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Reclaiming revolution

William Wells Brown's irreducible Haitian heroes

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Abstract This article examines black abolitionist William Wells Brown's 1854 lecture *St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and its Patriots*, juxtaposing Brown's history of the Haitian Revolution against those printed in publications such as the American *DeBow's Review* and the British *Anti-Slavery Reporter*. The staggered, often contradictory nature of the multiple insurrections and uprisings occurring in Haiti complement Brown's own interest in fragmented narratives, and allow him to offer a model for black revolutionary activity contained not in a singular moment or figure, but instead spread across multiple revolutions and revolutionaries. Following Brown's logic opens up the possibility of developing an international revolutionary continuum deeply dependent upon black liberatory goals. A host of events could subsequently re-emerge as part of such a continuum, including but certainly not limited to the American Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, and an internationally inflected American Civil War.

Keywords abolitionism ● Haiti ● history ● revolution ● Toussaint L'Ouverture

On 16 May 1854, the African-American abolitionist, William Wells Brown rose to give a lecture at London's elite Metropolitan Athenaeum. Brown had been in England for five years, devoting a substantial amount of that time to speaking engagements across the British Isles. Black abolitionists in England traditionally recounted the horrors of American slavery, with special attention being paid to personal experience. They also, at times, commented on current events. Brown, a fugitive slave exiled since 1850 from the United States, certainly had plenty of autobiographical material to draw upon. Furthermore, had he decided to concentrate on the news of the day, 1854 presented multiple choices: in the United States the controversial

Kansas-Nebraska Act ignited simmering sectional animosities while, more pertinent to Brown's British audience, England had recently entered the Crimean War against Russia. For his May lecture, however, Brown turned to a past conflict: the Haitian Revolution. In his speech, published one year later as *St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and its Patriots*, Brown recounted how from 1791 to 1804 that island's captives defeated their white masters and went on to battle troops from Spain, Britain, and Napoleonic France, finally emerging victorious and establishing the New World's first free black nation.

Brown's European sojourn was intensely productive, as in addition to his constant speaking tours he penned an edition of his own slave narrative, a travel account, and a novel. Of these, *St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and its Patriots*, though largely overlooked by scholars or categorized simply as a historical treatise, arguably represents Brown's most ambitious antebellum work.¹ I contend that in his 1854 lecture Brown presents a model for historicizing black revolution that forestalls attempts by white writers, many sympathetic to Brown's abolitionism, to assimilate successful black revolutionaries into a white revolutionary narrative. With a dissenting voice filtered through his international perspective, Brown questions the American Revolution's primacy in anti-slavery discourse, offering in its stead the 1791 Haitian uprising.

It can be argued that even when deployed by abolitionists, a historical narrative rooted in American Revolutionary principles implicitly validated antebellum American society. Discussing 19th-century histories more generally, Hayden White argues that the notion of 'history' itself is already implicated in a culturally specific progress narrative, for 'it is possible to view historical consciousness as a specifically Western prejudice by which the presumed superiority of modern, industrial society can be retroactively substantiated' (White, 1973: 2). Even as Brown offered Haiti as an alternate revolutionary moment, he risked participating in a narrative form that potentially excused slavery. John Ernest has pointed out that the black historical project is always already caught up in a racist tradition, for 'one could not construct a narrative of black progress without becoming implicated in the narrative of white progress, a narrative that shaped not only conceptions of social order and purpose but also the very documents the black historians would need to construct a history'. Ernest contends that Brown treated this very problem in his later histories, as he 'challenged the codes and modes, the ideological design, of the American past, and thereby of historical understanding itself' (Ernest, 2004: 335). Nearly a decade before his first book-length historical treatment, *St. Domingo* marks a critical point in Brown's engagement with 'history' as an unstable concept.²

Brown's lecture stands out not only for its attack on dominant white narratives, but also for its attempt to articulate an irreducible black revolutionary identity. The Haitian Revolution provided Brown with an ideal series of events and characters for such a project. The speech's title hints at the radical intervention Brown was making in the ubiquitous discourses surrounding the Haitian Revolution. 'St. Domingo', the island, involves numerous

'Revolutions', with many 'Patriots'. Most accounts of the Haitian Revolution attempted to reduce the uprising to an isolated incident, dependent upon the presence of its most famous leader, Toussaint L'Ouverture.³ As a stand-in for blacks worldwide, Toussaint had become a manageable target for critics anxious to portray the ideal black leader as a man assimilated into white norms. Southern American newspapers displaced their fears of a domestic slave uprising onto Haiti, and alleviated their concerns by over-determining Toussaint as a conservative, figuratively white leader. Departing from his contemporaries, Brown refuses to distill the Haitian Revolution into one already-contained figure. Instead, he casts Toussaint as only one among many black revolutionaries operating in the United States as well as Haiti – some as yet undiscovered. The black character generated by *St. Domingo's 'Patriots'* is irreducible in two senses: it cannot be limited to one moment, nor can it be isolated in one figure.

The events in Haiti between 1791 and 1804 also mark the beginning of a distinctly revolutionary, as opposed to rebellious, black liberation movement. In *From Rebellion to Revolution*, historian Eugene Genovese characterizes rebellions as restorationist (Genovese, 1979: xxi). He argues that slave rebels rose up with the intention of recreating pre-slave societies, often, as in the case of maroon colonies, on the outskirts of existing plantation economies. These rebels did not attempt to overthrow the slave regime and create a new order. By contrast, Haiti's black leaders ultimately did not simply seek to establish a free space within a slave society, but challenged the very terms upon which such a society was founded. After the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, the North was no longer a sanctuary for escaped slaves such as Brown. Any safe return to the United States would be predicated either upon Brown buying himself from his former captor, a concept Brown found unacceptable in principle, or upon a fundamental change in American society. Fugitive slaves in the black abolitionist movements could no longer afford to skirt revolutionary options.⁴

Furthermore, Brown's focus on Haiti's revolutions (as distinct from the Revolution) gestures towards a future, related revolution in the United States. For Brown, the Haitian Revolution exists not as a singular, contained event, but instead as one part of a larger, unfinished struggle for black liberation. It is in part this indeterminacy that transforms Haiti's uprising from a rebellion to a revolution. Developing such a distinction along temporal lines, Lester Langley writes in *The Americas in the Age of Revolution*, '[r]ebellions conform to linear processes: their beginnings, crucial turning points, and ends are easily recognizable'. Revolutions, on the other hand, 'exhibit the characteristics of non-linear dynamics: their origins, patterns, and finalities are never very clear' (Langley, 1996: 3). The staggered, often contradictory nature of the multiple insurrections and uprisings occurring in Haiti complement Brown's own interest in fragmented narratives, and allow him to offer a model for revolutionary activity contained not in a singular moment or figure, but instead spread across multiple revolutions and revolutionaries. Brown opens his speech not in 1791 but in 1492, when Columbus discovered the 'Island of

St. Domingo' (p. 3). From that moment through to his present, in 1854, Brown catalogues the numerous contestations occurring on St. Domingo, from free mulattoes challenging white planters in 1791 to black overlords fighting amongst themselves in 1804, from the island's native Carib inhabitants' 1492 battles with the Spanish to the 1843 revolt that exiled President Boyer.⁵ The Haitian Revolution Brown describes in 1854 had yet to conclude. Instead, Brown envisioned its continuation in the United States. 'No revolution ever turned up greater heroes than that of St. Domingo,' Brown declared in his speech, '[b]ut no historian has yet done them justice' (Brown, 1855: 33). It was not that the Haitian Revolution had been overlooked, but that the manner in which the period and its players were historicized isolated them, foreclosing the possibility of a continuation on American soil.⁶

Spinning the Haitian Revolution had been a lively activity for journalists and activists on both sides of the slavery debate, in America as well as England. The common move in American abolitionist discourse had been to place the Haitian Revolution a step beneath its American counterpart. Through an international lens, this hierarchy must have appeared decidedly provincial. As part of a broader rhetorical strategy, however, American revolutionary principles were invoked to vindicate the anti-slavery movement. William Lloyd Garrison, in particular, engaged in a rhetoric that consistently called upon the American Revolution and its principles of liberty. Robert Fanuzzi, examining Garrisonian abolitionist discourse, argues that Garrison sculpted his political movement 'so that it was deliberately commemorative and backward-looking, an homage to a lapsed revolution and scathing denunciation of the present moment' (Fanuzzi, 2003: xvii). This strategy extended to British activists who leaned towards Garrison's sect. Famed orator George Thompson delivered a speech in Manchester on 12 December 1853 in which he consistently referenced the American Revolution and its Declaration of Independence. According to a review appearing in Garrison's *Liberator*, the 'lecturer began historically, by referring to the period when the thirteen American Colonies declared their independence' ('Lecture on American Slavery', 1854: 3). Garrison rooted his movement in the principles of the American Revolution, a practice that abolitionists such as Thompson imported to England.⁷

Though Brown largely followed Garrison, by focusing in *St. Domingo* on the Haitian uprising, he implicitly rejects the American Revolution as the abolition movement's inspiration. Brown's choice anchors his own anti-slavery practice in a revolution achieved by black slaves, not by the men who owned them. Brown does tempt his audience with the familiar comparison between Toussaint and George Washington, admitting that '[e]ach was the leader of an oppressed and outraged people, each had a powerful enemy to contend with, and each succeeded in founding a government in the New World' (Brown, 1855: 37); but he immediately shatters the pairing: 'Toussaint liberated his countrymen; Washington enslaved a portion of his, and aided in giving strength and vitality to an institution that will one day render asunder the UNION that he helped form' (p. 37). Not only had the American

Revolution's greatest hero betrayed blacks, but he had ensured the destruction of the United States. By contrast, Haiti's uprising existed as a pure revolution, unstained by such hypocrisy. This is not to say that Brown dismisses wholesale the American Revolution's ideals, for he terms 'glorious' the 'sentiments of the Declaration of Independence' (p. 38). Yet, these notions never materialized for African Americans in the antebellum United States. Brown eschews Garrison's focus on 1776 and the Declaration's unfulfilled sentiments, and concentrates his attention instead on a revolution that symbolized black self-reliance. 1791 was, for Brown, the moment when blacks had begun to take justice into their own hands.

Elevating Toussaint above Washington in part condenses the Haitian and American revolutions into their respective heroes. Had Brown rooted his analysis in this juxtaposition, *St. Domingo* would simply have echoed a well-worn strategy. While the fires of the Haitian Revolution still raged, Southern journalists highlighted Toussaint's role as leader of the uprising, while simultaneously working to soften his image. Slavery advocates could not simply dismiss Haiti's most prominent hero, but they could make Toussaint a less threatening figure by separating him from the horrific violence being wrought on that island. In 1802, the *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser* defended Toussaint against charges made by the French after his capture, declaring that the 'life of Toussaint is unstained by any of those enormous crimes; those gross perjuries; those wanton massacres; those cold-blooded murders, which have almost invariably marked the destructive progress of his sanguinary competitors'. That brutalities were occurring was undeniable, but the paper assured its readers that Toussaint could not be held responsible, for any atrocities 'were perpetrated without his command or approbation' and 'were out of his power to prevent' ('June 26', 1802: 2). The account effectively removes Toussaint from his black revolutionary context while limiting his role in the actual struggle.

In May 1855 *DeBow's Review*, a leading Southern periodical based in New Orleans, followed a similar tack, and displaced fears of an American slave insurrection onto the Haitian Revolution. While admiring Toussaint as 'more humane, reasonable, and discreet than the white fanatics sent [to Haiti] from France', the article almost entirely erases his role in the revolution, asserting that the uprising was conceived not by black slaves but by French agitators: 'Any one familiar with the history of Commissioner Santhonasee, Abbé Gregorè, and Toussaint L'Ouverture, knows that the insurrection of St. Domingo is not to be attributed to the negroes, but to the instigation of the French devils and mad republicans sent among them' ('Practical Effects', 1855: 595). Without such provocation, the slaves would have had no cause to rebel, as they were 'particularly well treated' (p. 596). Hence, American slaveholders need not fear their slaves, but should instead direct their wrath at their true enemies: abolitionists at home and abroad. By limiting Toussaint's role, and thereby dismissing the Haitian Revolution's lasting impact, Southerners surrounded by an enslaved population could rest a bit easier.⁸

While Southern American newspapers and periodicals predictably softened Toussaint in order to undercut his radical legacy, British journals with a vastly different political agenda painted a similar picture. The British abolitionist movement effectively organized in the late 18th century, and from that beginning onward largely viewed its crusade as a struggle for a moral and orderly global civilization. The Haitian Revolution became a clear example of the awful chaos that slavery inevitably produced. When emancipation was officially declared in the British colonies in 1834, many British abolitionists turned their attention to slavery in the United States. This was the focus of the prominent British Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS), founded in 1839. Depicting Haiti as a successful, free black society emerged as a fundamental goal for the BFASS, which explicitly wrote into its 1854 constitution the need 'to diffuse authentic intelligence respecting the results of emancipation in Hayti [sic], the British colonies, and elsewhere'. For Haiti to be a positive example, its violent inception had to be downplayed; and working towards this end, some British abolitionists eerily echoed their American adversaries.⁹

On 2 October 1854, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, the organ of the BFASS, offered a lengthy portrait of Toussaint that diminishes his revolutionary impact, distances him from his fellow slaves, and celebrates his conservative attributes. Though the Haitian Revolution had been brutal, and Toussaint the primary black general, the paper denies that context, as it 'would rather refer to him as the framer and administrator of just and wholesome laws, the calmer of unruly passions, the reconciler of conflicting interests, and the reducer of chaotic events into harmonious and symmetrical order'. Toussaint, though in bondage, was raised 'without experiencing any of those hardships and sufferings to which the slave is most commonly exposed' ('Toussaint', 1854: 217). Hence, the paper extracts Toussaint from the normal condition of slavery. In fact, according to this account he had fought not for his fellow slaves, but instead out of '[l]oyalty at first to the King of France, whom he had been taught to consider as the rightful claimant of his allegiance'. Indeed, for this writer, Toussaint had initially refused to join the Revolution 'because he saw nothing great or worthy in the motives which prompted the rising of the slaves' and fought for liberation only after hearing the French emancipation proclamation, at which point 'he at once saw that his loyalty had mistaken its object, and that in fighting against the Republic he had been but serving the cause of oppression and despotism' (p. 218). Like the pro-slavery papers in America, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* quashes Toussaint's revolutionary credentials, pointing instead to the French as the true instigators. Furthermore, once in power Toussaint acted as any good conservative white leader, for Haiti was 'where he had hoped to shew [sic] to the world how peaceful, how orderly, how great and prosperous, might become a commonwealth of negroes properly governed and instructed' (p. 221). Anxious, then, to remove Toussaint from any radical and disorderly context, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* contributed to the sanitizing discourse surrounding the Haitian Revolution.¹⁰

For its profile of Toussaint, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* drew heavily from H.G. Adams's *God's Image in Ebony: Being a Series of Biographical Sketches*,

Facts, Anecdotes, Etc., Demonstrative of The Mental Powers and Intellectual Capacities of the Negro Race (1854). Adams, in turn, admitted that he borrowed much of his own material from Wilson Armistead's *A Tribute for the Negro: Being a Vindication of the Moral, Intellectual, and Religious Capabilities of the Coloured Portion of Mankind; with Particular Reference to the African Race* (1848). Adams claimed that he had written his own book in order to furnish those who could not afford Armistead's 'costly and elaborate volume' with 'a cheap and accessible form' (Adams, 1854: i); yet when it came to Toussaint's portrait, Adams added information – subsequently reprinted in a still less expensive medium by the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* – that blunted Toussaint's radicalism. For example, Armistead argued that, though Toussaint did technically fight on the side of the French Crown for a time, '[h]e knew and cared little for the state of parties in France: he was fighting for his Black brethren against their White oppressors' (Armistead, 1848: 274). Adams, by contrast, claimed that Toussaint initially fought out of a learned loyalty for the French King. Such allegiance, though, was misplaced, as it served only to keep Toussaint in bondage: 'his better judgment was obscured, and his strong reason fettered, by the doctrine of blind, unquestioning obedience to the powers that be, by means of which, and the iron grasp of tyrannous [sic] rule, it is alone possible to keep men in a state of slavery' (p. 19). When the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* excerpted Adams's account for its own sketch, the paper omitted this qualification. Hence, as Toussaint's image traveled from account to account, his revolutionary credentials were increasingly elided. Furthermore, equating Toussaint with conservative Anglo-American values in essence whitened him. When Southern journalists envisioned the Haitian leader as a version of a white plantation manager, or British abolitionists viewed him as little more than a European pawn, they evacuated Toussaint's stature as a black radical.¹¹

Intervening in this discourse, *St. Domingo* complicates Toussaint by highlighting his role in the disorder and violence others wished to obscure. Similar to other accounts, Brown celebrates the general's many 'private virtues' (Brown, 1855: 13), such as his 'generosity, humanity, and courage' (p. 16). Furthermore, he concedes that Toussaint had fought on behalf of the French monarchy. Instead of casting this choice as a signifier of order, however, Brown situates Toussaint's allegiance within the larger chaos and brutality that defined the Revolution's early stages: 'The white republicans of the mother country were arrayed against the white republicans of Hayti [sic], whom they had been sent out to assist; the blacks and mulattoes were at war with each other; old and young of both sexes, and of all colors, were put to the sword, while the fury of the flames swept from plantation to plantation and from town to town' (p. 16). Brown muddies Toussaint's moderate image by embedding in the General's character a fierceness that could be unleashed when necessary. For instance, when in 1802 Napoleon sends a massive armada against the Haitians, Toussaint delivers a proclamation to his people imploring them to slaughter the French without mercy, while '[t]hose whom our swords spare will be struck dead by an avenging climate; their bones will

be scattered among these mountains and rocks, and tossed about by the waves of our sea' (qtd. in Brown, 1855: 24). Though normally restrained and compassionate, Toussaint carries within him a capacity for total violence. Toussaint's white admirers attempted to distance him from the Haitian Revolution's violent legacy by highlighting his moderate governance and generous stance towards white planters; but while Brown lauds Toussaint's conservative traits, he couches them in an ever-present radicalism.

Brown's focus on the Haitian Revolution was certainly inspired in part by the need to complicate previous historical accounts. More importantly, Haiti was the optimal rhetorical site for Brown to use as he crafted an argument for black revolutionary identity. From his position in England, the exiled abolitionist predictably looked beyond America's borders for his inspiration. Furthermore, as Ifeoma Nwankwo argues in her work on black cosmopolitanism, African Americans had to grapple with what the Haitian Revolution meant for their own national identity, as 'Whites' fear of the revolution and its presumably contagious nature forced people of African descent throughout the Americas, particularly those in the public and published eye, to name a relationship to the Haitian Revolution, in particular, and to a transnational idea of Black community, in general' (Nwankwo, 2005: 7). Unlike his contemporaries, who argued for black emigration, Brown's relationship with Haiti in *St. Domingo* is largely figurative: he uses the Revolution's many characters as vessels for a dispersed identity. Yet, by framing his treatment as a history of Haiti and placing that revolution above its American counterpart, Brown locates his conceived identity beyond America's borders. Indeed, the character traits spread across Haiti's revolutionaries in *St. Domingo* resist any fixed national identification.¹²

Towards this end, Brown refuses to focus his history solely on Toussaint, offering instead multiple portraits that, when considered as a whole, form a nuanced black revolutionary identity. While Toussaint embodies the traditionally heroic element of this conception, his deputy, Henri Christophe demonstrates black competency in leading a nation. A primary general under Toussaint, Christophe would lead an independent Haiti for, according to Brown, a nine-year period. Christophe shares many personal qualities with Toussaint, and indicates what responsible black governance looked like. During the Revolution, Brown declares, Christophe 'gave unmistakable proof that he was a great general, and scarcely second to Toussaint' (Brown, 1855: 30). Like Toussaint, Christophe is a heroic warrior who defies his white adversaries. When the French general Leclerc demands Christophe's surrender, the former slave refuses, for Leclerc 'found that he had a man, and not a slave, to deal with' (p. 21). Again echoing Toussaint, Christophe shows a capacity for total war when threatened with re-enslavement. In his reply to Leclerc, Christophe promises the invader that if he persists in his aggression, he will capture only rubble: "'The decision of arms can admit you only into a city in ashes, and even on these ashes I will fight still'" (qtd. in Brown, 1855: 21). While his wartime heroics place Christophe beside Toussaint, Brown primarily concentrates on his peacetime leadership. If Toussaint is Haiti's tragic

hero, Christophe is its practical steward, possessing 'the best guaranties for a useful, if not a happy career' (p. 34). Christophe's able governance during a time of great civil unrest leads Brown to proclaim, '[t]o no one do the Haytians owe more than to this man', since 'during the nine years that he governed St. Domingo, the island prospered, and was fast returning to its original grandeur' (p. 35). In *St. Domingo*, Christophe shepherds Haiti from violence to a relative stability, and thus represents an element of a black identity that can not only win a revolution, but also responsibly govern a new nation.

Before Christophe seized power, Toussaint's other primary ally, the much-feared Jean-Jacques Dessalines, ruled the newly independent island nation. If, to whites, Toussaint stood for order and sanity, Dessalines was his opposite, embodying chaos and terror. As the first ruler of a free Haiti, Dessalines had enacted his revenge by ordering the slaughter of white planters. In his study on American reactions to Haiti, Alfred Hunt remarks upon this binary, noting, 'Dessalines was the sinister figure representing a long line of violent, vengeful rulers; Toussaint represented stability and forgiveness' (Hunt, 1988: 91). In some cases, American journalists simply erased Dessalines from history. In a June 1855 article *DeBow's Review*, in order to prove that blacks were unfit for self-rule, compares Haiti's production under different leaders ('Beauties', 1855). The list begins with the French government, moves to Toussaint in 1801, and then skips to Christophe in 1819. Dessalines appears nowhere in the entire article, nor in the list of rulers. For some in the American South – with sectional animosities beginning to erupt and amid the always-present specter of slave conspiracy and revolt – the violence committed by Dessalines was simply inconceivable. By celebrating Dessalines's radicalism, Brown reminded his audience that although Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner had been discovered or defeated, such outcomes were not inevitable.¹³

For Brown, Dessalines's actions balance Toussaint's restraint and Christophe's stability, and represent not a simple brutality, but a deep passion. Brown refuses to ignore or condemn Dessalines, instead using him to demonstrate a black capacity for powerful emotion. Dessalines's fervor so consumes him that it defied language: '[h]e was a bold, turbulent, and ferocious spirit, whose barbarous eloquence lay in expressive signs rather than in words' (Brown, 1855: 21). Unlike his two compatriots, Dessalines was unable to restrain his rage when provoked. Brown makes clear, however, that the atrocities Dessalines committed were always in response to white aggression, as was the general pattern of the Revolution: '[c]rime was repaid with crime, and vengeance followed vengeance' (p. 12). Yet, when let loose, Dessalines's fury was unmatched. After Toussaint declared that he would show no mercy to the invading French, Dessalines ordered the execution of 700 prisoners. Brown details how his rage, when left unchecked, could be truly terrible, as the warrior slaughtered entire families: 'The child died in the arms of its sick and terrified mother; the father was unable to save the daughter; the daughter unable to save the father' (p. 25). Brown admits that Dessalines can be characterized as 'cruel', but it is his fanaticism, 'his hatred to the whites, and his indomitable courage', that affords the General his strength (p. 33). Dessalines

illustrates how the black identity Brown conceives can be merciful, but can also erupt with awesome fury.

Brown further deepens his investment in the unfettered element of black character with Lamour de Rance and Vida, who lead Haiti's maroon community, this pair epitomizing for him a largely unmediated African heritage. Lamour and Vida represent the positive union of the black male and female – though not, perhaps, masculine and feminine – as the two are most effective once they unite. Lamour and Vida lead the 'many barbarous and wild blacks, who had escaped from slavery soon after being brought from the coast of Africa' (Brown, 1855: 28). For Brown, the maroon blacks offer access to an international black identity that exists beyond slavery's grasp. They had been kidnapped from their homelands and endured the Middle Passage, yet create a new community without white interference. Their raw barbarity manifests itself physically, as Lamour is 'an adroit, stern, savage man, half naked, with epaulets tied to his bare shoulders for his only token of authority'. Similarly, Vida has a face 'all marked with incisions, and large pieces had been cut out of her ears' (p. 28). Such markers could signify slavery's cruelties, yet they can be reclaimed as part of an African origin. Though initially separate, the two maroon leaders join and direct their energies at the occupying white armies:

Lamour and Vida united, and they were complete masters of the wilds of St. Domingo ;– and, even to the present day, their names are used to frighten children into obedience. These two savages came forth from their mountain homes, and made war on the whites wherever they found them. (Brown, 1855: 29)

Once the male and female elements of a wild black identity are intertwined, the terror they inspire in their enemies is mythical in its power. While Dessalines's cruelty evidences a deep passion, Lamour and Vida link Brown's conceived black identity to an African ancestry.

It is important to note that in Brown's history Lamour and Vida do not spontaneously revolt against the slave society. Rather, recognizing the revolutionary potential of an already existing conflict, the maroons seize an opportunity for enacting a fundamental change in their society. Likewise, as Brown points out, the Haitian Revolution does not begin with slaves forming liberation armies, but with a series of complex struggles between white colonists and their French imperial overlords. As negotiations for increased rights and independence devolved into armed conflict, and the divisions between the white slaveholders deepened, Haiti's enslaved communities, like Lamour and Vida after them, saw the possibility of freedom and ensured that the ongoing battles would have a revolutionary outcome. Highlighting black revolution's sometimes opportunistic character, Brown anticipates Eugene Genovese's observation that otherwise intended conflicts could, through black involvement, emerge as revolutions charged with overthrowing the slave system. Significantly, Genovese goes to the American Civil War for an example of just such a shift, citing 'the movement of American slaves into the Union Army' as contributing to 'the destruction of slavery by the absorption of the impulse

to slave revolt . . . into larger forms of struggle with better chances for success' (Genovese, 1979: 41). Like Haiti in 1791, the Civil War began as a struggle over the rights of white elites, evolving into a war for abolition only after free and enslaved blacks made clear their unwillingness to remain on the sidelines.

In his lecture, Brown draws many parallels between the Haitian Revolution and events in the United States. When the French attempt to retake the island, the black revolutionaries use the terrain to their advantage, as '[l]ike Nat Turner, the Spartacus of the Southampton revolt, who fled with his brave band to the Virginia swamps, Toussaint and his generals took to the mountains' (Brown, 1855: 23). While Turner's 'revolt' fails, the comparison points out the possibility of a different outcome. Brown not only links Haiti to the United States' past, but looks forward to a bloody future. In describing how the Haitian mulattoes 'took the lives of their white fathers, to whom they had been slaves, or who, allowing them to go free had disowned them', Brown ominously declares, '[l]et the slave-holders in our Southern States tremble when they shall call to mind these events' (p. 25). While such pronouncements certainly serve as expected warnings to American slave-holders, Brown's connection between Haiti and the United States represents a sophisticated move towards fleshing out the contours of an international black revolutionary movement. Brown peppers his lecture with hemispheric references, comparing Dessalines to Cortez and commenting on the French use of Cuban bloodhounds. Most importantly, he draws the United States into this context:

Who knows but that a Toussaint, a Christophe, a Rigaud, a Clervaux, and a Dessalines, may some day appear in the Southern States of this Union? That they are there, no one will doubt. That their souls are thirsting for liberty, all will admit. The spirit that caused the blacks to take up arms, and to shed their blood in the American revolutionary war, is still amongst the slaves of the south; and, if we are not mistaken, the day is not far distant when the revolution of St. Domingo will be reenacted in South Carolina and Louisiana. (Brown, 1855: 32)

In this brief paragraph, Brown brings together under one banner the Haitian and American revolutions and an as yet unknown third revolutionary struggle. The same 'spirit', the same 'thirsting for liberty', has incited and, presently, will urge slaves to fight for their freedom. Following Brown's logic opens up the possibility of developing an international revolutionary continuum deeply dependent upon black liberatory goals. A host of events could subsequently re-emerge as part of such a continuum, including but certainly not limited to the American Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, and an internationally-inflected American Civil War.

Notes

1. While Brown's speech has gone largely unnoticed by critics, there are some significant exceptions. For a succinct reading see Sundquist (1993: 31–6). Levine includes an excerpt from *St. Domingo* in his edition of Brown's *Clotel* (Brown,

- 2000: 500–2). An abridged version of Brown's lecture appears under the title 'The History of the Haitian Revolution' in Newman et al. (2001).
2. For more on how the specific historical forms of the 19th century implicitly contained political arguments, see White (1973). Fox-Genovese and Genovese (2005: 125–246) also examine some of the ways in which southern elites in the antebellum era engaged with historical literature. Ernest provides compelling arguments for how Brown endeavors to subvert dominant narratives through formal experimentation; there is an examination of how this operates in Brown's histories in his *Liberation Historiography* (Ernest, 2004: 331–43); in 'Fugitive Performances' Ernest detects similar strategies operating in Brown's travel narrative, *3 Years in Europe*. In Ernest's reading, Brown adopts the position of the 'fugitive tourist', a figure who, 'exploring the theory and practice of society from shifting locations and shifting perspectives, remaps and restages identity, leaving her or his readers with a world of possible performances but no stable script' (Ernest, 2002: 160). Highlighting such instability is crucial for Brown's project, as he finds in it 'the terms for appropriating and redefining the moral and experiential grounding for the very ideals of social progress and authority that he can be seen as trying to imitate' (p. 160). Thus, the fugitive slave turned fugitive tourist both participates in and overturns societal norms. This move equally applies to Brown's historical frame in *St. Domingo*. For a further discussion of how Brown manipulates previous narrative structures see M. Giulia Fabi's reading of his novel, *Clotel* (Fabi, 1997). Like *St. Domingo*, Brown's travel narrative and novel were composed in England. I argue that Brown's focus on narrative instability stems directly from his exile and subsequent desire to transgress national boundaries. For the details of Brown's biography, William Edward Farrison's *William Wells Brown: Author & Reformer* remains the authoritative assessment. Farrison (1969: 145–246) provides details of Brown's literary output during his European exile. Though Farrison gives an otherwise thorough reading of this five-year period, and especially Brown's speaking tours, surprisingly, he fails to mention *St. Domingo*.
 3. I follow Brown in referring to Toussaint L'Ouverture by his first name. For the debate over how Toussaint gained his surname see DuBois (2004: 172).
 4. For more on the transformation from slave rebellion to revolution, and the importance of the Haitian Revolution to this shift, see Genovese (1979: 82–125).
 5. Though a history of the Haitian Revolution anchors *St. Domingo*, my focus is more on Brown's speech than the Revolution itself, which resists a simple snapshot. There is a provocative treatment of the Revolution, and especially its political underpinnings, in C.L.R. James (1989). Interestingly, James himself has become an object of American Studies scholarship, and his own political situation eerily resembled Brown's. In times of uncertain national identity, both men were physically forced from the United States. While the growing sectional crisis marooned Brown in England, Cold War paranoia led to James's confinement on Ellis Island. Both men used their exiles to compose works that focus on the transnational (see Pease, 2002). While James critically develops a transnational focus in institutional American Studies, its emergence can be traced back to *St. Domingo*. For another historical account of the Haitian Revolution see DuBois (2004); Langley (1996) emphasizes Haiti's hemispheric context.
 6. Brown's attempt to draw the United States into an international context anticipates the transnational turn in American Studies. For important arguments for this emphasis see Kaplan (1993), Carolyn Porter (1994) and Elliott (2007). See

- Fluck (2007) and Hong (2007) for a useful complication of transnational paradigms.
7. For more on how Garrisonian discourse cultivated an anachronistic tenor, see Fanuzzi (2003). Bennett (2005) discusses intersections between Garrison and the American literary tradition emerging in the 1850s. See Blackett (1983) on how black abolitionists such as Brown interacted with British allies like George Thompson; Lorimer (1978) considers how blacks in general were treated in England during this period.
 8. Hunt highlights how for southern whites Toussaint's legacy was regarded as an alternative to an impending race war, as he 'became an important symbol of stability and reason in a world seemingly dominated by anger, passion, and the threat of violence' (Hunt, 1988: 88); he gives an excellent account of Toussaint's image in America (pp. 84–101). Fox-Genovese and Genovese offer a succinct treatment of southern white reactions to the Haitian Revolution, especially within the broader Atlantic context of the American and French revolutions (Fox-Genovese and Genovese, 2005: 35–9).
 9. Maintaining order was a primary goal for British abolitionists in the 18th and 19th centuries. In his study of that movement, David Turley writes: 'a great deal of antislavery argument grew out of a fundamental concern for proper order in the world' (Turley, 1991: 45). Furthermore, Turley argues, slave revolts had convinced abolitionists that slavery led to chaos, and hence its abolition was a move toward stability (p. 40). For a lively one-volume treatment of the British abolitionist movement, from its inception until emancipation in the British colonies, see Hochschild (2005). For more on the British abolitionist focus on abolition as part of a broader civilizing mission, see Davis (1984) and Andrew Porter (1999). Seymour Drescher, analyzing the impact of the Harper's Ferry raid in England, argues that the Haitian Revolution in particular had convinced the British that non-violence was the only palatable means of abolition: 'The St. Domingo uprising of 1791 and the subsequent Haitian war of independence of 1803 against the first Napoleon furnished the ultimate image of servile insurrection – a war of scorched earth, and of mutual mutilation and extermination' (Drescher, 1995: 263); Geggus (1982) and Davis (2001) also consider British reactions to the Haitian Revolution.
 10. Crawford (1987) has an interesting take on how more mainstream British newspapers handled slavery and possible insurrections; he detects in the *London Times*, for instance, a similarly conservative approach and fear of destabilization.
 11. Hunt argues that southerners 'admired Toussaint's conservative tactics after assuming power, particularly his attempt to stabilize the work force and his treatment of white planters' (Hunt, 1988: 87), traits that led them to conclude that 'Toussaint thought like a white man' (p. 89).
 12. Nwankwo highlights the Haitian Revolution's figurative importance for African Americans: 'The uprising was significant . . . not only because it brought into being the first Black republic in the Americas, but, more importantly, because it encouraged new visions of the interrelatedness of people of African descent in disparate locations as well as of their place in the world' (Nwankwo, 2005: 8). The Revolution, for Brown, held a particular rhetorical importance. For other African-American activists Haiti provided a literal space for black freedom, becoming a primary vehicle for the burgeoning black nationalist movement. Two prominent black emigrationists, John Browne Russwurm and James T. Holly, argued that the Haitian Revolution proved the black fitness for self-rule. In his

1826 commencement address at Bowdoin College, Russwurm saw Haiti as evidence of successful black government, which he envisioned as ideal for black people. 'May we not,' he asked his audience, 'indulge in the pleasing hope, that the Independence of Hayti [sic] has laid the foundation of an Empire that will take a rank with the nations of earth' (Russwurm, 1969: 397). Wilson Moses suggests that black nationalists in the 19th century were bound up in white ideologies, as they were 'much concerned with preserving Anglo-American values and transmitting them, in modified form, to the black community' (Moses, 1978: 11). To a degree, Russwurm fits this characterization, as he proved Haiti's success by comparing it to European nations. Brown moves in a distinctly different direction, as he seeks to counter attempts to whiten Haiti and its revolutionaries. Nearly 30 years after Russwurm's oration, James T. Holly also celebrated how Haiti had adopted European values. In his 1855 speech, 'A Vindication for the Capacity of the Negro Race for Self-Government', however, he also moved towards establishing the Haitian Revolution as a distinctly black occurrence. Against the charge that Haiti's black slaves had sat idly by until aroused by their betters, Holly held up three centuries of black revolution: 'The charge that they were thus ignorant of the priceless boon of freedom, is *refuted* [original emphasis] by the antecedent history of the servile insurrections, which never ceased to rack that island from 1522 down to the era of negro independence' (Holly, 1970: 29). Like Brown, Holly situated the Haitian Revolution in a black revolutionary tradition. He also examined, albeit briefly, Haitian heroes other than Toussaint. For more on Russwurm, see Foner (1969); for Holly, see Bell (1970).

13. Fox-Genovese and Genovese point out how attempts by southern journalists to censor Dessalines's presence stemmed not only from white anxiety but also out of a fear that their own enslaved population could be incited: 'Some southern newspapers published Dessalines's proclamation of 'Liberty or Death' in 1804, but when Thomas Ritchie of the Richmond *Enquirer* promised to publish a full-scale account of Dessalines's massacre of whites, he had to eat his words. Protests convinced him that reportage would unsettle the slaves, and he supported measures to restrict emancipations and hem in free Negroes' (Fox-Genovese and Genovese, 2005: 38). For more on slave uprisings in the United States placed within a hemispheric context see Genovese (1979: 1–50).

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