could "destroy the thought of annexation" if it exhibited more "activity" along the lines of cultural improvement and material advancement. He just did not envision such progress happening. Instead he described Haiti as existing in a liminal state, suggesting that "with Hayti the question seems to be or not to be . . . it neither stays or goes, so to speak."¹⁰² For Knox, then, the fate of Haiti hung in the balance, introduction into modernity under the guidance of foreigners or devolution into prehistoric barbarity as an independent people were the two paths available to Haitians. The choice was theirs.



¹⁰⁰ "Hayti Misrepresented," *The Freeman*, August 22, 1914.

¹⁰¹ *The Freeman*, April 22, 1905.

¹⁰² "Hayti Misrepresented," *The Freeman*, August 22, 1914.

A few months later, U.S. policymakers demonstrated their belief that Haitians had decided their fate. In December 1914, a detachment of U.S. Marines from the USS *Machias* disembarked at Port-au-Prince. They entered the Banque Nationale d'Haïti, a financial institution controlled by two U.S. banks operating under the influence of the U.S. State Department. There the Marines removed \$500,000 worth of gold belonging to the Haitian government from the vaults, loaded it back onto their ship, and brought the stolen loot back to New York. The U.S. government rationalized the seizure by arguing that the gold might be necessary to cover Haiti's debts to U.S. bankers. Haitians roundly decried the act, viewing it as further evidence that racist foreigners had gained too great an influence in Haitian economic life.¹⁰³

The raid was only the beginning. From Washington, Haitian ambassador Solon Menos warned other Haitian political leaders that the seizure at the Banque Nationale was simply a precursor to further attacks on Haitian sovereignty. He noted that U.S. officials in the State Department increasingly joked with him, bantering about political violence taking place in Haiti. On one occasion, U.S. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan told him that rebels had taken over the town of St. Marc and insinuated that Americans should assume control over Haitian affairs. Events in Europe appeared to heighten the audacity of Bryan and President Woodrow Wilson, as both men reached the unguarded conclusion that an independent Haiti was susceptible to encroachment by Germany and its strong naval force. In this context, Menos could not escape the conclusion that U.S. financial desires, strategic

¹⁰³ Dubois, *Haiti*, 204-205.

interests, and racial attitudes were quickly circumscribing the boundaries of Haitian independence.¹⁰⁴

The excuse for the anticipated intervention arrived in the summer of 1915. Haitian President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam had found himself in a bind for most of his time in office. On the one hand, he needed to accommodate the United States because it controlled the coffers of his bankrupt state. On the other hand, members of the Haitian parliament, urban elites, and rebels in the countryside all articulated vehement displeasure with any efforts to placate the Americans. Sam's attempts to navigate this treacherous political terrain failed to appease his critics, particularly Rosalvo Bobo and those who rallied to his anti-U.S. standard. By July, the pressures wrought by the rebel leader caused the Sam regime to collapse under a wave of brutality. After Sam's military commander executed 167 political prisoners ostensibly loyal to Bobo, the capital erupted. A crowd seized the President from his refuge in the French legation, dragged him into the streets, and tore his body apart. Dissidents paraded the bloody remains throughout the city, reveling in the grotesque end of the man responsible for the deaths of their husbands, sons, and brothers.¹⁰⁵

U.S. policymakers saw a unique opportunity in the macabre scene. On July 28, 1915, under the authorization of President Wilson, the USS *Washington* entered the harbor of Port-au-Prince. A contingent of 330 U.S. sailors and Marines landed just south of the city, quickly assessed their foreign surroundings, and subsequently moved towards central Port-au-Prince. It was not long before they subdued the capital. In doing so, the Marines acted as agents of civilization, as the military arm of a U.S. government whose leaders

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 206-207.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 209-210.

believed that blacks were “devoid of any capacity for political organization . . . [or] genius for government.” Their efforts to stem the Haitian “tendency to revert to savagery” and assume control of that country’s future were quickly processed by Haitians who watched the initial throng of Marines multiply into a force of two thousand by late August. In the words of one eyewitness, Haitians “understood then that a new phase of our history was beginning.”¹⁰⁶



Booker T. Washington also watched the unfolding of events in the Caribbean, albeit from the relative safety of his home in Tuskegee, Alabama. In an article published in the *New York Age* a month before his death, the most influential black man of his time contended that “Haitians themselves are largely at fault for their present unhappy conditions.” He identified various links in an elaborate chain of evidence that proved his point. Haitian leaders, Washington pointed out, were enamored with French culture. Consequently, they eschewed industrial training, instead devoting “themselves to politics, little knowing, it seems, that political independence disappears without economic independence, that economic independence is the foundation of political independence.” He claimed that this folly left the country underdeveloped, reliant on the financial largesse of foreigners, and ultimately responsible for the actions of the U.S. Marines. Washington concluded that the U.S. government had to take control of Haiti or else Europeans, in

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 213-215. The authoritative treatment of the United States occupation of Haiti remains Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971).

violation of the Monroe Doctrine, would have taken military action to obtain the money owed to them by the Haitian government.¹⁰⁷

To a considerable degree, Washington saw great promise in this inevitable intervention. The Tuskegee President suggested that the United States would seize “the opportunity to do a big piece of fine work for Haiti,” to act with “unselfish benevolence” in their intervention into Haitian affairs. He thought education was a particularly fruitful area of potential development. Washington expressed his hope that the U.S. occupiers would give Haitians “a thorough up-to-date system of common school, agricultural and industrial education.” Moreover, he identified the occupation as an especially providential occasion for African Americans “educated in the best methods of education in this country to go to Haiti and help their fellows.” They might even build upon their previous efforts, bring “promising” Haitian youths to their schools in the United States, and give them “something they have never had . . . education, real education.”¹⁰⁸

Yet, despite this optimism, Washington had his misgivings. He insisted that the U.S. government needed to be careful “in the class of white men sent to Haiti” because the “average American white man” was ill-suited to work among a proud black people in their country. Washington cautioned that “there are only a few white men in the United States who understand, or even undertake to understand, the American Negro, and there are still fewer white men in this country who can go into Haiti and get the sympathy, the co-operation and the confidence of the Haitians.” Much care, then, was needed in selecting

¹⁰⁷ Washington, “Dr. Booker T. Washington On American Occupation of Haiti,” *New York Age*, October 21, 1915 in *The Booker T. Washington Papers Vol. 13, 1914-15*, ed. Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 395-397.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 398-399.

those who would take charge of helping Haitians “establish a republican form of government on the basic principles of liberty, fraternity and equality.”¹⁰⁹

Indeed, Washington implied that the success or failure of the U.S. occupation of Haiti would provide a referendum on race relations in the United States. The former slave argued that the U.S. government had the opportunity to prove to Haitians “that in spite of the many wrongs inflicted upon their fellows in the United States that in all the real things of civilization [African Americans] are further ahead of any similar number of black people anywhere in the world.” Washington’s real meaning was difficult to miss. After witnessing the continued legal and physical challenges to black citizenship during his lifetime, the preeminent black leader knew that it was African Americans, not Haitians, who needed the convincing. To this point, he guaranteed that “the ten million black people in the United States are watching this government prayerfully, watching to see if it will exercise the same patience with Haiti that it has exercised with larger and more important countries that have been as disorderly as Haiti.” In essence, they, like generations of African Americans before them, would be watching events in the “Black Republic” hoping to see portents of a more egalitarian and just future for blacks in the United States.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 399-401.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

EPILOGUE:

THE ONE BEST CHANCE THAT THE NEGRO HAS

After the seizure of Port-au-Prince, the U.S. Navy and the State Department searched for a Haitian politician who would be amenable to their preferred terms of occupation. They found their puppet in Sudre Dartiguenave, president of the Haitian senate. Under the duress of the Marines, the Haitian legislature elected Dartiguenave to the national presidency and began consideration of a treaty between the United States and Haiti. Besides making the occupation official, the document would grant the U.S. government control of Haitian customs houses and the state treasury, replace the Haitian army with a new military structure led by U.S. Marines, and make all appointments and nominations to Haitian political office subject to approval by the president of the United States. When the Haitian Senate ratified the treaty, Dartiguenave proclaimed it the forging of a new Haitian independence. He left any shame he felt in comparing the surrender of national sovereignty to the Haitian Declaration of Independence unspoken.¹

To be sure, though, a number of Haitian elites identified the convention as a shameful betrayal of Dessalines and the Haitian Revolution. Editors committed to printing the truth about the occupation quickly faced the shuttering of their presses and the prospect of imprisonment. Some prominent Haitian officials who worried about the attack on their country's honor resigned their posts. Others faced extreme coercion, including the

¹ Dubois, *Haiti*, 222.

withholding of their salaries, when they protested the “moral slavery” implicated in the convention. While these journalists and politicians were unsuccessful in their efforts to halt the foreign intervention, they made it clear that many Haitians would continue to oppose the symbolic re-forging of the very chains of subservience broken by their ancestors.²

Indeed, ordinary Haitians built a sustained resistance to the U.S. occupation almost from the moment that U.S. Marines landed on Haitian soil. As Haitian politicians in the capital turned their country over to the Americans, peasant insurgents called Cacos mobilized throughout the countryside to repel the invaders. The ideas that girded their resistance received sound articulation by one former domestic servant who had become a Haitian military officer. Upon receiving word that the United States had assumed control of his country, he insisted that:

For almost 112 years, we have been a free and independent people. Our sweat and our courage gave us our independence. In that time, we have never been governed by a head of state chosen by a foreign power.³

This tradition of sovereignty, the rebel suggested, made it inconceivable that Haitians would now acquiesce to attempts to re-forging the bonds of slavery rather than fight in defense of the idea that blacks could govern themselves.

Despite their resolve, Haitian rebels faced long odds in defeating a modern army whose members possessed new weaponry and old prejudices. All of the U.S. Marines were white and, as critics of the occupation would later stress, many of them were southern. Oftentimes these soldiers knew very little about the “land of black people” except for what

² *Ibid.*, 219-222.

³ Roger Gaillard, *Premier écrasement du cacoïsme* (Port-au-Prince: R. Gaillard, 1981), 105, quoted in Dubois, *Haiti*, 224.

they learned from racist books such as Spenser St. John's *Hayti; or, the Black Republic*. Consequently, the Marines tended to conceptualize their mission in Haiti within their understanding of U.S. race relations. One high-ranking colonel from Virginia pronounced his fitness for duty in Haiti by writing "I know the nigger and how to handle him." Another private recalled that shooting at Cacos made him reminisce about a childhood amusement park game called "hit the nigger and get a cigar." For white soldiers raised in the segregated United States, all of their experiences seemed to have equipped them for the responsibility of subjugating a population of "bad niggers, as we would call them at home."⁴

The initial conflict between these Marines and the Cacos culminated in November 1915. That month, a few hundred insurgents equipped with pikes, machetes, and antiquated rifles took refuge at Fort Rivière. Outgunned and outmanned, they prepared to make a final stand at the mountain fortress in northern Haiti that dated back to the first war for national independence. A contingent of Marines, however, found a passage into the fort. As they took the Cacos by surprise, some of their comrades scaled the fortress walls and began firing on the Haitian rebels with machine guns. The battle was quickly over. Although some Cacos escaped the carnage and hid their weapons for use at a later date, the decisive victory for the Marines made it clear that the Americans were in Haiti to stay.⁵



Black Protestant missionaries working in the Haitian field were among the first to criticize the new state of affairs in that country. In late 1915, AME Reverend S.E. Churchstone Lord wrote to the U.S. Secretary of State to complain about the presence of

⁴ Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 78-80, 141, 155-156.

⁵ Dubois, *Haiti*, 230-231.

degenerate Marines. In fact, he questioned the very purpose of the occupation. As U.S. soldiers launched a brutal counter-insurgency campaign in the countryside and assaulted Haitians in urban centers, the future member of the Universal Negro Improvement Association noted that little effort was devoted to promised reforms. Less troops and more Protestant social workers and black educators, he surmised, were needed if the occupation was to achieve the humanitarian ends promoted by U.S. propagandists.⁶

Leaders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) were even more unyielding in their scrutiny of the intervention in Haiti. Since its inception in 1909, the civil rights organization had become a home to thinkers who subscribed to an increasingly popular Pan-African worldview. In particular, co-founder W.E.B Du Bois believed that the discrimination faced by African Americans at home was connected to the sufferings of colored people abroad. Consequently, after first speculating that occupation might benefit Haitians, the Massachusetts-born intellectual emerged as a vocal opponent of an invasion that demonstrated the adverse influence of white supremacy in global and domestic affairs.

Throughout its early stages, Du Bois made a concerted effort to expose the failings of the occupation in *The Crisis*. The editor of the official organ of the NAACP published routine updates on Haitian resistance to the occupation, re-printed editorials from liberal newspapers sympathetic to the Haitian opposition, and contributed his own thoughts on the nefarious motives of U.S. policymakers. For instance, in the December 1915 edition of

⁶ Brenda Gayle Plummer, "The Afro-American Response to the Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934," *Phylon* 43, no. 2 (2nd Quarter, 1982): 130-131. On the presence of the UNIA in occupied Haiti, see Plummer, "Haiti," in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, The Caribbean Diaspora, 1910-1920 Volume XI*, ed. Robert A. Hill (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), ccxix-ccxxi.

his paper, Du Bois speculated that the “smooth promises of benevolent guardianship in Haiti with no intention to interfere with [Haitian] political integrity” could not be taken seriously. He pointed out that Woodrow Wilson had appointed a white Louisianan to a diplomatic post in Port-au-Prince historically given to African Americans. Even worse, Du Bois argued, the new minister resident and consul general to Haiti was likely related to a member of a white citizens’ committee that favored the entrenchment of “the *rule* of the *Caucasian*” and the disfranchisement of black voters in Caddo Parish. In the estimation of the Pan-Africanist leader, granting such men authority in Haiti made it unlikely that the occupation was anything except an attempt to ensure that the interests of white supremacists reigned in Le Cap as well as Louisiana.⁷

Moreover, Du Bois made it a point of emphasis to highlight the voices of Haitian intellectuals who also viewed the occupation as an affront to black political autonomy. In particular, he devoted space in the editorial section of *The Crisis* to commentary from the Haitian journalists who U.S. officials in Port-au-Prince tried to silence. The January 1916 edition of the NAACP organ, for example, featured an editorial written by Ernest Chauvet. In the piece originally published in his *Le Nouvelliste*, the prominent Haitian editor argued that the occupation was “not only an annexation, not even a protectorate, but rather a frank attempt at colonization.” Identifying the hypocrisy of the imperial powers, he questioned why Haiti was occupied at a time when the U.S. government sympathized with the desires for self-determination possessed by the people of Belgium and the Balkan states. To complement the views expressed by his Haitian peer, Du Bois included a photograph above the caption “Our Christmas Greeting to Haiti.” The depiction of two lifeless Haitian bodies

⁷ “Haiti,” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 2, no. 2 (December 1915), 81.

slumped over an abandoned cannon served as a stark reminder of what the “frank attempt at colonization” entailed for the population represented by Chauvet.⁸



The racist brutality of the occupation would become even more apparent in the following months and years. In the summer of 1916, U.S. officials in Haiti revived a set of labor laws that had not been used for almost a century. The invocation of the *corvée* regulations allowed occupation administrators to conscript rural Haitians to work on public works projects where they faced unbearable hardships. One victim of the forced labor system argued that it was tantamount to enslavement because:

One: the work isn't paid. Two: you worked with your back in the sun, wearing nothing but pants. Three: they only sent you home when you were sick. Four: You didn't eat enough, just corn and beans. Five: You slept in a prison or at the construction site. Six: When you tried to run away, they killed you.⁹

The threat of the actual reintroduction of slavery seemed no less real to those who managed to evade *corvée* conscription. The first full year of the occupation was also the point at which U.S. officials formed the Gendarmerie, a new law enforcement body that granted U.S. commanders full control over Haitians who they came to regard as their “little chocolate soldiers.” Haitian men consigned to public works construction now had little recourse. And neither did Haitian women raped by Marines nor did Haitian families left

⁸ “Editorial from *Le Nouvelliste*, Port-au-Prince, Haiti,” *The Crisis* 2, no. 3 (January 1916), 133-134.

⁹ Gaillard, *Hinche mise en croix* (Port-au-Prince: Le Natal, 1982), 224, quoted in Dubois, *Haiti*, 242-243.

homeless by counterinsurgency raids authorized in the purported interest of law and order.¹⁰

Elite Haitians were often no less disconsolate about the presence of the Americans but they, too, struggled to halt the entrenchment of U.S. hegemony. By 1918, occupation authorities tried to enact a new constitution for Haiti that would erase the ban on foreign ownership of property. Their efforts in the interests of U.S. investors incensed Haitian political activists in Port-au-Prince. Members of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies were particularly passionate about protecting a provision once described as the “Holy Grail” of Haitian autonomy. Their ability to do so was, however, eroded as occupation officials circumvented democratic political processes. U.S. authorities arrested vocal dissidents, crafted the new constitution, and put it to a national referendum held under the watch of U.S. Marines and Haitian gendarmes. Opponents could do little as more than 99% of those who participated in the sham vote filled out a ballot that gave the lone option of approving the constitution.¹¹

There is little doubt that the results of the farcical election were misleading as increasing numbers of Haitians found the presence of the Americans intolerable. This popular anti-occupation sentiment was best captured in a revitalized Caco insurgency led by Charlemagne Péralte. In the fall of 1918, the former Haitian military officer escaped from *corvée* duty in the northeastern city of Le Cap then set about recruiting followers among the victims of the region’s brutal forced labor regime. Over the next year, his war against the occupiers spread throughout Haiti. Cacos launched guerilla attacks from

¹⁰ Dubois, *Haiti*, 232-238.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 244-247.

inaccessible locations high in the mountains, infuriating occupation forces who had the manpower and technology to succeed in open combat. Even the assassination of Péralte by a U.S. Marine did not bring an immediate end to the frustrating uprising. Before their final defeat and dispersal in late 1920, Haitian farmers, *corvée* laborers, and former soldiers continued to find inspiration in a martyred insurrectionary who was the spirit of Haitian independence incarnate.¹²



The political and social conditions opposed by educated urbanites and rural insurgents in Haiti seemed all too familiar to blacks in the United States. Throughout the South, African Americans were swept into an unrelenting system of debt and coerced labor. In its most insidious form, debt peonage occurred under the auspices of local government officials who leveled exorbitant fines against black men arrested on minor crimes and then hired them out to industrialists who lost the debt records of their laborers. At the same time, whites resorted to violence to express their anxieties about the return of black veterans from Europe or the shifting demographics caused by the migration of blacks out of the South. From New York to Nebraska, white mobs beat and killed hundreds of black victims while destroying the property of thousands more. African Americans certainly resisted these oppressions. But as a federal anti-lynching bill failed to pass the U.S. Senate, it became obvious that meaningful change would come as a result of black protest not white beneficence.

In fact, black leaders realized that effective agitation for full political and civil rights needed to include vigorous opposition to the occupation of Haiti. By 1918, NAACP officials

¹² *Ibid.*, 248-264.

had grown more concerned about troubling reports that occupation officials were violating the due process rights of Haitians. They began courting prominent Republicans who stood to benefit from criticisms of an occupation started by Democrats. In exchange for the financial support needed to launch an investigative commission in occupied Haiti, the NAACP promised to help the Republican Party make the continued presence of U.S. Marines in Haiti a key issue in the upcoming presidential election. The civil rights organization expected that their cooperation with Republican leaders would result in more progressive relations between the United States and Haiti as well as increased consideration of the issues that most concerned African Americans.¹³

With the monetary support of the Republican Party secured, the NAACP was finally able to send James Weldon Johnson to Haiti in 1920. During the course of his six-week sojourn through the country, the NAACP field secretary interviewed U.S. officials and Haitians from all social backgrounds. What he learned disturbed him greatly. In a journal kept during his travels, Johnson wrote that “the main object of the Occupation is to get a strangle hold on the economic life of the country.” He also recorded his recollections of interviews with U.S. Marines who admitted to finding humor in criminal actions that “Haitians rightfully consider cruel and brutal.” By the end of his sobering trip, Johnson was firmly dedicated to exposing the sordid realities of U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean.¹⁴

Upon his return to the United States, the NAACP investigator prepared a series of articles on the occupation for *The Nation*, the flagship magazine of white liberalism. The

¹³ Plummer, “The Afro-American Response,” 132.

¹⁴ Special Report of the (NAACP) Field Secretary on His Visit to Haiti, James Weldon Johnson Collection, Yale University, quoted in Plummer, “The Afro-American Response,” 132.

first part of “Self-Determining Haiti” dispelled the notion that the United States “was forced, on purely humane grounds to intervene in the black republic.” Johnson pointed out that the enactment of the new Haitian constitution, the subsequent dissolution of the Haitian legislature, and the creation of a veritable army of U.S. bureaucrats all benefited U.S. businessmen including those at the National City Bank of New York.¹⁵ The second part of the series ridiculed the apologists for the “conquest of Haiti.” To the claim that “material improvements in Haiti justify American intervention,” Johnson noted that the “slaughter of three thousand and practically unarmed Haitians,” the “slavery” of the *corvée*, and the exportation of “American hatred to Haiti” were the only “accomplishments” of the occupation.¹⁶ His third installment further derided the idea that the United States was acting in the best interests of Haiti. Johnson showed that the U.S. businessmen who were most instrumental in bringing about the intervention now stood to profit from their oversight of Haitian finances and their investment in Haitian construction projects. In sum, the first three parts of the exposé identified the occupation as a struggle between U.S. officials who wanted to exploit a supposedly “backward and uncivilized people” and Haitians who decried “the loss of their political and economic freedom . . . after over one hundred years of self-government and liberty.”¹⁷

Lest he further marginalize those ignored by occupation officials, Johnson highlighted the strengths of the Haitian people in the final installment of his series. At a moment when the idea of cultural relativism was gaining traction among American

¹⁵ James Weldon Johnson, “Self-Determining Haiti, Part I” *The Nation* 111 (August 28, 1920): 236.

¹⁶ Johnson, “Self-Determining Haiti, Part II” *The Nation* 111 (September 4, 1920): 265-267.

¹⁷ Johnson, “Self-Determining Haiti, Part III” *The Nation* 111 (September 11, 1920): 297.

intellectuals, Johnson not only praised the “educated, cultured, and intellectual” Haitian elite but also lauded the Haitian peasantry. Ordinary Haitians, he insisted, were “industrious and thrifty,” “quick-witted and imaginative,” “kind-hearted, hospitable, and polite.” Their neat thatched-roof cabins, economical homemade clothing, and draft animals loaded with produce for sale all demonstrated the development of cultural values and behavior best suited for their economic and social environment. Lambasting white Americans who argued that Haitian “inferiority,” “retrogression,” and “savagery” justified intervention, Johnson further proclaimed that the privileging of French as the official language of Haiti was the only obstacle to national progress. He concluded that the production of books, newspapers, and government documents in the Krèyol vernacular would best capture the potential of the Haitian masses who were surely “splendid material for the building of a nation.”¹⁸

The *Nation* series did much to bring the damaging occupation to the attention of influential white liberals. But Johnson was equally concerned with promoting the liberation of Haiti to African Americans. In a summary of his findings prepared for *The Crisis*, the NAACP official emphasized the racism of occupation authorities. He explained that the establishment of segregated social clubs in Port-au-Prince confirmed that the United States had implanted Jim Crowism where before “there was no such thing . . . as race prejudice.” This change in Haitian social life, Johnson argued, was intentional. He charged the U.S. government with purposefully sending white southerners to Haiti, contending that

¹⁸ Johnson, “Self-Determining Haiti, Part IV” *The Nation* 111 (September 25, 1920): 345-347.

“the mere idea of white Mississippians going down to civilize Haitians and teach them law and order would be laughable except for the fact that the attempt is actually being made.”¹⁹

Johnson insisted that the deterioration of Haitian life under the occupation deserved the attention and sympathy of African Americans. Who else besides a rural black southerner, he suggested, could better critique the nefarious policy of deploying white men to Haiti because of their “knowledge of “handling niggers?”” Who else besides an educated black professional, he surmised, could better sympathize with Haitian elites lampooned by U.S. Marines for thinking “they are as good we are?” Johnson thus concluded that African Americans should take a special interest in restoring the sovereignty of Haiti, “the one best chance that the Negro has in the world to prove that he is capable of the highest self-government.” Indeed, he warned that if “Haiti should ultimately lose her independence, that one best chance [would] be lost” and white supremacy would receive unwarranted validation.²⁰

Johnson’s admonition was not lost on its intended audience. The Eleventh Annual Report of the NAACP published in January 1921 asserted that “it was unquestionably the race prejudice which prevails in the United States that made possible the brutalities practiced by United States marines (sic) upon citizens of the Negro Republic of Haiti.” In the minds of its authors, the “unlawful seizure” of Haiti and the “exploitation and abuse of its people” had a direct correlation to the “issue of lynching and race riots” as well as the “crime of peonage.” Consequently, the report proposed that agitation in support of

¹⁹ Johnson, “The Truth About Haiti: An N.A.A.C.P. Investigation,” *Crisis* 20, no. 5 (September 1920): 223-224.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 224.

Haitians struggling for their liberation was a fitting “accompaniment of the fight along similar lines made in the United States.”²¹

NAACP leaders were in favor of reinforcing their anti-occupation rhetoric with concerted action on behalf of embattled Haiti. In its Eleventh Annual Report, the civil rights organization also praised Johnson for spearheading the organization of L’Union Patriotique d’Haiti, a group of Haitian nationalists committed to challenging the legality of the occupation.²² Moreover, the NAACP entered into coalitions with white organizations that opposed the occupation including the Popular Government League and the Foreign Policy Association. When Johnson formed the Haiti-Santo Domingo Independence Society, he, too, made it a point to involve white liberals who could contribute knowledge gained from their work in civil rights and urban reform and possibly lend greater prestige and financial support to the anti-occupation movement.²³

As demonstrated by the various groups formed by Johnson, the NAACP was at the forefront of anti-occupation protest but it was far from isolated. With the abuses of the U.S. Marines a matter of public record, a number of black organizations voiced their own concerns about the intervention in Haiti. The American-Haitian Benevolent Club, an association of Haitians descended from the black émigrés of the antebellum era, recommended that the United States deploy black troops more sympathetic to Haitians if the occupation persisted. At the same time, black religious organizations including the

²¹ *Eleventh Annual Report of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for the Year 1920* (New York: National Advancement for the Advancement of Colored People National Office, 1921), 7, 9.

²² *Ibid.*, 11-12.

²³ Plummer, “The Afro-American Response,” 133.

Baptist Youth Progressive Union Congress demanded the end to military rule in Haiti and the release of Haitian political prisoners. Their counterparts in the National Colored Republican Conference remained unanimous in their opposition to U.S. policy in Haiti even as Republican officeholders ignored the anti-occupation sentiments of the black voters who elected them. The Empire State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs articulated similar resolve as they warned Washington that "the Negroes of the United States are keenly interested in the actions of the American government in Haiti, and hope those actions will be such that we can support them with our approval and votes."²⁴

The missive from the black clubwomen was indicative of the leadership positions assumed by aspiring class and elite black women in opposition to the occupation. In 1922, Harriet Gibbs Marshall arrived in Haiti. She came alongside her husband, a black lawyer from Massachusetts appointed by Warren G. Harding as a clerk at the Port-au-Prince legation. Rather than commit himself to ending the occupation or democratizing it, the Republican President thought he could placate black voters with token representation in the administration of Haiti. To his disappointment, this action, along with the authorization of a Tuskegee report on education in occupied Haiti, did little to mollify black Republicans who expected more substantive change in Haitian policy.²⁵ Indeed, Marshall would waste little time in using her presence in Port-au-Prince to craft a female domain within the anti-occupation movement.



²⁴ *Ibid.*, 136-139.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

During her first year in the Haitian capital, the graduate of Oberlin College searched for evidence of improvements in Haitian social life achieved under U.S. influence. She could not find any. In correspondence with the American Association for Organizing Family Social Work, Marshall explained that Haitians were a “worthy and courageous people” whose history of slavery and despotism had left them “ill prepared for establishing and maintaining a republican government.” Even worse, she lamented that Haitian elites remained lacking in “the technique and resources for [the] development of social work for the masses.” The subsequent inattention to social welfare left ordinary Haitians wanting for the “gifts of this era . . . for modern methods . . . for justice and assistance.” Understanding that altruistic endeavors were anathema to U.S. authorities, Marshall assumed responsibility for the social work needed to assist those Haitians who would establish a new and more prosperous independence for their country.²⁶

In particular, Marshall committed herself to the establishment of an organization that “would show the educated, cultured few how they can help the impoverished many.”²⁷ She canvassed prosperous neighborhoods and professional workplaces where the wives of Haiti’s preeminent business and political leaders responded enthusiastically to her proposed endeavor. In March 1926, these pledges of support came to fruition when Marshall and her Haitian collaborators formed *L’Oeuvre des Femmes Haitiennes pour l’Organisation du Travail*. Branches throughout Haiti promoted “native industry” and assisted Haitians “without means,” especially impoverished youth who would benefit from

²⁶ Letter from Harriett Gibbs Marshall to Mrs. John M. Glenn, August 4, 1924 in the Washington Conservatory of Music Records, Box 112-2, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University (hereafter cited as Washington Conservatory of Music Records).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

but could not afford a “practical education.” In addition, Marshall, who became a vice president of the social service organization, advanced a U.S. auxiliary that she hoped would not only provide financial support for the Haitian branches but also establish a model for improved relations between the United States and Haiti.²⁸

Marshall thought that the desire to better Haitian life expressed by critics of the occupation should manifest itself in support for her new organization’s educational mission. Shortly after its founding, *L’Oeuvre* opened the Jean Joseph Industrial School in Port-au-Prince. The institution for the “unlettered” Haitian masses featured departments of native arts, industrial training, business, physical culture, English, hygiene, and social service. As the head of its executive committee, Marshall took charge of the efforts made to promote the school to potential benefactors in the United States. Pamphlets produced under her leadership insisted that U.S. citizens should give to the Jean Joseph because Haitians had consistently responded to “the call of the oppressed, to the call of liberty.” Annual donations ranging from one to one hundred dollars would repay Haitians for their contributions to the American Revolution, augment Haiti’s “meager national resources,” and mitigate the adverse impact that occupation officials had on Haitians hoping to earn an “honest livelihood.”²⁹

²⁸ *L’Oeuvre de Femmes Haitien pour L’Organisation du Travail* Pamphlet in the Washington Conservatory of Music Records, Box 112-2.

²⁹ *Jean Joseph Industrial School* Pamphlet, in the Washington Conservatory of Music Records, Box 112-2. The pamphlet’s statement that “eight hundred brave Haitians gave their lives for American independence at Savannah” is a bit imprecise. Approximately 750 free men of color from the colony did volunteer to fight alongside Patriot forces at Savannah. At that point, however, they fought as French colonial subjects, not as citizens of an independent Haiti.

Marshall found many black women involved in the club movement receptive to her message. While NAACP leader Addie Hunton assured Marshall that she neither “made an address without referring to Haiti” nor missed an opportunity to disseminate “propaganda in behalf of Haiti,” Mary McLeod Bethune served on the Jean Joseph Industrial School’s American Patrons Advisory Committee.³⁰ Together Bethune and Marshall, who was also the chairwoman of the American Patrons Executive Committee, helped make the Jean Joseph a minor cause célèbre within the black women’s club movement. Besides establishing headquarters in New York and claiming auxiliary branches in New Jersey, Maryland, Washington, D.C., Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, the American Patrons received substantial support from the Empire State Federation of Colored Women’s Club. Members of the National Association of Colored Women affiliate held “showers” where “friends of Haiti” donated school supplies, kitchen utensils, gardening tools and other goods that the club could then ship to the Jean Joseph.³¹ Such efforts were a welcome complement to the hundreds of dollars that dues-paying members of the American Patrons raised for building infrastructure, water, and classroom equipment at their school.³²

Marshall would persist in her activism even after her return to the United States in 1928. Freed from their obligations to the U.S. government, she and her husband declared

³⁰ Letter from Addie Hunton to Harriett Gibbs Marshall, June 19, 1926 in the Washington Conservatory of Music Records, Box 112-2. In fact, Hunton was a member of a WILPF delegation sent to Haiti in 1926. The result of their trip was a report, *Occupied Haiti*, that recommended the end of the U.S. occupation. See Emily Green Balch, *Occupied Haiti* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1927).

³¹ Jean Joseph Industrial School Publicity and Letter from Layla Lane, October 24, 1927 in the Washington Conservatory of Music Records, Box 112-2.

³² Jean Joseph Industrial School Publicity in the Washington Conservatory of Music Records, Box 112-2. For instance, records show that the 131 members of the American Patrons sent \$198.00 (approximately \$2,660 today) to Haiti in 1927.

their opposition to the occupation, arranged contacts between Haitian nationalists and U.S. philanthropists, and founded the Save Haiti League, an organization that fundraised for the liberation of “bleeding and defenseless Haiti.”³³ At the same time, Marshall petitioned U.S. educational administrators on behalf of Haitians who sought admission to their schools.³⁴ She also published *The Story of Haiti, From the Discovery of the Island by Christopher Columbus to the Present Day*. African American and Haitian reviewers praised the book for presenting Haitian history “without bias.”³⁵ Yet Marshall was insistent that her writings complemented her activism. She stressed that the book would “contribute to a better understanding” between African Americans and Haitians, “tighten the bond of mutual helpfulness and admiration between us,” and make the more race-conscious and cosmopolitan “young people” more amenable to working on behalf of Haiti.³⁶



By the time Marshall published her polemic, it seemed clear that the situation in Haiti was untenable. Thousands of Haitian students throughout the country were protesting educational policies instituted by U.S. occupation officials that seemed designed to keep Haitians in subservient positions. Dissatisfaction surfaced, too, regarding onerous

³³ Plummer, “The Afro-American Response,” 139-140; Meeting Advertisement for the Save Haiti League, December 15, 1929 in the Washington Conservatory of Music Records, Box 112-2.

³⁴ Letter from Harriet Gibbs Marshall to Theodore Roosevelt, June 30, 1927 and Letter from Garnet C. Wilkinson to Harriet Gibbs Marshall, October 4, 1929 in the Washington Conservatory of Music Records, Box 112-2.

³⁵ Letter from Forrester B. Washington to Harriet Gibbs Marshall, January 30, 1928; Dantès Bellegarde, Review of *The Story of Haiti*, in *La Presse*, May 13, 1930 (translated), in the Washington Conservatory of Music Records, Box 112-2.

³⁶ Notes on *The Story of Haiti*, in the Washington Conservatory of Music Records, Box 112-2.

taxes, immigration restrictions, and the leadership of a president, Louis Borno, who agreed with the Americans that Haitians were not prepared for democracy.³⁷ This popular unrest climaxed in December 1929. That month, a group of 1,500 peasants armed with machetes, stones, and clubs entered Aux Cayes where they hoped to present local authorities with their grievances. Before they could do so, however, the protestors encountered a patrol of twenty Marines equipped with rifles and automatic weapons. Unnerved by the size of the crowd that surrounded them, the U.S. troops opened fire. Official reports would list at least twenty-four dead and dozens more wounded.³⁸

Condemnation was swift and decisive when word of the massacre at Aux Cayes reached blacks in the United States. The Save Haiti League publicized correspondence from Haitians testifying to the wanton slaughter of men, women, and children at the town in southwestern Haiti.³⁹ Such reports led black newspapers including the *Pittsburgh Courier* to insist that it was imperative that the United States now “take the Hate out of Haiti by immediately withdrawing and leaving these black folk to work out their own destiny.”⁴⁰ Even moderate black organizations voiced their dismay with the violent repression of Haitian grievances. For instance, eschewing its traditional focus on the economic empowerment of African Americans, the National Urban League called on Herbert Hoover

³⁷ Dubois, *Haiti*, 278-285.

³⁸ Schmidt, 199-200.

³⁹ “Letter Smuggled Out Of Haiti Says U.S. Marines Slew Hundreds Of Unarmed Natives At Aux Cayes,” *The New York Amsterdam News*, December 25, 1929.

⁴⁰ “Take The Hate Out Of Haiti,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, December 21, 1929.

to recognize the irrationality of the persistent and “ruthless militarism in Haiti.”⁴¹ As the Republican President authorized yet another Tuskegee-led commission on Haitian education, these black voices made it apparent that cosmetic changes to foreign policy would not suffice. The facts were already known; the occupation needed to end.⁴²

The mounting pressure from blacks inside and outside of Haiti influenced the decision of the Hoover administration to move towards ending the occupation. In the spring of 1930, Haiti held its first free elections since the arrival of the first Marines. A record number of Haitians elected nationalist leaders to the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. As their president, they selected Sténio Vincent, a member of L’Union Patriotique who had resigned from the Dartiguenave administration in protest. The Haitian opposition hailed the ascendancy of a leader committed to the end of direct foreign control of Haiti but it soon became clear that the realization of their “second independence” would not be without complications.

After taking office, Vincent revealed his conviction that a successful independent Haiti still required the influence of the United States. He acquiesced to a gradual emancipation process in which the “Haitianization” of his country’s institutions would occur over the course of four years. Moreover, he signed a deal with the United States that gave a “fiscal representative” from Washington control over the policing and collection of customs, tariffs, and taxes. Perhaps most galling to antioccupation activists, Vincent rewrote the Haitian constitution but maintained the clause granting foreigners the right to own property to Haiti. In the wake of these changes or, perhaps, continuities, a new

⁴¹ *Opportunity* 8 (January 1930): 7.

⁴² “Take The Hate Out Of Haiti.”

generation of leftist activists would emerge and inject Haitian political culture with their condemnations of capitalistic and neoliberal oppression.⁴³

Concern about the forms that U.S. dominance in Haiti would take in the future received a sympathetic hearing from some black intellectuals including Langston Hughes. But, for the most part, black leaders conceptualized the final removal of U.S. Marines from Haiti in 1934 within a much older tradition of black political culture and thought. Taking stock of the end of the occupation, Robert Abbott asserted that “Haiti is now on her own and the world will watch with critical interest if she can . . . measure up to the duties which her new responsibilities imply.” The editor of the *Chicago Defender* suggested that African Americans would pay close attention to the development of Haiti. In a passage that would have been just as comprehensible a hundred years prior, Abbot concluded that “it is now up to Haiti . . . to demonstrate that superiority in both individuals and governments is not circumscribed by color or race but finds its permanence in character, constancy and spiritual devotion to human interest.”⁴⁴ In essence, as the *Defender* published sensational stories of migrants escaping to Chicago from the South, it seemed obvious that African Americans still needed the example of a liberated Haiti, an “experiment in self-government” that could vindicate their tenuous claims to the political and civil rights promised long ago.

⁴³ Dubois, *Haiti*, 292-300.

⁴⁴ “Haiti on Her Own,” *The Chicago Defender*, August 25, 1934.

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