

Pace University

DigitalCommons@Pace

---

Gilder-Lehrman Institute Theses

Dissertations, Theses, Capstones

---

## An Inverted Mirror: Early American Perspectives on the Revolution in St. Domingue

Eric May

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/gli>



Part of the [Latin American History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

An Inverted Mirror:  
Early American Perspectives on the Revolution in St. Domingue

Eric May

HIS 700: Thesis

Dr. Michael Rosenfeld

November 30, 2022

The Age of Revolutions, as it has been termed, sprang out of the Enlightenment ideals of the eighteenth century that found an expression with the first democratic revolution of the era, that of the United States. Thirteen years later, a second revolution in France would attempt a similar feat, as newly-created French citizens sought to inscribe their own liberal democratic principles into law in language that mirrored the Declaration of Independence and drawn from the same reservoir of egalitarian principles. As the United States experiment in governance entered its first decades - learning in turn to navigate faction, hostile foreign landscapes, and how or when to put abstract principles such as “freedom of speech” into practice - the revolution in France dominated American political discourse. While nearly all Americans celebrated the birth of their “sister republic,” Federalists feared its radical turn after 1792, though Democratic-Republicans lauded its adherence to the ideals of democracy and liberty from real or implied aristocratic privileges. Within this complex skein of events yet another revolution unfolded, one that was similar in sentiment but with dangerous connotations for the status quo: the revolt of the Blacks and free colored people of the French island colony of St. Domingue, modern day Haiti. Between the first armed revolts in 1790 in response to the colonial assembly’s refusal to recognize the citizenship of free colored people to the eventual victory of formerly enslaved Jean-Jacques Dessalines in 1804 against the French forces of Emperor Napoleon, the image of St. Domingue in American public life was used and reused by politicians, writers, and journalists to inspire, threaten, and coax public sentiment. Both Federalists and Democratic Republicans, radicals and conservatives, North and South, used the decade-long revolution in St. Domingue for their own political devices.

The focus of this study is on how the Haitian Revolution depicted in the partisan press of the early American republic and how this discourse reflect government policy in the 1790s and

early 1800s. Both Federalist and Republican writers—Thomas Paine, William Cobbett, Benjamin Franklin Bache, Abraham Bishop, and dozens of partisan newspapers throughout the nation—used the Haitian Revolution as a way of influencing public opinion or telegraphing their own domestic or foreign concerns. Writers sought to strengthen arguments in favor of pro-British or pro-French foreign and trade policies by using the events in St. Domingue as a rhetorical mirror to signal, reflect, or obfuscate American concerns at home.

The Haitian Revolution can also be seen as a lens to explore the boundaries of political support for radical racial egalitarianism, the abolition of slavery, and the role of the United States in world affairs during an age of revolution. Each of the American presidential administrations during this period—Washington, Adams, and Jefferson—perceived and responded to the events in St. Domingue with their own set of political and economic assumptions and changed United States policy as they saw fit. From the support of white planters and refugees under Washington, to Adams' opening of trade with Black general Toussaint Louverture and sanctioning of American naval support to assist him against his rival André Rigaud, to Jefferson's decision to embargo and deny diplomatic recognition to an independent Haiti, America's relationship with the Haitian Revolution reflected its own political disputes and internal contradictions, and were guided by the pens and minds of the printers, writers, and readers of the early United States.

## **Chapter 1: George Washington and Early American Perceptions of Haitian Revolution (1790-1796)**

The history of the United States and its perceptions of the revolutionary events in St. Domingue begins with the relationship America had with St. Domingue's colonial master, France. The simultaneous revolutions in both colony and metropole overlapped—one

overshadowing the other throughout the 1790s as the concern regarding America's Quasi-War with France dominated the early republic's concerns—yet, eventually, events in St. Domingue, would take precedence in the American public imagination.

The revolution in France was seen through a political and partisan lens; its twin uses, according to historian Stanley Elkins, were to provide “nourishment” to “Americans’ own opinion of themselves,” and the other was as a “major reference point for domestic political partisanship, just as such partisanship was first publicly emerging.”<sup>1</sup> Other historians note that the French Revolution “not only gave Americans something to talk about in their quest for a national identity, but they also spurred its maturation and helped determine its parameters.”<sup>2</sup> Pro-French citizens saw a vision of Americanness rooted in a democratic egalitarianism, a trans-Atlantic (perhaps even multi-racial) cosmopolitanism, and staunch support for France over its enemies, particularly Great Britain. Wearing French cockades and Phrygian caps in solidarity, and using terms of address like “citizen” or “sister republic” in the newly-formed Democratic-Republican Societies, these Francophiles were willing to see beyond their own national perspective. They served on French privateers, cheered on French military victories, and sang the Marseillaise, “*Ça Ira*,” and other international revolutionary songs in a now-forgotten “new version of American nationality.”<sup>3</sup>

This new vision did not come without a cost. While Democratic-Republicans would urge Americans to “seize the occasion . . . to manifest to the world, how much we are interested in the dawn of universal happiness,” eagerly buying American editions of French almanacs supplying readers with the new Gallic calendar and French Revolutionary events, for the less zealous the

---

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 309.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Rainbow Hale, “‘Many Who Wandered in Darkness’: The Contest over American National Identity,” *Early American Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 129.

<sup>3</sup> Hale, “Many Who Wandered,” 131.

increase in revolutionary intensity was concerning.<sup>4</sup> Between 1793 and 1796, the number of non-newspaper works on eschatology, the religious study of end times, multiplied by a factor of ten over the period 1765 to 1792; key phrases like “millennium,” “rumor,” and “anxiety” in newspapers of the time doubled or tripled, according to an examination of the digitized collection of *America’s Historical Newspapers*.<sup>5</sup>

Yet it would be fear, in the case of Washington and later Adams, or encouragement, in the case of Jefferson, of the French Revolution that would help create a key point of disagreement between their political factions, Federalists and Democratic-Republicans. Jefferson’s avid support was well documented in his famous January 3, 1793 letter to American ambassador William Short, where he dispassionately rationalizes the deaths caused by the beginning of the Reign of Terror: “Was ever such a prize won with so little innocent blood? My own affections have been deeply wounded by some of the martyrs to this cause, but rather than it should have failed, I would have seen half the earth desolated.”<sup>6</sup> Later that month, he would cautiously add in another letter, this time to his son-in-law, that the “sensation [the Reign of Terror] has produced here, and the indications of [it] in the public papers, have shown that the shape our form of government was to take depended much more on events in France than any body had before imagined.”<sup>7</sup> The same, in time, could be said about St. Domingue.

The early connection between the two revolutionary colonies went back decades, and while the 1790s would see American intervention on behalf of revolutionaries in St. Domingue, namely Toussaint Louverture during his struggle with revolutionary competitor André Rigaud,

---

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Rainbow Hale, “On Their Tiptoes: Political Time and Newspapers during the Advent of the Radicalized French Revolution, circa 1792-1793,” *Journal of the Early Republic*. 29, no. 2 (Summer 2009), 197.

<sup>5</sup> Hale, “On Their Tiptoes,” 206-207.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Elkins, *Age of Federalism*, 317.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Elkins, *Age of Federalism*, 317.

the free colored community in St. Domingue had already sent a regiment to fight alongside the French forces against the British in Savannah during the American Revolution. The Fontages Legion served as a proving ground for several Haitian revolutionary figures, including Rigaud himself, providing them with valuable military experience. The cry of “No taxation without representation” would have been understood in either colony, and issues of political representation in the metropole—denied the American colonists but begrudgingly granted to the planters and later free people of color in St. Domingue—were problematized in both by the seemingly irreconcilable demand for political liberty and equality with the economic reality of a colonial system of labor founded on racial slavery.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the ideology of the American Revolution helped spark early murmurings of equality among the free people of color, leaving them “ripe for rebellion” as by 1789 they learned of Northern states abolishing slavery.<sup>9</sup>

From the beginning, a key point was obvious: “Americans had recently been rebels, were noted in the world as such, and knew it,” with the obvious implication that similar insurrections in the name of freedom (in St. Domingue’s case literally) would elicit public and governmental sympathies. Historian Winthrop Jordan quotes a member of the Pennsylvania legislature as saying “it would be inconsistent on the part of a free nation” to not support those who had used force to “throw off the yoke of the most atrocious slavery; if one treats the insurrection of the negroes as rebellion, what name can be given to that insurrection of Americans which secured their independence?”<sup>10</sup> Rhetoric of this kind churned through the press as partisan perspectives utilized the tropes of radical liberatory rhetoric or paranoia over Black revolt to suit their own

---

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael J. Drexler eds, *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States: Histories, Textualities, Geographies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 201), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy: Haitian-American Relations During the Early Republic* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 378.

needs. Thus, any American “reading” of the Haitian Revolution was always intertwined within the ideological perspectives that underlay the fierce debates over governance, equality, and notions of liberty in the early republic. As one historian notes, a review of the newspaper record of the time “shows that Americans [anticipated] a revolution in St. Domingue well before they saw Haiti ... interrelat[ing] events in France with those in French St. Domingue” and ultimately “misread[ing]” the Haitian Revolution in an attempt to fit into a useful political narrative.<sup>11</sup>

The initial policy of the United States during the Washington administration had two key regional components. Southern states saw the defense of slavery as an institution as their primary prerogative. Governor Charles Pickney of South Carolina best expressed this view when he reminded his fellow southerners how “similar the situation of the Southern States and St. Domingo are in the profusion of slaves - that a day may arrive when they may be exposed to the same insurrection”; meanwhile, the Northeastern position was primarily mercantile: the lucrative trade with St. Domingue should be continued with whatever group happened to be in power, whether it was rebellious white planters, loyal French Republicans, or even newly-freed Black leaders like Louverture. Federalist control of the government during the first ten years of the revolutionary conflict saw the “triumph of the commercial interest,” though this would be chipped away from ever-increasing reports of atrocities that poured across the Atlantic in the reprinted letters, reports, and declarations from St. Domingue.<sup>12</sup>

Historian Timothy Matthewson outlines the importance of economic ties between the United States and St. Domingue in detail: by 1790 the colony purchased between 10 and 15

---

<sup>11</sup> James Alexander Dun, “(Mis)reading the Revolution: Philadelphia and ‘St. Domingo,’ 1789-1792,” in *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States: Histories, Textualities, Geographies*, ed. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael J. Drexler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 44.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas O. Ott, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789-1804* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 53-54.



percent of all American exports, with West Indian islands as a whole purchasing over 30 percent in total. In turn, St. Domingue bought more US-manufactured exports than all other islands combined. Hundreds of American ships traded with the island each year, with commodities such as Southern pork, flour, corn and lumber; Mid-Atlantic beef and livestock; and New England salted provisions and oils helping drive the economies of each region; Massachusetts alone had 60 rum distilleries dedicated to profitably processing West Indian molasses.<sup>13</sup> It was in support of this burgeoning trade that Washington reluctantly provided \$726,000 in supplies, arms, and ammunition to support French planters after the outbreak of slave revolt in 1791.<sup>14</sup> However, this aid would not prevent the collapse of slavery in the colony in 1793, nor would Washington's sympathies allow for the direct military intervention in the conflict, especially as the administration occupied itself with the establishment of national institutions and concerns over hostile Indian confederations along its borders.<sup>15</sup> As policymakers debated the appropriate level of intervention, the dueling sympathies towards the French planter elite and for the Black revolutionaries themselves were displayed in the marketplace of ideas, the mushrooming landscape of the partisan press and political pamphlet in the eighteenth century's "Republic of Letters."

One of the notable participants in this "republic" was Thomas Paine, whose earliest works on the issue of slavery and its status date back to before the Revolution. His "African Slavery in America," published in 1775 in the *Pennsylvania Journal and the Weekly Advertiser*, provides a preview of the most cogent and persuasive arguments for the humanity of enslaved Africans and the hypocrisy of a colonial people struggling for its own freedom while infringing

---

<sup>13</sup> Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy*, 9-10.

<sup>14</sup> Timothy M. Matthewson, "George Washington's Policy Toward the Haitian Revolution," *Diplomatic History* 3, no. 3 (Summer 1979), 335.

<sup>15</sup> Matthewson, "George Washington's Policy," 323.

on the liberties of the enslaved. Paine recounts in detail how these “inoffensive people [were] brought into slavery, by stealing them, tempting kings to sell [their] subjects ... and hiring one tribe to war against another, in order to catch prisoners.”<sup>16</sup> His essay challenged American readers to acknowledge that “We have enslaved multitudes, and shed much innocent blood in doing it; and now are threatened with the same.”<sup>17</sup> The next year saw the publication of his famous *Common Sense*, but the work that would contribute most to the conversation regarding St. Domingue, the Haitian Revolution, and the tortuous relationship the United States had with slavery domestically and abroad would be his 1791 *Rights of Man*.

Despite his later reputation, Paine’s thinking was not as radical as has been supposed. According to Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick’s *The Age of Federalism*, Paine could best be described as an “American nationalist” who called for a “strong central government, a national navy, and a public debt,” approving of a national bank, a new constitution, and disdained the fashionable atheism of the era; he was, in short “a good Federalist.”<sup>18</sup> So good, in fact, that *Rights of Man* was dedicated to George Washington, whose “exemplary virtue hath so eminently contributed” to the principles of freedom.<sup>19</sup> The strange combination of a radical reputation and fairly mainstream political views might appear strange to a modern perspective, but historian Michael Durey points out that this was consistent within the context of eighteenth-century British radicalism. What he terms “commercial radicalism” argued that commerce “expanded and humanized the mind by way of increased contact and the encouragement of mutual interdependence,” an argument that would drive the more progressive policies of Federalists like

---

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Paine, “African Slavery in America,” in *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner, 2 vols. (New York: The Citadel Press, 1945), 16

<sup>17</sup> Paine, “African Slavery in America,” 18.

<sup>18</sup> Elkins, *The Age of Federalism*, 324.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, in *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner, 2 vols. (New York: The Citadel Press, 1945), 244.

Timothy Pickering or John Quincy Adams in regards to recognition of a potentially independent St. Domingue.<sup>20</sup> Paine wrote that “common interest” regulates the concerns of the landowner, farmer, merchant, and tradesman and that “every occupation” prospers by an increase in trade.<sup>21</sup> “Without strain,” argues Durey, radicals like Paine could combine “egalitarianism, advocacy of commercial development, and a vision of unlimited progress” into a singular vision.<sup>22</sup>

Yet Paine’s ideas also contained clear set of supports for the end of hereditary rule, government ruling without popular consent, and even slavery; he was clearly no conservative either. It was no accident that within *Rights of Man* France’s 1789 “Declaration of the Rights of Man” was reprinted, quoting its first clause that “Men are born and continue, free, and equal in respect of their right” and that the “imprescriptible rights of man” were “liberty, property, security, and resistance of oppression.”<sup>23</sup> In his personal correspondence, he applied these principles to the events in St. Domingo when he responded to the “distressing accounts” he had read as a “natural consequence of Slavery and must be expected every where” in a letter to American ambassador William Short.<sup>24</sup> As Paine’s ideas filtered into the mainstream of public discourse, they were utilized by other writers, particularly Democratic-Republicans defending a Francophile notion of liberty that wanted to push beyond the social boundaries of the American and French Revolutions; among these was a zealous young writer from Connecticut, Abraham Bishop.

The role that anti-slavery and later anti-Federalist rhetoric would play in Bishop’s career will be expanded upon during the discussions of the Adams and Jefferson administrations’

---

<sup>20</sup> Michael Durey, “Thomas Paine’s Apostles: Radical Emigrés and the Triumph of Jeffersonian Republicanism,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (October 1987), 678.

<sup>21</sup> Foner, *Writings of Thomas Paine*, 357.

<sup>22</sup> Durey, “Thomas Paine’s Apostles,” 686.

<sup>23</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man*, 314.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Paine to William Short, November 2, 1791, in *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, 1321.

responses to events in St. Domingue; in each period, Bishop's idealism, self-interest, and ideology would refract off of the interplay between Black struggles for freedom and a Jeffersonian contradiction over what egalitarianism meant in a society so deeply riven by racism and its profitable corollary, slavery. His early life and career mirrored that of many up-and-coming political and social leaders: graduation from Yale, acceptance to the New Haven bar, travel in Europe, and, in his public speeches and writing, a fashionable criticism of established norms. One of his first speeches, delivered in 1788, was "on the present political state of America," criticizing the new constitution. Later that month he delivered another titled "On the Evidences of the Christian Religion," likely challenging public tax support for ministerial pay and "exhibiting the mountebank tricks of a juggler," according to contemporary, fellow lawyer, and erstwhile friend David Daggett.<sup>25</sup> His reformist credentials were further exhibited by his support for general education, "spearhead[ing] an effort to consolidate schools, encourage wider attendance, expand curricula, and provide educational opportunities for girls."<sup>26</sup> However, his most radical contribution was regarding the events in St. Domingue and their relationship to American sensibilities, which were published in 1791 as a series of essays in Boston's *The Argus* titled "The Rights of Black Men."

Responding to what Bishop termed "a great zeal in favor of the whites" of St. Domingue, Bishop's essay sought to reassert the principles of the American Revolution in search of consistency, writing "Let us be consistent Americans ... The Blacks are entitled to freedom, for we did not say all *white* men are *free*, but *all men* are free."<sup>27</sup> It was in this appeal to shame and hypocrisy that Bishop positioned the example of St. Domingue for his purposes:

---

<sup>25</sup> David Waldstreicher and Stephen R. Grossbart, "Abraham Bishop's Vocation: or the Mediation of Jeffersonian Politics," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1998), 625-626.

<sup>26</sup> Waldstreicher, "Abraham Bishop's Vocation," 629.

<sup>27</sup> Matthewson, "George Washington's Policy," 324; Waldstreicher, "Abraham Bishop's Vocation," 630.

We believe, that Freedom is the natural right of all rational beings, and we know that the Blacks have never voluntarily resigned that freedom. Then is not their cause as just as ours? We fought with bravery, and prayed earnestly for success upon our righteous clause ... for what! - Not to gain Freedom; for we were never Slaves; but to rid ourselves of taxes ... Believing our cause to have been just, I believe firmly, that the cause of the Blacks is just.<sup>28</sup>

The argument urged Americans to support the Black insurgents-cum-revolutionaries with an unequivocal call to action against the “hammock-sickness” and “cannon-fevers” of the anti-slavery advocates and societies: “Shall we now sacrifice principle to a paltry partiality for colour? ... *Will you assist them?*”<sup>29</sup> Bishop’s appeals were peppered with references to the Declaration of Independence and Paine’s *Common Sense* and *Rights of Man*, speaking to the importance of this ongoing public conversation regarding the egalitarian ideals behind the American Revolution. However, he also cites how public opinion was muddled by newspaper accounts that spoke of “massacred master[s] and mariners ... a black man’s murdering his overseer ... insurgents in the West-Indies kill[ing] 43 of the white people and [taking] 12 prisoners,” while on Sundays they might have been exhorted to make “fervent prayers for the poor blacks” from the pulpits of their churches.<sup>30</sup>

Like many radicals before and after him, Abraham Bishop’s views would mellow with time. The mid 1790s saw him return to the practice of law, eventually securing some minor public offices: clerk of the County Court, clerk of the Probate Court, and finally clerk of the Superior Court in Connecticut.<sup>31</sup> His invective turned towards the Federalist party, decrying them as elitists that relied on pomp and public spectacle rather than pursuing the best interests of the average man. In time, he would invert the language of radical equality within the context of

---

<sup>28</sup> Tim Matthewson, “Abraham Bishop, 'The Rights of Black Men,' and the American Reaction to the Haitian Revolution,” *The Journal of Negro History* 67, no. 2 (Summer 1982), 150.

<sup>29</sup> Matthewson, “Abraham Bishop,” 153-154.

<sup>30</sup> Matthewson, “Abraham Bishop,” 151.

<sup>31</sup> Waldstreicher, “Abraham Bishop’s Vocation,” 632.

Jeffersonianism, as David Waldstreicher documents, “recast[ing] his antislavery beliefs in a way that served the Jeffersonian cause, as a protest against a new, ‘white’ slavery.” He “inverted” some of the language used in his “Rights of Black Men” by comparing the slavery of Blacks in the South with the “white slavery” practiced by the wealthy New England Federalists. The Revolution of 1800 and the ascendancy of Jefferson influenced both his political ideals and impulses towards equality, as it would with Benjamin Franklin Bache.<sup>32</sup> However, Bishop’s more radical sentiments were not the only ones supportive of the revolution in St. Domingue: 1791 similarly saw the publication of Joseph Lavallée’s *The Negro Unequaled by Few Europeans*, published by Philadelphia’s *American Museum*, translated from the original French. In it the protagonist Itanoko, described as an educated, well-traveled enslaved African, explained how “the liberty of man is an inalienable right,” never to be bought or sold.<sup>33</sup> Though at the margins of Republican sentiment, Bishop and Lavallée represented an attachment to principle that would seldom be repeated during this era.

Bishop was not imagining the partisan standpoints within the press of the early 1790s concerning the plight of the revolutionaries in St. Domingue. Newspapers such as Benjamin Franklin Bache’s Francophile *Aurora General Advertiser* or Philip Freneau’s *National Gazette* faced off against John Fenno’s Federalist-leaning *Gazette of the United States* or Thomas Green’s *Connecticut Courant*. Yet regardless of political affiliation, 1791 and 1792 saw the term “St. Domingo” become a constant heading in columns alongside the events in London or Paris, as American readers learned to associate St. Domingue as a “significant site of a global struggle between liberty and tyranny.”<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Waldstreicher, “Abraham Bishop’s Vocation,” 647-648.

<sup>33</sup> Ronald Angelo Johnson, *Diplomacy in Black and White: John Adams, Toussaint, Louverture, and Their Atlantic World Alliance* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2014), 16.

<sup>34</sup> Dun, “(Mis)reading the Revolution,” 53.

Early published reports were grim. The first wave of revolution on the island revolved around free people of color agitating for legal equality within the French system, receiving substantial support from the metropole in the process. Jacobin clubs in France advanced circular letters calling for full citizenship for “propertied mulattoes” and the *Amis de Noir*, the French anti-slavery society that boasted membership of such Enlightenment luminaries as the Marquis de Condorcet and had been founded by Jacques Pierre Brissot, a leading member of the Girondin faction.<sup>35</sup> Fenno’s *Gazette* published mention of letters confirming the execution of Vincent Ogé and other free people of color “most active in the disturbances” there by being “broke[n] alive on the wheel,” on March 26, 1791. Four days later, another 80 were described as having been executed. Bache’s *Aurora* was far more sympathetic, stating that both men were killed “for the crime of asserting the rights of human nature.”<sup>36</sup> By July 23, the *Gazette* acknowledged that the National Assembly in France had passed what had become termed the May 15<sup>th</sup> Decree, giving “equal rights” to free people of color, though the news in the colony “created a great disturbance ... The Provincial Assembly met, protested against the decree ... [and] determined to oppose the execution of it.”<sup>37</sup> Revolutionary France might be on the side of liberty (at least for the landed and already free members within the racial caste system of St. Domingue), but the white planters on the island were actively resisting any changes.

Bache’s *Aurora* and the *Connecticut Courant* were both critical of the white planter cruelty and adherence to their spirit of racial aristocracy that, at least in principle, the American press resented. The *Aurora* published an important “Concise Sketch of the Politics of St. Domingo” in April of 1791, with Bache attempting to narrate the exact source of the conflict for his readers:

---

<sup>35</sup> Ott, *Haitian Revolution*, 38-39.

<sup>36</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, May 13, 1791.

<sup>37</sup> *Gazette of the United States*, March 26, March 30, July 23, 1791.

“The flame of Liberty ... [threatens] the ruin of those Colonies, by introducing a system of equality, instead of that spirit of insubordination, which was thought essential to their prosperity.” When deputies were sent to the National Assembly to represent the interests of the island, their claims were “chiefly dictated by men of large property and accustomed to [social] distinctions ... [and] could not express the sentiments of the Colonists at large.” Notably, no mention of racial caste or slavery is contained within Bache’s “Concise Sketch” (the key struggle was imagined as between white factions - the “democratical” and “moderate republican” against the “aristocratical” and monarchical”).<sup>38</sup> On the same page a bold advertisement for Paine’s *Rights of Man* declared that this “celebrated Pamphlet,” though “opposed by the English administration,” would be given “immortality” by the American press.<sup>39</sup>

The *Courant*’s coverage mirrored that of Fenno’s *Federalist Gazette*, describing early confrontations with Ogé and the revolt of free people of color and their defeat. By October of 1791, with increasing involvement of enslaved Blacks in the fighting between white planters and free people of color, it included reports of a number of plantations rebelling and some killing their overseers. “Several thousands of the negroes had assembled and committed some ravages by burning several habitations ... Planters, with their wives and children, are every minute arriving, who bring accounts of continued distress and destruction,” relayed a letter published in the October 24<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Courant*, from a letter “received from a gentleman at Cape Francois.” As to the cause of the “dreadful insurrection” the author described as “the tyranny of some of the overseers,” but the tone remains sympathetic to the white planters enduring “cruel murders and massacres” as the formerly enslaved “murder[ed] all the whites they catch, sparing neither age or sex ... Alas! To see beautiful girls, lovely women, with their children and infants,

---

<sup>38</sup> Dun, “(Mis)reading the Revolution,” 47.

<sup>39</sup> “A Concise Sketch of the Politics of St. Domingo,” *Aurora General Advertiser*, April 29, 1791.



travelling the streets without a shoe on their feet, just escaped from the flames” of burning homes and plantations.<sup>40</sup>

While the Washington administration sent aid in the form of arms and supplies, the white planters fighting in defense of their property were fleeing from St. Domingue in droves, many of them landing in Pennsylvania and Virginia. The former saw an increase in ships arriving from the French West Indies from thirteen in 1791 to 158 two years later. According to historian Gary Nash, thousands of white planters arrived during the first years of the revolution, many bringing hundreds of their slaves with them: all told, between 1790 and 1794, 2,236 white passengers and 816 enslaved people arrived in Philadelphia, a sizeable increase to the population of a city whose 1790 census figures boasted little more than forty thousand inhabitants.<sup>41</sup> Nash recounts how pledges to the African Church of Philadelphia were siphoned off to provide support for the French refugees, showing that “even the most sympathetic white Philadelphians placed the distress of white slave owners ... ahead of the aspirations of those had been slaves.”<sup>42</sup> Virginia also received a sizeable group that landed in Norfolk in 1793. Authorities quickly provided emergency relief loans for the newcomers in the “cause of humanity,” though many in Virginia may have wished that these planters and their enslaved attendants had landed elsewhere, the latter now especially suspect due to their close association with every slaveholder’s worst nightmare: open and deadly slave rebellion.<sup>43</sup>

Bache’s *Aurora* described the ambivalence many liberal-minded adherents to the abolitionist cause felt regarding the expansion of this new French influence on American society.

---

<sup>40</sup> *Connecticut Courant*, October 24, 1791.

<sup>41</sup> Gary B. Nash, “Reverberations of Haiti in the American North: Black Saint Domingans in Philadelphia,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 65 (1998), 50.

<sup>42</sup> Nash, “Reverberations of Haiti in the American North,” 45.

<sup>43</sup> James Sidbury, “Saint Domingue in Virginia: Ideology, Local Meanings, and Resistance to Slavery, 1790-1800,” *The Journal of Southern History* 63, no. 3 (August 1997), 538.

The *Aurora*'s July 12, 1793 edition explained how the “members of the French Society of the Friends of Liberty and Equality” held a special meeting a few days earlier in order to consider “the unfortunate situation of the French citizens who were forced by the conflagration at Cape Francois and the destruction of the means of subsistence in that part of the French colony ... to seek an asylum in the United States.” The criticism of these planters is subtle. It continued, “although the French Patriotic Society do not in any manner approve” of their conduct and “their aristocracy of colour” and ideas “absurd and prejudicial to mankind ... have been the principal cause of all the evils that now assail them,” nevertheless “the citizens of the United States will undoubtedly use their most unremitting exertions to assist the French colonies of the West-Indies.” The subscription opened to their favor “immediately amounted to *eight hundred dollars*, which they expect will rise higher.”<sup>44</sup>

This dualism in allegiance was not unique to Bache's paper, but the *Aurora* in many ways captures the factionalism that lay at the heart of the American public discourse regarding St. Domingue. The *Aurora* regularly ran advertisements for runaway slaves and indentured servants, a finding that historian Paul Finkelman indicates was a key difference between Federalist and Republican papers in 1790s Philadelphia, as it was dominated political by Quakers, the majority of whom were “openly affiliated with the Federalists,” and where it was “almost an oddity” to find a Jeffersonian involved in the Pennsylvania Abolition Society.<sup>45</sup> In addition, between October of 1792 and July of 1793, numerous advertisements for “valuable Plantation[s]” or farms were run—many listed with adequate room to house additional laborers—and often

---

<sup>44</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, July 12, 1793.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Finkelman, “The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Federalism” in *Federalists Reconsidered*, Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, eds. (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 146.

printed twice: once in English and again in French.<sup>46</sup> The same printer who would claim that the slave trade was “iniquitous and atrocious [sic], as it is repugnant to the laws of nature and principles of morality and religion,” would have his own idealism confused by a defense of the liberal rule of republican France against the eventual Black-led rebellion of Toussaint Louverture or Jean-Jacques Dessalines by the late 1790s.<sup>47</sup> His eventual full identification with Jeffersonian Democratic Republicans and their defense of slavery, despite their egalitarian ideals (for whites) and support for the revolution in France, weakened his anti-slavery resolve; he no longer had the “luxury of attacking an institution defended and practiced by his political allies,” a sentiment he and Abraham Bishop alike would share as the attitudes towards American interests in St. Domingue and support for its status as an independent Black nation shifted over time and radical language over slavery, race, and equality weakened.<sup>48</sup>

The cause of much of this waning idealism was the reality of slave rebellion throughout the Greater British Caribbean in the latter part of the 1700s. Jamaica, in many ways the British attempt at creating their own sugar-producing St. Domingue, had experienced major uprisings, conspiracies or plots in 1739, 1760, and 1776.<sup>49</sup> The 1790s saw slave conspiracies uncovered throughout the Spanish colonies and slave rebellions rocked Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Curacao, and Grenada. South Carolina governor Pickney’s concerns seemed particularly prescient in the face of such disasters. Every state south of Maryland passed laws to prevent the entry or importation of free people of color or enslaved Blacks from the French West Indies, with the exception of Virginia, and by 1795, 12,000 enslaved people had arrived in United States,

---

<sup>46</sup> For specific instances, see *Aurora General Advertiser*, October 6, 1792, October 31, 1792, July 12, 1793.

<sup>47</sup> James Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 159.

<sup>48</sup> Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache*, 159.

<sup>49</sup> Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy*, 6.

bringing with them their knowledge, or at least exposure, to rebellion.<sup>50</sup> This proximity had an undoubted impact on the relationship between idealistic talk of radical and immediate abolition, and the hysteria that American plantations or cities could be next. Gary Nash recounts how Bishop's words, republished in Philadelphia's *American Museum*, a paper with similar readership and leanings to Bache's *Aurora*, were drowned out by events that cast the rebellion in St. Domingue as "transforming all blacks, free as well as slave, into internal enemies." A fire in Albany, New York in November of 1793 destroyed two dozen homes and wiped out property; blame was securely associated with "black arson ... [and] with the Caribbean overthrow of white rule."<sup>51</sup>

News from St. Domingue exacerbated these fears, and when in July 1794, a formerly enslaved leader of the rebellion rode into Fort Dauphin in the northern province of St. Domingue and ordered his troops to massacre the remaining French, leading to the deaths of eight hundred planters.<sup>52</sup> The Federalist *Connecticut Courant* reported the event in exacting detail, explaining how the general Jean Francois, "ordered to kill without distinction all the *French white People* ... all massacred without mercy; while the same scene was acted in the different quarters of the city ... The cry of those villains during the massacre was *Long live the King!!!*" The *Courant's* account was drawn from an account by one Mr. Simon of Philadelphia, "who was there in an American vessel at the time," yet directly after Simon's account, the printer chose to include a brief editorial. As if a direct rebuke against the eager Abraham Bishops of the world, it read:

We trust the great body of the people in this country will cheerfully second the measures of the President to quell disturbances and a rebellious spirit, which, if permitted to spread, will

---

<sup>50</sup> Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009), 534.

<sup>51</sup> Nash, "Reverberations of Haiti in the American North," 61.

<sup>52</sup> Ott, *Haitian Revolution*, 82.

render life and property insecure, and destroy our fairest hopes of peace and liberty. If the laws cannot protect us from hot-headed anarchist, our government is not worth defending.<sup>53</sup>

Three days later, a letter to the editor of the Philadelphia *Aurora* tepidly asked why the “*paroxysm* of benevolence” regarding the “emancipation of *Africans*” did not include greater concern for “our *own citizens* who are groaning beneath the yoke of a severe and hopeless captivity” in Algiers. “Shall the Americans have the reputation of humanity and freedom, and not exercise them in the cause of their own fellow citizens? Shall Africans make the world resound with our exertions to restore [their] degraded state ... [while] those of the same country and same blood with ourselves, languish out their days with the iron of slavery upon them?”<sup>54</sup> Already the ardor for the “Rights of Black Men” was cooling, even in radical Philadelphia.

The fears in Virginia were far more palpable. According to historian James Sidbury, a year before refugees began arriving, rumors of a slave uprisings in Norfolk and Portsmouth were afoot, with Governor Henry Lee convinced that the “example of the West Indies” (and perhaps the “practicing of severing husband, wife and children”) was to blame. By 1793, Portsmouth complained to the governor that it was rife with “many hundreds [of] French Negroes,” including many who “belong[ed] to the insurrection of Hispaniola.”<sup>55</sup> Savannah newspapers reported mass meetings of citizens concerned with the “seasoned negroes” from the West Indies along with the French planter refugees, and an October 1793 report from the *New-York Journal and Patriot Register* stated that “They write from Charleston (S.C.) that the NEGROES have become very insolvent [sic], in so much that the citizens are alarmed, and the militia keep a constant guard. It is said that the St. Domingo negroes have sown the seeds of revolt, and that a magazine has been

---

<sup>53</sup> *Connecticut Courant*, August 25, 1794.

<sup>54</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, August 28, 1794.

<sup>55</sup> Sidbury, “Saint Domingue in Virginia,” 539.

attempted to be broken open.”<sup>56</sup> According to historian Shane White, “French-speaking blacks made up a surprisingly high proportion of runaway slaves advertised in New York newspapers in the 1790s,” citing a 1792 example of a particular runaway, Zamor, who was thought to be “lurking about this city among the French negroes.” Akin to the reports from Albany, news from 1796 reported waves of arson attributed to French blacks, and by 1801 a riot was reportedly fomented by this same population of enslaved people, sobering events for even a city where more than a third of all free Blacks, numbering more than two thousand in 1800, were working in white households.<sup>57</sup> This fear of “French Negroes” spread far beyond Virginia, becoming a stand-in for any Black American, enslaved or free, who agitated against his oppression. “Frenchness” became a metaphor for the connections between race, revolution, and liberation.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, though the early political rhetoric that applied radical notions of rights to the enslaved men and women revolting in St. Domingue was championed by writers such as Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin Bache, and Abraham Bishop, Francophile political allegiances and the fears of spreading slave rebellion at home weakened any real political attempts by Jeffersonian Republicans to intervene on behalf of the free people of color or enslaved Africans in the colony. During Washington’s administration, Federalist concern for the economic relationship with St. Domingue was of key importance, and assistance flowed to white French planters during the early 1790s until their break from Republican France was confirmed and reports of increasing bloodshed between whites and Blacks began to dominate newspaper accounts from the island. Though Bishop, Bache, and others used the press to elicit often radical forms of concern for the Black inhabitants of St. Domingue and the Painite ideas that compelled many on the island,

---

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Jordan, *White over Black*, 381.

<sup>57</sup> Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 155-156.

<sup>58</sup> Sidbury, “Saint Domingue in Virginia,” 534.

white and Black, to fight for freedom or liberty, fear of escalating violence and the rhetoric of contagious insurrection were powerful motivators to maintain the status quo, though the second Federalist administration, and much of the Federalist press, would take a surprising turn towards support for the Black inhabitants of that island, especially as the figure of Toussaint Louverture rose to a position of prominence.

## **Chapter 2: John Adams & the Turn Towards Haiti Under Toussaint Louverture (1797-1800)**

The Washington administration's official policy of non-intervention with St. Domingue's revolution lasted throughout the mid-1790s. Meanwhile, as the revolt in St. Domingue against Republican France grew into a full-fledged slave rebellion, the distance between perceived French and American interests grew. The British invasion of the island in 1793 was assisted by the Spanish who desperately wanted to staunch the tide of rebellion from reaching their end of Hispaniola. The War of the First Coalition spread across Europe, and by 1796, it appeared that the French republic had fought the entire continent to a standstill. When John Adams began his presidential term, the situation between France and the United States had changed drastically.

The attitude of popular support for the French Revolution had cooled in both the political and public spheres. Federalist fear grew in regards to worries of French intervention in foreign nations and the potential of homegrown collaboration. The rhetoric conveyed by Democratic-Republican supporters and their publications gave credence to the possibility that something similar could happen in the United States.<sup>59</sup> In 1796, French privateers began to trawl the eastern seaboard and by July 2, the Directory sanctioned piracy against all neutral ships trading with

---

<sup>59</sup> Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 246.

belligerents, a list that included nearly every power in Europe. The year 1796 saw dozens of American ships taken, Federalist newspapers dutifully recording their loss.<sup>60</sup>

During the course of what became the Quasi-War between France and the United States, there would be hundreds more. In response, the Adams administration called a special session of Congress in May of 1797 to pass acts in this newly-declared but unofficial war to protect the commerce and coasts of the United States, allowing American ships to seize French vessels suspected of acting as privateers. Demands for 80,000 new militia members and harbor fortifications followed.<sup>61</sup> Yet, the event that would create this hysterical tipping point and move the popular politics of the age away from thoughts of French allegiance occurred the following year with the diplomatic furor caused by the XYZ Affair.

In an attempt to forestall outright war with France, Adams commissioned a three-man commission to meet with the French in order to negotiate a peace. Unsurprisingly, they were met with animosity. Angered by Adams' 1797 speech to Congress, France demanded a public apology, followed by substantial loans and a separate sum of fifty thousand pounds for the Directory's "private use" before the commission could even be officially heard. Additionally, "scarcely veiled threats" about the reality of American neutrality were made: the time was soon coming where all nations must declare themselves friends or enemies.<sup>62</sup> Upon returning home, the outrage at this event rippled through the political atmosphere, with skeptical pro-France Democratic-Republicans demanding proof of French treachery. Adams' publication of the "XYZ Dispatches" between the anonymous French ministers and Adams' commission confirmed the insult with an increase in French privateering compounding it—more than three hundred

---

<sup>60</sup> Paul Douglas Newman, "The Federalists' Cold War: The Fries Rebellion, National Security, and the State, 1787-1800," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 67, no. 1 (Winter 2000), 76.

<sup>61</sup> Newman, "The Federalists' Cold War," 76; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 240.

<sup>62</sup> Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 241-242.



American vessels had been captured by Spring of 1798, French predation no longer confined to the Caribbean.<sup>63</sup> Historian Matthew Rainbow Hale summarizes the impact of the event on the Franco-American relationship succinctly: “The XYZ Affair effectively discredited the notion of French and American linkage and the transnationalist nationalism that it engendered. After that event, it became extremely difficult to envision an Americanness bound to Frenchness.”<sup>64</sup> Yet the use of the French Revolution and its excesses, still rebounded across the page: Benjamin Franklin Bache published a story of a slave from St. Domingue who had mistook Adams’ entourage for a procession to the guillotine, emphasizing that things “are not as they affected to be,” hinting at Federalists’ own tendencies towards overreach in the months that would follow.<sup>65</sup>

The response to this aggression found a way into the relationship between United States and St. Domingue, as the two former colonies began to see greater cause for self-interest. Part of this was the mercantile nature of Federalism, though idealistic concerns regarding anti-slavery and republican notions of equality were also at play. As early as 1783, John Adams, writing to Robert Livingston, stated that “The commerce of the West India Islands is part of the American system of commerce . . . The Creator has placed us upon the globe in such a situation that we have occasion for each other. We have the means of assisting each other, and the politicians and [their] artful Contrivances cannot separate us.”<sup>66</sup> By 1798, the Adams administration had established diplomatic relations with Toussaint Louverture, a former slave-turned-general who looked to have nearly defeated the French (having already routed the British attempt at claiming the island) with an eye to supporting a Haitian bid for independence. As historian Ronald Angelo Johnson argues, Adams and his supporters were actively considering helping to “establish the

---

<sup>63</sup> Newman, “The Federalists’ Cold War,” 79.

<sup>64</sup> Hale, “Many Who Wandered,” 168.

<sup>65</sup> Hale, “Many Who Wandered,” 156.

<sup>66</sup> Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy*, 9.

first nation-state with a majority-black government and citizenry,” a revolutionary decision for a decidedly moderate figure.<sup>67</sup> Michael Zuckerman concurs, writing that “in St. Domingue it was the Federalists who held far more closely to the faith of Founders,” and that “Federalists remained steadfast in their support of [Toussaint] through a decade of the of the most disparate circumstances.”<sup>68</sup> The clearest attempts to do this were through a mixture of the economic, in the form of “Toussaint’s Clause,” exempting St. Domingue from a 1798 bill designed to economically punish France and its colonies for perceived aggression and hubris, and the direct intervention of the United States Navy on behalf of Toussaint against his French-backed opponent, André Rigaud.

July 7, 1798 saw Congress break the arrangements of the 1778 Treaty of Amity and Commerce and declare a suspension of trade with France and all of its colonies, including St. Domingue. By then, Louverture had defeated the British invasion of the island, though he shrewdly offered an evacuation of their remaining troops and a negotiated trading relationship that gave Great Britain “protected and exclusive” trading rights with St. Domingue.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, he wrote John Adams, and, in a November 6, 1798 letter, assured him that “the Americans will find [here] protection and security; that the flag of the United States will be respected here as would that of any other ally ... that I will facilitate, by all the means in my power, the prompt return [of American ships] to their country”; in short, he promised to

---

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Dillon and Drexler, *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Zuckerman, *Almost Chosen People: Oblique Biographies in the American Grain* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 185, 188. Additionally, Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg concur, claiming that “the party that sought to stem the tide of popular politics proved far more open to the rights of Indians, women, and African Americans than their Jeffersonian opponents, who championed individual freedom and participatory politics,” in “Introduction: The Paradoxical Legacy of the Federalists” in *Federalists Reconsidered*, Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, eds. (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 10.

<sup>69</sup> Carolyn Fick, “Revolutionary St. Domingue and the Emerging Atlantic: Paradigms of Sovereignty,” in *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States: Histories, Textualities, Geographies*, ed. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael J. Drexler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 27.

counteract any French aggression with judicious cool-headedness.<sup>70</sup> Due to this promise, the Adams administration saw an opportunity to change the course of American foreign policy that would suit both Federalists *and* anti-slavery supporters, the passage of “Toussaint’s Clause.” By maintaining the trade between Louverture and the Americans, already steady in terms of armaments and foodstuffs, American stood to confound their most recent enemy, the French Republic.<sup>71</sup>

By February of 1799, Congress had passed a law that had exempted St. Domingue from the U.S. embargo and allowed for normal trade with the colony. Additionally, a three-way alliance termed the “Heads of Regulation” was created in June that allowed Britain and the United States access to Haitian ports, while stipulating Louverture would protect shipping against French privateers. The cost was an assurance to both parties that Toussaint would also confine any ambitions of slave emancipation solely to his island.<sup>72</sup> The Republican perspective on this agreement was predictable. Albert Gallatin argued that “Toussaint’s clause” would only exacerbate the possibility of independence for St. Domingue, something that would be “extremely injurious to the interests of the United States,” though he himself was a member of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and had authored a legislative committee report arguing that “[s]lavery is inconsistent with every principle of humanity, justice, and right, repugnant to the spirit and express letter of the constitution of this Commonwealth.”<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Jefferson worried that it would lead to a state of “high aggravation” to the quarrelsome French and would be “probably more than the [French] Directory would bear.” Besides, Louverture and his supporters were nothing more than “cannibals,” and “missionaries” and

---

<sup>70</sup> Fick, “Revolutionary St. Domingue,” 28.

<sup>71</sup> Dillon and Drexler, *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States*, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Fick, “Revolutionary St. Domingue,” 31.

<sup>73</sup> Johnson, *Diplomacy in Black and White*, 60.

“black crews” from the island would surely spread beyond the island, inciting discontent among the enslaved Africans in southern states.<sup>74</sup>

But historian Angelo Ronald Johnson makes a series of useful claims regarding the significance of the passage of Toussaint’s Clause as part of the Federalist ability to overcome partisanship in the service of a larger political good. The passage of the bill in 1799 was by a narrow margin—fifty-five votes to thirty-seven—and with only five Democratic-Republican votes. Far from bipartisan, it still showed the ability of Pickering, Adams, and other pro-Dominguan figures to convince their proslavery southern colleagues that “Louverture [was] a man to be trusted and Saint-Dominguan independence as something not to be wholly feared,” a task that would enable the Adams administration to go even further in support of Louverture’s regime by means of direct assistance from the United States Navy.<sup>75</sup>

It was at this moment that Adams’ administration was far bolder than the president himself. Both Carolyn Fick and Michael Zuckerman posit that John Adams was initially against independence for St. Domingue or any of the French colonies in the Caribbean and that the avoidance of war with France and the maintenance of friendly relations with Britain. However, both also mention that outspoken Federalists such as Secretary of State Timothy Pickering, Alexander Hamilton, and even a young John Quincy Adams favored a “free and independent” St. Domingue, though this must not be misconstrued as a full-throated attack from Federalists on the institution of slavery itself.<sup>76</sup> Pickering, in particular, has been singled out as particularly influenced by anti-slavery ideals, but, as Arthur Scherr points out, though credited by some historians as being a card-carrying member of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of

---

<sup>74</sup> Donald R. Hickey, “America’s Response to the Slave Revolt in Haiti, 1791-1806,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 2, no. 4 (Winter 1982), 368.

<sup>75</sup> Johnson, *Diplomacy in Black and White*, 65.

<sup>76</sup> Zuckerman, *Almost Chosen People*, 191; Fick, “Revolutionary St. Domingue,” 23.

Society, he had never joined such an organization or one like it. Similarly, his defense against the spread of slavery in the Northwest Territory in the 1780s was more proof of his belief in the efficiency of free labor than a radical abolitionist credential.<sup>77</sup>

Correspondence from John Quincy Adams expressed that the United States “can and must do something” about the revolution in St. Domingue and that they should be thereafter “free and independent . . . [and] in close alliance” with the United States.<sup>78</sup> Pickering went so far as to praise Louverture as a “prudent and judicious man possessing the general confidence of the people of all colours,” and to claim that “Nothing is more clear than, if *left to themselves* [emphasis added], that the Blacks of St. Domingo will be incomparably less dangerous than if they remain the subjects of France,” though he too worried about “black troops” putting “in jeopardy our Southern States,” this time led by the tricolor of France rather than an avenging army of former slaves.<sup>79</sup>

Rufus King, American consul to Great Britain, held similarly nuanced views when he wrote that “[w]e meddle not with the politics of the island . . . It is probably that [Louverture] wishes to assure himself of our commerce as the necessary means of obtaining [independence]. Neither moral nor political considerations could induce us to discourage him; both would warrant us in urging him to the *Declaration*. *Yet we shall not do it*. We shall go no further than the Act of Congress allows.” He too worried about what southern slaveholders in Congress would do if faced with a federal government openly supporting a fledgling state formed from the ashes of slave rebellion.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Arthur Scherr, “Arms and Men: The Diplomacy of US Weapons Traffic with Saint-Domingue under Adams and Jefferson,” *The International History Review* 34, no. 3 (June 2013), 615-616.

<sup>78</sup> Johnson, *Diplomacy in Black and White*, 29.

<sup>79</sup> Hickey, “America’s Response to the Slave Revolt in Haiti,” 365.

<sup>80</sup> Fick, “Revolutionary St. Domingue,” 34.

The ambiguity felt by many Federalist opponents of slavery was evident in the popular press of the time, providing a mirror into the hearts and minds of non-elites. *Rural Magazine* published a 1798 extract from French explorer and nobleman Baron Alexandre-Stanislas de Wimpffen’s journey to St. Domingue that sympathetically recounted the experiences of Blacks unfairly whipped, beaten, and killed for insubordination “in excruciating agony.” Wimpffen portrayed planters as wantonly cruel—doubling punishment if the victim asked to be spared, even if the crime was only refusing to submit to their “loathsome” embraces.<sup>81</sup> In contrast, two years earlier, the Federalist *American Minerva* directed readers to be wary of Quaker activism and agitation for emancipation that had “greatly corrupted” the minds of slaves, encouraging them to arson, escape, or worse. The *Minerva* could not help but connect the “miserable havoc and massacres” that were occurring “in consequence of emancipation” in the West Indies.<sup>82</sup>

Joseph Dennie, Federalist publisher of *The Farmer’s Weekly Museum*, an important New Hampshire literary journal of the 1790s, captured this same tone in his *The Lay Preacher*, published in installments during the mid-to-late 1790s. Reflecting on St. Domingue, his criticism was levied at the cruelty of slavery, but also the fashionable radicalism of his Republican opponents: “Those who have been professors of the new philosophy of France, and their servile devotees in America, taint every thing they touch ... Instead of viewing man as he is, they are continually forming plans for man as he should be.” His criticism then deliberately addressed the *Amis de Noir*, Jefferson, and even Bache’s *Aurora* itself and what he deemed their unrealistic progressive vision:

Condorcet’s hope, unlike that of many of his visionary brethren, was lost in fruition; and he had the satisfaction to behold the government of St. Domingo administrated by sable hands. To gain so useful an end, the Frenchman was careless how many houses of the whites were consumed, or how many bodies were butchered ... [though] God forbid I should be once

---

<sup>81</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 61.

<sup>82</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 146.

thought pressing an argument against the injured Africans ... Of this dangerous deistical, and Utopian school, a great personage from Virginia, is a favoured pupil. His Gallic masters stroke his head, and pronounce him forward and promising.<sup>83</sup>

Dennie and writers like him mirrored the concern emanating from the more cautious Federalists, wary of those who might wish to emulate Jefferson's "Notes," spending their mornings reading the *Aurora* and their nights at "French politics."<sup>84</sup> Yet even Dennie's cautious criticism of radical ideas made room for the occasional pro-St. Domingue editorial (though often simultaneously anti-French). The December 17, 1798 edition of the *Farmer's Weekly Museum* published news from St. Domingo that reported that "Toussaint, a celebrated and *sable* General, is on the point of declaring that colony independent, and of forming an amicable connexion with America. Toussaint is a brave, humane, moral man." It added a closing flourish as a reminder to those who "objected to a swarthy leader" in the form of a brief poem: "Mistake me not for my complexion ... Bring me the fairest creature, northward born, ... and let us make incision for your love, to prove whose blood is the reddest, his or mine. I say, American, this face of mine Hath fear'd the valiant."<sup>85</sup> Three months later, the *Museum* published a virulently anti-French set of falsehoods that would stir the average Southerner (and many Northerners) into a hysteria: "a body of black troops" was being dispatched by the French Directory "to invade the southern States, desolate the country, and introduce '*holy insurrection,*' among black cultivators of the south."<sup>86</sup>

The apogee of this anti-French, anti-Jeffersonian sentiment was the English refugee and former soldier William Cobbett. To say that Cobbett was the anti-Thomas Paine would not be an understatement: he published a satirical biography of Paine and spilled gallons of ink in his *Porcupine's Gazette* attacking what he perceived as the institutionalized Jacobinism that was

---

<sup>83</sup> Joseph Dennie, *The Lay Preacher*, ed. John E. Hall (Philadelphia: Harrison Hall, 1817), 151.

<sup>84</sup> Dennie, *The Lay Preacher*, 151.

<sup>85</sup> *Farmer's Weekly Museum*, December 17, 1798.

<sup>86</sup> *Farmer's Weekly Museum*, March 25, 1799.

infecting the American government—though in fairness, and indicative of the dual-mindedness of the time, he would also eventually champion an effort to have Paine reburied in his native England. Cobbett had grown up during the American War of Independence, and, according to Michael Durey, watched the villagers of his town of Farmham, “previously ignorant and disinterested in national affairs, divide into opposing camps as the war went badly,” his father “constantly engaged in political argument” with their loyalist neighbors.<sup>87</sup> A varied career saw him enter the British military as a clerk, leave the service, enter publishing, and, after writing a particularly scathing critique of the British military establishment in his *The Soldier’s Friend*, landed in the radical cauldron of ideas that was Philadelphia in the 1790s.<sup>88</sup>

Reacting to the to the Quasi-War and drawing on his own innate British anti-French sentiments, Cobbett’s *Porcupine’s Gazette* displayed the growing antipathy to the French Revolution’s “rupture of hierarchical Old World values, while his pamphlets and newspapers vented anxiety and rage at a changing social order,” displaying some of the worst qualities of Federalist thought in its attempts at manufacturing racist caricatures of fanatically pro-Black Republicans.<sup>89</sup> His “Liberty and Equality” article, published October 6, 1797, expresses what he saw as the hypocrisy of the radical Jeffersonian. In it he created a scenario involving a white woman resenting her Republican husband’s attempts at establishing an egalitarian household by permitting their slave, “Sambo,” to join them for dinner.<sup>90</sup> A March 1798 article made similar hay of the contrast between Republican, Paineite egalitarianism and the reality of slave

---

<sup>87</sup> Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic* (Lawrence, KS: University of Press of Kansas, 1997), 12.

<sup>88</sup> For an extended discussion of the Philadelphia of the 1790s and the émigré experience there, see Michael Durey, *“With the Hammer of Truth”: James Thomson Callender and America’s Early National Heroes* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 51-54.

<sup>89</sup> Arthur Scherr, “‘Sambos’ and ‘Black Cut-Throats’: Peter Porcupine on Slavery and Race in the 1790’s,” *American Periodicals*, 13 (2003), 8.

<sup>90</sup> William Cobbett, “Liberty and Equality,” *Porcupine’s Gazette*, October 6, 1797.



ownership: “Let nothing that these people do be disgraced with the name *liberty*,” he explained, describing the Jeffersonian. Newspapers regularly advertised “for sale *six sheep, ten horses, and twenty-five men!!*—And these are the people, my God! Who talk about the *natural* and *unalienable* rights of man—and who make such a boast of the purity of their principles.”<sup>91</sup>

But Cobbett’s desire to verbally fillet his opponents led him to make his own sins against journalistic purity or objectivity, especially when it came to the fate of St. Domingue or its leadership. Publishing an anonymous “extract of a letter from London,” dated June 1797, he explains how then Commissioner Léger-Félicite Sonthonax conspired to “hire a number of persons to go into the United States, and set fire to the populous towns” in an attempt to sow dissent among the enslaved Blacks of the American South.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, his December 30, 1797 *Gazette* included the alarming headline regarding how in South Carolina there was the uncovering of a “CONSPIRACY OF SEVERAL FRENCH NEGROES TO FIRE THE CITY, and to act here as they had formerly done at St. Domingo.” His article created a morality tale around the people of Charleston “aiding and abetting the French in their war on the commerce of Great Britain,” having “at one time like a port ceded to the French ... [exhibiting] every mark of entire devotion to their interests, of hostility towards the kingdom of Great Britain, and of disrespect and contempt towards the Federal Government.” Charleston’s willingness to support Charles Edmund Genet during his 1794 visit, and the memory of the civic festivals “celebrat[ing] the anniversary of the alliance between France and America,” were highlighted in Cobbett’s attempts to create a political-useful “I-told-you-so” out of the radical excesses of France, and, by this point, the long-simmering rebellion in St. Domingue.<sup>93</sup> This did not stop Norfolk, Virginia

---

<sup>91</sup> Scherr, “‘Sambos’ and ‘Black Cut-Throats,’” 17.

<sup>92</sup> William Cobbett, *Porcupine’s Gazette*, September 5, 1797.

<sup>93</sup> William Cobbett, *Porcupine’s Gazette*, December 30, 1797.

residents from celebrating the anniversary of the Franco-American alliance in February 1798 (nor would it have likely prevented Bostonians from giving a feast for Citizen Pierre Adet, one of Genet's successors, in 1796).<sup>94</sup>

While Cobbett has been correctly described by Scherr and other historians as a racial ideologue, his support for Black general Toussaint Louverture mirrored that of the Federalist establishment, both in print and in government. Between 1799-1800, the American government's support for Louverture in his efforts to consolidate control in St. Domingue by eliminating his rival André Rigaud was instrumental. As Toussaint's forces laid siege to Rigaud's final stronghold at the port of Jacmel in the South Province, Captain Raymond Perry's frigate *General Greene*, ordered to patrol for privateers in the area, both blockaded the port from external resupply and bombarded the town at Louverture's express request. Jacmel was captured on February 27, 1800 and Rigaud himself captured in October of 1800 by the American schooner *Experiment*.<sup>95</sup>

The Federalist *Federal Galaxy* provided a detailed report of Perry's efforts in June 14, 1800, explaining how they intercepted supplies for Rigaud, reducing the defenders of Jacmel to a "state of starvation." After they had "engaged three of Rigaud's forts warmly for 30 or 40 minutes," the enemy "evacuate[d] the town." The report concluded that the "capture of Jacmel is of infinite consequence to Toussaint, and of high importance to the commerce of the United States to this island" and that it was "impossible" to describe "the manner in which Toussaint expressed his gratitude to Captain Perry on the occasion."<sup>96</sup> A letter to Edward Stevens, American consul-general to St. Domingue from Louverture himself does some justice to that

---

<sup>94</sup> Hale, "Many Who Wandered," 140.

<sup>95</sup> Elkins, *Age of Federalism*, 659.

<sup>96</sup> *Federal Galaxy*, June 14, 1800.

gratitude, however: “Nothing could equal [Captain Perry’s] kindness, his activity, his watchfulness and his zeal in protecting me, in unhappy circumstances, for this part of the colony.”<sup>97</sup>

There is a historical debate regarding the rationale for this decision to intervene. Historian Ashli White explains its genesis as part of consul-general Edward Stevens’ plan to both economically benefit American commerce and further a general Federalist desire for greater racial equality, or at least greater racial even-handedness in foreign dealings. White cites a June 1799 letter from Stevens to Secretary of State Pickering saying that “if Toussaint proves unsuccessful ... all the arrangements we have made respecting Commerce must fall to the Ground. The most solemn Treaty would have little weight with a man of Rigaud’s capricious and tyrannical temper,” though he is careful to remind Pickering that support for Louverture also meant aiding local white populations whom he recognized and drew some support from.<sup>98</sup> According to White, “In Stevens’ calculated reading, Louverture was the only possible guarantor of peaceful multiracial society in St. Domingue - and of American trade.”<sup>99</sup> For Michael Zuckerman, the connection between Louverture and Stevens was even closer, their attachment “unwavering and indispensable” to one another.<sup>100</sup>

Arthur Scherr problematizes this relationship, criticizing historians who, having “only examined the topic briefly,” conclude that the Federalists support for Louverture’s regime was due to the Adams administration’s “anti-slavery” and “proto-abolitionist” sentiments.<sup>101</sup> The willingness for Federalists to actively court reconnection with the British during the mid-1790s

---

<sup>97</sup> As quoted in Fick, “Revolutionary St. Domingue,” 37.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 162.

<sup>99</sup> White, *Encountering Revolution*, 163.

<sup>100</sup> Zuckerman, *Almost Chosen People*, 190.

<sup>101</sup> Scherr, “Arms and Men,” 600.

coincided with the brutal British attempt to add yet another sugar-producing slave colony to their imperial holdings. Throughout the late 1790s, Congress limited trade with St. Domingue precisely because of this, passing a series of laws that made all arms exports illegal during the majority of Adams' presidency. It was not until the June 26, 1799 proclamation whereby Adams waived restrictions on trading with French colonies—restrictions put in place for fear of angering the British and embroiling the United States in the ongoing European conflict—that allowed for the legal sale of weapons to Louverture, a window of time that lasted only ten months.<sup>102</sup> A letter from Adams to Pickering, dated July 2, 1799, supports the pro-commerce, pro-British interpretation of events: “Harmony with the English in all this business of St. Domingo, is the thing I have most at heart,” wrote Adams. “The result of the whole is in my mind problematical & precarious. Toussaint has evidently puzzled himself—the French government, the English cabinet, and the administration of the United States. All the rest of the world knows as little what to do with him, as he knows what to do with himself.”<sup>103</sup>

It is important to note, however, that through the lens of Rigaud and Louverture, the pro-British and pro-French factions within the American political spectrum of the early republic had their rhetorical way. In some ways, Rigaud represented the Democratic Republican ideal: though he himself was multi-racial, he was a staunch supporter of Republican France and the principles of the revolution, albeit in a more moderate form. As a representative of the free people of color on the island, his attachment to total abolition of slavery was tenuous—members of his community were themselves often prosperous sugar producers and slaveowners—and his loyalty to France was considered strong enough to be asked to serve in Napoleon's bloody expedition to

---

<sup>102</sup> Scherr, “Arms and Men,” 601-602.

<sup>103</sup> “From John Adams to Timothy Pickering, 2 July 1799,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-3702>.

retake the island after 1800 headed by General Victor Emmanuel Leclerc.<sup>104</sup> Once slave emancipation had made St. Domingue a “multiracial egalitarian society,” Rigaud’s vision of a possible return to the status quo, this time in a society helmed by free people of color, was far more palatable to the Jeffersonian Republicans than an “emergent black military elite” at the helm, typified by Louverture and his supporters.<sup>105</sup>

Support for Rigaud and disdain of Louverture found its way into the *Aurora*, where throughout 1799 and 1800, it published a series of articles praising the free man of color while openly criticizing Louverture. A detailed biography, published January 1, 1799, outlines the reasons for why “[i]n the modern history of St. Domingo, general Rigaud will be to the future historian a distinguished character.” The *Aurora* outlines Rigaud’s connection to the Fontages Legion’s campaign in Savannah during the Revolutionary War, his racial background— “[h]is father was from the south of France . . . ; his mother was a negro slave [and] housekeeper . . . [h]is complexion is very dark, but his features wholly European”—and ends with a description of his “humanity to prisoners, his philosophical turn, [and] his private social virtues.”<sup>106</sup>

As the tensions between these two former allies against the British invasion increased with the defeat and expulsion from the island in 1798, a war of rhetoric mirrored that of the real “War of the South,” also commonly referred to as the “War of Knives.” Though there was “quite a bit of diversity on both sides,” according to Laurent Dubois, it is often presented as a racial conflict between Louverture’s black army against the free people of color under Rigaud; both men

---

<sup>104</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 254.

<sup>105</sup> Fick, “Revolutionary St. Domingue,” 32.

<sup>106</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, January 1, 1799.

accused the other of racist motivations, and, most damningly, of secretly desiring to reimpose slavery on the Black cultivator class that formed the backbone of the rebellion.<sup>107</sup>

By July of 1799, the *Aurora* had published Louverture's public response to a letter from Rigaud, accusing Rigaud of stirring up racial animosity among the free people of color—"persuading them that I am an enemy to their class"—and exculpating himself from any criticism related to race. "A friend of all mankind without distinction of colour, I make no difference between them, but as they are distinguished by virtues and vices ... the man of colour who loves his country, who respects the laws ... is equally dear [to me] as the black or the white." The final critique of this letter revolved around Rigaud's overweening desire for power, and his willingness to allow his "pride ... ambition, and jealousy" to destroy the happiness "between men of all colors who inhabit this colony" established by Louverture's multi-racial government.<sup>108</sup> On the next page ran a piece of commentary from the *Aurora*'s editorial desk, attempting to pick apart Louverture's argument and character, stating that "Toussaint is in the hands of the *Romish Clergy* ... all of them furiously inveterate against the French revolution," and reminding the reader of the "cast of [Rigaud's] mental character" in comparison to Toussaint's, a mere "coachman to a Frenchman now in the United States ... known to possess qualifications of mind of a very slender compass." Its final criticism rested on Louverture's "knowledge of the white race" being "acquired in servitude, and his unquenchable hatred of the white race" his most severe liability.<sup>109</sup>

In this final phrase the beginnings of the United States' turn away from St. Domingue under the Jefferson administration is seen. The heroism reported by the *Federal Galaxy* and

---

<sup>107</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 233.

<sup>108</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, July 18, 1799.

<sup>109</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, July 18, 1799.

support for a joint effort between the United States Navy and Toussaint Louverture were constantly at odds with the fears of the spread of slave rebellion abroad and the tensions created by American support for a colony still nominally controlled by the French. An *Aurora* account of the taking of Jacmel focused not on the figure of Louverture as a Black General Washington, but a “dread monster in human shape, who, not content with assassinating above 2000 persons in the environs of Jacquemel [Jacmel], and causing them to be shot from a cannon or drowned, an equal number of those victims; but actually sacrificed 7000 of his own men.” This “three headed monster, that has betrayed Spain, England, France and its friends ... the atrocious fanatic who feeds on the blood of the Divinity,” was the real enemy, and with him his army of Black formerly-enslaved soldiers, so terrifyingly willing to apply the *Rights of Man* to their current situation.<sup>110</sup>

The Adams administration’s engagement with the revolution in St. Domingue resulted in a change in both political policy and partisan rhetoric. The formerly radical Jeffersonian press, exemplified by the *Aurora*, began to turn away from what they saw as the excess of revolution, while the Federalist press and political establishment shrewdly discerned both idealistic and commercial advantage to be had from Louverture’s successes. Policies like “Toussaint’s Clause” or the military support for Louverture’s forces at the climax of the “War of the South” were meant to secure and preserve a lucrative trading relationship while economically punishing France during a time of undeclared war. In addition, Federalist writers such as William Cobbett could make political hay out of excoriating the Republicans for their devotion to radicalism due to their wholehearted support for the French Revolution while chastising them for their hypocrisy in regards to matters of race. While short-lived, this move to support a Black-led

---

<sup>110</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, May 14, 1800.

quasi-independent state so near the borders of the United States has been praised by some historians. Sadly, it would be quickly undone as the revolution in St. Domingue—officially Haiti after its independence in 1804—reached its final phase, one coinciding with the rise of Jeffersonian Republicanism in the federal government, the first of many chilling slave rebellions within the southern United States, and the desire for many Americans to cool the rhetoric of universal liberty in the service of peace, prosperity, and the maintenance of a racial status quo at home.

### **Chapter 3: The Jeffersonian Turn Away from Haiti (1801-1804)**

The “Revolution of 1800” saw a massive political realignment occur for the first time in United States history; the presidency and both houses of Congress changed allegiance with the Democratic-Republican party becoming dominant. Concomitant with this political change were shifts within the practice of slavery geographically, economically, and ideologically, as the anxiety of slave rebellion caused the southern planter aristocracy to restrict abolitionist discourse and “double down” on defense of it as an essential institution, all while the increased profitability of slavery made it increasingly difficult for the South to give up.<sup>111</sup> As Ashli White explains it, “This was no longer the politics of the first decades of the early republic, with Federalists and Democratic Republicans decrying the dangers of faction,” with the nation growing more sectional and more attached to or repulsed by the institution of slavery. The refugees from St. Domingue and bloody descriptions of the revolution that still trickled across the Atlantic. Slavery’s supporters “attributed these harrowing scenes to emancipation, not slavery”; its

---

<sup>111</sup> Dillon and Drexler, *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States*, 9-10.



advocates argued that northern abolitionists were the new Jacobins; and any lasting connection with St. Domingue only hastened the possibility of bloody uprising.<sup>112</sup>

The beginning of the nineteenth century saw the first slave rebellion at least partially inspired by the ongoing revolt in St. Domingue. Gabriel Prosser led an attempted revolt in 1800 that sought to collect arms and march on the Virginia capital. While no one was killed in the process, and the plot foiled by the collaboration of two enslaved Black Virginians, two elements were readily apparent: slaveowners were incredibly lucky to have escaped calamity so easily, and some connection to the radicalism on the French island of St. Domingue was responsible.<sup>113</sup> According to Gary Nash, “Americans widely believed that the spirit of rebellion, born in Saint Domingue and nurtured by the Jacobin radicalism of the French Revolution, was still spreading and would leave untouched no part of the black population, slave or free, North or South.”<sup>114</sup> Evidence from the investigation pointed towards a possible French influence: the conspirators spoke of sparing only three groups of whites—Quakers, Methodists, and French. Also, some of the depositions of the plotters reported that two Frenchmen had actually joined the plot, though their identities remained mysterious.<sup>115</sup>

A literal connection between Louverture and the rebellion in the Caribbean has never been proven, but historian Douglas Egerton posits that “the struggle for freedom in Saint Domingue was a source of inspiration” for Gabriel, and that “the Dominguan slaves reminded their Virginia brethren that the struggle to fulfill the promise of 1776 was far from over.”<sup>116</sup> Contemporaries were in agreement, including then-governor of Virginia James Monroe, who

---

<sup>112</sup> White, *Encountering Revolution*, 206-207.

<sup>113</sup> Jordan, *White over Black*, 393.

<sup>114</sup> Nash, “Reverberations of Haiti,” 63.

<sup>115</sup> Sidbury, “Saint Domingue in Virginia,” 550.

<sup>116</sup> Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 45-46.

mobilized the state militia to suppress the rebellion and, according to Duncan Faherty, “doubtless envisioned a connection between” Gabriel and Louverture. Faherty cites Gordon Wood’s speculation that Jefferson supported French attempts at recolonizing the island because of fears caused by Gabriel in Virginia as evidence of how far-reaching the domestic concern of international interference within the enslaved communities in the Southern states was at the time. Slaveholding Republican Southerners could placate their “fantasies about a docile U.S. slave population” by using the “scapegoat for turmoil” onto a “foreign threat.”<sup>117</sup> Conversely, the Federalists could use the insurrection as a “cudgel for belaboring Jeffersonians,” according to Winthrop Jordan, as politically-aligned papers such as the Fredericksburg *Herald* declared that the “vile French Jacobins” were to blame for the plot, “aided and abetted by some of our own profligate and abandoned democrats.” In response, Republicans would, as mentioned in the previous chapter, respond with a reminder of the Adams administrations direct military aid for Louverture.<sup>118</sup> Gabriel’s rebellion and its linkage to St. Domingue became thus became another partisan tool to be used for political advantage or to prop up preestablished beliefs regarding race or the stability of Southern slave society, though it would hardly be the last.

In August of 1802, numerous reports circulated around dozens of coastal U.S. cities about a flotilla of French warships, allegedly laden with imprisoned Black revolutionaries. The private correspondence of numerous prominent southerners and federal politicians show the ways that the press helped influence policymakers through waves of misinformation emanating from the island.<sup>119</sup> The only indisputable fact was, however, that for over sixty-three days in the late

---

<sup>117</sup> Duncan Faherty, “‘The Mischief That Awaits Us’: Revolution, Rumor, and Serial Unrest in the Early Republic,” in *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States: Histories, Textualities, Geographies*, ed. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael J. Drexler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 73.

<sup>118</sup> Jordan, *White over Black*, 396.

<sup>119</sup> Faherty, “‘The Mischief That Awaits Us,’” 59.

summer of 1802, three French frigates anchored themselves in New York harbor's quarantine ground—*La Consolante*, *La Volontaire*, and *Salamandre*—awaiting provisions. A frenzy of misinformation followed these events, though the ships would disembark without any actual incident, the fates of their imprisoned cargo lost to history. The *New-York Gazette* attempted to deny a series of false narratives about the French threatening to fire on the city if denied provisions or wantonly land their cargo. Coverage of August 14<sup>th</sup> through 16<sup>th</sup> retells a dramatic, though uncorroborated, tale of *La Consolante* drifting out of the quarantine grounds, running “foul” of the brig *Twins*, with “a number of blacks on board ... secret[ing] themselves in the hold, and one in the top was not discovered; and during the night, he ... made his escape on Staten-Island.” In the same article, reporting on the 16<sup>th</sup>, provides an addendum, with the *Gazette* assuring the reader that it had “made it our business to become acquainted with [the *La Consolante*'s] situation,” and explaining to their readership that the “she has had no death on board since her arrival” and “none but the officers and oarsmen of one boat are allowed to come to shore.”<sup>120</sup> A more benign (and logical) tale regarding the ships was that they had been rebuffed from their original destination of Cartagena, turned away by the Spanish, and thus were to head to New York until they had received new orders, eventually was reported.<sup>121</sup>

Frightened southerners present in New York at the time, particularly Fontaine Maury of Virginia, were adamant that the ships were a threat, sending numerous letters to important public figures such as Virginia Governor James Monroe, Maryland Governor John Frances Mercer, and former governor of South Carolina General William Moultrie. In one particular letter to Monroe, he suggests that the frigates had caused “extreme agitation of the Public mind” and had heard of “many instances” of the French offering their cargo “for sale in this city, in open violation of the

---

<sup>120</sup> *The United States Gazette*, August 20, 1802.

<sup>121</sup> Faherty, “The Mischief That Awaits Us,” 65.

Laws,” a clear falsehood. Monroe’s receipt of these letters showed his willingness to believe and act on these kinds of reports, having endured Gabriel’s Rebellion two years prior. He asked that for Maury to continue his reports on the “insurgent slaves of St. Domingo” and sent dispatches to Colonel William Davies and Colonel Thomas Newton to be ready to repulse any unauthorized landings or “remonstrate against” any French attempts to anchor anywhere near Norfolk.<sup>122</sup> The excitement over this event continued well into the fall, with newspaper readers as far as Maine reminded of the potential dangers of French frigates full of French-speaking Black revolutionaries.

One single “French-speaking Negro” was arrested in October 11, 1802 in South Carolina, causing Governor Drayton to activate the state militia, standing guard up and down the coast alongside concerned citizens.<sup>123</sup> Reportage of this made its way back up to Vermont and New York, with the Poughkeepsie Journal ominously reporting that “FRENCH NEGROS LANDED IN SOUTH CAROLINA,” according to an extract of a “*letter from a respectable gentlemen in Georgetown, S.C.*” on November 2, an account that was later reported by the *Vermont Journal* and the *Green Mountain Patriot* as “wholly from a French negro being taken up in that vicinity” and that “[w]e are sorry to state, that the country, for some distance above this place, was alarmed and the men actually on their march.”<sup>124</sup>

As the Haitian Revolution matured into full independence, and Louverture’s or Rigaud’s dreams of a multi-racial society fading alongside the idealism of Jeffersonian Republicans like Abraham Bishop, the massacre of the remaining French population of the island was reported in the Spring and Summer of 1804. The *Aurora* related that a “general massacre of the whites had

---

<sup>122</sup> Faherty, “‘The Mischief That Awaits Us,’” 72-73.

<sup>123</sup> Faherty, “‘The Mischief That Awaits Us,’” 76.

<sup>124</sup> *Poughkeepsie Journal*, November 2, 1802; *Vermont Journal*, November 9, 1802; *Green Mountain Patriot*, December 1, 1802.

taken place in Port-au-Prince, & that the massacre was to be carried out all over the southern department,” though the “Americans were treated with great respect throughout the Island.”<sup>125</sup> As reports increased, so did press criticism of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, independent Haiti’s first, and short-lived, emperor. The treatment of Americans became “extremely circumspect” due to the “ignorance and jealousy of the blacks”; the “slightest transgression of their rules [was] punished with severity.”<sup>126</sup> By June, reports from Port au Prince indicated that there had been a “general massacre of the French white inhabitants ... Out of five hundred and sixty-two persons, only two were spared,” though, once again, “the brigands respected the person and property of the Americans who happened to be there.”<sup>127</sup> All told, between two and four thousand French civilians were killed, with the “Proclamation of Dessalines,” dated April 28, 1804 providing a chilling rationale.

Reprinted in *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, Dessalines’ argument was unapologetic about the reasoning behind the massacre:

[T]he hour of vengeance [had] arrived, and the implacable enemies of the *rights of man* [emphasis added] have suffered the punishment due to their crimes ... Bent for many ages under an iron yoke ... mutilated victims of the cupidity of white Frenchmen ... Where is that vile Haytian [sic], so unworthy of his regeneration, who thinks he has not accomplished the decrees of the Eternal, by exterminating these blood-thirsty tygers? ... Yes, we have rendered to these true cannibals war for war, crime for crime, outrage for outrage: yes, I have saved by country; I have avenged America.<sup>128</sup>

True to form, Cobbett could not resist an editorial comment on Dessalines’ oblique references to both Paine and the Abbé Raynal, whose famous *Histoire philosophique* had predicted the rise of an avenging figure of the enslaved. According to Cobbett:

---

<sup>125</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, May 1, 1804.

<sup>126</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, May 15, 1804.

<sup>127</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, June 2, 1804.

<sup>128</sup> “Proclamation by Dessalines, as Gov. Gen. of the Island, dated at the Cape, April 28, 1804; first Year of Independence,” *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, July 28, 1804.

It is pretended, that a justification is to be found for these blood-thirsty monsters in the treatment, which they so long endured from their masters. The same defence was set up for the Septembrisers [sic] of Paris; and the same defense might be made for revolutionary cut-throats in any country. Indeed, the massacres of St. Domingo have been produced by doctrines such as those which produced by doctrines such as those which produced the massacres of France.<sup>129</sup>

Modern perspectives on the 1804 massacres downplay the role of radical ideology in their discussion of causation. Instead, the fact that only French whites were targeted—neither the Polish veterans of the doomed Leclerc expedition who eventually defected to the Haitian cause nor the British or American merchants in Haitian ports—speaks more to an “economic pogrom” designed excise the remnants of the plantation class. The goal, then, was as likely to enrich black and mixed-race officers in Dessalines’ army as it was to avenge the bloody legacy of slavery.<sup>130</sup>

Regardless, the massacre and its public discussion coincided with the dramatic expansion of American western territory and its concomitant fears of ever-growing slave populations. Jefferson’s Louisiana Purchase, and the debate regarding the expansion of slavery within it, helped push public sentiment and Republican support for the avenging slaves of St. Domingue away from the newly independent Haiti. The fate of slavery in the Louisiana Territory and the possibility of sustaining US-Haitian trade relations were both tied to the bloody actions of Dessalines, only five years after Federalist military aid and broad public support for Toussaint Louverture.

The same *Aurora* that had once decried the immorality of slavery warned by December 1804 that trade with Dessalines would endanger American interests with France, just as “if the blacks in the island of Jamaica should rise upon their masters, the government of the United States would be an accessory to the war, if the citizens of these states were not restricted from

---

<sup>129</sup> “Internal State of St. Domingo,” *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, July 28, 1804.

<sup>130</sup> Philippe R. Girard, “Jean-Jacques Dessalines and the Atlantic System: A Reappraisal,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 69, no. 3 (July 2012), 579.

supplying the blacks with *gunpowder* and *cannon* and *cannon ball*.”<sup>131</sup> (Arthur Scherr documents that between September 30, 1804 to October 1, 1805, 349,300 pounds of domestically-produced gunpowder were exported to Haiti, though “no exports of cannon are mentioned in the official documents.”<sup>132</sup>) More importantly, within the same article, an argument coalesced around two key points: that “we cannot be indifferent to the danger of the example of St. Domingo,” as it pertains to the existence of enslaved Africans throughout the American South, or “the mode in which they have revenged themselves on their opposers.” For, if the United States continued to trade with revolting slave colonies—engaging in “the knight errantry of fighting the cause of the blacks against all the powers of Europe”—they would jeopardize their own liberty in search of a dangerous mixture of idealism and avarice.<sup>133</sup>

Two months earlier, New York’s *Evening Post* published a similar editorial from a Federalist perspective that charged:

Democrats with inconsistency, because after complaining of the excessive power of poor old Adams, they made the modest Jefferson despot of Louisiana . . . Twenty years ago the fact would have appeared much stronger stated simply as it is, an insurrection of slaves; but we have since that day become so excessively philanthropic as to give a preference to the blacks over people of our own kind.<sup>134</sup>

What continued was a similar analogy to being an accessory to revolt—“let us suppose a French province or English country to be in open rebellion, and that America should furnish provision, arms, and ammunition to the rebels”—though with a decidedly paradoxical twist:

Surely if there be a nation on earth which, beyond all others, should have frown’d on the revolt of St. Domingo, America is that nation. She ought to have done more. She ought to have assisted France in reducing those negroes to obedience . . . The right to hold men in

---

<sup>131</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, December 15, 1804.

<sup>132</sup> Arthur Scherr, *Thomas Jefferson's Haitian Policy: Myths and Realities* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 449.

<sup>133</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, December 15, 1804.

<sup>134</sup> *The Evening Post*, October 18, 1804.

bondage is indeed questionable, and is well worthy of consideration to those who have assumed it. But as to the crime of murder there can be no question.<sup>135</sup>

As had happened in Philadelphia, Charleston, and Norfolk in the 1790s, later refugees from St. Domingue flooded into the furthest reaches of the American South, particularly after the 1803 purchase of the Louisiana Territory. Thousands of white settlers, free people of color, and enslaved Blacks fled to the Louisiana territory, especially after the purchase by the United States. Unlike previous waves of immigrants, the St. Domingans who left post-1803 did so in hopes of finding a slice of Francophone life within the “possibilities” afforded them by the vast territory of the American mainland. This “land of opportunity,” according to historian Nathalie Dessens, provided the best of both words—a chance at “re-creating Saint-Domingue” within a land devoid of Spanish influence and fully aligned with the “colonial entrepreneurial” spirit that was shared by Saint Domingans and the American planter elite.<sup>136</sup> Once rooted, the Saint-Domingan refugees formed a politically active core that would advocate for itself, and its rights to slave ownership, elected representation, and culturally-sustaining institutions.<sup>137</sup> In fact, upon federal recognition of the Louisiana Territory in 1804, a precursor to its eventual statehood in 1812, some exceptions would be made for the ban on imported slaves for refugees from Saint-Domingue, or at least the remission of any penalty fees that would have been incurred. Even after the 1808 federal ban on the slave trade, residents of New Orleans pressured their governor to petition on their behalf another exception, one that was passed in 1809 that allowed another remission of penalties for any slaves belonging to French refugees, this time from Cuba—a common stop for many French planters fleeing the revolution in Haiti.<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> *The Evening Post*, October 18, 1804.

<sup>136</sup> Nathalie Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 31-32.

<sup>137</sup> Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans*, 119-120.

<sup>138</sup> Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans*, 43.



Exceptions aside, the role that St. Domingue, and the white planters who now petitioned to become eventual American citizens, would play in the larger discussion of the expansion of slavery westward was brought to a climax by the acquisition of Louisiana. According to historian Linda Kerber, the debate over how to treat the Louisiana Purchase ran aground of the only former model of large-scale territorial acquisition that had precedence, the Northwest Ordinance, one that prohibited the expansion of slavery. Though the vote banning slavery in this new acquisition would ultimately fail, this debate over the bill that led to the incorporation of Louisiana as a United States territory reasserted how the “horrors of . . . St. Domingo,” as said by Senator John Smith of Ohio during the proceedings, would disquiet the minds of American policymakers.<sup>139</sup>

During the Senate’s debate, the full range of contemporary racial and political rhetoric was on display. Tennessee’s George Washington Campbell argued against plans to limit the self-government of Louisiana due to its inhabitants being ruled formerly by French or Spanish monarchies, saying that “we shall consider them as part of the human species . . . if the people had never enjoyed liberty till they were ripe for it, how many ages of darkness would have passed away!” A young Virginia Republican, John G. Jackson pushed this argument further, adding that, even if they current white inhabitants of Louisiana had been “slaves” to monarchy, this “does not prove that they are not fit objects of a free Government. Look at the ensanguined plains of St. Domingo; the oppressed have their broken their chains, and resumed their long-lost rights. This example proves more than a volume . . . [A]re the subjects of a monarchy, the inhabitants of Louisiana, more deficient in manly sentiment than the people of St. Domingo?”<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 43.

<sup>140</sup> As quoted in Jordan, *White over Black*, 389-390.

But while the analogy of slave liberation served useful for admitting former subjects of France into the American form of democratic governance, it also served as the catalyst for limiting further importation of foreign slaves.

What would become termed the “Breckinridge Bill” was named after Kentucky senator John Breckinridge, staunch Jeffersonian Republican and eventual Attorney General under Jefferson during his second term. The most contentious aspect was its limiting foreign importation of slaves, restricting the slave-trade to those purchased within the Union and carried to the new territory by American citizens going there to settle. According to Arthur Scherr, the prime rationale for this limitation was to prevent a “dangerous ratio” of slaves to free whites to safeguard against another St. Domingue, a line of reasoning only strengthened by news of Dessalines massacre in the spring of 1804.<sup>141</sup> From the first day of the debate over the bill, Tuesday, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1804, the association was made clear. Breckinridge declared, “I am against slavery. I hope the time is not far distance when not a slave will exist in this Union. I fear our slaves in the south will produce another St. Domingo.” Demurring voices exclaimed that the territory could not be settled without slave labor, with John Smith replying that “I wish slaves be admitted there from the United States. I wish our negroes were scattered more equally, not only through the United States, but through our territories—that their power might be lost.” Jesse Franklin, Republican senator from North Carolina reminded those in the session that “negro insurrections have already been frequent—they are alarming. Look in the laws of Virginia and North Carolina made for the purpose of guarding against and suppressing these rebellions.”<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup> Arthur Scherr, *Thomas Jefferson's Haitian Policy: Myths and Realities* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 125.

<sup>142</sup> Everett S. Brown, “The Senate Debate on the Breckinridge Bill for the Government of Louisiana, 1804,” *The American Historical Review* 22, no. 2 (January 1917), 340, 345.

In some sense the debate over the inclusion of Louisiana and the decision to allow it to be populated with enslaved people from foreign destinations was a referendum on the slave trade and, according to some historians, the expansion of slavery itself within the United States. Though the slave trade was official outlawed under Jefferson's Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves of 1807—only South Carolina had actively done so since 1798—all other Southern states had banned the practice on their own.<sup>143</sup> Though both sides of the political divide argued against the expansion of slavery, the Federalists were most vocal in their opposition, even those from the South, “[keeping] the faith in natural rights as Jeffersonians rarely did,” according to Michael Zuckerman; even in the Virginia House of Burgesses, all but one Federalist member had opposed the Three-Fifths Clause or the confinement of suffrage to white freemen.<sup>144</sup> Samuel White, Federalist senator from Delaware, summarized these sentiments best:

’Tis our duty to prevent, as far as possible, the horrid evil of slavery—and thereby avoid the fate of St. Domingo. Nothing but the interposition of Heaven, an unusual thunder-storm, prevented the slaves, only two years since, from destroying Richmond in Virginia. That, and other states are obliged annually to make many severe and expensive provisions to protect and guard the lives of the masters and their families against the violence of slaves.<sup>145</sup>

Later in the proceedings, Senator James Jackson of Georgia laid out a common argument in reply: “It is very unfortunate that we have slaves; but having them we cannot with safety or policy free them.” The connection to the problem of “French negroes” seemed clear with his opposition to manumission—“one free negro is more dangerous where there are slaves than 100 slaves.” Wilson Nicholas of Virginia concurred: “Free men of *colour* have a very ill effect on slaves—they do much more mischief than strangers conceive of,” only to be countered forcefully

---

<sup>143</sup> Scherr, *Thomas Jefferson's Haitian Policy*, 128.

<sup>144</sup> Zuckerman, *Almost Chosen People*, 193.

<sup>145</sup> Brown, “The Senate Debate on the Breckinridge Bill,” 347.

by Stephen R. Bradley, Democratic-Republican from Vermont, with a venomous quote from the Old Testament: “*He that steals a man and sells him ought to die.*”<sup>146</sup>

Despite the heated rhetoric within the legislature, the response from the *Aurora* was muted, choosing to focus on the possible benefits of providing democracy to those white settlers and plantation owners who would, in time, become American citizens, praising the decision to enfranchise and include them, for “ignorance is the great source of human enslavement, and that to remove that ignorance from a people you can never begin too soon.”<sup>147</sup> The echo of the admission of Louisiana would linger in the Federalist press, the *Windsor Federal Gazette* reprinting in May 1804 an article from Boston’s *The Repertory* that excoriated Federalists for allowing the “aggrandizement of the Southern States and their accumulating power” due to the purchase of Louisiana and the expansion of slavery there: “[A]re WE to submit to the guidance and tyranny of the South? ... The purchase of Louisiana at the expense of 15 million dollars for the augmentation of the Southern interest, must finally convince the States North of the Chesapeake that they must unit in the common Northern interest.”<sup>148</sup> Louisiana, its territorial incorporation, and the influence its newfound Americans and their foreign slaves would even urge Thomas Paine’s criticism.

Responding to a “memorial and remonstrance” presented to Congress during the 1804 session demanding immediate admission of Louisiana as a state and a resumption of the importation of foreign slaves by its members, Paine published an open letter “To the French Inhabitants of Louisiana” that ran in the *Aurora* on September 22, 1804. He includes the preamble in his reply for the reader to consider:

---

<sup>146</sup> Brown, “The Senate Debate on the Breckinridge Bill,” 352.

<sup>147</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, January 27, 1804.

<sup>148</sup> *Windsor Federal Gazette*, May 8, 1804.

We the subscribers, planters, merchants, and other inhabitants of Louisiana, respectfully approach the Legislature of the United States with a memorial of *our rights*, a remonstrance against certain laws which contravene them, and a petition for the redress to which the laws of nature . . . have entitled us.<sup>149</sup>

What followed was a step-by-step dismantling of the Louisianan entreaty that was wholly “the work of some person who is not of [our] people” and a reminder that “[w]e obtained our rights by calmly understanding principles, and by the successful event of a long, obstinate and expensive war. But it is not incumbent on us to fight the battles of the world for the world’s profit.” Paine wrote those words over a decade after his initial publication of *Rights of Man*, and his weariness with principle, even that which compelled him to cross the Atlantic to join with the great revolution in France, is palpable, for he “was in France though the whole of the Revolution . . . for after endeavoring to give it principle, he had nearly fallen a victim to its rage.” The language of anti-slavery that was so rousing in his 1775 “African Slavery in America” was muffled by time and experience, as Abraham Bishop’s must have been as the radicalism Jeffersonian Democratic-Republican party gave way to white supremacy. Instead, Paine kept his response focused on responding to the principles the formerly-French plantation owners utilized in their petition:

We fought for liberty when you stood quiet in slavery . . . You are arriving at freedom by the easiest means that any people ever enjoyed it; without contest, without expense, and even without any contrivance of your own. And you already so far mistake principles, that under name of *rights* you ask for *powers*; *power to import and enslave Africans*; and *to govern* a territory that *we have purchased*.<sup>150</sup>

Nestled in among the arguments regarding the just purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France (a reminder that, by purchasing Louisiana, the planters were no longer held under the tyranny of the French Revolution or the French empire that succeeded it) was a return to an older

---

<sup>149</sup> “To the French Inhabitants of Louisiana,” *Aurora General Advertiser*, September 22, 1804.

<sup>150</sup> “To the French Inhabitants of Louisiana,” *Aurora General Advertiser*, September 22, 1804.

mode of discourse. It is one reminiscent of the anti-slavery that drove Federalists and Democratic-Republicans alike to support efforts to arm and aid Toussaint Louverture only a few years earlier, and that caused newspapers like the *Aurora* or the *Argus* to run full-throated attacks on slavery, or open comparisons between the revolution in St. Domingue and America's own. However, the final words rest not on principles regarding the ultimate injustice of slavery, but the unfairness of what the petitioners were asking for. Paine ends his letter with, "*Do you want to renew in Louisiana the horrors of Domingo?*"<sup>151</sup>

The Jefferson administration's ultimate decision to incorporate Louisiana as a slave territory, though only for American-born slaves, was not the only way it sought to distance itself from those horrors. 1804 saw the passage of the Clearance Bill, officially the Act to Regulate the Clearance of Armed Merchant Vessels, as a way of tamping down the trade between American merchants and St. Domingue. After the failure of the Leclerc Expedition to reestablish French control over the island, and the acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase, more than doubling the size of the United States, Jefferson found himself desiring a peaceful position through which to consolidate his nation's gains. This bill and the embargo on Haitian trade that followed it have been described as a diplomatic nod to France, especially as Jefferson put pressure on Spain, a French ally, to acquire Florida. Additionally, in July of 1804 a British court ruled that transshipping of goods from the West Indies to Europe on American ships would violate their neutrality while the British and French were still at war; American ships again began to be seized on the open ocean.<sup>152</sup>

---

<sup>151</sup> "To the French Inhabitants of Louisiana," *Aurora General Advertiser*, September 22, 1804.

<sup>152</sup> Gordon S. Brown, *Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 160-161.

When the bill passed in Congress in the Winter of 1804, both the *Aurora* and *Connecticut Courant* commented on it, illustrating the Federalist and Republican perspectives on the issue of allegiance with France and the desires for idealistic and economic intercourse with St. Domingue. The *Aurora* reminded the reader that American was “at peace with France ... [and] we have not a simple complaint to allege against France, either from the past or the present,” neatly forgetting the Quasi-War that occurred only six years earlier. Yet, “in this state of tranquility it is claimed as a right to arm and fight French vessels.”<sup>153</sup> The *Courant* levied its criticism primarily at Virginia congressman John Wayles Eppes, sponsor of the bill and nephew (and son-in-law) to Jefferson himself, who “entertain[s] a strong dislike to the interests of our merchants ... He had no idea of allowing the independence of St. Domingo, nor did he include the blacks in the *rights of man* [emphasis added].”<sup>154</sup>

Yet with a substantial majority in both houses and the presidency, the Clearance Bill was passed. Soon after an even more restrictive embargo was proposed by Senator George Logan of Pennsylvania, its goal to “stop trade that was both illegal and provocative,” but in his closing remarks alluding to the problem of “cherish[ing] the black population of St. Domingo, whilst we have a similar population in our Southern states.”<sup>155</sup> Timothy Pickering, senator from Massachusetts after his role as Secretary of State under Adams, took issue with the embargo, though not for reasons of ideological solidarity with Haiti’s struggle for independence from France, but because of the shame acquired at learning that the embargo was the product of an “*insolent demand* of the minister of France” that we “tamely yield up this *right*” and “abandon

---

<sup>153</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, February 26, 1805.

<sup>154</sup> *Connecticut Courant*, January 9, 1805.

<sup>155</sup> Quoted in Brown, *Toussaint’s Clause*, 166.

this commerce.”<sup>156</sup> Still some Federalists writers and supporters maintained the retained an modicum of idealism, including Thomas Paine. His letter to Jefferson on the matter reminded the president that maintaining trade with the island “would be beneficial to all parties ... And when we have gained their confidence by acts of justice and friendship, they will listen to our advice in matters of Civilization and Government.” He went further to remind Jefferson that, “The United States is the only power that can undertake a measure of this kind. She is now the Parent of the Western world.”<sup>157</sup> The admonishment fell on deaf ears, and the vote to embargo all trade with Haiti passed along party lines (93-26), ending both economic and diplomatic relations between the United States and Haiti.

This decision of the American government signaled a final turn away from the earliest Republican support for the rebels of St. Domingue as fellow freedom fighters and the rhetoric that had inspired them. The actual efficacy of the embargo for serving trade has been debated. “Commercial engagement [remained] the norm after independence,” according to Phillipe Girard, with the U.S. retaining a commercial agent in Port-au-Prince and merchants relaying the “glorious” and profitable time he still spent on the island trading coffee and sugar.<sup>158</sup> But it did underscore the divide that continued throughout the period of Haiti’s revolution between American political factions, even as they changed their allegiances or rationales. The last public debates over the embargo placed Federalists in sympathy with those who felt the Haitian “case is not dissimilar to that of the people of the United States,” and high-ranking members of the Jefferson administration like Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin admitting that one of the “principal motives for passing [the embargo] was the apprehension of the danger which at that

---

<sup>156</sup> “From Timothy Pickering to Thomas Jefferson, 24 February 1806,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-3296>.

<sup>157</sup> Thomas Paine to Thomas Jefferson, January 1, 1805, in *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, 1425.

<sup>158</sup> Girard, “Jean-Jacques Dessalines and the Atlantic System,” 578.



time (immediately after the last massacre of the whites there) might on account of our numerous slaves, arise from unrestricted intercourse with the black population of that island.”<sup>159</sup>

Ultimately, the embargo was a failure—it neither forced Haiti back into the arms of France nor caused the withering of the newborn Haitian state, nor did it protect American shipping from further predation from French or British ships. Instead it acted as a bitter coda to the relationship between the United States and a now-independent nation that had successfully taken up the fight for freedom against their oppressors and created an entrenched American enmity towards the Black republic for another half century to come.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to examine the Haitian Revolution through the eyes of Americans—Federalist and Republican, Northerners and Southerners, white and Black—from across the sea. The three leaders discussed all took a different approach, influenced as they were by a changing landscape of international alliances and the domestic demands for greater economic growth and reassurance against the threats, imagined or otherwise, connected to the widespread practice of slavery. For the nearly two decades that St. Domingue haunted the newspapers, pamphlets, and imaginations of American writers and politicians, it proved to be the crucible upon which their idealistic mettle was tested; most of them were found wanting.

From the perspective of the press, writers like Abraham Bishop and Benjamin Franklin Bache showed the remarkable heights of American idealism during this era, championing the *Rights of Man* at a time when it seemed the United States and its revolution could have been the spark that ignited a worldwide transformation in governance. Yet their demands for the “Rights

---

<sup>159</sup> Hickey, “America's Response to the Slave Revolt in Haiti,” 373; Dillon and Drexler, *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States*, 9.

of Black Men” were subsumed by their defense of the French Revolution, its excesses, and eventually, by an allegiance to the Democratic Republican party’s unwillingness to part with the institution of slavery, especially as it became emboldened by increasing profitability and expanded through territorial holdings in the new Louisiana Territory. According to Arthur Scherr, “even when newspapers committed themselves to one or the other political party, they generally steered clear of divisive, unproductive racial issues,” even if on occasion they were audacious enough to compare the struggle of the Haitians to the legacy of the American Revolution.<sup>160</sup> Men like Thomas Paine or his adversary William Cobbett, in turn, used Haiti as a barb to prick the conscience of the average American to think beyond the revolution at home or as a truncheon to punish Americans who dared to protect the French and their vision for a world socially and culturally upended.

Politically, the story of the Haitian Revolution is one of declension. To quote Winthrop Jordan, to survey “the spread of [Black] rebellion in the New World and to examine American responses to what they saw as a mounting tide of danger is to watch the drastic erosion of the ideology of the American Revolution.”<sup>161</sup> The earliest American encounter with Haiti was only partially sympathetic to free people of color such as Vincent Ogé, intervening to assist only the white planter class, welcoming them even as they fretted about the human cargo they brought with them. With the political climate turning against the French Republic, active support of a rebellion, even one headed by a Black leader that sought seemingly sought independence, the Adams administration would only seek to trade with and militarily aid Haiti as long as it fit squarely within preexisting demands of American domestic and foreign policy. The loss of

---

<sup>160</sup> Arthur Scherr, “‘Sambos’ and ‘Black Cut-Throats’: Peter Porcupine on Slavery and Race in the 1790’s,” *American Periodicals*, 13 (2003), 21.

<sup>161</sup> Jordan, *White over Black*, 375.

Toussaint Louverture as an ally corresponded with the rise of Jefferson's desire for French and, most unfortunately, with a more radical, bloody and racialized form of resistance on the island, personified by the terrifying figure of Jean-Jacques Dessalines. The embedded racism of the American politicians of this era, panicked that the enslaved people within their borders would be infected by St. Domingue's example, was the standard, and any attempt at empathy or support for Black resistance the anomaly. The contradiction that lay at the heart of their judgments could not be overcome and was rarely even countenanced. As Tim Matthewson phrases it:

“Washington, Hamilton, and Jefferson believed that all men were entitled to freedom. They abhorred the institution of slavery. Like most Americans, however, they saw slave revolt as both antiwhite and antiplantation, and believed that Haitian slaves were, like those of the South either existentially or by nature, incapable of building a productive, biracial society,” with idealists like Edward Stevens, Timothy Pickering, or Rufus King as lonely outliers.<sup>162</sup>

---

<sup>162</sup> Timothy M. Matthewson, “George Washington's Policy Toward the Haitian Revolution,” *Diplomatic History* 3, no. 3 (Summer 1979), 328.

## Bibliography

## Secondary:

- Ben-Atar, Doron and Barbara B. Oberg. "Introduction: The Paradoxical Legacy of the Federalists" in *Federalists Reconsidered*, edited by Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, 1-18. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998.
- Brown, Everett S. "The Senate Debate on the Breckinridge Bill for the Government of Louisiana, 1804." *The American Historical Review* 22, no. 2 (January 1917): 340-364.
- Brown, Gordon S. *Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
- Clarfield, Gerard H. *Timothy Pickering and the American Republic*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980.
- Cotlar, Seth. *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011.
- Dessens, Nathalie. *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007.
- Dillon, Elizabeth Maddock and Michael J. Drexler eds. *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States: Histories, Textualities, Geographies*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.
- Dubois, Laurent. *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Dun, James Alexander. *Dangerous Neighbors: Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.
- Durey, Michael. "Thomas Paine's Apostles: Radical Emigrés and the Triumph of Jeffersonian Republicanism." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (October 1987): 661-688.
- Durey, Michael. *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic*. Lawrence, KS: University of Press of Kansas, 1997.
- Durey, Michael. *"With the Hammer of Truth": James Thomson Callender and America's Early National Heroes*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1990.
- Egerton, Douglas R. *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993.

- Elkins, Stanley and Eric McKittrick. *The Age of Federalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Finkelman, Paul. "The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Federalism" in *Federalists Reconsidered*, edited by Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, 137-156. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998.
- Foner, Philip S. *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, 2 vols. New York: The Citadel Press, 1945.
- Girard, Philippe R. "Jean-Jacques Dessalines and the Atlantic System: A Reappraisal." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 69, no. 3 (July 2012): 549-582.
- Hale, Matthew Rainbow. "'Many Who Wandered in Darkness': The Contest over American National Identity." *Early American Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 127-175.
- Hale, Matthew Rainbow. "On Their Tiptoes: Political Time and Newspapers during the Advent of the Radicalized French Revolution, circa 1792-1793." *Journal of the Early Republic*. 29, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 191-218.
- Hickey, Donald R. "America's Response to the Slave Revolt in Haiti, 1791-1806." *Journal of the Early Republic*, 2, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 361-379.
- Horne, Gerald. *Confronting Black Jacobins: The United States, the Haitian Revolution, and the Origins of the Dominican Republic*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015.
- Hunt, Alfred N. *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988.
- Israel, Jonathan. *The Expanding Blaze: How the American Revolution Ignited the World, 1775-1848*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.
- James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- Johnson, Ronald Angelo. *Diplomacy in Black and White: John Adams, Toussaint, Louverture, and Their Atlantic World Alliance*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2014.
- Jordan, Winthrop. *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1968.
- Kerber, Linda K. *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970.

- Matthewson, Tim. "Abraham Bishop, 'The Rights of Black Men,' and the American Reaction to the Haitian Revolution." *The Journal of Negro History* 67, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 148-154.
- Matthewson, Timothy M. "George Washington's Policy Toward the Haitian Revolution." *Diplomatic History* 3, no. 3 (Summer 1979): 321-336.
- Matthewson, Tim. "Jefferson and Haiti." *The Journal of Southern History* 61, no. 2 (May 1995): 209-248.
- Matthewson, Tim. "Jefferson and the Nonrecognition of Haiti." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 140, no. 1 (March 1996): 22-48.
- Matthewson, Tim. *A Proslavery Foreign Policy: Haitian-American Relations During the Early Republic*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003.
- Nash, Gary B. "Reverberations of Haiti in the American North: Black Saint Dominguan in Philadelphia." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 65 (1998): 44-73.
- Newman, Paul Douglas. "The Federalists' Cold War: The Fries Rebellion, National Security, and the State, 1787-1800." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 67, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 63-104.
- Newman, Simon. "American Political Culture and the French and Haitian Revolutions: Nathaniel Cutting and the Jeffersonian Republicans." In *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, edited by David P. Geggus, 72-89. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001.
- Ott, Thomas O. *The Haitian Revolution, 1789-1804*. Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1973.
- Pasley, Jeffrey L. *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2001.
- Riley, Pdraig. *Slavery and the Democratic Conscience: Political Life in Jeffersonian America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.
- Scherr, Arthur. "Arms and Men: The Diplomacy of US Weapons Traffic with Saint-Domingue under Adams and Jefferson." *The International History Review* 34, no. 3 (June 2013): 600-648.
- Scherr, Arthur. "'Sambos' and 'Black Cut-Throats': Peter Porcupine on Slavery and Race in the 1790's." *American Periodicals*, 13 (2003): 3-30. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20771154>.
- Scherr, Arthur. *Thomas Jefferson's Haitian Policy: Myths and Realities*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011.

Sidbury, James. "Saint Domingue in Virginia: Ideology, Local Meanings, and Resistance to Slavery, 1790-1800." *The Journal of Southern History* 63, no. 3 (August 1997): 531-552.

Tagg, James. *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.

Waldstreicher, David and Stephen R. Grossbart. "Abraham Bishop's Vocation: or the Mediation of Jeffersonian Politics." *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 617-657.

White, Shane. *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1991.

Wilson, David A. *Paine and Cobbett: The Transatlantic Connection*. Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988.

Wood, Gordon. *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009.

Zuckerman, Michael. *Almost Chosen People: Oblique Biographies in the American Grain*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993.

#### Primary Sources:

##### Newspapers:

*Argus* (Boston, MA)

*Connecticut Courant* (Hartford, CT)

*The Evening Post* (New York, NY)

*Farmer's Weekly Museum* (Walpole, NH)

*Federal Galaxy* (Brattleboro, VT)

*Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA)

*Green Mountain Patriot* (Peacham, VT)

*The National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC)

*Philadelphia Aurora (Aurora General Advertiser)* (Philadelphia, PA)

*Poughkeepsie Journal* (Poughkeepsie, NY)

*Windsor Federal Gazette* (Windsor, VT)

*Vermont Journal* (Windsor, VT)

##### Other Sources:

Cobbett, William. *Porcupine's Works*, Volume IV. London: Cobbett and Morgan, 1801.

Cobbett, William. *Porcupine's Works*, Volume VII. London: Cobbett and Morgan, 1801.

Cobbett, William. *Porcupine's Works*, Volume XII. London: Cobbett and Morgan, 1801.