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Making the First International: Nineteenth-Century Regimes of Surveillance, Accumulation, Resistance, and Abolition

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Making the First International: Nineteenth-Century Regimes of Surveillance, Accumulation, Resistance, and Abolition

CHRISTINA HEATHERTON

The first use of aerial surveillance in the Americas was recorded in the French colony of Saint-Domingue in the waning years of the eighteenth century. The device, a manned hot air balloon, was launched at the Gallifet plantation, a thriving center of the colony's sugar economy. Hovering above the island's north coast, French colonial passengers gained a sprawling vantage point from which the world could be both seen and imagined: a conquest of air to complement the conquest of land. But in 1791, things were not so clearly visible. After months of quiet planning, Haitian rebels emerged from the thick woods onto that same Gallifet plantation, setting fire to buildings and fields, choking the night sky with smoke. Despite its omnipotent heights, colonial surveillance had failed to prevent an uprising of enslaved African people in this, the world's most productive colony, the economic engine of the French empire, and largest market for the European slave trade. The uprising at Gallifet would come to be marked as the first insurrection of the Haitian Revolution, the greatest slave rebellion in world history.

The Revolution reverberated globally. Its tremors struck at the foundations of imperial palaces. From the boardrooms of royal chartered companies to the trading floor of London's Stock Exchange, wealth, in all its certitude, began to tremble as "all the Atlantic mountains shook," as William Blake would write. When Haitian rebels emancipated themselves from colonial slavery they simultaneously defied capital's abstract value assessments: the form of sight with which planters, merchants, creditors, and industrialists had translated their lives onto balance sheets. Transforming sugarcane into a global commodity necessitated both systematized sadism as well as enhanced surveillance. Routine rape, torture, murder, and the terror born from the looming threat of violence, accompanied instruments of vigilant

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observation like the hot air balloon. What went up in smoke that night, were not just physical structures of enslavement but also a specific way of seeing, what Peter Linebaugh calls an "illusion of omniscience." Surveillance in this way did not represent colonial dominance but rather the anxiety of a regime aware of its own illegitimacy. Across interconnected geographies of accumulation, rebels heeded this lesson well.[1]

Haiti, as the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass described, was the "original" and most influential "emancipator of the nineteenth century." In wake of its uprising, fever dreams of abolition deliriously swept the colonized world. From Kingston to Caracas, Rio de Janeiro to New Orleans, Douglass observed that "insurrection for freedom kept the planters in a constant state of alarm and trepidation." Under pictures of revolutionary leader Toussaint L'Ouverture, enslaved and colonized people marched and organized. In their collective imaginations and in physical acts of overtaking ships and rerouting them, enslaved people steered themselves toward Haiti's free soil. Slaveholders and colonizers, fearing revolutionary contagion, took extreme measures to sequester the spirit of Haiti. The revolution, however, could not be contained. While the fledgling republic was full of contradictions, Haiti radiated hope and promise to the enslaved, expropriated, and exploited, engendering its own internationalism and setting the world aflame.[2]

Burning embers floated from Haiti to Europe, a continent wracked by fevers and fires. In the heat of the French Revolution, old absolutist orders and hereditary monarchies were expiring while new regimes struggled to seize power. As a "fearful succession" of "revolutions," and "outbreaks" exploded by mid-century, Douglass described a "general insecurity brood-[ing] over the crowned heads of Europe." Across the continent, middle-class radicals joined frustrated aristocrats, ambitious bankers, and aspiring merchants in attempts to establish liberal bourgeois orders. Concurrently, the swelling rage of expropriated peasants, exploited laborers, and colonized insurgents began to gather. As the "famine-stricken" Irish seethed against British colonialism; the industrial working class mobilized in "the buzz and din of the factory" and mines; and "oppressed and plundered" peasants resisted their dispossession, Douglass observed the ways the "dormant energies of the oppressed classes all over the continent" had been "stirred" by the

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[1] William Blake "Jerusalem" (1804) quoted in Peter Linebaugh, "All the Atlantic Mountains Shook," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 10 (Autumn 1982): 87–121.

[2] Frederick Douglass, "Lecture on Haiti," in Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon, eds., *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution: Selected Essays and Historical Documents* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 202–211.

French Revolution. He recognized links between struggles, noting how the French provisional government had heeded the call of the Haitian Revolution and decreed the "unconditional emancipation of every slave" throughout French colonies in 1794. Although Napoleon reversed this decision in 1802, the emancipatory politics set in motion by the Haitian Revolution continued to reverberate internationally. By calling together movements against despotism, colonialism, exploitation, and slavery, Douglass drew a powerful continuum of struggle against "tyrants of the old world, and slaveholders of our own."[3]

Douglass delivered these remarks in August 1848 at the tenth anniversary celebration of the Emancipation of the West Indies, in Rochester, New York. West India Day, as it was known, was a revered holiday and recruitment event for abolitionists. For Douglass, who had emancipated himself from slavery a decade before, West India Day commemorated the freedom enslaved people had won for themselves. Douglass understood that from Bussa's uprising in Barbados to the Demerara Rebellion in Guyana, the Baptist War in Jamaica, and unrest throughout the Bahamas and beyond, enslaved people had been the driving force behind abolition. While Douglass's prior West India Day speeches connected the abolition of West Indian slavery to the struggle to end US slavery, his speech that year, entitled "The Revolution of 1848," demonstrated how struggles against slavery and tyranny were as interwoven as the global circuits of accumulation that united them.

In that fateful year of 1848, Douglass described how people across spaces and struggles were connected by their "interests, sympathies and destiny." This vision of internationalism challenges many prevailing interpretations. The concept of internationalism is often fixed to the 1848 publication of the *Communist Manifesto*, which, by accident of history, was published amid popular uprisings throughout Europe. The document was intended to outline the specific goals and mission of the Communist League, a group that counted Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels among its members. Their *Manifesto* describes the class struggle between the growing proletariat and ascendant bourgeoisie under expanding industrial capitalism. Their aim was to embolden the workers of the world to unite against these generalizable conditions. Poorly received in its time, the *Manifesto* became regarded as the program of a broader global revolutionary movement only in retrospect. Plucked from its context, its concept of internationalism, some have argued,

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[3] Frederick Douglass, "The Revolution of 1848," *The North Star* (August 4, 1848).

appears limited to Western European male industrial workers. But as Douglass's speech underscored and as Marx and Engels would elsewhere expound, resistance to capital was as globally interlinked as the geographies of accumulation that capital produced. In the nineteenth century, internationalism arose alongside and in opposition to capital's political, social, and spatial reshaping of the world.

As steel rails traversed land and steam engines pushed ships across water – moving goods, people, raw materials, and weapons alike – revolutionary ideas transited the globe. "Steam, skill, and lightning," observed Douglass, "have brought the ends of the earth together." Douglass was one of many abolitionists who traveled the world in what Manisha Sinha has described as an "abolitionist international." In speeches to Irish abolitionist societies, religious houses, and workingmen's groups in England, Ireland, and Wales, Douglass and other abolitionists like Sarah Parker Remond, described imperialism and the colonial subjugation of Ireland in the same breath as they spoke of India, parts of Africa, and the Caribbean. In this critical period of US state formation, they linked slavery to questions of Indigenous land theft and genocide as well as military aggression against Mexico. "The oceans that divided us, have become bridges to connect us," said Douglass in his 1848 West India Day speech. The "wide 'world has become a whispering gallery.'"[4]

From its incendiary outset, the nineteenth century was defined by a radical reshaping of space, time, and possibilities. While bourgeois revolutions destabilized European empires and gathering proletarian struggles challenged nascent industrial capitalism, abolitionist and anticolonial struggles seized the beating hearts of colonial economies, particularly in the Western Hemisphere. In Haiti, France lost a ruthless slave economy of sugar; in Mexico, Spain lost a lifeblood of filched silver and minerals; and in the burgeoning United States, Britain lost sovereign claims over Indigenous land and slave-cultivated tobacco, cotton, and rice. Nineteenth-century power struggles over sovereignty, capitalism, socialism, and the meaning of freedom were deeply entangled. Considering these struggles together, as Douglass did, the transition from mercantile colonialism to liberal imperialism appears to be less a shift in economic policy and more a concerted response to interlinked multipolar struggles from below.

Though global movements opposing slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism are customarily narrated as discrete and separate, this chapter

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[4] Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016), 339–380.

considers their multiple linkages. Drawing from Douglass's 1848 speech, it argues that the internationalization of capital produced a broad internationalist consciousness opposing linked forms of accumulation. Such consciousness arose despite new global technologies of surveillance designed to preempt and crush it. From the heights of hot air balloons to the all-seeing prison guard of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, definitive symbols of surveillance emerged in the nineteenth century alongside the dramatic expansion of the global capitalist system. Such measures sought not only to monitor the activities of rebels, they also strove to prevent their movements from aligning. Despite such efforts, this chapter argues that an underappreciated form of internationalism developed within and against the circuits of accumulation that linked people worldwide. In this era of anxious surveillance, an abolitionist internationalism was forged with an understanding that struggles could resonate across space regardless if revolutionaries could actually see one another.

Liberal Internationalism

While internationalism is commonly attributed to Karl Marx, the term was actually coined by Jeremy Bentham, English theorist of utilitarianism, a few years before the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution. Bentham was building and banking on a new world order, one where men with "English-bred minds" would superintend the global economy. In an era of dramatically shifting political structures and disjointed legal systems, Bentham sought to delineate internal and international jurisprudence and determine which branches of law could regulate the "mutual transactions between sovereigns." In this he was not thinking of countries like Haiti. His writings were replete with racist colonial assumptions. For Bentham the sovereign right of liberty was "the pride of Englishmen" while "liberty without security" was "possessed by Hottentots and Patagonians." For Bentham and his contemporaries like John Stuart Mill, freedom was equivalent to the freedom of British trade.[5]

In the ascendant bourgeois order, liberal capitalists, like Bentham, consolidated the necessary power to reshape landscapes. They adapted preexisting

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[5] Quoted in Ole Spierman, *International Legal Argument in the Permanent Court of International Justice: The Rise of the International Judiciary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 50–52; David R. Armitage, "Globalizing Jeremy Bentham," *History of Political Thought* 32, no. 1 (2011): 63–82; Linda Colley, "Empires of Writing: Britain, America and Constitutions, 1776–1848," *Law and History Review* 32 no. 2 (May 2014): 237–266.

political administrative structures to exert authority over the territories of their investments. Bentham's interests in Latin America offer a poignant illustration. By 1825 Bentham was "little known in England" but well known "in the plains of Chili and the mines of Mexico" for rejecting the monopoly character of colonial trade. In correspondence with independence leaders such as José de San Martín and Simón Bolívar, Bentham discussed liberation through the production of new markets. He planned to build an interoceanic canal through Latin America, a project long desired by Spain. He foresaw that the canal would be funded by British capitalists upon land ceded to "the Anglo-American United States," by newly independent Mexico. To his mind, the largely Indigenous Mexican population was "not as yet of sufficient age to go alone." In a related endeavor, former US vice president and infamous dualist Aaron Burr plotted to invade Mexico, crown himself emperor, and appoint Bentham legislator, predicting that Mexicans would follow the Englishman, "like a flock of sheep." The liberal internationalism espoused by Bentham promised a new world of expanding markets which simply overlay enduring colonial commitments.[6]

Bentham is perhaps most well known for his theory of the panopticon, published in 1791. The panopticon represented a spatial logic of isolation and control, applicable to work sites, poor houses, schools, and most famously, prisons. In contrast to the dungeon-like prisons of the Paris Bastille, Bentham's panopticon separated people from one another, making them visible only to an unseen central authority, exposing them to continuous monitoring, and curtailing their communication with one another. Modeled on the spatial management of plague-ridden French villages, Bentham reasoned that the panic of contagion, like the threat of insurrection, could be contained if people internalized the mechanisms of surveillance, believing, in other words, that they were always being watched.

The panopticon was not Jeremy Bentham's idea but an adaptation of his brother Samuel's theory, developed while overseeing shipbuilders on British dockyards. Samuel's mandate was to prevent the scavenging of wood scraps and timber waste created during ship production. These leftover "chips" were customarily used by workers to warm homes, cook food, and construct furnishings like narrow stairs or cabinet doors. Given that shipbuilding was a highly specialized form of labor, the salvaging of chips had been

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[6] Annie L. Cot, "Jeremy Bentham's Spanish American Utopia," in José Luís Cardoso, et al., eds., *Economic Development and Global Crisis: The Latin American Economy in Historical Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 34–47; Colley, "Empires of Writing," 254.

a customary part of compensation since 1634. Samuel's efforts to surveil workers and save chips aligned with broader efforts to mechanize and de-skill production, install low wages, and subordinate labor on the dockyards. While workers opposed these measures through strikes and riots, the production process was eventually rationalized. Consequently, the taking of chips was transformed from longstanding custom into criminalized act. The panopticon, a critical component of nineteenth- and twentieth-century carceral logic, was born out of efforts to surveil workers and repress labor. In elevating capital's line of sight while hindering workers' communication and solidarity, Bentham's theory of internationalism shares much in principle with the theory of the panopticon. This could be further seen throughout the production process of British ships.[7]

The Cursed International

If the arrogance of the French colonial empire could be symbolized by a hot air balloon, the power and reach of the British Empire was exemplified by its ships, vessels for the administration of war, commerce, colonialism, and slavery. The interconnected geographies of accumulation could be understood throughout the production of ships, as could the interlinked spaces of resistance they produced. From the capital required to finance their production, the shifting valuation of the commodities within, to the very timber utilized in construction, one could observe the synchronous processes that enabled the dominance of British capital in the nineteenth century, as well as the struggles that arose in opposition to it.

The capital for producing British ships was largely a product of British colonialism, particularly in India. In the nineteenth century, colonized Indian workers were conscripted to labor throughout the British Empire while Indian soldiers were deployed worldwide to protect existing sites of British investment and open new ones. British colonial administrators deindustrialized the country and reorganized production to vastly expand the growth of strategic commodities such as grain, cotton, and opium. While grain grew plentifully, it was kept in reserve for British trade, even during times of famine. By the 1870s, the skeletal remains of starving Indians could be found at the steps of grain depots; the grain possessing greater speculative value than Indian life. Indian-grown opium was transported from cities like

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[7] Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Verso, 2003), 371–401.

Bengal to Chinese cities like Canton. As Chinese people were hooked on the drug through an illegal and illicit trade, Britain gained a foothold in the Chinese economy, colonizing Hong Kong in 1842. The "commodities imported from East India," Marx noted, "were chiefly re-exported to other countries, from which a much greater quantity of bullion was obtained than had been required to pay for them in India." Indeed, the surplus gained from taxes and tribute on colonial goods, particularly from India, was so immense, it enabled Britain to become a lender of capital to other states and municipalities. In this position, Britain become a global creditor and thereafter, the dominant economic power of the nineteenth century. This capital was subsequently reinvested into its colonial infrastructure, including the construction of British ships.[8]

British ships that operated illegally as slave ships after the end of the British trade in 1807 were vessels of both trade and war. The grotesque processes that transformed African people into "Atlantic commodities" occurred largely aboard ships, as Stephanie Smallwood describes. The "value" of enslaved people was continually assessed in relation to the space and commodities required to keep them alive, especially as they became sick, distressed, wounded, insane, or attempted to take their own or their captors' lives. In 1781, a British Solicitor General pronounced that slaves had as much humanity "as wood." He litigated the infamous case of the *Zong* where over 150 slaves were thrown overboard, allowing the ship's owners to file an insurance claim for lost "cargo." In refusing to press criminal charges the Solicitor General had declared, "What is this claim that human people have been thrown overboard? This is a case of chattels." The *Zong* joined the infamous diagram of the slave ship *Brookes* in the abolitionist imagination. Both ships illuminated the cold calculations whereby enslaved people were assessed as abstract mediums of exchange to be traded, sold, stored, or murdered. In 1840, British painter J. M. W. Turner commemorated the *Zong* in *The Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhon Coming On)*. Alongside the painting he displayed a poem with the concluding lines: "Hope, Hope, fallacious Hope! Where is thy market now?"[9]

[8] Karl Marx, "The East India Company – Its History and Results," *New York Daily Tribune* (July 11, 1853); Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994), 271.

[9] Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 33–64; Turner quoted in Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 138.

If Bentham's liberal internationalism was haunted by colonialism's starved skeletons and slavery's restless spirits it was also hounded by the curses of dispossessed peasants. In Germany's eastern Rhineland, peasants in the early nineteenth century were confounded by a profound shift in property relations as the Black Forest became parceled off to private owners. With the expropriation of forest land, peasants were suddenly punished for foraging, hunting, or engaging in other customary practices of survival. Soon thousands were incarcerated for theft or trespassing and new "criminals" flooded German courts. As forests made famous by the Brothers Grimm underwent rapid capitalist development, fairy tale monsters were replaced by lurking forest managers, tax collectors, and bailiffs. Peasants fought against dispossession in the ways they could, organizing and also emigrating in huge numbers, an average of 40,000 per year between 1830–40. When these means did not suffice, peasants enchanted the forests and bewitched the trees so that anyone who cut them down would carry their curses.[10]

The wood from these forests was felled by new timber companies. It was then floated down the Rhine and transported to England where it often became the masts of British ships. Through these ships, built with surplus capital from brutal colonial rule; carrying barrels of grain, kept from the mouths of starving people not deemed valuable enough to feed; when they illegally functioned as slave ships, transported enslaved African people, treated as if their very lives were commodities; and constructed with wood which carried the curses of dispossessed and criminalized peasants, one gains a sense of the world linked in struggle, the basis of internationalism. In observing dispossession in the German Rhineland, a young Karl Marx became politicized. He saw how "the organs of the state" could become the "ears, eyes, arms, legs" of property owners and came to believe that the liberal economic order advocated by figures like Bentham was the cause rather than the cure of this cursed international. With this understanding, Marx would become a revolutionary.

Resistance existed at every stage within the accumulation process, as the making of British ships reveals. In ship construction, workers collectively organized against the rationalization of their production. Their movements aligned with the resistance of the predominantly female labor force of spinners, weavers, and domestic workers opposing their disproportionate exploitation with the encroachment of industrial production. Though capital

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[10] Karl Marx, "Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood," *Rheinische Zeitung*, no. 303, October 30, 1842; Peter Linebaugh, "Karl Marx, the Theft of Wood, and Working-Class Composition: A Contribution to the Current Debate," *Crime and Social Justice* 6 (Fall-Winter 1976): 5–16..

for producing the ships was procured through colonialism, resistance to these regimes was ceaseless, resulting in actions such as the Indian Mutiny of 1857 which removed the rule of the East India Company. Chinese people similarly refused to bend to illicit British drug profiteering, leading to the Opium Wars in mid-century. Escaping despotism and dispossession which produced ship timber, millions of Germans emigrated throughout a radical diaspora, with some called '48ers to connote their participation in the 1848 revolution. Aboard illegally trading slave ships, enslaved people unceasingly rejected the regimes which deemed them property, from small acts of self-preservation to organized forms of resistance such as taking over ships or killing officers. In these ways, the ship articulated the international production of value and the production of countervailing internationalism. Such links can be further traced through the abolitionist internationalism of the Haitian Revolution.

Abolitionist Internationalism

Despite new surveillance methods, the transit of insurrectionary knowledge in the nineteenth century was neither staunched nor fully intercepted by modern technology, much to the dismay of slaveholders and shareholders globally. Of the Haitian rebels, the manager of the aforementioned Gallifet plantation had sneered, "this class of men have neither the energy nor the combination of ideas necessary for the execution of this project."[11] And yet, this "class" of revolutionaries successfully executed plans to overthrow slavery and produce the world's first free Black republic. Some ideas had migrated from France, as Napoleon's soldiers ruefully learned upon hearing Haitian rebels sing "La Marseillaise" as their own anthem. From the pocket of one captured rebel, authorities confiscated gunpowder, an African talisman, and Thomas Paine's the *Rights of Man*. Here were the makings of a revolutionary consciousness: warfare materiel, symbols of African history and culture, and tracts inspired by the French Revolution.

From its inception, the republic drew upon vibrant anticolonial traditions. As leaders sought to replace French laws, street names, and everything that "revive[d] memories of the cruelties of this barbarous people," they urgently looked to rename Saint-Domingue, the French name for the colony.[12] Haiti

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[11] Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 97.

[12] "Haitian Declaration of Independence, 1804," in Julia Gaffield, ed., *The Haitian Declaration of Independence: Creation, Context, and Legacy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 239–248.

had been the name given to the island by its Indigenous Taíno inhabitants. It was reclaimed by revolutionary leaders as a means to honor the living presence of Taíno people and their longstanding resistance to colonialism. For a time, Haitian soldiers called themselves "Las Incas," in honor of the Indigenous-led resistance of the Great Rebellion against Spain's colonialism in the Southern Andes. In this 1781–4 rebellion Túpac Amaru and other Andean revolutionaries had fought against colonial dispossession and *mita*, the Spanish system of forced Indigenous labor, later described by Peruvian radical José Carlos Mariátegui as mining in service of the "annihilation of human capital."[13]

When Haiti became free soil, its leaders sought to expand the geography of freedom. While they searched for formal recognition internationally, they also proffered support to others. Iterations of Haiti's constitution offered refuge to fugitive slaves and welcomed enemies of empire to become "children of Haiti." To be Haitian was to be Black, a political choice rather than an inheritable status. Outlined in the 1805 Constitution, a person was determined to be Black if they rejected slavery, renounced French colonialism, and accepted Haitian law. Article 44 of the 1816 Constitution stated that "all Africans and Indians" as well as their descendants who resided in the republic, would "be recognized as Haitians." As Haiti's legacy spread, people confronting slavery, colonialism, and Indigenous dispossession increasingly sought support and refuge in Haiti. North American opponents of slavery and colonialism were among those who recognized Haiti as a beacon of freedom.[14]

The Spanish-American wars of independence were influenced, and even incubated, by Haiti, the first Latin American republic to gain independence. The Haitian Declaration of Independence was translated from French into English and Spanish. Excerpts were printed in Haitian newspapers, like the aptly named *Le Telegraph*, alongside calls for the liberation of Spanish colonies. Spanish officials were horrified after intercepting copies of incendiary Haitian newspapers headed to Spanish-controlled ports. Official attempts to squelch anticolonial fervor were warranted: Mexico would send up its own "cry" in 1810, declaring its independence a few years after Haiti's declared independence in 1804. Like other anticolonial leaders, Simón Bolívar, the great liberator of South America, was granted refuge and support from the newly independent Haitian government in 1816. By 1817, he was sailing

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[13] José Carlos Mariátegui, "On Studying the Peruvian and Indo-American Reality," in Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker, eds. and translators, *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011), 78.

[14] Quoted in Ada Ferrer, "Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic," *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (2012): 43.

Haitian ships manned by Haitian crews after being sheltered by the Haitian leader, Alexandre Pétion. This support was conditional: Pétion requested that Bolívar abolish slavery in every territory he liberated from Spanish rule. In this way, abolition, the centerpiece of Haitian Revolution, became a central part of the independence movement against the Spanish empire.

Haiti famously inspired uprisings against slavery throughout the United States. In 1811 Charles Deslondes, then rumored to be Haitian, organized an uprising of 500 slaves to seize New Orleans. In 1822 Denmark Vesey, who had briefly lived in Haiti, organized a rebellion in South Carolina. Vesey, who reportedly read Haitian news to his co-conspirators and communicated with cooks sailing between Charleston and Haiti, plotted his uprising on Bastille Day and promised followers that Haiti would provide them aid and refuge. Following Vesey's uprising, legislators passed the 1822 Negro Seamen Act, which mandated that Black sailors be imprisoned while their ships were in dock and treated "in the same manner as . . . those afflicted with infectious diseases.'" Despite such efforts, the desire for freedom refused quarantine. Enslaved men overtook the Georgia-bound *Decatur* in 1826 and ordered the crew to set sail for Haiti. On the anniversary of the Haitian Revolution in 1831, Nat Turner launched an insurrection in Virginia. Virginia's governor received a threatening letter shortly after which explained, "Hayti offers an asylum for those who survive the approaching carnage."[15]

Internationalism of Debt

The United States emerged as a nation within the shadow of the Haitian Revolution and defined itself largely in relation to the world's first Black republic. For example, the newly independent republic quickly and gener-ously sent its first formal allocation of foreign aid to Haiti. This aid, however, was not sent to assist Haitian rebels but instead to fortify French colonial forces as well as its slave owners. Apart from the Adams Administration 1798 to 1801, US officials attempted to define themselves on the world stage alongside other major European powers. In speaking to the French ambassa-dor in 1801, Thomas Jefferson wondered whether the United States, France, and Britain could cooperate in order to "confine this disease to its island." As long as, "we don't allow the blacks to possess a ship," he advised, "we can

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[15] Quoted in Marcus Rediker, *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 108; quoted in Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 148–149.

allow them to exist and even maintain very lucrative commercial contacts with them." Once Haiti gained its independence, the United States joined the European powers in refusing to grant Haiti official diplomatic recognition.[16]

Some of the greatest gains the United States realized in relation to the Haitian Revolution were territorial. US officials pressed for the cession of vast swaths of French territory once it became clear that Napoleon and his forces could not retake Saint-Domingue after 1802. Under the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, the United States annexed 827 million acres, doubling the size of the country. The annexation decisively failed to expand the geography of liberty. Settlement, particularly of the agriculturally rich Missouri River Basin, entailed the violent displacement and forced removal of Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Crow, Pawnee, Osage, and Comanche people among others. Only after land was "cleared" by settlers and volunteer militias, could the expanding cotton economy take root. The Louisiana Purchase intensified a brutal geography of accumulation: land violently wrested from Native people, made alienable, and transformed into private property, was put into productive use through the forced labor of humans, themselves diabolically transformed into commodities under chattel slavery, all in order to reap cotton, the blood-rich raw material of the new republic.

Land was also made productive through relations of debt. Jefferson had promoted a unique theory for seizing lands "which they [Native people] have to spare and we want." He suggested that the United States "push our trading houses" in order to sink Native people deep in debt. When these debts got "beyond what the individuals can pay," he suggested that they would "become willing to lop them off by a cession of lands." Jefferson's theory was soon confirmed. Shortly after the Louisiana Purchase, Choctaw and Chickasaw people were cut off from Spanish markets in Pensacola and confined to trading with Americans. In these circumscribed conditions they racked up huge debts. Without money, they were forced to offer what they did have in abundance: land. This coercive debt relationship was replicated throughout the nineteenth century.[17]

Relative to the financial volatility represented by the Haitian Revolution, the emergent United States became a more attractive investment site for European investors. US economic development, from its inception, had

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[16] Quoted in Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 225.
[17] Quoted in Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 2nd edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 22–23; John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1607–1814* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 214–215.

relied on various forms of debt financing. Soon after its independence, debts from as early as the Revolutionary War were bundled and sold to European financiers, largely British capitalists in the form of bonds. National debts do not represent an absence or lack of capital, rather, they should be understood as capital. Marx described the magical process, where debt "endows barren money with the power of breeding and thus turns it into capital" without exposing it to the customary risks. He notes that, "the sum lent is transformed into public bonds, easily negotiable, which go on functioning in their hands just as so much hard cash would." The circulation of its bonds did not hinder US economic development, rather, the sale of those bonds financed the industrialization, urbanization, expansion, militarization, and state-making practices of the country in its formative years in the early nineteenth century. As Marx further remarks, "With the national debt arose an international credit system." Through the sale of its bonds – its debt – the United States was firmly entrenched in this credit system from its inception.[18]

Investment in the emerging American republic, particularly on behalf of financiers from the British Empire from whom the United States had just won its independence, was uncertain. European investors, largely British, were eventually swayed to purchase US debts seeing them as "stable" relative to other forms of investments. The Louisiana Purchase, for example, was enabled by a bridging loan provided to the US government by the London bank of Baring Brothers. Interest rates on that and other US loans issued by London banks were lower than those issued on Latin American bonds because of the racist assumptions that Anglo-Saxons were better equipped to repay their loans. In this era of profound unrest and revolutionary revolt, market volatility was coterminous with conflagrations of anticolonial, antiracist, abolitionist, and class struggles. Both the French Revolution and the Haitian Revolution epitomized such conflagrations. In contrast to formerly popular investment sites, in particular France and Haiti, the United States emerged as a relatively more secure option. In as far as the new country appeared equipped to control the uprisings of its own working class, maintain a system of slavery, manage racial hierarchies in workplaces, and subjugate Indigenous populations through genocidal practices, its economic development represented a more "stable" investment. Security, therefore, came to articulate with racism, and racism became a primary mechanism for achieving economic stability.

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[18] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), I, 919–920.

Under obligation to foreign capital, racism came to structure a range of repressive practices and legitimating logics in the United States essential to securing bonds and accumulating capital. These processes, foundational to the political economy, were not fixed to an original stage of capitalist development, but evolved and persisted in practices and philosophies over time. Rather than a mystical force unleashed upon the world, racism enabled the expansion of US capital. Racist practices qualified the country to receive British and other European financing. In turn, these practices and logics produced the dictates that the United States would come to impose on other countries. When the United States assumed the position of financier rather than debtor, its racist logic represented an inimitable synthesis of the formations that had effectively produced its own political economy. The first time that the United States would take on this role, displacing the British as the major financier of a national economy, occurred in newly independent Mexico at the end of the nineteenth century.

Internationalism at War

If Haiti's free soil acquired meaning in proximity to the slaveholding United States, Mexico's territory was similarly charged; its borders directly delineated freedom from unfreedom. Abolition infused the Mexican independence movement from its inception. While often overlooked, Mexico and the United States developed nearly conterminously as independent republics. The United States' formal independence from Britain preceded Mexico's declaration of independence from Spain by less than thirty years. Three months after declaring independence from Spain in 1810, Father Hidalgo issued a decree abolishing slavery. While not yet formal law, New Spain became a haven for fugitive slaves, who often had "Mexico on the brain" as a southern escape route on the Underground Railroad. Black Indigenous Mexican President Vicente Guerrero declared an end to slavery in the country, a decree eventually formalized by 1837. The second article of the 1857 Mexican Constitution affirmed this, adding that all enslaved people could recover their liberty by setting foot on Mexican soil. In contrast to the United States, Mexico was established as a place where slavery was not only abolished but also unimaginable.

Though Mexico arose as an independent nation alongside the United States in the nineteenth century, the US political elite and popular press represented Mexico as a "weak, worthless, indolent, and turbulent nation," as Frederick Douglass recounted. Mexican people were characterized as violent

aggressors given "to the sway of animal passions" and therefore "totally incapable of self-government" and in need of the "strong beneficent arms of the Anglo-Saxon." These characterizations were relative to the organized and aggressive pursuit of Mexican life, labor, and territory leading up to the Mexican-American War, 1846–8.[19]

Rather than extending the reach of free soil, the Mexican-American War vastly expanded the geography of brutality. Accustomed to the extreme settler colonial violence of Indian Wars, US soldiers waged war against Mexican people with equal wantonness, disregarding formal rules of engagement to routinely rape, rob, and kill unarmed civilians. In July 1847 US reporter and one-time war supporter, Anne Royall published "Outrageous in Mexico," condemning the attacks on Mexican women by US soldiers. Rape, rarely recognized as a crime in the United States when it was committed against non-white women, was denounced by figures like Royall when it was used as a weapon of war. The excessive violence and sadism of US soldiers led to thousands of desertions including several hundred defectors to the Mexican side. Some of these soldiers were new immigrants to the United States who, having escaped tyranny in their home countries, refused to perpetuate it against people in another. The San Patricio Battalion, composed of mostly Irish and some German soldiers, became one of the staunchest defenders of the Mexican cause against the US military. Their deserter's handbill defined liberty against "those who desire to be the lords of the world, robbing properties and territories which do not belong to them." Perhaps they were familiar with abolitionists like Douglass, who had traveled to Ireland during the potato famine, and spoken passionately against slavery, British colonialism, and US aggression against Mexico. Either way, they refused to perpetuate in Mexico that which they had escaped under British rule in Ireland.[20]

With the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo at the end of the Mexican-American War, the United States annexed the northern half of Mexico's territory. Ulysses S. Grant decried the Mexican-American War as "one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation." He condemned the US government for "following the bad example of European monarchies" and indulging in a reckless "desire to acquire additional

[19] Frederick Douglass, "The Future of the Negro People of the Slave States," in Philip S. Foner, ed., *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 482.
[20] Quoted in Paul Foos, *A Short, Offhand Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict during the Mexican-American War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 106.

territory." Grant's observation about this tragic if not farcical imitation of old European regime in 1848 was prescient.[21]

After the US had annexed much of Mexico's territory in 1848, France set its sights on the remaining land. Though mere decades had passed since the Napoleonic Wars, times had rapidly changed. That same year, Napoleon Bonaparte's nephew, the conservative Louis Napoleon, became the head of France. The younger Napoleon aspired in vain to his uncle's stature. Laughable in his aspirations and overreaching in his ambitions, he was a mere "caricature," or as Karl Marx famously described, a "farce." The opening of Marx's 1852 book *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* describes the French leader's efforts to borrow the "costumes" of the past, along with the "borrowed language," and "battle slogans" drawing on the legitimacy of the French Revolution, to conjure the "dead of world history." By 1851, Louis Bonaparte had consolidated his power, staged a coup, and anointed himself emperor.

Like his uncle, Louis Bonaparte had vast territorial ambitions. He sent troops to New Caledonia, Algeria, China, Senegal, Lebanon, and China. He sympathized with the slaveholding Confederacy during the Civil War. Like Jeremy Bentham, he also longed for a Latin American canal and sought a major footprint in Mexico where his most egregious forays took place. In 1861, Mexican President Benito Juárez declared a moratorium on servicing foreign debts. Ostensibly enraged, Louis Napoleon sent French troops to recover the funds. Compared to other foreign bondholders, France's share of the debt was relatively small, hardly enough to justify an invasion. Unswayed, Bonaparte installed Maximilian of Habsburg, Archduke of Austria, as the new Emperor of Mexico in 1864. When Maximilian was executed by Mexican forces in 1867, the robes of the fantasy French empire fell, exposing a sad charade of the *ancien régime*.

Marx had written *The Eighteenth Brumaire* in a flurry. He had attempted to capture Bonaparte's coup as events unfolded. He also used the events to reflect on the missteps of proletarian revolutions and to reassess the power struggle against the bourgeoisie described in the *Communist Manifesto*. Marx and Engels had written the *Manifesto* before uprisings against absolutist regimes and monarchies swept Europe in 1848. They had noted the swelling of industrial working-class power and its correlation to the exploding size of the global capitalist economy. Their *Manifesto* correctly predicted that an

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[21] Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2006), 25–27.

emerging and consolidating working class would assert its power across the continent, opposing the bourgeois struggle for state power through proletarian internationalism. They appraised the revolutionary potential of the bourgeoisie in developing the means of production and abolishing monarchies. What they had not anticipated was how formidable the bourgeoisie would become. Under Bonaparte's authoritarian regime, the bourgeoisie supported a brutal counterrevolution, utilizing law, a modern police force, and mechanisms of surveillance to violently suppress working-class dissent. Marx realized that there would be no simple transition of power for the proletariat. The *Brumaire* revised the *Manifesto*'s theories of the state and history to directly promote a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

Significantly, Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* was not published first in France, nor in England where Marx was living at the time, and not in Germany where both he and Engels were from and to whose struggles they remained connected. The first edition was published in New York City by Joseph Wedemeyer, a revolutionary German émigré, one of thousands who had fled or been exiled from Germany after participating in 1848 revolutions against autocracy and despotism. These "'48ers" absorbed the lessons of the *Brumaire*, particularly its assessment of Bonaparte's regime, learning difficult lessons about the ferocity of bourgeois class interests. The *Eighteenth Brumaire* famously describes how people make history but not under conditions of their own choosing. This was decidedly the case of the '48ers. Roughly 190,000 Germans fought for the Union army. Many, like Wedemeyer, were revolutionary veterans and socialist internationalists who immigrated to the United States, joined the abolitionist movement, and transposed their own struggle against tyranny onto the US Civil War against slavery.

Whispers of Internationalism

Before the US Civil War, Frederick Douglass had toured cotton factories in northwest England where unemployment would soon rage. The Union would blockade Southern ports in an attempt to strangle Confederate trade. In doing so it would take the South's major source of value out of circulation. Southern warehouses would groan under its unsold weight while English looms gathered dust. During the Civil War, English workers faced starvation, eviction, disease, and death. Between November 1861 and November 1862, employment in towns in Lancashire fell by 300,000. Karl Marx wrote in the *New York Tribune*: "a great portion of the British working classes directly and severely suffers

under the consequences of the Southern blockade." In an effort to restore the economy, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, William Gladstone, endorsed the recognition of Confederate independence in October 1862. The British Prime Minister mulled intervention on the side of the Confederacy.[22]

In light of these considerations, abolitionists like Douglass now asked the British people to do the unthinkable and support the Union cause. In public meetings, newspaper articles, and books they pled with British people not to support the war, to disavow the Confederacy, and to oppose slavery at the expense of their own immediate economic interests. In "The Slave's Appeal to Great Britain" Douglass challenged British people, "Must the world stand still, humanity make no progress, and slavery stand for ever, lest your cotton-mills stop, and your poor cry for bread?" Astonishingly, many British workers agreed.[23]

From mill towns in Manchester to financial and trade centers in London, British workers organized mass public meetings supporting the abolition of slavery and opposing British military support for the Confederacy. These public meetings grew in number and size after emancipation became a Union war aim in January 1863. On March 26, 1863, Karl Marx attended a meeting of the London Trade Union Council at St. James Hall where workers expressed their solidarity with abolition. John Bright, a Quaker, and mill owner chaired the meeting. He later wrote to US abolitionist politician Charles Sumner describing abolition's "transcendent importance to labour all over the world." It was unusual for a Trade Union meeting to discuss "political issues," with workers declaring their opposition to the Confederacy and support for abolition. Henry Adams who reported the meeting to the US State Department described it as, "an act almost without precedent in their history."[24] Similar meetings spread across the country, often passing resolutions supporting the Union. In kind, Northern US workers sent shiploads of money and aid. In the British county of Lancashire, Northern provisions amounted to over £27,000 worth of goods with over £1,000 in cash aid. British dock workers refused payment for unloading the goods. Railway workers transported the aid for free, an act of solidarity that moved many and brought others to join the cause. As Frederick Douglass had observed, new spaces of

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[22] Karl Marx, "English Public Opinion," *New York Daily Tribune* (February 1, 1862).

[23] Frederick Douglass, "The Slave's Appeal to Great Britain," *The Saturday Press* (November 29, 1862).

[24] "John Bright to Charles Sumner, April 4, 1863," quoted in Philip S. Foner, *British Labor and the American Civil War* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981), 62; Henry Adams, "Report on the Trades' Union Meeting" (1863), quoted in Foner, *British Labor and the American Civil War*, 62.

accumulation had produced new political arrangements, new social organizations, and new sensibilities in a shared global space.[25]

> A change has now come over the affairs of mankind. Walled cities and empire have become unfashionable ... Oceans no longer divide but link nations together ... Space is comparatively annihilated. Thoughts expressed on one side of the Atlantic are distinctly heard on the other.[26]

It was out the large public meetings of workers opposing slavery that the International Working Men's Association (IWMA) arose in 1864. In his inaugural address, Marx noted that, "it was not the wisdom of the ruling classes" but "the heroic resistance" of the working classes that prevented Europe from crusading to propagate "slavery on the other side of the Atlantic"; a resistance that resonated deeply with abolitionist struggles led by enslaved people themselves. Shortly after its founding, the IWMA had multiple abolitionist celebrations. In 1865 it published an address "To the People of the United States of America," which proclaimed, "No more shall the salesman's hammer barter human flesh and blood in your market places, causing humanity to shudder at its cold barbarity." From its inception, the IWMA imbricated abolition with the class struggle. More than empathy, more than mere acknowledgment of other national struggles, the solidarity of the First International was built upon the powerful understanding that people could recognize one another even if they never saw each other, a possible abolitionist internationalism at the heart of proletarian internationalism.[27]

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[25] Philip S. Foner, *British Labor and the American Civil War* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981), 58.

[26] Frederick Douglass, "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro," in Philip S. Foner, ed., *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 188–206.

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