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# Curiosity Seekers, Time Travelers, and Avant-Garde Artists: U.S. American Literary and Artistic Responses to the Occupation of Haiti (1915-1934)

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CURIOSITY SEEKERS, TIME TRAVELERS, AND AVANT-GARDE ARTISTS:  
U.S. AMERICAN LITERARY AND ARTISTIC RESPONSES  
TO THE OCCUPATION OF HAITI (1915-1934)

by

SHELLEY STEVENS

Under the Direction of Dr. Renée Schatteman

ABSTRACT

U.S. American literary and creative artists perform the work of developing a discursive response to two critical moments in Haitian history: the Revolution (1791-1804) and the U.S. Marine Occupation (1915 to 1934), inspiring imaginations and imaginary concepts. Revolutionary images of Toussaint Louverture proliferated beyond the boundaries of Haiti illuminating the complicity of colonial powers in maintaining notions of a particularized racial discourse. Frank J. Webb, a free black Philadelphian, engages a scathing critique of Thomas Carlyle's sage prose "On the Negro Question" (1849) through the fictional depiction of a painted image of Louverture in Webb's novel *The Garies and their Friends* (1857). Travel writing and ethnographies of the Occupation provide platforms for new forms of artistic production involving Vodou. Following

James Weldon Johnson's critique of U.S. policy (1920), others members of the Harlem Renaissance provide a counter narrative that reengages particular U.S. readers with Haiti's problematic Revolution through the visual and literary lens of the Occupation experience. The pseudo journalism of William Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929) serves as the *poto mitan* (center point) around which other creative works produced after the Occupation appear. Katherine Dunham, Zora Neale Hurston, and Maya Deren followed in Seabrook's wake. Literature, performances, and film, as well as complementary ethnographic records for each follow from Dunham (*Dances of Haiti*, 1983), Hurston (*Tell My Horse*, 1938), and Deren (*Divine Horsemen*, 1953). The artistic production of these significant cultural producers may better represent their experience of fieldwork in Haiti following the Occupation. Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Dunham's exposure of Haitian dances across the world stage, and Deren's experimental films better capture the reciprocal effect of the ethnographic process on each in their continued presentation to contemporary audiences. Literature directly related to their production appears later in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), Arthur Flowers's *Another Good Loving Blues* (1993), Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), and Nalo Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads* (2005). These productive literatures and art forms actively engage in creating the transnational ideal of diaspora as we understand it today. All dance delicately with spirit.

INDEX WORDS: Haiti, Ethnography, Vodou, Revolution, Occupation, Toussaint Louverture, Thomas Carlyle, James Weldon Johnson, Emily Balch, William Seabrook, Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Dunham, Maya Deren, Art, Literature, Film

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for Mikayla, who knows “what matters the most”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lori McKenna, “The Most,” *Lorraine*, Nashville: Lori McKenna, 2011.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With honor, respect, and eternal friendship, I offer this dissertation to Richard A. Long, Atticus Haygood Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies Emeritus, Emory University, who left this life January 3, 2013. He and I conceived this project over the period of a decade following his supervision of my M.A. thesis. May his soul find solace amongst the company of many great and esteemed friends.

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I must thank the Haitian Studies Association for allowing me to present portions of this work as it progressed at various stages at both the University of Virginia and Lynn University. The feedback I received from the participants became invaluable in refining my approach to such a delicate subject.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION: ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES.....	1
CHAPTER II PRECURSORS TO OCCUPATION: IMAGES OF REVOLUTION IN FRANK J. WEBB'S <i>THE GARIES AND THEIR FRIENDS</i> (1857).....	24
CHAPTER III AMERICAN INVESTMENT IN THE U.S. OCCUPATION OF HAITI (1915-1934).....	82
CHAPTER IV AN OPEN INVITATION TO HAITI: WILLIAM SEABROOK'S <i>THE MAGIC ISLAND</i> (1929).....	167
CHAPTER V KATHERINE DUNHAM (1936 AND BEYOND), ZORA NEALE HURSTON (1936-37), AND MAYA DEREN IN (AND OUT OF) HAITI (1947-55).....	240
CHAPTER VI CONCLUSIONS: LOVE'S DISCOVERY, ERZULIE IN THE NARRATIVES OF ISHMAEL REED, EDWIDGE DANTICAT, AND NALO HOPKISON.....	310
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	333

## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION: DEPARTURES AND ARRIVALS

As we go walking in that rubble  
 As we go walking in that heat  
 And we're holding all the roses as we travel  
 And we're holding all the thorns as we grieve

...

What doesn't kill us will make us stronger  
 What doesn't break us will make us last a little longer  
 If it doesn't set us free in the end  
 Well it serves the ones who follow us my friend

Before, they had the riot rails  
 Before, they had the barricades  
 Before, they had the history that they love to make  
 I want you to write this down  
 I want you to carry it around  
 Blessed are the ones who know of this heavy road

—Amy Ray, “From Haiti (with love),” *Lung of Love*, Daemon Records, 2012, CD.

Once you find yourself in another civilization you are forced to face your own.

—James Baldwin, pbs.org, 29 November 2006.

On July 20, 2001, I left Atlanta for Haiti alone. With an impending attempted coup d'état on the horizon insurgent rebels captured several journalists for ransom that summer. On my way to interview artists, blissfully unaware, I experienced little of the fear buzzing in the air around me. But I did encounter new sensation aplenty. From the moment I stood in line at curbside check-in in Atlanta, everything in my worldview changed. The usual impatience one experiences from hurried travelers to international destinations was punctuated by new sounds

and behaviors. Haitians like to argue, and not in a hateful way but with a profound sense of entitlement combined with an expectation that things will go wrong; this was culturally new to me.<sup>1</sup> Armed and prepared, defenses high, various papers in hand, these people spoke with voices escalated in combinations of Creole, French, and English that moved faster than my limited training could follow. Tempers flared as the woman ahead of me stormed off with her family of children, denied seats due to a flaw in the complex paperwork required for Haitian trans-nationals. I think she argued why would she go to Haiti if she did not intend to return? Everyone does who can. Her papers would not allow readmission into the U.S. for at least one of her children. Out of the check-in line I figuratively and temporarily reentered America as I boarded the flight bound for Miami. In Miami, as I traversed the multiple concourses between the arrival and departure gates I seemed to cross an invisible linguistic border. The attendants on the flight to Miami spoke English. A mixture of Spanish and English greeted my arrival. At the departure gate everyone became the woman previously denied passage as our travel papers were scrutinized with agonizing detail in a rush of bodies and dialects, each jockeying for the best seat on the plane.

The flight to Port-au-Prince is remarkably short, just over two hours. In less than five hours I had left one world for another. As the plane approached its destination, the pilot announced he would circle around so that travelers seated on both sides of the plane could see the beauty of the island. Although the attendants announced in multiple languages, “please remain seated until the plane has landed,” Haitians stood, offering prayers and tears in a cacophony of languages, steadying themselves by grasping hands with the stranger closest to

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<sup>1</sup> As the crowd gathered round, tensions heightened, and then dispersed, I was reminded of Edwidge Danticat’s description, “For some of us, arguing is a sport. In the marketplace in Haiti, whenever people were arguing, others would gather around them to watch and laugh at the colorful language. People rarely hit each other. They didn’t need to. . . . If you couldn’t match them with an even stronger accusation, then you would concede the argument by keeping your mouth shut,” *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, New York: Soho, [1994] 1999, 55.

them. They burst out in a roar of thanks, congratulations, and handclapping addressed to the pilot, God, and the spirits for securing a safe landing. After expressing a mixture of sadness, gratitude, anxiety, memory, the joy of return, nostalgia, and love of home, everyone, impatient again, gathered their many things and prepared to step out into the stifling heat of the open tarmac.

**Purpose.** Two important moments in Haitian history appear most prominently and influentially in the creative work of American authors and artists: the period of Haiti's Revolution from 1791 to 1804 and the U.S. Occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934. Each period provides a distinct set of influences chronicled through fiction, prose, drama, poetry, dance, and film from the mid-nineteenth century and into the present century. At each of these two critical junctures, travelers, colonizers, scientists, occupiers, journalists, and other authors and artists captured in textual form narratives of their observations published in the media, books, travelogues, and ethnographies, in or translated into English for American audiences. Inspired by this burgeoning body of knowledge Americans traveled to Haiti to see for themselves the possibilities available in the first free black republic following the Revolution. Others, unable to travel, devoured the works of their fellow conspirators and developed fictions derived from reports of Haitian struggle, life, and belief, therein reported. In approaching these works, Laënnec Hurbon cautions "we should be aware of the force of the imagination's strong involvement in American discourse, and thus of the limits of that discourse in terms of the knowledge that Americans bring," myself included.<sup>2</sup>

These historical moments act as two specific points of departure for literary and artistic responses, establishing two sometimes intersecting trajectories of production. Some nineteenth-

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<sup>2</sup> Laënnec Hurbon, "American Fantasy and Haitian Vodou," *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, ed. Donald J. Cosentino, Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995, 181.

century responses to the Revolution are explored in detail in the following chapter. The Occupation brings about a renewed wave of interest in Haiti just as the Harlem Renaissance explodes on the scene in America. Some of these literary agents not only examine the Occupation, but also revisit the Revolution through the lens of Occupation themes. Other twentieth-century authors treat one instance or the other or both in their work. Each chapter presented here addresses a particular case study beginning with careful examination of images of the Revolutionary “culture heroes” to borrow a term from Katherine Dunham’s *Island Possessed* (1969).<sup>3</sup> In the initial stages of conceiving this project, Professor Richard A. Long (d. 3 January 2013), pointed to the question, “What did the average American, living in say the Midwest know about Haiti at any of these moments?” The answer led to an excruciatingly detailed examination of print images of Toussaint Louverture.<sup>4</sup> Louverture is the most well known of the leaders of the complex rebellion in Haiti we have come to call the Revolution.<sup>5</sup>

The other idea that Americans have about Haiti has to do with Vodou.<sup>6</sup> Any scholarly treatment of Vodou requires sensitivity and careful deliberate investigation of the historical and

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<sup>3</sup> Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969, 163.

<sup>4</sup> From here on Toussaint Louverture is referred to in the text as Louverture, according to current practice in scholarly literature, and spelled according to the convention chosen by the hero himself. This will at times be confusing because many of the referents I work with use the more popular convention of Toussaint and the spelling L’Ouverture to refer to Haiti’s most famous war hero. Laurent Dubois pointed out that, “While he signed his name ‘Louverture,’ it is typically spelled ‘L’Ouverture.’ Many writers refer to him as ‘Toussaint.’ This makes sense, given that he took on the name ‘Louverture’ only late in life. But even though his nemesis, Napoleon, gets the same treatment, it’s still a bit jarring--imagine historians of the American Revolution writing about George and Thomas,” Laurent Dubois, “A Free Man,” *The Nation*, April 16, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> See Philippe R. Girard, *The Slaves Who Defeated Napoleon: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian War of Independence, 1801-1804*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Vodou is the spelling of choice currently employed for scholarship on Haiti. Vodun refers to the African Fon religion from which some of Vodou practice originated. In America, such practice is variably called Voodoo or Hoodoo. “The word vodoun itself is Dahomean in origin. Among the Fon speaking peoples of West Africa it signified ‘spirit’ or diety . . . the cult priest is usually referred to as a houngan, a Fon (Dahomean) title signifying ‘spirit chief’. . . . He also is known by the title bocor, which seems to be derived from bocono, the diviner or priest of the Dahomean Fa cult,” Harold Courlander, *The Drum and the Hoe: Life and Lore of the Haitian People*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960; reprint, California Library Reprint Series Edition, 1973), 10. Although Vodou shares its name linguistically with the religion practiced by the Fon speaking peoples of present day Benin as well as similar words for its practitioners, ritual practices, and deities, the two religions have developed differently on either side of the Atlantic due to different social, political, and economic factors and climate. Shared

ethnographic materials available. Vodou plays a role in both the Revolution and the Occupation. Vodou is a syncretic religious and spiritual belief system derived from a combination of retained African, Native American, colonial Catholic, and, now contemporary, Protestant practices. Spectacular reports of Vodou began to appear with avid frequency during the U.S. Marine Occupation. During this period U.S. Marines and journalists wrote sensationalist and racist accounts of cultural practices they found unfamiliar, disturbing, and frightening including animal sacrifice, spirit possession, zombification, and rumors of cannibalism.<sup>7</sup> Faustin E. Wirkus's *The White King of Gonave: The Cult of Vodou in Haiti 1915-29* (1931) and John Houston Craige's *Black Baghdad* (1933) represent the most popularly read of these. In a reading of Craige's memoir, Jennifer Fay notes that he equates the demoralizing conditions of extended deployment on the ground in Haiti with a metaphorical zombification. "Marines too represent the spectral labor and hidden costs of military magic and material comfort" in disturbing narratives where, "Marines go mad like rabid dogs, become violent toward the natives, then turn suicidal."<sup>8</sup>

Gerarde Magliore-Danton reports,

These accounts both echoed and seemed to corroborate the scientific discourse of nineteenth-century anthropology, with its racializing and classificatory approaches to human societies, its positing that black populations were inherently inferior and required white tutelage. Reproducing this colonial discourse and continuing in the tradition of defamatory travel writing about Haiti was a spate of pseudo-ethnographic narratives written during the American occupation of Haiti (1915–1934). A number of these narratives, replete with "voodoo tales" for a

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origins does not mean that contemporary practices from Africa and Haiti would be mutually intelligible to one another," Shelley P. Stevens, *Zonbis, Zobop and Zanj: A History of Haitian Metal Arts*. Unp. M.A. thesis, Atlanta: Emory University, 2003, 9.

<sup>7</sup> James Weldon Johnson commented about the charge of cannibalism made by a "naval inquiry" in Haiti after he visited the country in February 1920: "The question as to which was more reprehensible, the alleged custom in Haiti of eating a human being without cooking him, or the authenticated custom in the United States of cooking a human being without eating him. The Haitian custom would have, at least, a utilitarian purpose." Johnson spent a great deal of the rest of his life working to bring about legislation to make lynching in the U.S. illegal. He provides a frightening eye-witness account of one such account from Memphis, Tennessee, too grotesque for repeating here, *Press*, Jan. 27, 1921, in *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*, originally published 1938, reprint 1962, 1990, 360-361.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Fay, "Dead Subjectivity: *White Zombie*, *Black Baghdad*," *The New Centennial Review* 8.1 (2008): 81-101, 96-97.

thrill-seeking American readership, were written by US Marines. Toward the end of the occupation, this popular genre was complemented by the first of a damaging tradition of “zombie films.”<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes included in this list is William B. Seabrook’s *The Magic Island* (1929), but for reasons that become clear I hold white enthusiast adventurer Seabrook out as a different type of example, and attempt to recuperate some useful material from his work, as he was significantly influential on later American and African American writers and artists.

American interest in Haiti renewed during and immediately following the Occupation period. Many important and influential Americans traveled to Haiti or consulted the resultant works of those who reported on their experiences during the Occupation; e.g., Melville Herskovits, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Arna Bontemps.<sup>10</sup> The most popularly known African American ethnographers to follow are dancer Katherine Dunham (1935-36 and ongoing until her death in 2006), under the supervision of Melville Herskovits at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois (a suburb of Chicago), and Zora Neale Hurston (1936-37), supervised by Franz Boas at Columbia University [Barnard College] in New York. Hurston wrote her most famous novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), during seven weeks of her first of two trips to Haiti. A relative genealogy of ethnographers and literary authors influenced by production of the Occupation period follows here. The narrative structure of *Their Eyes* is examined for influence of metaphors of Vodou (as suggested by analysts of Herskovits) as an early example of what would follow later in the century. Few contemporary writers have written about the influence of Haiti on Hurston’s literary production.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Gérarde Magliore-Danton, “Anténor Firmin and Jean Price-Mars: Revolution, Memory, Humanism,” *Small Axe* 18 (Sept. 2005): 150-170, 151.

<sup>10</sup> Each of these is addressed in terms of their work and/or their influence on others in the body of the dissertation.

<sup>11</sup> The bibliography, offered here as a substantive part of the dissertation, offers extensive documentation of sustained interest in Haiti. It includes much material regarding Zora Neale Hurston’s fiction pointing to a burgeoning interest in the effect of her ethnographic research on her artistic production. Examples include Gwendolyn Mikell, “When Horses Talk: Reflections on Zora Neale Hurston’s Haitian Anthropology,” *Phylon* 43.3



Vodou art has been extensively catalogued in the past two decades by Karen McCarthy Brown in *Tracing the Spirit: Ethnographic Essays on Haitian Art* (1995) and Donald J. Cosentino, editor of *The Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, curated at the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History (1996). *Sacred Arts* is by far the most comprehensive collection of Vodou derived arts ever circulated in a single collection. My study of hundreds of images of artworks produced by Haitian artists in these texts and others strongly influences the way I read Vodou in literature.<sup>12</sup> Brown provides an aesthetic model of Vodou arts that warrants reading in literary terms.<sup>13</sup> Brown's definition of a "Haitian aesthetic" includes nine factors primarily including "the division of the picture plane into a grid based on the form of *veve* patterns[; . . .] a focus on earth and that which pushes up from beneath the surface; [and] the filling up of the visual space with object upon object. . . . The other six elements in her definition refer not to form but to meaning: 1) indirect communication, 2) condensation of multiple referents into a single image through visual puns and conflicting visual images, 3) humor, 4) preoccupation with binding and

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(1982): 218-230; D. A. Boxwell, "'Sis Cat' as Ethnographer: Self-Presentation and Self-Inscription in Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*," *African American Review* 26.4 (1992): 605-617; Erik D. Curren, "Should Their Eyes Have Been Watching God? Hurston's Use of Religious Experience and Gothic Horror," *African American Review* 29.1 (1995): 17-25; Derek Collins, "Myth and Ritual of Ezili Freda in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Western Folklore* 55.2 (1996): 137-154; Pam Bordelon, "New Tracks on Dust Tracks: Toward a Reassessment of the Life of Zora Neale Hurston," *African American Review* 31.1 (1997): 5-21; Daphne Lamothe, "Vodou Imagery, African American Tradition and Cultural Transformation in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Callaloo* 22.1 (1999): 157-175; Annette Trefzer, "Possessing the Self: Caribbean Identities in Zora Neale Hurston's 'Tell My Horse'," *African American Review* 34.2 (Summer 2000): 299-312; Leigh Anne Duck, "'Go there tuh know there': Zora Neale Hurston and the Chronotope of the Folk," *American Literary History* 13.2 (Summer 2001): 265-294, and, "'Rebirth of a Nation': Hurston in Haiti," *Journal of American Folklore* 117.464 (Spring 2004): 127-146; Diana Miles, *Women, Violence, and Testimony in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston*, New York: Peter Lang, 2003; Amy Fass Emery, "The Zombie In/As the Text: Zora Neale Hurston's 'Tell My Horse'," *African American Review* 39.3 (Fall 2005): 327-336; I hope the bibliography serves as a useful research resource for others pursuing similar interests in developing recuperative and revised narratives of creative production.

<sup>12</sup> See Stevens, *Zonbis, Zobop, and Zanj*, and my contributions in the forthcoming, *Below the Surface: Ethnic Echoes in Modern and Contemporary Art*, ed. Peggy Blood, New York: Kendall New York, 2013. Sources for images consulted for these works and through which I have learned to 'read' Vodou include all of Selden Rodman's published texts, my inspection of works in the National Gallery of Haiti and the Nadar Gallery in Port-au-Prince, and a variety of print sources from around the world, in addition to Brown and Cosentino. See bibliography for comprehensive accounting of texts and exhibition reviews.

<sup>13</sup> Karen McCarthy Brown, *Tracing the Spirit: Ethnographic Essays on Haitian Art*, Davenport, Iowa: The Museum and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995, 22.

loosing, 5) transformation, and 6) bricolage.”<sup>14</sup> Bricolage “interests me here, because it is through both structural and ‘iconographic bricolage’ that the other elements are communicated to the viewer.”<sup>15</sup>

Brown’s aesthetic model can be applied to the literary and other performative works in question and help to answer some of the questions I try to answer textually including: How does one provide a catalog of literary works by American authors influenced by either the theme of Revolution or Occupation and/or a combination thereof that derives specifically from the historical incidents of Haiti? And why are they so relevant to the U.S. American experience? And persistent? How is spirit narrated? What structures, linguistic features, narrative tropes communicate the unspeakable (not just the horrors but the resiliencies that hold people together over time)?<sup>16</sup>

**Format.** The format of the dissertation exemplifies the multimodal, multimedia, multidisciplinary approach I take to executing the work of research, interpretation, and analysis. Vignettes derived from my travel journal appear when appropriate. I visited Haiti in 2001 to conduct preliminary investigations into the work of Haitian artists working in metal. The results of that work culminated in my M.A. thesis, *Zonbis, Zobop, and Zanj: A History of Haitian Metal Art* (2003), completed in the Graduate Institute for the Liberal Arts at Emory University under the supervision of Dr. Ivan Karp and Professor Richard Long. In its own way that project lead to this one though the two are significantly different in form, content, intent, and material. During the Occupation period postcards illustrate the complex travel relations between Occupation forces, their families, the media, and sightseers. These postcards interestingly represent some of

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<sup>14</sup> Stevens, *Zonbis, Zobop, and Zanj*, 116.

<sup>15</sup> Stevens, *Zonbis, Zobop, and Zanj*, 116.

<sup>16</sup> See Toni Morrison, “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature,” *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1994.

the first evidence of black American tourism in Haiti. Artists who traveled to Haiti during and immediately following the Occupation include William Eduoard Scott (1884-1964), an American-born and Paris-trained painter mentored by Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859-1937). Scott traveled to Haiti during the Occupation period and set up a workshop school to train Haitian artists including Pétion Savain (1906-1973), predating the Haitian Popular Arts Renaissance by more than a decade.<sup>17</sup> Scott's works inspired by Haiti can be viewed at The Clark Atlanta University Gallery, and Savain's original work is displayed at Hammond's House Gallery in the West End of Atlanta, Georgia. Following shortly after the Harlem Renaissance, Jacob Lawrence painted a series of forty-one works titled *Toussaint L'Ouverture* (1938) as visual biography.<sup>18</sup> His work serves as evidence of the ways in which artists began to review the Revolution through the lens of Occupation. Still images from Maya Deren's body of work are currently on display in New York at Fountain Gallery.<sup>19</sup> Reaching a bit beyond the proposed dates for this project Boston-born painter Lois Mailou Jones (1905-1998) married Haitian painter Louis Vergniaud Pierre-Noel in 1953 and lived in and out of Haiti for some time.<sup>20</sup> This small selection of artists makes clear the potential for the use of artworks to facilitate literary interpretation and vice-versa.

Fortunately, much art historical methodology and the practices of its historiography are borrowed directly from literary theory allowing for the type of interplay of the literary-visual continuum I engage at times here reading art works as text, and texts as works of art, employing similar strategies of deconstruction and reformulation. A little known fact to English scholars is

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<sup>17</sup> Richard A. Long, personal communication, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Carolyn Williams, "The Haitian Revolution and a North American Griot: *The Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture* by Jacob Lawrence," *Echoes of the Haitian Revolution, 1804-2004*, eds. Martin Monroe and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw, Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2008, 61-85.

<sup>19</sup> Deren's images still hold value for contemporary audiences; exhibited in *[Un]seen*, curator Elyse Goldberg, Fountain Gallery, New York, May 23-July 10, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Jontyle Theresa Robinson, curator, *Bearing Witness: Contemporary Works by African American Women Artists*, Atlanta: Spelman College, 1996, 130-131.

that visual theory and art historical methodologies developed out of already established techniques of analysis and interpretation of literature. Art historians study the same philosophers beginning with Plato and Aristotle on rhetoric to Kant on beauty to Hegel's phenomenology to Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, and Benjamin of the Frankfurt school to the French semiotics, linguistics, and psychoanalytics of Kristeva, Barthes, Derrida, and Lacan. We follow the same trajectories in feminist theories and the challenges posed by black womanists including Laura Mulvey, Griselda Pollack, Helene Cixous, Donna Haraway, Michelle Wallace, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Alice Walker. In queer theory, we read and apply Sedgwick, Bersani, Edelman, Foucault. The difference in art studies is that we rarely study theory for theory's sake. Usually, theory substantiates our analysis of specific images as we pay attention to every stroke of the brush as in linguistics attention is paid to every detail of narrative structure. Deconstruction is the favorite tool of both fields. And specific historical, social, and political context is documented in parallel ways. The benefit of training in both fields is the intense obsessive attention to detail that can be applied to any critical analysis of a work of art, literature, or performance. Those skills are exhibited here across four case studies relevant to the Occupation of Haiti as suggested by Professor Richard A. Long through a series of conversations over a period of a decade. As is readily noted, I rarely differentiate between the literary, plastic, and performative arts. To limit this study to one or the other would leave out important works. I prefer the term culture producers. On this conflict Katherine Dunham remarks later in her career,

In 1936, when I went to the West Indies, it was partly as an anthropologist and partly as a dancer. And for a while I had very rough time holding those two things together. My interest in Haiti was not only dance but it was the Vodun. But then I knew what I had to do. I wanted to see what the foot movements were. And they have movements and the various things that would make up what they brought, what their ancestors had brought from Africa to the Caribbean and this comes across quite well. And then of course as I got into it, I had to see what God

behaved in what way and what God danced in a certain way when the devotee became possessed.<sup>21</sup>

In bridging the tools of several fields we get a fuller portrait of a critical moment in time in determining a critical global relationship between the U.S. and Haiti. We also get fragmentation. Truth is not seamless or linear but composed of disparate parts.

**Chapters.** An outline of the following individual chapter content follows here. Chapter Two addresses the nineteenth-century proliferation of images of Haitian revolutionary leaders and the subsequent impact of such distribution on neighboring islands, specifically Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and pre-Civil War America in inspiring rebellion and influencing U.S. policy towards Haiti and its own conflicted relationship with abolition. I analyze thirty-eight images of Louverture comparing them in a strict formal art historical framework in order to determine which might be a true representation of the man himself. In discerning nine discreet types and six themes within the collection of works I find that none is likely a true likeness and that each is drawn or printed with particular political and polemical intentions in mind. These images inspire pride and/or fear, sometimes serving as impetus for instigation of rebellion, and all are used as propaganda in some form or another. Here I look at a particular fictional literary representation of Louverture in Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and their Friends* (1857) and its relationship to Thomas Carlyle's sage prose "Discourse on the Negro Question" (1849). This triangulation of the physical print images of Louverture, a fictional description of a painting of Louverture, and an extended discourse on the place of remitted slaves in the former colonies mirrors the generally accepted theoretical Atlantic Triangle proposed by Paul Gilroy. The details of Webb's life and the specifics of his fictional text life help illustrate the lived realities of freedom in a world in the process of liberation. Webb and Carlyle battle for who owns language, carving out the territory

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<sup>21</sup> Katherine Dunham, interview, Martina Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror of Maya Deren*, Zeitgeist Films, 2004, DVD.

of discursive space between black and white in a world deeply divided along those lines. This work also situates Haiti at the center of a global discourse that becomes more apparent in the age of Occupation.

This chapter further serves as a general introduction providing evidence of the ways in which nineteenth-century literary works concerned with Haiti foreground the literary and artistic production during and following the U.S. Marine Occupation. Sidney Mintz's concept of the U.S. American South and its concerns as part of a social and cultural schematic defined by the shared historical economics of the plantation provides some theoretical boundaries.<sup>22</sup> Many critics frame the problem of the intervention as a Southern one. In addition to struggles for liberation and inspiration for rebellion coming from Haiti, free black American authors wrote texts engaged in critiquing the politics of abolition and the potentials of emigration. A significant number of free blacks lived in Haiti for some part of their lives during the nineteenth century or seriously considered doing so. Among them were lawyer and poet George B. Vashon and adventurer Prince Saunders, in addition to James T. Holly, head of the emigration movement in 1858, and H. Ford Douglas, instigated and funded in part by James Redpath to encourage "Indians" and free blacks to emigrate to Haiti. Frederick Douglass endorsed H. Ford Douglas in 1859 though Frederick Douglass remained staunchly anti-emigration.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, at least one white plantation owner, Zephaniah Kingsley of Florida, (who incidentally was in communication with Thomas Jefferson about this very issue) bought land in Haiti for his manumitted slave wife and their children to reside on after his death. He knew that subject to Fugitive Slave laws in

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<sup>22</sup> Plantation economies serve for Mintz as the defining capitalist features of post-slave postcolonial societies and provide for structural resemblances and similarities between regions and nations that share different linguistic and colonial histories; see Sidney Mintz, "The Caribbean as Socio-Cultural Area," *Cahiers d'Histoire Mondiale* 9.4 (1996): 914-15.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Bardolph, "Social Origins of Distinguished Negroes: 1770-1865: Part 1," *The Journal of Negro History* 40.3 (1955): 211-249, 234, 236; Robert L. Harris, Jr., "H. Ford Douglas: Afro-American Antislavery Emigrationist," *The Journal of Negro History* 62.3 (1977): 217-234, 224, 228.

America, they would be re-conscripted into slavery; in Haiti they could be free, maybe even slave owners on a modest plantation.<sup>24</sup> In American literature, Frank J. Webb takes all of this on and more in *The Garies and Their Friends* (1857).<sup>25</sup> Introduced by Harriett Beecher Stowe and marketed as an abolitionist novel, *The Garies* was largely ignored as a pro-capitalist text depicting the possibilities and potential horrors for free blacks in Philadelphia prior to the Civil War and emancipation.<sup>26</sup> Webb's critique conflicts with the prevailing view of Louverture.<sup>27</sup> Other texts or artworks that specifically engage with Haiti as a topic, whether the author traveled to Haiti or simply read the travel reports of those that did spend time on Haitian soil, will be noted here as needed to illustrate my point.<sup>28</sup>

In 1903, W.E.B. DuBois, calmly stated, "The meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line."<sup>29</sup> No more clearly are those lines drawn than in the U.S. American political, historical, and social analysis of the Occupation. Chapter Three brings this work into the U.S. Occupation of Haiti (1915-1934) and the proliferation of media responses. I consider American travelers, scholars, artists, writers, and observers not specifically interested in Vodou but other concerns, some as simple as tourism, others deeply politically motivated, noting parallels with the American struggle for civil rights and equal recognition. James Weldon Johnson, W.E.B. DuBois, and

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<sup>24</sup> Mark Fleszar, "To See How Happy the Human Race Can Be: A Colonization Experiment on Haiti's Northern Coast, 1835-1845," *The Journal of the Civil War Era on the Global South*, 2012, forthcoming.

<sup>25</sup> Frank J. Webb, *The Garies and Their Friends*, 1857, introduction R. Reid-Pharr, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Eric Gardner, "'A Gentleman of Superior Cultivation and Refinement': Recovering the Biography of Frank J. Webb," *African American Review* 35.2 (Summer 2001): 297-309, 299-300.

<sup>27</sup> The mythological Louverture is quite different from the man represented by his actions. These differences and their impact on literary and comparative artistic representations of him are explored in Chapter 2.

<sup>28</sup> Other works that warrant our consideration are *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1831), William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853), Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and Charles Chesnut's *The Conjure Woman* (1899).

<sup>29</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1999, 5.

Langston Hughes all traveled to Haiti to get a sense of the reality of Haitian life.<sup>30</sup> These responses paint quite a different picture. For example, Johnson “made an investigation of the brutality of the U.S. Marines and of U.S. Imperialism on the island of Haiti.”<sup>31</sup> He was concerned with the inhumane treatment of Haitians by military officials steeped in U.S.-style southern racism intent on enforcing Jim Crow-like prohibitions on a nation of free blacks. Haiti caused Johnson to reflect on U.S. slavery: “Our Civil War freed the slaves in name only. It left them, illiterate, homeless, and penniless, merely entered into a new slavery in which there was neither legal nor moral obligation on the masters; there was not even so much as a financial interest in the ‘new slaves’.”<sup>32</sup> In a diasporic rendering Johnson sees that culture and economics in the U.S. and Haiti present the greatest hardship to all black Americans. Arna Bontemps, influenced by Hughes, cowrote a children’s book with him about the children with no shoes, *Popo and Fifina* (1933).<sup>33</sup> Additionally, Bontemps wrote a fictional account of Gabriel Prosser’s rebellion, *Black Thunder: Gabriel’s Revolt: Virginia, 1800* (1936) inspired by the Haitian Revolution as seen through the lens of Occupation.<sup>34</sup> Ralph Ellison incorporated legends of folklore derived from his work with the Federal Writer’s Project in Harlem in 1939 into his most famous work, *Invisible Man* (1952), and other short stories.<sup>35</sup> In DuBois’s only first hand observation of Frederick Douglass at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893, he commented,

to steal a book is theft, but to steal an island is missionary enterprise; to tell a neighbor an untruth is to lie, but to tell a neighboring country a whole portfolio full is to be diplomatic. The whole criticism that can be brought against

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<sup>30</sup> See Edwidge Danticat, *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010; Long, personal communication, 2011; and Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1988.

<sup>31</sup> Lynn Adelman, “A Study of James Weldon Johnson,” *The Journal of Negro History* 52.2 (1967): 128-145, 143-4.

<sup>32</sup> Johnson, *Along this Way*, 346.

<sup>33</sup> Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*, illustrations by E. Simms Campbell, introduced and afterword Arnold Rampersad, New York: Oxford University Press, [1932] 1993.

<sup>34</sup> Arna Bontemps, *Black Thunder: Gabriel’s Revolt: Virginia, 1800*, Boston: Beacon, [1936] 1992.

<sup>35</sup> Christopher A. Shinn, “Masquerade, Magic, and Carnival in Ralph Ellison’s ‘Invisible Man’,” *African American Review* 36.2 (2002): 243-261; see Danticat, *Create Dangerously*.



Douglass's Haytian ministry is that he utterly refused to be "diplomatic," and to this, we his people, say "Amen!"<sup>36</sup>

Additionally considered here are those that justify the Occupation, Karl Kelsey and George Mitchell Brown. To offer balance to highly inflammatory claims on both sides, I introduce the Emily Balch mission. Their investigations were presented before the U.S. government. These critics capture the many ways Haiti has inspired and failed to inspire in the American imagination. Haiti explodes U.S. American notions of race into the global kaleidoscope as black and white meet metissage on the third world stage.

In Chapter Four, travel literatures about Haiti are accounted for with emphasis on an initial focus on ethnographies as resources authors mined for source material. Three types of ethnography were conducted during, or shortly after, the Occupation; internal works by Haitians (e.g., Jean Price-Mars's *Ainsi Parla l'Oncle: Essais d'Ethnographie* [*So Spoke the Uncle: Ethnographic Essays*] [1928]) promoted a national identity for Haiti in the face of sensationalist works of "popular ethnography" produced by U.S. Marines and other Americans including journalist enthusiast William B. Seabrook. Works by externally and academically trained foreign anthropologists like Melville Herskovits, whose collections of folklore appeared in *Life in a Haitian Valley* (1932), comprise the third category of ethnographic work.<sup>37</sup> This chapter engages a sustained attack against the spectacle of Vodou created by Seabrook, Wirkus, and Craig. It also acknowledges Seabrook's own attempts to do the same thing, noting his successes and failings. Each of the charges against the Haitians made by sensationalists is taken at face value and compared with other knowledges available at the time to contradict the ridiculous notions promulgated by some. The chapter also sets the stage for the arrival of Dunham and Hurston.

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<sup>36</sup> Herbert Aptheker, "DuBois on Douglas: 1895," *The Journal of Negro History* 49.4 (1964): 264-268, 267-8.

<sup>37</sup> Magliore-Danton, "Anténor Firmin and Jean Price-Mars," 151.

Chapter Five examines the work of artists Dunham, Hurston, and Deren, who through various mediums visualize that kaleidoscope in fiction, dance, and film. They lay the groundwork for a hundred years of artistic and literary production based on visualization of Haitian molecular geometries of space played out in spirit form. Misrepresented as a syncretic religion, I argue Vodou is a philosophy. As a philosophy, it warrants our reconsideration in narratives of healing practice, personal and global. What is the function of spirit? Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Derrida, Kristeva, and Žižek have all approached this. All dance around this global argument of who owns memory, who creates it, and who defines it? Does this focus distract from or add to other meaningful debates? Deren argues that all art is artifice. Memory also is always artificial, partial, in all senses of the word. This is not just semantics, but semiotics, a semiotics of the an(other), a mirror image of our intellectual entanglements of the past centuries, worked out in performance, a language of the body and mind, not to be dismissed as new age touchy feely healing.<sup>38</sup>

All of the controversy around Vodou, instigated by Occupation reports, especially including Seabrook, drew Katherine Dunham from 1935 to 1936 and beyond (see *Island Possessed*, 1969) and Zora Neale Hurston from 1936 to 1937, preceded by *Mules and Men* (1935) and resulting in *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938). In 1936 Allen Lomax, in conversation with Hurston, collected over fifteen hundred aural samples of varying types from work and folk songs to Vodou chants, some of which have been recently re-released.<sup>39</sup> New York artist Maya Deren worked as Dunham's assistant in America as she exhibited her Vodou influenced choreography across America. Derived from an interest

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<sup>38</sup> See Murphy Pizza, "Sacred Body in a Clear Mirror: A Comparison of Women's Theologies in Vodou and Neopaganism," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 13.1 (Spring 2007).

<sup>39</sup> Gage Averill, "Ballad Hunting in the Black Republic: Allan Lomax in Haiti 1936-1937," *Caribbean Studies* 36.2 (2008): 3-22, 3; Alan Lomax, "Musical Selections from Alan Lomax in Haiti," Harte, 2010, CD.

developed working with Dunham as her personal assistant, Deren followed on her own to Haiti (see both text [1953] and film versions of *Divine Horsemen* [filmed 1947-1951] and her contemporaneous experimental films).<sup>40</sup> Seabrook, Dunham, Hurston, and Deren all relied on data recovered from observing a white man (“Doc Reser”) turned servitor of Vodou.<sup>41</sup> Art, music, and literature were subjected to and influenced by the ethnographic gaze, photographic lens, musical recordings, and popular literary production; authors/artists drew on these bodies of representation relying on narrative structures revealed in folklore, mysticism, herbalism and healing arts, creating a mutually intelligible theoretical body of spiritual knowledge and understanding that appears in literatures post-dating the Occupation. The intricate interrelationships of these ethnographers requires a bit of untangling as we follow the lines of connection to other influential Americans whose interest was also piqued by stories coming out of Haiti during the Occupation.

Immediate literary and artistic responses to Occupation period ethnographies are considered here. Dunham, Hurston, and Deren represent the most renowned and well written about of these. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is considered in light of Hurston’s ethnographic work and other biographical material about the author that has since surfaced. Within the texts under consideration certain motifs or structuring metaphors reappear across authors and time from Vodou practice or ethnographic presentations thereof. Stories of the *loas*, or spirits, appear differently in every fictional text but also with certain consistent identifying features. The rhythm of some texts and performances assume certain patterns depending on the *loas* appearing. Within these the *loas* have consistent identifying features. The likes and dislikes of the *loas* influence

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<sup>40</sup> Dunham, interview, *In the Mirror*.

<sup>41</sup> “I heard many things about Dr. Reser before I met him. A great deal is said about the white man who is a houngan (Voodoo priest). All of the foreigners living in Port-au-Prince know him and like him,” Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*, New York: Harper & Row, [1938] 1990, 245; Dunham calls him “Doc Reser,” in *Island Possessed*, 58.

details of description employed by the author or performer when characterizing a scene or situation in terms of that spirit. *Their Eyes* has been described as an *Erzulie* tale, as she is the combination *loas* equated with love, and on its surface *Their Eyes* is a love story.<sup>42</sup> *Their Eyes* may also be read as a *Marassa* story when analyzed in Vodou terms. *Marassa* refers to twins and the third child that follows, each gifted in spiritual ways. I follow Derek Collin's and Marilyn Houlberg's lead and offer *Their Eyes* as both an *Erzulie* and *Marassa* tale, such as I also do with Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1984).<sup>43</sup> *Their Eyes* is not Hurston's only important work of the time. I also look closely at other selected essays she wrote in Haiti where she begins a fascinating dialogue on race theory and her ethnographic work in *Tell My Horse*. I borrow from others who have already extensively documented the literary production of Katherine Dunham and her dance legacy through performances staged in Haiti and internationally as well as the textual and experimental film work of Maya Deren.<sup>44</sup> I supply my own interpretations to the meaning of their works and the significance of their careers. All of these works are echoed in later literary works by authors I address in the conclusion.

In the concluding chapter I offer some further explorations of what Love, embodied by the *loas* Erzulie, has to offer us in modern fiction grounded in theory. Other texts immediately influenced or concerned with the work of Dunham, Hurston, and Deren that could also be considered in this context include Ntozake Shange's *Sassafras, Cypress, and Indigo* (1982),

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<sup>42</sup> See Derek Collins, "The Myth and Ritual of Ezili Freda in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Western Folklore* 55.2 (1996): 137-154.

<sup>43</sup> Marilyn Houlberg, "Magique Marasa: The Ritual Cosmos of Twins and Other Sacred Children," *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, 269.

<sup>44</sup> See Vève A. Clark and Sara E. Johnson, eds., *Kaiso! Writings by and about Katherine Dunham*, Studies in Dance History, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005; and Vève A. Clark, Millicent Hodson, and Catrina Neiman, eds. and comps., *The Legend of Maya Deren: A Documentary Biography and Collected Works*, Vol. 1: Part 1, New York: Anthology Film Archives/Film Culture, 1984, 1988.

Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988).<sup>45</sup> Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) and Arthur Flowers's *Another Good Loving Blues* (1993) offer examples of works by men in which themes born of the Occupation period ethnographies persist.<sup>46</sup> Hurston makes an appearance in Flowers' expert retelling of *Their Eyes* and also in the character of Earline in Reed's blending of Western and African Caribbean magical themes to capture the inexplicable feeling of *jes grew*. Both authors signal their deeper interest in narrative metaphors of Vodou by intentionally directing the reader to consider the broader body of work by Hurston and others. By wrestling with Western magical belief systems in *Mumbo Jumbo* Reed gives credence as well to historical predecessor William Seabrook. Jamaican-born speculative fiction author Nalo Hopkinson, specifically in *The Salt Roads* (2003), and the most important and prolific Haitian-born author of our time, Edwidge Danticat, provide convincing evidence of the persistence of these themes into the twenty-first century. Hopkinson's fictional rendering of the revolutionary period in Haiti is the most effective to date. Danticat's body of work includes five novels and several collections of work by others of Haitian extraction or Haitian by association. Not only is she a culture producer, she is a culture promoter, the most well-known, widely published spokeswoman for the current generation of Haitians. Spirit gently walks through her texts, bearing witness to the subtle ways in which resistance to the Occupation and the persistence of Vodou carry through to define the body of work under investigation here. Works by these and others are compared for the form and shape of their content and presentation and interweaving influences on their counterparts.

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<sup>45</sup> Ntozake Shange, *Sassafras, Cypress & Indigo*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982; Paule Marshall, *Praisesong for the Widow*, New York: Plume, 1983; Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day*, New York: Tricknor and Fields, 1988.

<sup>46</sup> Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, New York: Scribner, 1972; Arthur Flowers, *Another Good Loving Blues*, New York: Viking, 1993.

**Theoretical Interventions.** Interwoven within each chapter one finds the theoretical groundings that drive my methodology. Michael Dash proposes in *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (1998) that we start with Haiti at the center of any literary analysis of U.S. American and related Caribbean literary production due to the central position Haiti played in the development of American capitalism in its infancy, as the conditioning grounds for slaves imported to American plantations, and because that plantation system is the foundation on which our contemporary economy is born.<sup>47</sup> Dash drew his concept of shared plantation economies as the connecting thread between the Caribbean, the American South, western Central America, and northern South America from Sidney Mintz's anthropological research of women's small markets in rural Haiti in the 1950s.<sup>48</sup> Mintz suggests that shared economic constraints based on the historical experience of the plantation are defining structural factors in determining culture.<sup>49</sup> American capitalism as we know it directly resulted from the productive physical labor of African slaves and indentured workers dating back to the sixteenth century. Those economic structures affect today's economies. Arguing from a cultural materialist point of view artistic and literary production is in many ways an artifact of that historical experience and its shadows are everywhere present and persistent. Indeed, prominent black American serial writer Pauline Hopkins predated Dash's call for a centering of Haiti in such literary discourse in 1902, when she wrote, "In the history of this island [the Republic of Hayti]—the sole possession of the Negro race in America—we find what we seek: the point of interest for all Negroes, whether Frenchmen, Spaniards, Americans, or African—the point of

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<sup>47</sup> Also see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Black in Latin America*, pbs.org, 2010, DVD.

<sup>48</sup> See Charles V. Carnegie and Sidney Wilfred Mintz, "Anthropology of Ourselves: An Interview with Sidney Mintz," *Small Axe* 19.10.2 (March 2006): 106-177, 107, for a lovely photograph of Mintz at Le Marche de Fer in Port-au-Prince in 1950s. I like it because I do not have a photograph of myself there and not much changed in the interceding fifty years except maybe the proliferation of Chinese produced plastic wares. The place is crowded with art. You can see this in the Mintz photo.

<sup>49</sup> Sidney W. Mintz, "The Caribbean as Socio-Cultural Area," *Cahiers d'Histoire Mondiale* 9.4 (1996): 914-15.

interest for all students of the black race,” in her biography of “Toussaint L’Ouverture” (1902).<sup>50</sup> My work, as generously evidenced here, allows for gender balanced with little preference shown for any specific gender but rather for hybridity, plurality, and/or neutrality as exhibited in the working/speaking voice/subject of many authors and artists.

I rely on the contemporary writings of Édouard Glissant, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, and Françoise Vergès as my theoretical guideposts. In *Poetics de Relation* (1997) and *Caribbean Discourse* (1989) Glissant theorizes and develops notions of trauma theory applied to the three abysses of estrangement, dislocation, and relocation created during the Middle Passage. These ruptures are sustained in artistic production today. Glissant calls for a new poetics (and literary analysis) that interrupts the chronologic linear structure of narrative to better recapture the memory of a shared but disrupted historical past.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, Dash is a student, sometimes translator, and critic of Glissant, a Martiniquan-born French-trained postcolonial psychoanalytic theorist. In *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (1996), Benítez-Rojo further expands on Glissant’s recuperations on trauma by applying chaos theory to the continual repetitions of cultural practice on various islands due to the suppurating wound left by the raping bull of colonialism.<sup>52</sup> Here I look at narrative and linguistic devices and metaphorical structures such as the repetitive recycling of themes of resistance perpetuated via Vodou myth, folklore, and representations of *loas*.<sup>53</sup> Further, Vergès’s *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* (1999) proves essential to understanding the development of dependency relations between oppressor and oppressed,

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Colleen C. O’Brien, “‘Blacks in all Quarters of the Globe’: Anti-Imperialism, Insurgent Cosmopolitanism, and International Labor in Pauline Hopkins’s Literary Journalism,” *American Quarterly* 61.2 (June 2009): 245-270, 256.

<sup>51</sup> See Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989.

<sup>52</sup> Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, 2nd ed., trans. James E. Maraniss, Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, 160-161.

<sup>53</sup> *Loas* are spirits, or orisha, of the Vodou pantheon of deities, of which there are many.

psychological self and other, through a rigorous interrogation of the work of psychoanalytics in maintaining and instituting colonial relations long after the colonists have technically left.<sup>54</sup> A student of Franz Fanon, Vergès reminds us of the limitations of psychoanalysis and the mistakes made by previous applications in real historical and interpretive terms. Vergès's rigorous retelling of the events surrounding the colonial enterprise on Reunion, a small island nation off the coast of Africa, reminds one of the level of critical inquiry and proficiency of language we must aspire to as well as reminds us all too well of the limitations and traps of applying psychoanalytic theories to a previously colonized nation. Sybille Fischer cautions, "As long as we remain attentive to the delicate and politically significant relationship between evasion and revelation, suppression and reinscription, silence and memory," here and in other texts, "psychoanalytic concepts may allow us to recognize the fissures that indicate the location and outline of a disavowed past."<sup>55</sup> All three core theoretical sources are psychoanalytic in nature but my theoretical applications are not simply limited there. The roots of Glissant, Benítez-Rojo, and Vergès run deep into Fanon, Freud, Nietzsche, Derrida, Lacan, and others. Also, I find that many authors, such as Zora Neale Hurston, Edwidge Danticat, Toni Morrison, and Nalo Hopkinson theorize a developmental framework for artistic production within the work of literature itself.

In synopsis, we find a compelling and complex interweaving of the cultural production of the Occupation of Haiti through the eyes of travel writers, ethnographers, music collectors, dancers, and plastic and performative artists. The Haiti each of these artists, writers, and creators knew is gone—from the Revolution to the Occupation to the Arts Movement to the secondary

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<sup>54</sup> See Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999.

<sup>55</sup> Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2004, 136.



Arts Resurgence of the 1970s to my own preliminary doctoral research into the work of Haitian artists in 2001. Subsequent waves of destruction have reduced the once proud Pearl of the Antilles to a worse kind of plight than any of us would have wanted to imagine, even under the most difficult of circumstances due to the earthquake in 2010. Each of us carries images of ghosts, *chimerá* (both of towns and people), in our hearts and minds, imaginary Haitis, each partaking of a rich literary and artistic tradition that has captivated the interest of hundreds of scholars for more than two hundred years. May these Haitis persist in the literary and artistic imagination for centuries to come and assist in the work of recovery.

## CHAPTER II

## PRECURSORS TO OCCUPATION:

## IMAGES OF REVOLUTION IN

FRANK WEBB'S *THE GARIES AND THEIR FRIENDS* (1857)

. . . call me Toussaint St. Jean . . .  
 I got the heart of a warrior  
 I didn't think that you could do that  
 You won the battle but you didn't win the war  
 Look out the window  
 See a hundred thousand more, warriors, warriors, see I'm a warrior, a warrior . . .

—Wyclef Jean aka. Toussaint St. Jean, “Warrior’s Anthem,” *From the Hut, to the Projects to the Mansion* (DJ Drama presents Wyclef Jean aka. Toussaint St. Jean), R.E.D. Distribution, 2009, MP3.

Toussaint bears witness to the tragic dissolution, in San Domingo, of the sign of the Revolution. In these forms of witness there is no passivity; there is a violent turning from interrogation to initiation. . . . the battle has been waged on hybrid territory. . . . In the figure of the witness of a postcolonial modernity we have another wisdom: it comes from those who have seen the nightmare of racism and oppression in the banal daylight of the everyday.

—Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994, 254.

**It’s all in the name.** The chauffer, an innocuous word in Haiti, who met me at the former Francois Duvalier International Airport, was a tall young man in denim knee-length shorts and a white-printed t-shirt sporting the faded image of his favorite rap star. Except for his strong accent and broken English, he could have been any twenty-year old man I had seen that morning, as I rushed from my two-bedroom South Decatur apartment, leaving behind a seven-year old daughter. A simple life, of simple means and a living room filled with books borrowed from all over the world to prepare for my Haitian arrival. Toussaint met me with a small hand-written

torn piece of white cardboard with my name scrawled across it as I exited the dusty airport. I walked across the blazing tarmac, passed through the questioning eyes of immigration, engaged with the lowliest mechanical baggage carrier ever, held my head high and walked into the crowd as if, as if I knew, as if I was one of the many Haitians returning home. Thousands appeared to await my arrival. Toussaint explained hurriedly that Jean Bertrand-Aristide, then President of Haiti for the third time, was expected back on the next flight in from a diplomatic mission to Cuba to secure food (and possibly loans). Toussaint dutifully opened the passenger door, securely locking me inside the 1980s white rumped Toyota Corolla. He insisted I put my seatbelt on before he slid the car in gear and gingerly negotiated thousands of potholes and throngs of people cheering “Viva Lavallas” before a bandstand. Looking behind me I saw the sign above the airport door of my arrival, “Bienvenue Aristide, bienvenue ‘titide.” I felt very welcomed to Haiti but worried about the daughter I left in the care of friends. I wanted her to see this and yet I didn’t. As Toussaint safely escorted me through the back streets because of trouble on the main ‘highway’ to Petionville, as I glimpsed the first market woman I had ever seen carrying a table upside down on her head containing all of her wares for sale, I wondered what a mother thought when she named a son Toussaint. What legacy, what feeling, what hopes did she hold for that son? Surely, an able navigator of the trusty steed, a kind friend to a seemingly lost *blanc* girl, he promised protection and safe passage in a state of upheaval.

**Introduction.** Perhaps we do not need to travel to Haiti to experience authentic Haiti. Perhaps the Haiti of our imaginations suits our needs here. Perhaps we may travel in our minds and those of the various authors interpreting international black experience through their representations, reminiscences, and memories of an imagined island nation. Perhaps that is enough. The literary canon is rife with direct and indirect allusions to an imagined Haiti. From

the early works of free black authors written before the end of American slavery to recent transnational immigrants Haiti emerges as historical and cultural material rich in content. Haiti looms large in the imagination as a source of inspiration for overcoming the political and spiritual fragmentation imposed by the American slavery period.

Haiti serves as the center point, or *poto mitan*, around which these images, texts, and performances circumambulate because of her status initially as the first geographical location of the Spanish-American colonial enterprise. Christopher Columbus landed the *Santa Maria* at the island he then called Hispaniola in 1492. The first colony of the new world provides a frame from which other colonial enterprise in the Americas finds themselves. Early events in colonial Hispanolia prefigure developments on other islands and the American continents. The Spanish conquistadores established a haphazard colony on Hispaniola to allow for the extraction of gold. Hispaniola's native inhabitants, the Taino and Arawak, who shared the island prior to Columbus's arrival, served as the New World's first slaves. When supplies of native labor ran short due to exploitation, overwork, disease, and suicide, Spain introduced slaves procured in Africa to establish the colony and extract gold. Hispaniola's gold resources were quickly exhausted, and the Spanish left the island fairly deserted with only a few Spanish and Africans mixing with the scarce leftovers of the native population to secure the land for Spain. Piracy was rampant on the northern end of the island during this fairly quiet period in the island's history, allowing for the sharing and mixing of cultural practices amongst the few remaining there and the pirates rampantly occupying the Northern coastal areas. During this time geographical divisions developed with the Spanish maintaining cattle farming on the Eastern half of the island and agricultural production of sugar, coffee, rum, etc. beginning to develop on the Western half of the island.

Aware of Hispaniola's potential as an agricultural region, partially due to the explorations and exploits of French privateers and piracy, France acquired the Western half of the island through the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, and invested in intensive production of sugar, making Hispaniola the largest producer of sugar in the world during the eighteenth century, the veritable Pearl of the Antilles. Sugar production required the importation of large numbers of African slaves. Hispaniola served not only as agricultural mainstay of the colonial era but also as a way station for the slave trade. Africans of varying ancestry, from Guinea to Angola, were imported. Leaving behind social, political, linguistic, and spiritual systems, these slaves reconfigured these systems to suit new needs. Languages collapsed and incorporated diverse idioms, giving rise to Haitian Creole, an amalgamation of French, Spanish, English and various African linguistic systems. This happened for religion as well. Forms practiced in Africa were not tolerated in the New World, but submerged under a veil of Christianity. For Haiti, that religious syncretism resulted in Vodou, a system of *loas* that loosely derive from Yoruba, Fon, and Kongolesé. These practices persist to this day in Haiti and in areas where Haitians have migrated in successive waves of diaspora.

In addition to being the site of origin for Vodou, Haiti became the first free black nation in the American colonies after a lengthy resistance against France from 1791 to 1804. Images of revolution inspired slaves throughout the colonial world to insurrection, or at least fantasies and dreams thereof. African-derived religion provided a healing salve for the accumulated traumas of slavery—consolation transmitted through the oral relaying of stories of resistance and their later textual encryption.

**Revolutionary Images.** Themes of resistance, rebellion, and resilience exemplified the physical revolt of the enslaved against their French colonial masters during the prolonged battle

for independence from 1791-1804 under the leadership of Toussaint Louverture.<sup>1</sup> Images of Louverture and other contemporaneous and subsequent war heroes including Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Alexandre Pétion, and Henri Christophe, provide role models and instigation for U.S. American slave rebellions; i.e., Gabriel Prosser in 1800, Denmark Vessey in 1822, Nat Turner in 1831, and John Brown at Harper's Ferry in 1859.<sup>2</sup> "Goaded by [Vessey's] children's inheritance of their mother's slave status, and his imagination fired by events in Santo Domingo, he matured his famous plot."<sup>3</sup> Other rebellions sparked throughout the Caribbean contributed to this unfolding drama, most significantly the Jose Aponte rebellions in Cuba in 1812.<sup>4</sup> Such self-styled revolutionaries modeled on the image of Louverture and others inspired fear in American slave holders influencing U.S. internal and foreign policy in regards to abolition and other possible solutions to the problem of slavery. Such solutions included potential emancipation, voluntary or forced emigration of freed slaves to Haiti, and the annexation of Haiti.

Historical accounts appear in works by and about Frederick Douglass's diplomatic efforts in Haiti (1891-1893); fictional accounts appear in Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and their Friends* (1957), Martin Delaney's *Blake, or The Huts of the Americas* (1859), William Wells Brown's *The Black Man* (1863), and Pauline Hopkins's *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and the Southwest* (1902).<sup>5</sup> Such authors drew their concepts of the rebel leaders from print images. The intent of this chapter is to determine which images of the rebel leaders these and other authors

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<sup>1</sup> On the debate about spelling, see fn 4 in Chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> See DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks*; Mathew Clavin, "A Second Haitian Revolution: John Brown, Toussaint Louverture and the Making of the American Civil War," *Civil War History* 54.2 (June 2008): 117-145.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Bardolph, "Social Origins of Distinguished Negroes: 1770-1865: Part 1," *The Journal of Negro History* 40.3 (1955): 211-249, 227.

<sup>4</sup> See Matt D. Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle Against Slavery*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Martin R. Delaney, *Blake, or the Huts of America*, Serialized 1859-1862, ed. Floyd J. Miller, Boston: Beacon, 1970; see Marnie Hughes-Warrington, "Coloring Universal History: Robert Benjamin Lewis's Light and Truth (1843) and William Wells Brown's The Black Man (1863)," *Journal of World History* 20.1 (March 2009): 99-130; Pauline Hopkins, *Of One Blood; or the Hidden Self*. Serialized 1902-1903, *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, 439-621, The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth Century Black Women Writers, New York: Oxford UP, 1988.

might have seen on display or in publication in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Detailed attention is paid to the available images discovered so as to determine if any truly represent the personage in question or are fictionalized visual depictions based on an idea the artist had of the leader. Are the images drawn from fictional and historical accounts, or do the fictional and historical accounts draw from actual images, or some combination thereof? Simply put, are any of the available images true likenesses of persons they claim to represent, and which images is it likely that black American authors had access to prior to the U.S. Occupation of Haiti? In order to answer these questions I employ the rigorous tools of art historical analysis, which here includes contextual information with a formal analysis of the fine details of each print image in question. I focus on local images of rebel leaders disseminated across the African American Diaspora during periods of rebellion and concentrate my efforts on one particular text in the following chapter, Webb's *The Garies* (1857). The fictional portrait that appears in the foyer of Mr. Walters's home in Webb's text planted the seed for this investigation. Just what painting of Louverture had Webb seen prior to 1857 and what were his intentions in placing it in a central location within the novel? Webb's novel is addressed in the following chapter. First, we must address the image of Louverture.

Brazil, Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Colombia and the early American republic, among others, greatly feared a rebellion and revolution such as occurred in Haiti from 1791 to 1804. This fear of rebellion was conceptualized through visual images of total destruction of plantation systems through burning of land and crops to murder of owners, overseers, and their families. These fears fueled the Aponte rebellions in Cuba and Simon Bolivar was influenced by Haitian-style rebellion after a short stay there.<sup>6</sup> Fear helped keep colonial masters' powers in

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<sup>6</sup> The effect of of images of Louverture on Aponte in Cuba are dealt with here in this chapter; "Simon Bolivar's campaign to liberate Venzeuala from Spanish rule, for instance set out from Haiti in 1816, with substantial

check and allowed for slaves and free people of color to negotiate certain freedoms and benefits. Generally speaking, fear of uprising allowed Africans and descendants of Africans, both free and enslaved, to realize agency in inspiring and unexpected ways.<sup>7</sup> A mythology of rebellion developed around the imagined idea of Louverture and the other leaders of the Haitian Revolution. Images in the forms of engravings, lithographs, and other prints were made and distributed across the region via trade. Images were published in historical and literary texts, handbills, tracts, newspapers, and magazines.<sup>8</sup> Images of Louverture took many forms from degrading caricatures to dignified portrayals in full military regalia. Images of other rebel leaders in Haiti and in other countries and regions follow this model. The mythological Louverture described by Eduardo Galeano follows:

1794: Mountains of Haiti

Toussaint

He came on the scene two years ago. In Paris they call him the *Black Spartacus*. Toussaint L'Ouverture has the body of a tadpole and lips that occupy almost all of his face. He was a coachman on a plantation. An old black man taught him to read and write, to cure sick horses, and to talk to men; but he learned on his own how to look not only with his eyes, and he knows how to see flight in every bird that sleeps.<sup>9</sup>

Galeano's description matches the caricature one might expect in a century saddled with the birth of the performance of blackface but the historical record of images shows a different picture.

As the Haitian Revolution unfolded from 1791 to 1804, portraits of the significant political leaders of the rebellions became popular including portraits of men in official semi-standardized military regalia. At the turn of the nineteenth century images of Henri Christophe, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Georges Biassou, and Louverture circulated in Europe and throughout

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assistance from southern Haiti's president Alexandre Pétion," Veerle Poupeye, *Caribbean Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1998, 34; *Black in Latin America*.

<sup>7</sup> Sibylle Fischer notes, "within a Creole ideology built on the assumption of unacceptability, unthinkability, or impossibility of slave agency," Dominicans "were acutely aware" that "Haiti represented an alternative, and it needed to be avoided at all costs," *Modernity Disavowed*, 146.

<sup>8</sup> Sources for examples of such images follow as I address individual portraits.

<sup>9</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: Faces and Masks*, New York: Pantheon, 1987, 76.



the Americas, especially those regions occupied with the business of slavery and concerned with abolition or emancipation.<sup>10</sup> The most important revolutionary period text to circulate widely within the plantation Americas, as defined in the previous chapter, with print images of all these men was L. Dubroca's *Vide de J. J. Dessalines, gefe de los negros de Santo Domingo; con notas muy circunstanciadas sobre el origen, character y atrocidades de los principales gefes de aquellos rebeides desde el principio de la insurreccion en 1791* (1806). Images of the Haitian rebels were particularly interesting to slaves and free peoples of color or free blacks across the African diaspora and also to white slave holders and sympathetic abolitionists.<sup>11</sup> Because of the popularity of the image of Louverture, as printed image, as literary figure, and as folk hero glorified in oral tradition, I focus attention on his image.<sup>12</sup> Louverture also appears at the center of this discussion because of the appearance of his image on the interior walls of homes in two specific locations in Philadelphia and Havana, although at least one of these representations is certainly a fictional creation. Because of the historical importance of the appearance of this print image of Louverture in the home of José Antonio Aponte y Ulabarra in Havana in 1810, the Aponte rebellion serves as the point of departure for examining the impacts of such images.<sup>13</sup> That an image of Louverture was in the possession of Aponte is based on the testimony of

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<sup>10</sup> See Frank Moya Pons, *History of the Caribbean*, Princeton: Markus Weiner, 2007, 147-161.

<sup>11</sup> *Gens de couleur* is the proper term for people of mixed French and African ancestry born in Haiti before the revolution occurred. Franklin Knight, "The Haitian Revolution," *American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 108. In other areas scholars choose free peoples of color to delineate non-slaves of African origin living amongst slaves. Because Frank J. Webb is considered by the few scholars of his work to be a free black author writing prior to the end of slavery in the U.S. and his text is one of my primary sources here, I choose to refer to him and others of similar status regardless of geography using that term-free black; Gardner, "A Gentleman of Superior Cultivation," 297-308. Because of his similar condition here Louverture is considered free black rather than *gens de couleur*, and José Antonio Aponte y Ulabarra in Cuba is considered free black as well rather than *le burguesía de color*, "a small but vital sector of Cuba's free black sector" in 1811; Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2002, 88. He is Aponte here in keeping with contemporary scholarship.

<sup>12</sup> As previously noted, Toussaint Louverture is referred to throughout this text as Louverture according to current practice in scholarly literature, spelled according to the convention chosen by the hero himself; see Dubois, "A Free Man," *Nation*, April 16, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Palmié, *Wizards*, 88.

himself in the days preceding his execution and the testimony of others preceding his arrest.<sup>14</sup>

Louverture also appears in the fictional foyer of the Walters residence in Philadelphia in Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and their Friends*, published in 1857, in London.<sup>15</sup> That images representing Louverture spread across a vast geographical and temporal expanse is not incidental and speaks to the continuing power of Louverture to inspire reaction.

The image of Louverture on Aponte's wall and in his sketchbook initially appeared with those of Christophe, Dessalines, and Biassou as a published group in Mexico in 1806 as part of *Vide de J.J. Dessalines*.<sup>16</sup> Prior to that few scattered engravings of Louverture are documented for ca. 1787, possibly 1795, ca. 1800, and 1805.<sup>17</sup> A portrait of Louverture dated ca. 1787 appears in a slightly altered form as plate number two in *Vide de J.J. Dessalines*. It is not unusual for images of Louverture to appear in slightly altered form in republications and reprints across the nineteenth century. For the purposes of this study I reviewed the ten plates in *Vide de J.J. Dessalines*, and compared them to twenty-two images of Louverture that span in time from ca. 1787 through 1912.<sup>18</sup>

Formal visual analysis of the Louverture images reveals nine styles that fit within six, sometimes, overlapping themes. Images were repetitively copied with slight to significant alterations as they were republished through time. All are engravings, prints, or lithographs. Only

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<sup>14</sup> "What Chaçon did talk about was another set of images [instead of the images in Aponte's sketchbook] that he had seen in Aponte's home, although they were not of Aponte's making. What made these images even more interesting for [Spanish investigator] Nerey and the other officials involved in the case was that, although Chaçon had earlier volunteered information on them, a raid of Aponte's house failed to produce them. Aponte himself would later admit to having possessed them, but, in his very last statement on March 30 confessed that he burned them some time ago when he had heard that these engravings (for this is what they were) were on the index for prohibited print materials," Palmié, *Wizards*, 99, 109.

<sup>15</sup> Webb, *The Garies*, 122-123.

<sup>16</sup> L. Dubroca, *Vide de J. J. Dessalines, jefe de los negros de Santo Domingo; con notas muy circunstanciadas sobre el origen, character y atrocidades de los principales jefes de aquellos rebeides desde el principio de la insurreccion en 1791; traducida del frances por D.M.G.C. año de 1805. Reimprimese por Don Juan Lopez Cancelada*, Mexico: M. de Zúñiga y Ontiveros, 1806, pl. 1, 2, 4, 6-10.

<sup>17</sup> Documentary details for each follow as presented.

<sup>18</sup> All images from *Vide de J.J. Dessalines* and others of Louverture considered here are available for view by the public in the New York Public Library's (NYPL) Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture's digital gallery.

one is in color. Some of the works carry fixed dates. Others are unspecified but can reasonably be assumed to fall within the dates of this study based on material analysis, style of the subject, production technique, and date of collection.<sup>19</sup> The ten images in *Vide de J.J. Dessalines* fit stylistically within the chronological schema of development apparent in the Louverture images.

**Role of Images in Spreading Fear of Rebellion and Narratives of Hope.** Images of Louverture and others were likely traded within slave communities, if not in the form of printed images then in literary description along the same lines of distribution that slave narratives and other political, religious, and Masonic tracts were circulated. Some slaves in the Americas including Louverture and free born blacks like Aponte could and did read and write and those that could not gathered around those that could to hear what the most recent tracts had to say. Some slave owners feared that circulation of visual and narrative descriptions of Louverture in other American slave holding colonies would incite slaves to revolt, and similarly that such circulation of records of other black war heroes would have similar effect.

Louverture stands out from the other Haitian war heroes over time because he unexpectedly comes to symbolize something different to some white audiences than one would expect initially. Louverture is adopted as an image of a redeemed slave for U.S. abolitionists who borrow his image to promote their causes. Over the course of the century the image of Louverture is transformed from one that incited fear to one that inspired empathy, symbolizing the hope of U.S. abolitionists to bring an end to slavery prior to the conclusion of the U.S. Civil War. Louverture may have worked to free Haitian slaves from the rule of French masters, but he was also perceived as a reasonable revolutionary for immediately requiring former slaves to return to laboring on Haitian plantation lands through massive agricultural rural labor reforms.

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<sup>19</sup> A reasonable provenance for these works has been established by archivists at the Schomburg Center as indicated by specific image details following here.

Louverture believed in the efficacy of the plantation economic system and had high hopes for continuing its solvency with free labor.<sup>20</sup> If Louverture could accomplish this in Haiti, there was hope for a compromise between Southern white planters in the U.S. and the industrializing Northern states, whereby slaves freed in the U.S. could be enticed to work as free labor on U.S. plantations. Some white slave owners and abolitionists alike came to see in Louverture a man of reason who recognized that Africans in the Americas must continue to engage in hard physical labor in order to thrive as free people. Thus, Louverture came to represent hope for American economists that, once free, slaves would recognize their place as laborers and continue to work.<sup>21</sup> Images of Louverture served a triple purpose; they functioned as a symbol of the threat of rebellion and revolution and also as a symbol of hope for rationality in a potentially economically destabilized situation. Louverture also came to function as a symbol of the potential for development and improvement of descendants of the African race, as evidenced in published texts.<sup>22</sup>

***Formal Analysis of Images.*** Twenty-two images of Toussaint Louverture from the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, photograph, print, manuscript, and archive divisions of the New York Public Library were selected for this study. They represent a broad range of types from caricature to portrait. This sample closely represents the types of images

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<sup>20</sup> Dubois, "A Free Man," 2.

<sup>21</sup> Alfred Hunt, *Slumbering Volcano: The Influence of Haiti on the Antebellum South*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988, 84-101.

<sup>22</sup> See Daniel Dana Buck, *The Progression of the Black Race in the United States and Canada: Treating of the Great Advancement of the Colored Race*, Chicago: Atwell, 1907; Julius Rubens Ames, *The Legion of Liberty! and Force of Truth, Containing the Thoughts, Words, and Deeds of Some Prominent Apostles, Champions and Martyrs*, New York: American A. S. Society, 1847; Norman Barton Wood, *The White Side of a Black Subject; a Vindication of the Afro-American race: From the landing of slaves at St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565 to the Present Time*, Chicago: Donohue, Henneberry, 1894; Harry Hamilton Johnston, Sr., *The Negro in the New World*, London: Methuen, 1910; William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark; Eminent, Progressive, and Rising*, Chicago: Johnson Publishing, [1887] 1970; James Jefferson Pipkin, *The Story of a Rising Race: the Negro in Revelation, in History, and in Citizenship: What the Race has Done and is Doing in Arms, Arts, Letters . . . and with those Mighty Weapons . . . the Shovel and the Hoe*, Saint Louis, Missouri: N. D. Thompson, 1902; and Charles Victor Roman, *American Civilization and the Negro: the Afro-American in Relation to National Progress*, Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1916.

circulating between Europe and the Americas and amongst the Americas during and after the Haitian Revolution. Within the twenty-two images of Louverture analyzed here, nine distinct styles emerge. The broad range of image types that appears here is remarkable. This survey leads to no clear idea of what Louverture looked like, but shows how he has been imagined at different points in history. A few of these styles are mirrored in *Vide de J.J. Dessalines*, which contains ten additional images of the Haitian Revolution including portraits of significant leaders and landscapes that are used here for contextual and comparative purposes.<sup>23</sup>

The selection under scrutiny here contains images that date from ca. 1787 to 1912. Some pieces are loose undated prints with no known provenance. One image that appears within the dates outlined for this study in the NYPL collection is a painting titled, *Général Toussaint Louverture (1743-1803)*, from the personal collection of Kurt Fisher.<sup>24</sup> Because of the style of the painting and the fact that it is a painting, I argue this object was collected during Fisher's tenure as director of the Bureau of Ethnology in Haiti from 1941 to 1949, in the heart of the Popular Arts Movement. Although the work is unsigned, it clearly dates to the twentieth and not to the nineteenth century. Some of the other works examined here derive from the same collection and are included in case more information becomes available to establish their provenance securely to the nineteenth century. It is not known if any of the thirty-two images in this survey were made by black artisans, though the painting in Fisher's collection probably was. The following warrants our consideration as we consider the visual potential of the thirty-two images compared in this study:

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<sup>23</sup> Of the twenty-two images of Louverture, ten are available for closer examination in published texts held in Special Collections at Emory University. Three are available on microfiche at Emory. Five other books with published illustrations about Haiti and not referenced in the NYPL digital gallery are also available in Special Collections at Emory for further analysis.

<sup>24</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1206626.

As Franz Fanon, the theorist of black existentialism, observed, ‘the black soul is a white man’s artifact.’ Though commenting on the late modern experience, Fanon understood that discerning a pure ‘experience’ represented a quixotic quest akin to the act of authentic recovery—arguably social history’s meaning.<sup>25</sup>

I present this exception to the accuracy of presentation of at least one work included in the dates specified by the study within the Schomburg collection to highlight the point that frequently ahistorical assumptions are made about artworks at the insistence of the collector.

**Early portraits.** The first style appears with the earliest portrait of Louverture in the historical record. The original is an engraving by the artist François Bonneville, who flourished ca. 1787, thus the image is dated as “depicted” at about the same time. It is an individual print titled *Toussaint Louverture. Général en Chef à St. Domingue*.<sup>26</sup> There are four images in the early portraits. One, dated 1922 or 1927, is a direct reprint of Bonneville’s original published in *The Negro in our History* by Carter Godwin Woodson. The original ovular frame of the portrait and content thereof has been retained but the title inscription has been altered to simply read, *Toussaint Louverture*.<sup>27</sup> Louverture is depicted as a slightly pudgy man with fairly light features and appears more French than African in facial structure. His attire is full military regalia with a feathered boat-shaped hat.<sup>28</sup> His countenance does not appear threatening but as a bit timid, as if

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<sup>25</sup> Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003, 5.

<sup>26</sup> The original title includes the awkwardly placed period. To preserve the integrity of the historical record I have left it as presented by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1244274.

<sup>27</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1219235; Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Negro in our History*, Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1927, 168.

<sup>28</sup> These images could be compared to the anonymous *Las Castas* image created during the late eighteenth century, Richard J. Powell, *Black Art: A Cultural History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Thames and Hudson, 2002, 9. This image depicts the sixteen “official” categories of metissage by which colonials categorized peoples of mixed African, European, and Indios labeled populations for census records in colonial Mexico. Categories are determined more by dress than skin tone and indicate that class was highly determined by fashion and clothing. This indicates that portraits of militia reveal more than we might initially assume. They indicate not only an increase in social and economic stature through service but through clothing.

he himself is unsure of his place in history. Whether the original of this image was taken from actual sittings between artist and subject is unknown. Another image in this group, dated to 1902, is obviously a copy of the original with slight variations in costume and facial structure. It is titled *Toussaint L'Ouverture* and appears in *The Negro in Revelation, in History, and Citizenship* by James Jefferson Pipkin.<sup>29</sup> The image shows foxing, a type of mold that is rarely reversible and commonly attacks old books and printed material. The circular frame is not present. In this image Louverture is presented with more lush, or fuller, facial features, a bit more elaborate hat, without his sash of military stars, and with his gaze more squarely directed at the viewer. The changes that occurred in the copying process are slight but reveal a softer face and more determined gaze. In the fourth image in this group the circular frame reappears with a new title, *Toussaint L'ouverture 'Soldier—Statesman—Martyr'—Wendell Phillips*, published in *The Progression of the Race in the United States and Canada: Treating of the Great Advancement of the Colored Race*, ca. 1907, by Daniel Dana Buck.<sup>30</sup> In this second copy of the ca. 1787 original, Louverture's features are even more generally softened and his face is further fleshed out, the skin is sagging around his face as if this representation is of an older man than appeared in the original from which it was copied. His feathered hat is further detailed and dramatized, and his military sash has been restored, sans stars. In both the original and the copies the hat takes up as much space in the portrait as does the face. The elaborateness of this hat is a visual signifier of the international military status Louverture achieved, emphasized here.

**An African Louverture.** The second style of representation that appears in this survey is comprised of an individual print titled, *Toussaint Louverture, about 1795*. It was published in

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<sup>29</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1168322; Pipkin, *The Story of a Rising Race*, 40.

<sup>30</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1231813; Buck, *Progression of the Race*, facing 186.

*The Negro in the New World* by Sir Harry H. Johnston along with 390 other “illustrations by the author and others.”<sup>31</sup> Another print of Louverture appears in this book, but is stylistically quite different and will be discussed later.<sup>32</sup> The book was not published until 1910 and the provenance of the original of this image is unknown, if this is not the original. Thus, it is unclear whether the print was rendered in 1795 or later. The image is strikingly different from the previous original image dated to ca. 1787. Here, Louverture is presented within a square frame with a much more deliberately and specifically drawn military uniform. More careful attention has been paid to the details of his feathered hat, as well, and to his facial features. Rather than the indistinct amorphous features in the previous set of images, this image clearly presents a black man with a rigid skeletal structure supporting a sharply angular face and dark skin. There is muscular strength evident in the facial structure and in the position with which he holds his shoulders. This image corresponds with the idea of Louverture as a formidable adversary capable of carrying out thirteen years of rigorous sustained defense and resistance on the island colony.

**Rainsford’s early prints.** The prints in the third group present a very different image of Louverture. They include a sketch and two prints of a full figure. The earliest is titled *Toussaint L’Ouverture; Sketched from Life by Major Rainsford*.<sup>33</sup> Marcus Rainsford is also the artist responsible for the prints in this group. There are two versions of this print, both titled *Toussaint Louverture*. The first print was published in 1805, in *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hyati: Comprehending a View of the Principle Transaction in the Revolution of Saint Domingo; with its Ancient and Modern State*, also published by the artist.<sup>34</sup> A second rendition

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<sup>31</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1228923; Johnston, *Negro in the New World*, 149.

<sup>32</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1228924.

<sup>33</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1248952.

<sup>34</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1242848; Marcus Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti: Comprehending a View of the Principle*



of this print appears in *Geschichte der Insel Hayti und ihres Negerstaats*, published in 1846 by Wilhelm Jordan.<sup>35</sup> It is not an exact reprint. Although the figure appears to be an almost exact copy the background details in the landscape are different. Because Marcus Rainsford is known to have flourished in 1805, this second print is also attributed to that time but will be referred to by the 1846 date.<sup>36</sup> The earlier image “sketched from life” is assumed to have been drawn prior to 1803 because Louverture had been captured and died in a French prison by then. In the sketch “from life” Louverture is depicted from behind in a counter-balanced position as if he has just taken a swipe at something with his sword. Only one sword held closely at his left side is present in the sketch; neither the sword in his right hand nor its target are present in the rectangularly framed image. Louverture is presented as stocky with the overdeveloped calves of a skilled equestrian. Strength is also emphasized by the way that the underlying muscles bulge against loose fitting clothing. The military costume depicted here is much less elaborate, and instead of a boat-shaped hat, Louverture wears a standard top hat with a single feather and flower secured by a satin band. The overall sketch is light in tone, and Louverture’s face in profile has soft features. The background is a lightly sketched terrain of earth and a stream and more earth beyond that that bears a similar feel to the landscape at what was then Cap Francois (today, Cap Haitien) based on other artistic representations of the landscape itself.

The other two engravings, possibly developed from this original sketch, are much more detailed with the harder distinct lines expected in an engraving. The figures in each of these two appear essentially the same. As in the sketch, the figure is presented in full with military dress wearing a top hat with a single feather and flower. In these engravings Louverture faces, and

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*Transactions in the Revolution of Saint Domingo, with its Antient [sic.] and Modern State*, microform, London: J. Cundee, 1805, opp. 241.

<sup>35</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1242844; Wilhelm Jordan, *Geschichte der Insel Hayti und ihres Negerstaats*, Leipzig: W. Jurany, 1846-49, frontispiece.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

engages his gaze directly, at the viewer. The details of military costume are significantly more detailed. The costume is form fitting, emphasizing the musculature underneath, but in a less convincing way. Because of the standardization of the uniform with expected norms, the demeanor of the man in the engravings is different. His skin color is also much darker, obscuring facial structure. Although there is significantly less detail in the sketch, it reads more convincingly as true. In the engravings Louverture holds a sword in his right hand and a proclamation in his left, presumably the Haitian Constitution “promulgated in June 1801,” which

reflects the many contradictions of L’Ouverture’s political and social philosophy. On the one hand, it is the first modern constitution to address the conflict between the defense of property rights and human rights; if all humans possess a fundamental and inalienable freedom, property rights must logically be explicitly qualified not to include humans. Aside from Robespierre’s never-adopted 1793 proposal for just such a constitutional limitation, this constitution was the first in Western modernity explicitly to base itself on the unlimited, universal right to freedom from enslavement.<sup>37</sup>

The images printed after Louverture’s death become commemorative of achievements as yet historically unrealized fully at the time of the sketch. They begin to function as so many others of the images in this survey, including some in the first two stylistic categories, as historical propaganda.

In the engraving published in 1805, a second smaller figure in similar military regalia and somewhat lighter in facial skin tone approaches Louverture from the viewer’s right. Elaborate attention is paid to the landscape. A small house appears on the top of a mountain to the viewer’s left surrounded by a fence connecting the shared property with a larger house positioned at a lower level on the mountain. Other less distinct mountains appear on the right with no

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<sup>37</sup> Additionally, “At the same time, the document puts in place a secondary series of paternalistic, authoritarian measures. If fully implemented, these would have so severely curtailed public freedom in every specific dimension as to regress far behind the various French constitutions—both pre- and post-Thermidor—the document draws from.” These secondary measures include instating Louverture as “dictatorial governor for life,” setting a precedent from which Haiti had only recently escaped; Nick Nesbitt, ed., *Toussaint Louverture: The Haitian Revolution*, introduced by Jean-Bertrand Aristide, London: Verso, 2008, 45-46.

development present and three smaller and less distinct figures around a small body of water. The development on the left appears to be a plantation. The proclamation in Louverture's left hand may be his rural development code issued five months after the initial Haitian Constitution of 1801, in which he planned to maintain Haiti's glory as the richest sugar plantation in the eighteenth century under free labor. The Proclamation of November 25, 1801, is particularly disturbing. In contrast to the liberal ideals stated in the Constitution, the Proclamation requires "all male and female citizens who live in [communes of the colony], whatever their quality or condition, [to] obtain a security card." Louverture "expressly ordered that municipal administrators . . . only deliver security cards to persons having a known profession or state, irreproachable conduct and well-assured means of existence." Anyone who could not meet the conditions required to obtain such a security card would be "sent to the fields" or "away from the colony if they are foreigners."<sup>38</sup> Charging "cultivators" with the task of redeveloping the underdeveloped mountains and lands destroyed during the initial fiery rebellions of 1791, appearing to the right in this image, Louverture effectively attempted to reinstate mandatory labor, albeit, with compensation, in the colony.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, in the 1846 publication of this

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<sup>38</sup> Toussaint l'Ouverture, "Proclamation of 1801," in Nesbitt, *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, 65-73. Louverture is concerned that, "Idleness is the source of all disorders, and if it is at all tolerated, I shall hold the military commanders responsible, persuaded that those who tolerate idleness and vagabonds are secret enemies of the government," 68. He responds to the notion that, "Since the revolution, perverse men have told [the people] that freedom is the right to remain idle and to follow only their whims," with, "As soon as a child can walk, he should be employed on the plantations according to his strength in some useful work, instead of being sent into the cities where, under the pretext of an education that he doesn't receive, he learns vice, to join the horde of vagabonds and women of ill repute," 66, 67. Compare his words and ideas to those of Thomas Carlyle, presented later in this chapter; to Dessalines's and Christophe's ruthless implementation of such accords; to U.S. Marine methods during the Occupation (1915-34); to Duvalier's *tonton macoutes*; and to the film *Ghosts of Cite Soleil*, directed by Leth Asger, Image/ThinkFilms, 2006, DVD. Louverture remains ignorant to the implications of such a strategy even imprisoned in France, see "Memoir of Toussaint l'Ouverture," Nesbitt, *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, 81-113.

<sup>39</sup> The pictorial structure of the enclosure or plantation in the 1805 engraving reflects conventions in perspective not uncommon for the time in European art. This section of the image also bears a strong similarity to images created by Haitian artist, Numa Desroches. Desroches painted an elaborate illustration of Henri Christophe's *Palace of Sans Suci* (n.d.) during Haiti's period of "isolation" in the nineteenth century. The painting serves as evidence of Haiti's continued contact with the outside world and her own internal drive to bring order out of the chaos of the Revolution. Desroches's painting also indicates "that Haitian 'primitive' painting did not appear miraculously in the middle of the twentieth century but is part of a longer tradition," Poupeye, *Caribbean Art*, 36. Préfète Duffaut, who

same full-figure portrait of Louverture, the background has changed. Again there are mountains on the left and right, but no water, no structures, and no evidence of plant life. Louverture is positioned in front of a decimated Haiti, devoid of development and population, holding the same proclamation. The change in this engraving between publications is startling when considered in historical context.

**French historical fancy.** The fourth set of images comprises two engravings of an indeterminate date that are clearly meant as illustrations of significant events in the history of the Haitian Revolution. They are not published in a book, but appear in the collection as individual artworks. They are presented here in order of the historical occurrence of the subjects in each, as the second one is undated. The first is titled, *Toussaint L'Ouverture Receiving a Proclamation*, and it is stated that it was created in 1821.<sup>40</sup> The second is titled, *Toussaint L'Ouverture Meurt dans la Prison du Château de Toux*, and it is stated that it depicts April 27, 1803, the day of Louverture's death in Fort de Joux.<sup>41</sup> No artist name is provided for either engraving, but due to the French title of the second and certain similarities in the structural format of the prints I have assumed they were made by a French artist. Both are printed within a rectangular frame with detailed descriptive text below that frame. At the center of the text is a similar imprint possibly indicating the name of the printer. The 1821 engraving depicts Louverture and a second armed guard in full military regalia receiving a printed paper from three French officials in various types of military regalia as well. These five men are positioned in front of a large East Indian-type tent. In the background are mountains, a palm-like tree, three teepee-like tents, and two

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painted during the Haitian Popular Arts Movement that began in 1944, also utilized similar manipulations of perspective, but in a more dramatic and surrealistic way, possibly based on his exposure to Desroches' painting; see *Heaven and Earth* (1959), Poupeye, *Caribbean Art*, 85.

<sup>40</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 485466.

<sup>41</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1258307; There is a discrepancy here. Joseph reports that Louverture died on April 7, Yvon Joseph, *Four French Travelers in Nineteenth-Century Cuba*, New York: Peter Lang, 2008, 262.

partially naked young black males sitting at the foot of the tree. This engraving distinctly resembles the works of other images of Haiti and other colonies and exotic or tropical locales circulated within a broad audience within the Americas and Europe.<sup>42</sup>

These types of written and visual descriptions did affect attitudes towards Haiti. Visual and literary images of this type were produced by non-Haitian itinerant artists who traveled to the island as emissaries of the aforesaid colonial powers. They show themes of lush tropical and romanticized earth/island landscapes as empty and devoid of civilized people ripe for Euro/American colonization, cultivation, scientific research, relaxation and improvement of physical health, and the possibility of escape, both for unlanded second sons of elite families and the rogue poverty stricken classes of each. Images depicted people within the landscape as uncivilized, unclothed, expendable, and unnecessary as anything but labor, essentially in various stages of dehumanization—serving the purpose of justifying the enslavement of Africans and reducing guilt over the almost complete genocide of the native Taino and Arawak populations. The 1821 engraving depicts Louverture, the natives in an imaginary setting, and the colonial officials, combining these elements into a sophisticated work of propaganda. The engraving depicting the 1803 death of Louverture in a French prison serves a similar function, although it depicts Louverture stripped of his military regalia in a bloated (not emaciated?) state in the arms of a man of indeterminate position and ethnicity.<sup>43</sup> In neither of these prints does Louverture engage the viewer with his gaze.

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<sup>42</sup> See José Campache, *Portrait of Governor Ustaniz*, c. 1792 (Puerto Rico); Agostino Brunias, *Chatoyer, the Chief of the Black Charaibes, in St. Vincent with his Five Wives*, c. 1770-80; and George Robertson, *Rio Cobre*, c. 1773 (Jamaica), all in Poupeye, *Caribbean Art*, 31-37.

<sup>43</sup> This image of Louverture reclining in the arms of an unidentified jailor at the moment of death is a genre painting. The use of light by the artist to illuminate the figure of Louverture is similar in style to that of African American painter Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859-1937); see *The Banjo Lesson* (1893) in Powell, *Black Art*, 27, 251. Tanner was one of the first significant African American artists to train and make his home in Paris to escape the virulence of U.S. American racism. Also see *Annunciation* (1898) and especially *Resurrection of Lazarus* (1896) in Sharon F. Patton, *African-American Art*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, 98-103.

**Abolitionist propaganda.** The fifth style of images also functions as propaganda, but as propaganda of a different sort. The previous engravings of 1821/1803 are of French production and likely had more to do with revisions of history than with abolition, as France had a largely undeveloped abolitionist movement.<sup>44</sup> The two prints that constitute this fifth group are two reprints of the scene of Louverture's arrest. He is shown inside a home with his wife and two children clinging to him as he appeals to another figure inside his door. Louverture's gaze is directed simultaneously to the guard at the door and to the viewer. Who is he appealing to? All of the figures are rendered as dark in skin tone. A map of Haiti is posted on the wall behind the figures with "Hayti" clearly spelled out. At the time of Louverture's capture the island had not yet been renamed Haiti. This did not happen until January 1, 1804, after his death. Louverture appears in military clothing and his children and wife in proper dress for the time, his sons in trousers, stockings, shoes, and tailored shirts. Louverture appears without his feathered hat. This print initially appeared with the caption, "Take them back, since it must be so; I am determined to be faithful to my brethren and to my God," in *The Anti-slavery Record* in 1835.<sup>45</sup> A reprint of the same image appeared in 1843 in *The Legion of Liberty!: and Force of Truth, Containing the Thoughts, Words, and Deeds of Some Prominent Apostles, Champions, and Martyrs*.<sup>46</sup> This time it bears a slightly different caption, "Take them back: I am faithful to my brethren and my God." The presence of the prints in these two texts certainly implies their use as abolitionist propaganda. Historical records reveal a more complicated picture than captured here. In May of

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<sup>44</sup> "In Britain in the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth a genuine and very modern mass movement united intellectuals, clergy, and hundreds of thousands of ordinary people in opposition to slavery and the slave trade. No such thing happened in France, where a relatively small and elite group had limited impact. France would be the first of the principal Western powers to abolish slavery and the first to reinstate it," Christopher L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, 84.

<sup>45</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 413695; *Anti-Slavery Record*, American Anti-Slavery Society, Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1835, 37.

<sup>46</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1240260; Ames, *Legion of Liberty*, n.p.

1802, “Toussaint offers to surrender to [Emmanuel] Leclerc,” Napoleon’s chief naval officer stationed in St. Domingue with authority over some twenty-one thousand troops beginning in February of that year.<sup>47</sup> Upon the arrival of the French naval forces, Toussaint ordered Christophe to burn Cap Français. Louverture writes in a “Letter to Napoleon from on Board the *Heros*,” dated July 12 1802, that he willingly “went to Gonaïves, where I was arrested,” expecting, ever the optimist, to cooperate with France in coming to a successful resolution to the conflict at hand. “With slavery still prevailing in throughout the Caribbean, as well as in the U.S., it was necessary to isolate and strangle Haiti so it could avoid all contagion of the bad example it represented by its escape from slavery.”<sup>48</sup> What Louverture cannot conceive of is the maltreatment of his family *after* his voluntary departure: “The next day my house was exposed to pillage; my wife and children were arrested; they had nothing, not even the means to cover themselves.”<sup>49</sup> Louverture appealed to Napoleon, much as these images make a sentimental appeal to the interested world that, “A mother fifty years of age may deserve the indulgence and the kindness of a generous and liberal nation. She has no account to render. I alone ought to be responsible for my conduct to the government I have served.”<sup>50</sup> In constructing a chronology of appearance of these types of images it bears consideration that the next style of image considered here was published specifically with abolitionist intent.

**Abolitionist sculpture.** The sixth stylistic group under consideration contains only one historical image. Its relationship to a contemporary monument commemorating Louverture in Port-au-Prince on the Champs de Mar bears consideration. The historical image was published in *The Uncle Tom’s Cabin Almanack, or, Abolitionist Memento. For 1853*. It bears the title, *Statue*

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<sup>47</sup> Nesbitt, *Toussaint L’Ouverture*, xii.

<sup>48</sup> Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 183.

<sup>49</sup> Louverture in Nesbitt, *Toussaint L’Ouverture*, 78.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

of Toussaint L'ouverture, and was published in 1853.<sup>51</sup> It is very likely that this image is one that Frank J. Webb had in front of him for consideration when writing *The Garies and their Friends*, published in 1857, as he was in direct contact with the author of the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe, during the period of his novel's publication. The 1853 image is published in the almanac with text wrapped in a rectangular form around the image. Louverture's full figure is depicted, in a more subdued military style costume, possibly alluding to the types of costume he would have worn as a coachman while still a slave. He wears no hat, but instead a Jeffersonian-type hairstyle. His hair is straight and tied back at the nape in the style of the American revolutionary founding fathers. A profound change is happening here and will be discussed further in the section analyzing the six themes. Although the print is light, Louverture bears facial features strongly associated with those of pure African ancestry at the time. His face is depicted in profile and although his head is held at a level angle, there is something slightly demurring in the way that he holds his body. His gaze does not demure; it is directed levelly at something away and to the left. The gaze is not directed at the viewer or towards the heavens in a spiritual appeal as other abolitionist images are apt to do.<sup>52</sup> Again his sheer physical strength is captured by the way that the costume drapes across his body. No sculpture of this description ever appeared in real time.

Although this sculpture was never executed, a monument to Louverture was designed and erected in 1959 on the Champs de Mar in Port-au-Prince by Haitian architect Paul Magliore. This contemporary sculpture bears some striking resemblances to the 1853 proposed statue. While monuments to Pétion, Dessalines, and Christophe, also on the Champs de Mar, depict these war

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<sup>51</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 413884; *The Uncle Tom's Cabin Almanack: or, Abolitionist Memento*, London: J. Casell, 1852, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Compare to *Am I Not a Man and a Brother?* (1787) by William Hackwood and *Am I Not a Man and a Brother?* (c. 1839); Patton, *African-American Art*, 76-77.



heroes in full military regalia and on horseback, Magliore depicted Louverture in more subdued clothing, with no horse or hat, and with his hair tied back in a similar style to the print of the proposed 1853 statue. Magliore is a sophisticated modern artist; his choices mark a point in the progression of the development of monuments in Haiti, whereby the monuments take a turn from glorifying the efforts of war heroes to those of the people.<sup>53</sup> Currently, Magliore's sculpture of Toussaint leans awkwardly at a forty-five degree angle supported by white sheets tied together and secured to a post to keep it from falling over due to the 2010 earthquake.<sup>54</sup> Another important monument that survived the earthquake is the *Maroon Iconnu*, an anonymous male figure mythically responsible for blowing the conch shell to signal to Haitian slaves that the rebellion that would lead to Revolution had begun.<sup>55</sup>

**Caricature portraits and the progress of the race.** Four prints begin to caricature Louverture's facial features. Two are dated to 1887 and 1897. Two are undated. These four are clearly of a type within which there are two slightly distinctive styles. The 1887 and 1897 prints are titled, *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, and depict Louverture in the expected military costume complete with generously plumed boat-shaped hat. What marks these as different is that Louverture's facial features are feminized. They are also Africanized. He looks like a beautiful dark woman of African descent. These appeared in, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising*, and, *The White Side of a Black Subject, Enlarged and Brought Down to Date; a*

<sup>53</sup> This is the topic of yet another paper, but interesting to note the intersection of the print media of the nineteenth century with the actual composition of a monument erected a hundred years later.

<sup>54</sup> Video image in Gates, *Black in Latin America*.

<sup>55</sup> "When I arrived in Haiti on Thursday, January 14, 2010, I asked my friend who was driving, 'Koté Nèg Mawon'—where is the free man? 'Li la' he said—he is here. And as we rounded the corner behind Champs Mars, the plaza in front of the devastated palace where thousands had already made their homes—and remain today—there, rising from the dust of the still trembling earth, stood the statue of Nèg Mawon. I was drawn by the image out of the car and as I stood, weeping, an old woman put her arm around me; she too was crying. I said, 'Nèg Mawon toujou kanpé!!'—the free man is still standing!! And she replied, powerfully, 'Cheri! Nèg Mawon p'ap jamn krazé'—my dear, the free man will *never* be broken," Joia S. Mukherjee, introduction, Paul Farmer, *Haiti: After the Quake*, eds. Abbey Gardner and Cassia van der Hoof Holstein, New York: PublicAffairs, 2011, xii. In the devastation of the quake I wonder if those who found shelter in the shadow of the monuments of revolution felt a certain safety and security, protected by *chimera*, spirits of the ghosts of ancestors.

*Vindication of the Afro-American Race; from the Landing of Slaves at St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565, to the Present Time*, respectively.<sup>56</sup> The other two prints under consideration here are not published within texts but exist as individual artworks. They are titled, *Toussaint Louverture*, and, *Portrait of Toussaint L'Ouverture*.<sup>57</sup> The individual prints are very similar to the published prints above, with a few slight differences. The African facial features are exaggerated in a way that is clearly masculine. There is a softness to the face here that indicates gentility. No artist is provided for these four images. None are direct reprints but copies as evidenced by very slight differences in presentation. In all four Louverture's gaze is directed to the left and not towards the viewer. In the feminized images the head is turned ever so slightly more towards the audience.

**History and progress.** Four images represent this group; they depict an entirely different man than in the previous group, although they parallel each other temporally in terms of publication. All appear in published texts, and none are individual originals. One is a direct reprint of an earlier published print. And one was included in a previously referenced text here. The stylistic differences between this group and the others are remarkable. Louverture is depicted in a military uniform but without a hat. He holds a bar in his right hand in three of the images. He has a tall forehead, lighter skin, and diminished African features. The implied

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<sup>56</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1169831; Simmons, *Men of Mark*, opp. 934; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1228868; Wood, *White Side of a Black Subject*, 320.

<sup>57</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1242089. As late as 1988, Selden Rodman, one of the foremost promoters of the Popular Arts Movement in Haiti, chose this image of Louverture for his history of the arts renaissance beginning in 1944. This is unfortunate in that it is one of the most highly caricatured of images of the war hero available. Rodman also mistakenly attributes the print to the eighteenth century. This implies that this specific image may have served as source material that inspired the abundance of images of Louverture produced after 1944 and distributed through Le Centre d'art in Port-au-Prince, the Obin family workshop in Cap Haitien, and others. Selden Rodman, *Where Art is Joy*, New York: Ruggles de Latour, 1988, 17. The time period I specifically focus on here is the nineteenth century, but it is worth noting that copies of the nineteenth century images of Haiti's cultural heroes continued to be popular within the boundaries of Haiti's much later popular arts revolution beginning in 1944; see Philomé Obin *Toussaint L'Ouverture in his Camp* (c. 1945); Poupeye, *Caribbean Art*, 67; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1169857.

muscularity of his body is also diminished by the softening of his facial features. The two reprints appear in 1888 in, *Nouvelle Géographie de l'île d'Haïti: Continent des Notions Historiques et Topographiques sur les autres Antilles*, and in 1914 in, *The Haitian Revolution, 1791 to 1804: or, Side Lights on the French revolution*.<sup>58</sup> The image that is clearly a copy of these two reprints is titled *Negro Warrior and Statesman, Toussaint L'Ouverture (full-blood)*, and appears in, *American Civilization and the Negro: The Afro-American in Relation to National Progress*.<sup>59</sup> Here Louverture's skin is clearly a bit lighter and his gaze is directed up and off to the left rather than down in a demurring pose as in the image from which it is copied.

The fourth in this group may be the original from which these three were made or a further copy. It is titled, *Toussaint Louverture, about 1802*, and published in, *The Negro in the New World*, in 1910.<sup>60</sup> Again Louverture appears without a hat and in military costume. Again, he bears the tall flattened forehead, and the physical structure of the head is similar to the other three in this group, but his African facial features are emphasized in a different way than seen anywhere else in the larger group of twenty-two. This is not caricature. The individual image of *Toussaint Louverture, about 1795*, analyzed above in the category "An African Louverture," was published in the same history of American civilization. Does one represent a younger Louverture and one an older seasoned more hardened man? The appearance of two images of the same man that are clearly physically not portraits of the same individual presents problems that will not be resolved here, but held out as opportunities when considered in historical context.

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<sup>58</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1267380; Dantés Fortunat, *Nouvelle Géographie de l'île d'Haïti: Contenant des Notions Historiques et Topographiques sur les autres Antilles*, Port-au-Prince : Chez l'auteur, 1888, 369; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1242855; Theophilus Gould Steward, *The Haitian Revolution, 1791 to 1804: or, Side Lights on the French Revolution*, New York: Crowell, 1915, opp. title.

<sup>59</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1216570; Roman, *American Civilization*, 8.

<sup>60</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1228924; Johnston, *Negro in the New World*, 158.

**Louverture as equestrian.** Only one image appears in this group in color. It is an undated lithograph titled *Toussaint Louverture; Chef des Noirs Insurgés de Saint Domingue*, by the artist Jean de Beauvais of Paris. It is the only image in the group that depicts Louverture on horseback. He appears in a blue and white military uniform with a feathered boat-shaped hat and sword raised in his right hand. His horse is draped in red and rearing its forefeet as to charge. This image bears little resemblance to the others in the group, but is interesting to consider. It looks like the model for the monuments to Dessalines, Pétion, and Christophe on the Champs de Mar, or like it could be any dark-skinned war hero from any nineteenth century rebellion. The only remarkable feature on this print that indicates anything about the identity of its subject is the brown coloration of the face and hands.<sup>61</sup>

**Difficulties Historians Encounter with Nineteenth-Century Images.** Several questions present themselves at this point in the analysis. Who made these works, who commissioned these works, who were the viewers, and what did they mean to their various audiences? Many history texts I encounter include images to accentuate particular points in the author's argument. Often times, although the images are compelling on their own, the authors do little to integrate or examine the materials presented in the images with information presented in the texts. This lack of discursive practice between image and text creates a void waiting to be filled. For example, in examining texts pertaining to the lives of African descended peoples in the colonial Americas, authors whose subject is ostensibly black provide images of black life created by non-black artisans. It is true that few images of blacks by blacks exist for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the historical records. That images by whites are substituted where these images of black life are lacking by black artisans is not a problem, but that they are provided without note within texts or footnotes as representative of a particular time and place is. Images are powerful

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<sup>61</sup> All of these images defy Galeano's textual description, *Memory of Fire*, 76.

and contribute to our understanding of an accumulated meaning of an historical past. Their presence does add to the texts, but not as much as they could if the authors addressed the conflict between subject and artist within the visual record.

Lack of explanation of manufacture, commission, connoisseurship, and circulation of the presented images does present a problem. For example, in Zephyr L. Frank's *Dutra's World: Wealth and Family in Nineteenth Century Rio de Janeiro* (a source I sought for comparison to Haiti) eighteen illustrations are included.<sup>62</sup> Only one of these images is an artifact of Dutra's life. It is a photo of his and his daughter's handwriting in his inventory. The other seventeen illustrations that appear spread throughout the text are not images of Dutra's life, but lithographs from German artist Johann Moritz Rugendas' *Voyage Pittoresque dans le Brésil* (1835) and French artist Jean Baptists Debret's *Voyage Pittoresque et Historique au Brésil* (1834-1839) published in Paris. They are beautiful idealized illustrations of colonial Brazil from the eyes of two itinerant or traveling artists that depict the vagaries of life from trade to funerals to standards of dress and costume. Any direct relationship between the images and Dutra's life should not be assumed and no correlation is made by the author. They appear to be offered as decorative devices rather than as historically significant. Images have an impact on the reader and could serve well for comparative purposes when analyzing the plantation economies of the African American diaspora.

Brazil was among a number of young colonies immediately affected by the Haitian Revolution, which inspired fear amongst neighboring and more distant countries of rebellion. "As in other American slave societies, the specter of the Haitian Revolution weighed heavily on the minds of slave masters surrounded by Africans. White fears were realized in the late

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<sup>62</sup> See Frank L. Zephyr, *Dutra's World: Wealth and Family in Nineteenth Century Rio de Janeiro*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004.

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when several Afro-Brazilian revolts shook Salvador and the surrounding countryside.”<sup>63</sup> Visual imagery is often invoked in narrative descriptions of Haiti that circulated within the African American diaspora and, probably, also within other areas of the Atlantic world, feeding fears of rebellion on one side and inspiring revolt on the other. Fear generated repercussions, “slavery became harsher in Cuba due to news of successful slave uprisings in Saint-Domingue.”<sup>64</sup> The images of plantation life included in *Dutra’s World* provide an impression of the structure of colonial urban life in other colonies at the same time. Significantly, an image titled, *Street scene in the Rua Direita, Rio de Janeiro, during the 1830s*, and another of a public “whipping post” by Rugendas, republished in *Dutra’s World*, depict colonial officials and what appear to be people of color in official or military style regalia.<sup>65</sup> Other images that influenced my thoughts about images of Louverture are published images of other colonial peoples of African ancestry depicted in full military regalia including but not limited to a photograph of an anonymous infantry sergeant in Uruguay in the 1860s; an anonymous “mulatto and black militiam[a]n of the artillery of Cartagena de Indias;” a portrait of General José Padilla ca. 1828; a painting of Simón Bolívar; and a photo of “Police chief Estanisloa Mansip” in full regalia sitting on an altar.<sup>66</sup> These images reveal a deep sense of pride. Other texts I reviewed offer more such images; I believe these and other archived images in publication and distribution throughout the nineteenth century were influenced by images of the war heroes of Haiti.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Kim D. Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in Post-abolition São Paulo and Salvador*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000, 170.

<sup>64</sup> Joseph, *Four French Travellers*, 247 fn11.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph, *Four French Travellers*, 17, 26.

<sup>66</sup> Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 63; Aline Helg, *Liberty & Equality in Caribbean Columbia 1770-1835*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2004, 102, 198, 224; Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997, 148.

<sup>67</sup> I ignore here the relationship between images of militia in the American and African colonies, but continue to think about it.

**Thematic Production and Reception.** Within the twenty-two images analyzed within the confines of this study several themes appear that help to locate the spheres of influence within which these images traveled. Many of the images presented here originally circulated as prints and were copied by other artists and/or reprinted in their original likeness over a broad range of time and within a broad range of types of publications. These originals and subsequent copies were published in the U.S., Mexico, France, and London and circulated through various different currents of exchange throughout the American African diaspora during this period of rebellions, revolution, abolition, and civil wars.<sup>68</sup> A secondary theme that appears within the analysis is that images are used in the service of documenting the progress of the black race. It was important to scientists and enlightenment philosophers alike to concoct some reason to justify the nuisance of the existence of slavery and the trade in human bodies as carriers of labor. Images of Louverture were included in texts exploring these ideas as primary evidence that indeed the black race was on a parallel path from primitive to civilized as the non-blacks were perceived to be following in the nineteenth century. These texts were shared amongst enlightened intellectuals and curiosity seekers. In like manner Louverture's image appears in texts chronicling the history of great men. His image appears in abolitionist texts for quite the

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<sup>68</sup> As a scholar of the African Diaspora, I find the terms that define divisions along linguistic, religious, geographical lines within the nineteenth century present and former colonies far too limiting and misleading. Currently debated and constructed divisions are sometimes useful for analyzing discrete events in specific locales. The scope of this project requires a broader definition of African Diaspora or the influence thereof than is permitted by the aforementioned delineating factors. Debates about just how to divide up the Americas during particular time periods have raged in scholarly circles for the past couple of decades. In fact, the term colonial Americas as I have already used it requires definition. I use this definition at this point here to broadly include all American countries, protectorates, and regions in which African slaves were imported, that is, all areas of the Americas impacted by the African slave trade.

The definition of Latin African American Diaspora in the nineteenth century will necessarily have to include areas of the United States impacted by the slave trade. In order to make my argument work I have to posit that during the nineteenth century, Haiti indeed functioned as a Latin American country. Haiti's influence, due the rebellions of 1791 to 1804, breaks linguistic barriers. Contemporary scholars of Haitian studies would also argue that Haiti breaks these linguistic definitions based on its experience of outside political intervention in the twentieth century. Based on this definition Haiti, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Chile, Nicaragua, Panama, etc. would constitute a Latin American group based on the similarities in intervention by the U.S. See Paul Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti*, Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 2000.

same reasons they appear here. Images that presented Louverture as a man of honor and civilization served to redeem the race, and abolitionists hoped the image would serve their interests in convincing the U.S. government, among others, to bring an end not only to the slave trade but to the institution of slavery itself.

Another site in which images of Louverture appears is in books documenting the history of the Haitian revolution. This is where the images posed the greatest real threat to slavery and the colonial plantation economic project. It was feared that counterinsurgents in other slaveholding colonies would get a hold of these images and be inspired to act in a like manner as the Haitian revolutionaries. The earliest such text of this kind to circulate amongst other rebels was *Vide de J.J. Dessalines*. It was published in Mexico in 1806 and contained images of Louverture, Christophe, Dessalines, and Bissou. This is likely the text circulating in Cuba immediately after the Haitian Revolution and the source of the images that Aponte accessed and displayed. Another area in which images of Louverture appear is in biographies. Although the earliest biography of Louverture was published long after Aponte's death, it was published in English in 1853, just in time for Frank J. Webb to incorporate it into his fiction.

**Historical Chronology of Appearance of Significant Images.** The two earliest images in this selection are a portrait, *Toussaint Louverture. Général en Chef à St. Domingue* (ca. 1787) by François Bonneville, and a full figure sketch, *Toussaint L'Overture: Sketched from Life* (ca. 1800) by Major Marcus Rainsford. The Rainsford sketch was originally released as an individual artwork and republished twice in texts available to a larger audience in 1805 and 1846. Rainsford significantly altered and revised his original sketch in the published engravings as discussed previously. The 1805 engraving was published in English in *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti*, and the 1846 engraving was published in German in *Geschichte der Insel Hayti*



*unfihres Negerstaats*. Both are histories of Haiti and the revolution. It is likely that the 1805 publication circulated in the English speaking colonies and the young U.S. republic, and the 1846 publication circulated amongst a broader European audience. At the time of Rainsford's 1805 publication, another text containing ten images of the Haitian revolutionaries was published in Mexico in Spanish and circulated throughout the Spanish speaking world.

One image of Louverture in *Vide de J.J. Dessalines* may have been influenced by Rainsford's sketch or the 1805 engraving, another is clearly influenced by Bonneville's ca. 1787 portrait. *Lauberture* in Dubroca is a full figure portrait with detailed images of the Haitian landscape and a military encampment in the background.<sup>69</sup> Louverture is depicted in more relaxed military clothes, in keeping with Rainsford's sketch, but also includes details of landscape reminiscent of Rainsford's 1805 engraving. A regiment of soldiers appears in the distance behind Louverture amidst two types of teepee-style tents. The land itself is somewhat empty showing a few scattered but damaged plants sprouting new leaves. An empty mountain rises of the left. "[T]he sprouting tree stump, or the flowering severed branch" in later Haitian paintings, such as Rigaud Benoit's *Choucoun* (1967), "suggest there are grounds for hope, despite the suffering, historical and recent," according to Karen McCarthy Brown.<sup>70</sup> Other full figure depictions that appear in *Vive de J.J. Dessalines* are *El Ciudadano. Heudonville habla al mentor de los Negros sobre las malas resultas de se revelion*;<sup>71</sup> *Cristóbal comandte. Del Exercto recorre la isla de Sto. Domingo incendiando a los infelices de ella*;<sup>72</sup> *Dessalines. Huye del valor*

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<sup>69</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1252508.

<sup>70</sup> Brown, *Tracing the Spirit*, 18; "The blighted tree, its branches lopped off, is perhaps the single most often repeated image in Haitian paintings. As a symbol of the crises occasioned by slavery, the loss of home and the loss of family, it is dramatic and powerful. As a finger pointing at the ecological devastation in contemporary Haiti, it is equally articulate," Brown, *Tracing the Spirit*, 18.

<sup>71</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1252505.

<sup>72</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1252506; here Christobal must be read as Henri Christophe.

*Frances, pero matando blancos*;<sup>73</sup> and *Coronación de Juan Santiago Dessalines primer Emperado de Haití*.<sup>74</sup>

A copy with modifications of Bonneville's ca. 1787 portrait of Louverture appears as the second plate in *Vide de J.J. Dessalines*. It is not indicated in the NYPL record whether these images are Dubroca's own work or that of another artist. In the Dubroca copy of the Bonneville original, the same ovular frame is maintained around the portrait; the military costume is a near copy, but the facial features have been darkened, the eyes widened so that the whites are sharply visible, and Louverture's ambiguous and somewhat pained expression in the Bonneville original has been changed to a gentle and generous smile. The caption below the simple title of *Louverture* has also changed.<sup>75</sup> Other portraits utilizing the same framing format and exhibiting similar visual features in *Vide de J.J. Dessalines* are of *Biasou*,<sup>76</sup> *Christobal*,<sup>77</sup> and finally *Dessalines*.<sup>78</sup> Dubroca's Louverture portrait appears as the second one in the series between Biassou and Christophe, possibly establishing a visual evolutionary historical scheme of development that culminates in Dubroca's coronation of Dessalines.

One of the most familiar images of slavery is of a ship with hundreds of Africans packed as chattel in small spaces without recognition of social, gender, or linguistic difference.<sup>79</sup> The plan of the ship represents the leveling of social class and the erasure of personality through systematic trauma that took place in the course of the voyage across the Atlantic, or through what Édouard Glissant has described as the three abysses of the "Open Boat." Although it is important to note that in most cases we do not know who commissioned the twenty-two images

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<sup>73</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1252509.

<sup>74</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1252511.

<sup>75</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1252504.

<sup>76</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1252503.

<sup>77</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1252510.

<sup>78</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1252512.

<sup>79</sup> A copy of this image repeats in *Uncle Tom's Almanack*.

surveyed here or the ten images in *Vide de J.J. Dessalines*, images of militia and others in respectable clothing and bearing honorifics worked as agents in the healing process of recovery allowing people to recollect some of the product of erasure lost in the voyages of abyss.<sup>80</sup>

Some full-size figure portraits contain scenes of brutal retribution against whites. In *Christobal Commandte*, Christophe is shown with a sword in his right hand and a torch in his left. Cap Francois is burning in the background and a small family of *blancos* and *gens de couleur* appears caught between the slice of the sword and the fire of the torch. The threat to their lives is implicit. In *Dessalines*, his sword is held high above his head in his right hand and a decapitated trophy head of a white or mulatto woman is held in his left. Clearly he has just slaughtered her. Another woman is shown decapitated and probably raped in an image not yet mentioned because only the woman's dismembered body appears in the image. No war hero claims responsibility for this woman's brutal death in *Fue muerto y destrozada en el campo ests infeliz pr. Haver resistido a los desesos brutales de los Negros y el nino perezio de hambre asulado buscando el pecho yerto de su madre*.<sup>81</sup> The artist displays her body lying on the plain between the mountains with her infant child on the ground to her left. Of fair skin, she is probably white.<sup>82</sup>

Images that appear in Dubroca's text are likely the ones that once adorned the walls of Aponte's home. It is no surprise they would inspire fear. It should be noted that *Louverture* is shown in a contemplative stance with his sword safely in its sheath. There are no images of violence in this full-figure portrait of Louverture or in any other image related to him in *Vide de J.J. Dessalines*. Louverture's temperament is depicted as being quite different than the others.

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<sup>80</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, translated Betsy Wing, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000, 5-9.

<sup>81</sup> Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division Digital ID: 1252507.

<sup>82</sup> Toni Morrison writes: "They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out here," in the opening lines of *Paradise*, New York: Knopf, 1998, 3. These images of revolution provide a deeper symbolic context and layers of intertextual meaning to her words.

This image reminds me of a passage in Madison Smartt Bell's contemporary novel of Toussaint's campaigns, *Master of the Crossroads*.

*Hold your position, watch and wait.* The admonition ran looping throughout Maillart's mind throughout the night, whenever he woke, which was often, and even during his periods of fitful sleep. Temperamentally, he was ill-suited for such a role, but he had studied during his service with Toussaint. If he asked himself what Toussaint would do in any given situation, the answer, most often, was nothing.<sup>83</sup>

"Bell, a southern-born contemporary novelist who claims Dostoevsky as one of his literary models remarked that what particularly drew him to Dostoevsky is 'the reflection of the metaphysical world on the mundane' in his writings."<sup>84</sup> Bell writes with an excruciating descriptive detail worthy of his chosen literary mentor.

**Aponte.** In a culture of fear immediately following the Haitian Revolution the publication and circulation of the images in *Vide de J.J. Dessalines* and others impacted their viewers. Cuba, Haiti's nearest neighbor, felt the impact most strongly with a wave of rebellions that broke and spread across the island between 1805 and 1811. Contemporary scholars and investigators at the time were rightly concerned to be alarmed at the circulation of such images. They were also concerned with locating the "mastermind" behind the rebellions. It was thought that for such widespread rebellion to occur somewhat simultaneously that a single individual must have been orchestrating the actions. Investigators at the time put to death several persons believed to have been co-conspirators, and though scholars still disagree as to the role played by Aponte in these outbreaks, this period of unrest has come to be known as the Aponte rebellions and Aponte has been heroized much like the Haitian revolutionaries.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Madison Smartt Bell, *Master of the Crossroads*, New York: Pantheon, 2000, 328.

<sup>84</sup> Maria R. Bloshteyn. "Dostoevsky and the Literature of the American South," *The Southern Literary Journal* 37.1 (Fall 2004): 1-24, 22.

<sup>85</sup> See Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion*; Palmié, *Wizards*.

Descriptions of Aponte's skills and temperament remind one more of Louverture than of the others. "[M]ost historians have been quick to assimilate him, if not to the typological slot of a Cuban Toussaint-Louverture, at least into that of a Nat Turner or Boukman—leaders of what was once fashionable to call *primary resistance movements*."<sup>86</sup> Although such books as *Vide de J.J. Dessalines* were banned by Spanish authorities this apparently did not prevent their circulation to at least Cuba. Aponte was an avid reader and book collector, as evidenced by the books retrieved from his house during successive raids by investigators.<sup>87</sup>

To Aponte, these books were, first of all, sources: sources to be exploited, in a very literal, aggressive way, for their contents. As he himself stated in the last round of questions on March 30, 1812, he literally took some of these books apart to derive from them precious images to be incorporated, at a future date, in his own work (Franco 1977, 171), and it is more than tempting to infer that he pursued reading, too, as a means to the end of gaining control over the representations of a culture to which people of his social standing were normally denied all but superficial access.<sup>88</sup>

Aponte's sketchbook has been the subject of much speculation, as it was probably destroyed by the investigators. Although no extant copy of that sketchbook is available for research, descriptions of it are in Aponte's own testimony and that of others whom he had shown it to in his home.<sup>89</sup>

Also, in his testimony and that of others is evidence that Aponte had images of the Haitian rebel leaders on the walls of his home. "Among the incriminating evidence found in his house were portraits of Haitian independence commanders Toussaint L'Ouverture and Henri Christophe gracing his parlor."<sup>90</sup> Palmié concurs that "Aponte was in possession of a small

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<sup>86</sup> Palmié, *Wizards*, 88.

<sup>87</sup> *Vide de J.J. Dessalines* does not appear in the inventory of books removed from Aponte's home, though biographies of other significant historical figures are represented, Palmié, *Wizards*, 107-8.

<sup>88</sup> Palmié, *Wizards*, 109.

<sup>89</sup> For detailed descriptions of the testimony regarding Aponte's sketchbook and some text for the actual investigative interviews conducted by Nerry, see Ch 1: "'For Reasons of History': José Antonia Aponte and his Libro de Pinturas," in Palmié, *Wizards*, 79-158.

<sup>90</sup> George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America 1800-2000*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 68-9.

gallery of portraits of New World revolutionaries: Toussaint, Henri Christophe, Dessalines, [and] Jean Francois.”<sup>91</sup> These are likely images taken from *Vide de J.J. Dessalines*, as Aponte was in the habit of taking books apart. These images were not found by investigators in Aponte’s house; although, he, “in his very last statement on March 30 confessed that he burned them some time ago when he had heard that these engravings (for that is what they were) were on the index for prohibited print materials.”<sup>92</sup> What Palmié clarifies for us here from a reanalysis of the primary sources of Aponte’s testimony and that of others is that images of war heroes were not found in his sketchbook, but in prominent positions on the walls of his home. Such testimony also reveals that it was part of Aponte’s artistic process to collect images from various sources, insert them into his sketchbook, and draw upon and around the images; i.e., he used the technique of collage to create historical images of the significant events of his own life and maps of the places in which he had engaged in battle in military service to the Spanish colony and crown, including a self-portrait.<sup>93</sup> Images of black revolutionaries played a dual role, and Aponte may have been cognizant of those roles, even in the creation of his own portrait and the construction of the only record of that image, his testimony. The images both encouraged people of African ancestry to join in violent rebellion and non-violent resistance and instigated fear in the minds of colonial masters.

The image of Louverture that appears in the home of Mr. Walter’s in Webb’s *The Garies* is addressed in the following section. I present Webb’s text separately and as a whole as it engages a specific image of Louverture for the first time in a novel published by a free black American. Where Aponte’s experience with the image of Louverture exhibits his personal historical reality as recorded in narratives of his trial, Webb presents Louverture in a work of

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<sup>91</sup> Palmié, *Wizards*, 88.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, 99.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*

fiction reflective of the lived historical realities of antebellum Philadelphia. The previous section has been dedicated to the historical record of visual images of Louverture. The following is dedicated to a representation of Louverture within a literary work of fiction. The functions of history and functions of literature, though they intersect, are different. The complexity of the placement of Louverture in such a literary setting functions to effect history and as an affect of history.

**Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and their Friends* (1857).** Newspapers, handbills, and self-published tracts reproduced and circulated print images of Louverture. Fiction, memoir, and travel logs that describe paintings and prints continue to serve as models for rhetorical description. Literary and oral depictions of Louverture influence images created of other rebel leaders in other places into the current century. "Toussaint and Christophe sat motionless as figures in a painting."<sup>94</sup> Within private homes of free peoples of color and public sites of group meetings images of Louverture and other rebellion heroes were placed in conspicuous places.<sup>95</sup> U.S. free born black author Frank J. Webb, in his novel of 1857, *The Garies and their Friends*, offers one literary example from the nineteenth century worthy of extended consideration. Webb describes in detail a painting of Louverture and its affect on the various viewers who encountered this painting; although no actual copy of the image was included in the printed novel, the dialog in the text reads as follows:

As [Mr. Garie] was leaving the room, he stopped before the picture which had so engaged his attention, when Mr. Walters entered.

"So you, too are, attracted by that picture," said Mr. Walters, with a smile. "All white men look at it with interest. A black man in the uniform of a general officer is something so unusual that they cannot pass it with a glance."

"It is, indeed, rather a novelty," replied Mr. Garie, "particularly to a person from my part of the country. Who is it?"

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<sup>94</sup> Bell, *Master of the Crossroads*, 324.

<sup>95</sup> See Kyle Baker's graphic novel of the historical rebellion, *Nat Turner*, New York: Abrams, 2008; and Asger, *Ghosts*.

“That is Toussaint l’Ouverture,” replied Mr. Walters; “and I have every reason to believe it to be a correct likeness. It was presented to an American merchant by Toussaint himself—a present in return for some kindness shown him. . . . That,” continued Mr. Walters, “looks like a man of intelligence. it is entirely different from any likeness I ever saw of him . . .”

“This,” said Mr. Garie, “gives me an idea of the man that accords his actions.”

Thus speaking, he continued looking at the picture for a short time, and then took his departure.<sup>96</sup>

Here Louverture’s image serves a double purpose of inspiration. It reminds free blacks and those that come in association with the image that the threat of overthrow of the U.S. slave system was possible and admirable. Ideas lead to actions, and Louverture’s image, as an idea, affects Mr. Garie specifically. A white plantation owner in South Carolina, he married his slave mistress in a radical act of love. Mr. Garie risked his own safety and that of his wife and children by taking a very courageous step toward their mutual liberation in moving the entire mixed-race family to Philadelphia, forming a significant alliance with Mr. Walters. As a metaphor of freedom achieved through reluctant violence, the image operates as a visual symbol for narratives of hope for both men and their families within an emerging community.

The image described here is unlike the print images described earlier in that Mr. Walters and Mr. Garie appear to be discussing a painting of Louverture rather than a print. This U.S. American example from a literary text provides description and no image. I suspect Webb wrote from his memory of several print images of Louverture he had seen, conflating those in his fictional description. The first widely dispersed collection of the revolutionary heroes appears in Debroca’s *Vide de J. J. Dessalines* (1806).<sup>97</sup> Images include Christophe, Dessalines, Biassou, and Louverture. It is highly likely that Webb was familiar with this text. As an obsessive reader,

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<sup>96</sup> Webb, *The Garie*, 122-23.

<sup>97</sup> L. Debroca, *Vide de J. J. Dessalines, jefe de los negros de Santo Domingo; con notas muy circunstanciadas sobre el origen, caracter y atrocidades de los principales jefes de aquellos rebeides desde el principio de la insurreccion en 1791; traducida del frances por D.M.G.C. año de 1805*, Reimprimese por Don Juan Lopez Cancelada, Mexico: M. de Zúñiga y Ontiveros, 1806.



Webb also likely saw the image of the proposed monumental sculpture of Louverture in *The Uncle Tom's Cabin Almanack, or, Abolotionist Memento. For 1853*.<sup>98</sup> Webb's text is not an effort at sentimental fiction as his audience expected at the time of its publication, but a work of sharp political satire a bit too sublime for his audience in 1857 to appreciate from a free black man. I chose it as the center point because it cements the position of U.S. America in the Atlantic triangle. It also speaks to fears of rebellion sweeping African diasporic American plantation-based economies and the real threat of violent race riots in the more liberal north.<sup>99</sup> Such fear is further generated by the fact and presence of a free black U.S. American writing harsh political criticism veiled as sentimental fiction before the Civil War. Vivid descriptions of the brutal deaths of several of the main characters in *The Garies* in violent race riots bring this fear to life. The image of Louverture inspires characters in *The Garies* to consider and enact armed resistance when assaulted by roving white mobs in a dispute over land settlement in free black neighborhoods in Philadelphia prior to the Civil War and Emancipation.

Audiences predisposed to enjoy sentimental or the gothic popular in the century, both forms of fantasy, were unprepared for Webb's depictions of financially successful free black men participating in a burgeoning northern industrial economy and the consequences thereof, including protracted description of intra and interracial violence. That the text goes against expected norms of passivity and embraces a particular active communalism that can only be successful within capitalism, or acknowledgment of the fact of capitalism's impending persistence in America, is the key to its brilliance.<sup>100</sup> One author who may have been influenced by Webb

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<sup>98</sup> *The Uncle Tom's Cabin Almanack*, 58.

<sup>99</sup> This interrelationship of ideas, images, and bodies in the economic exchange of the Atlantic world is illustrated beautifully in Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999, Appendix: "Table of the Diaspora," 259-60.

<sup>100</sup> Webb's interest reveals a burgeoning exploration in evolving notions of communism by other authors and artists; e.g., Langston Hughes, Elizabeth Catlett, etc.

was Pauline Hopkins, who offers biography, ethnographic sketches, nonfiction prose, and fictional characterizations, specifically in *Winona* (1902), of Louverture as an anti-capitalist anti-patriarchy figure whose analysis “endows women with the potential for revolutionary action.”<sup>101</sup>

Webb wrote *The Garies* while convalescing in England while his first wife, Mary Douglas performed abolitionist oratory, some of it composed by Harriett Beecher Stowe. Reflecting the mobility of potential emigrationists, Webb took Douglas to Kingston, Jamaica, for treatment of disease she contracted while performing in Europe. She died in Kingston of consumption.<sup>102</sup> While ill and unemployed Webb accompanied Douglas on her speaking performance tours throughout the northeast and overseas, also in France and Italy. Ostensibly he wrote the meat of the text while in London, while his wife followed a particularly successful performance career.<sup>103</sup> Writing from a distance and behind the aural veil of his wife’s career, Webb could and did depict an unequivocal description of the reality of the racial discrimination and violence he had recently left behind in the American North. His attempt to establish himself as an author may have served for him as an outlet for venting his own frustrations with his inability to procure stable and sustainable work as a free and obviously well-educated black man.<sup>104</sup> Writing probably operated as a healing exercise in itself as writing often does.<sup>105</sup> After Mary’s death, Webb returned to America, settling in the reconstruction South, where he wrote sporadically as a journalist. *The Garies and their Friends* is his only known novel. Because of

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<sup>101</sup> O’Brien, “Blacks in all Quarters of the Globe,” 254.

<sup>102</sup> Gardner, “Gentleman of Superior Cultivation,” 301.

<sup>103</sup> Gardner, “Gentleman of Superior Cultivation,” 300.

<sup>104</sup> Webb wrote this text during an extended period of convalescence following the loss of a career as “a commercial artist in the printing trade, the same occupation Charlie Ellis finally secures,” in *The Garies*, Lapansky, 35, in Gardner, “Gentleman of Superior Cultivation,” 299.

<sup>105</sup> While abroad Mary Webb became quite ill with consumption. Unable to continue performing, the Webbs came back to the States and then to Jamaica in hope that the tropical island climate might restore her health. She died in Kingston in 1859, two years after *The Garies* appeared in print in London; only limited biography is currently available for either Webb; see Gardner, “Gentleman of Superior Cultivation.”

the benefit of his physical geographical position in the British colonial world, Webb clearly satirizes Victorian critics, including a vicious parody of Thomas Carlyle.

**Webb, Thomas Carlyle and the Black Americas.**<sup>106</sup> Webb's physical relationship to England, Victorian literature, and Jamaica further complicates the positioning of this work. Here I illustrate the relationship between Victorian England, post-emancipation colonial Jamaica, and the politics of nineteenth-century American race relations as presented metaphorically via the lens of the Haitian Revolution in *The Garies*. The effect of works such as Thomas Carlyle's earlier "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question" and his later "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question" was anticipated by John Stuart Mill and an anonymous Victorian reviewer, but it was the work of Webb that clearly illustrated the intertextuality of such works in developing an American and European consciousness of race in the Americas. Webb's fictional work, *The Garies*, directly responds to other works published at the time of his own writing. His literary debt to Harriett Beecher Stowe is clearly acknowledged in her introduction to Webb's novel. His literary debt to white writers of the time is more obscurely buried within the narrative of the text. Only a reader variously exposed to the English and American discourses of abolition, the history of the Haitian Revolution, and Victorian prose literature would pick up on the subtlety of Webb's craft. Webb directly satirizes not only Carlyle's texts on race but also his infamous *Sartor Resartus*.<sup>107</sup> As Romare Bearden said in 1969:

A quality of artificiality must be retained in a work of art . . . the reality of art is not to be confused with that of the outer world. Art [is] a creative undertaking, the primary function of which is to add to our existing conception of reality.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Much of the following developed in researching a paper I wrote previously titled, "How to Hang a Victorian Icon: From Pumpkins to Race Riots, Thomas Carlyle and the Black Americas." The title refers to John Simms's "The Proper Way to Hang a Confederate Flag," exhibited amidst immense controversy at Gettysburg College, Pennsylvania, in 2004. "Artist to 'Lynch' Confederate Flag at Gettysburg College," Collegenews.org. 6 Sept. 2004.

<sup>107</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, New York: Oxford University Press, [1836] 2008.

<sup>108</sup> Richard J. Powell, Margaret Ellen di Giulio, Alicia Garcia, Victoria Trout and Christine Wang, eds., *Conjuring Bearden*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

In 1849, a controversial assessment of the condition of Africans and those of African descent in the British colony of Jamaica (and her neighbors) was published anonymously in Fraser's Magazine under the title "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question." It was subsequently republished in 1853 in expanded pamphlet form by its acclaimed author, Thomas Carlyle, with a new title, "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question." Following both of its appearances before the public the "Discourse" drew attention from critics locally and abroad. In 1971, the full text of the second "Discourse" was republished by Eugene R. August along with two accompanying responses.<sup>109</sup> The first response included in the 1971 republication is by an anonymous contributor to the *Inquirer* and the second is a letter to the editor of Fraser's by John Stuart Mill. Both of these responses appeared within months of the publication of the "Discourse" that appeared with the title "the Negro question." No further responses to the original or to the second "Discourse" with the more inflammatory title of "the Nigger question" are included in the 1971 publication. As editor of the 1971 compilation, August fortunately provides important descriptive notes about the appearance of the two versions of the "Discourse" that allow the contemporary reader to reconstruct a chronology of responses and their textual appearance at mid-century.

In addition to the two responses included by August in the 1971 edition, I propose that Carlyle's text had a broader reach than has been previously explored. Carlyle's provocative and "dangerous" text was read not only by his Victorian contemporaries at home, but also in the Americas. Ralph Waldo Emerson said of Carlyle, "He is as dangerous as a madman. Nobody

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<sup>109</sup> "[A] recent paper edition, by Eugene R. August, of the *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* coupled with John Stuart Mill's rejoinder" appeared in 1971; David J. DeLaura, ed. *Victorian Prose: A Guide to Research*, New York: MLA, 1973, 42, 95. The "Discourse" is referenced twice in DeLaura. I am working from a photocopy kindly provided to me by Dr. Paul Schmidt, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

knows what he will say next or whom he will strike. Prudent people keep out of his way.”<sup>110</sup> It may come as a surprise to Carlyle that his work was read not only by his white intellectual colleagues but also by free black writers and scholars moving in and between the Americas and Britain in the nineteenth century. What may come as a further surprise to Carlyle and scholars of Carlyle is that at least one free black American writer responded to his scathing attack of black life with a satirical parody that mimics Carlyle at his best and worst. Webb published *The Garies* in London in 1857, eight years after the initial release of “the Negro Question.”

*The Garies* is a novel, a chronicle of black life in an upwardly mobile black middle class Philadelphia. *The Garies* is specifically a Victorian novel. It is a Victorian novel in more ways than one, ways that are surprising, amusing and astounding. *The Garies* is a work of fiction. It is also a work of satire and parody, in which Webb consciously and actively satirizes the constructions of blackness offered by eminent Victorian writers of prose and fiction. Within this novel, Webb satirizes the abundant manuals of domesticity, prose efforts at resolving the “woman question,” and Charles Dickens.<sup>111</sup> But, most importantly, for this paper, Webb devotes four chapters of his novel to Thomas Carlyle.<sup>112</sup> Webb does not name Carlyle specifically. Instead he creates a fictional character in the name of George Stevens that any knowing Victorian reader would certainly recognize as the celebrated “founder” of Victorian prose and sage writing.<sup>113</sup>

Following a close reading of both the anonymous and Carlyle editions of the “Discourse” and the comments of the initial anonymous respondent and John Stuart Mill, I propose that Webb

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<sup>110</sup> DeLaura, *Victorian Prose*, 33.

<sup>111</sup> For example, see Susan Strackney Ellis, “The Women of England,” *Victorian Prose: An Anthology*, eds. Rosemary J. Mundleck and LuAnn McCracken Fletcher, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, 53-57; John Stuart Mill, “The Subjection of Women,” in Mundleck and Fletcher, *Victorian Prose*, 121-131; and Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Moston Dauwen Zabel, Boston: Riverside, 1956.

<sup>112</sup> Webb, *The Garies*, 151-193.

<sup>113</sup> DeLaura, *Victorian Prose*, 34.

be given serious consideration as a third direct respondent to Carlyle's "Discourse." This is a radical suggestion in that the 1971 edition of the "Discourse" included only British respondents. It is presumed and not noted otherwise of yet that the two included respondents are white males. To include a free black male American as an equally significant respondent as Mill is a radical move. A close assessment of the fictional parody of Carlyle in Webb's text will prove Webb a worthy respondent to be included in any future editions or future discussions of Carlyle's "Discourse." Webb's inclusion is anticipated by the initial anonymous respondent, published in the 1971 edition.

**History of the Discourse on the Negro/Nigger Question.** For any further understanding of how Webb fits into this discussion, it is prudent to look closely at the contextual and historical appearance of Carlyle's "Discourse." A short history follows here. In December 1849, a nine-page essay titled, "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question" appeared in *Fraser's Magazine*, published anonymously and widely read. A two-page response to this article appeared immediately on December 8 in *The Inquirer* titled "Mr. Carlyle on the Negroes." Although the author of this response has yet to be identified, as it was also published anonymously, the author correctly identifies the author of the "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question" as the illustrious Victorian author Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle's discourse was written to engage his audience with the topic of Victorian Britain's responsibilities towards the emancipated slaves of her colony at Jamaica.<sup>114</sup> Carlyle wrote that responsibility lay not in the hands of the British but in those of the enslaved. His text is emotionally charged with stereotypical and inflammatory descriptions that evoke if not exact violence towards the supposed "black" offenders.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Jamaican slaves achieved emancipation or abolition in 1838; Jamaica was granted independence from Britain in 1962.

<sup>115</sup> Carlyle feared Jamaica would become another Haiti.

A response to the two previously anonymously published articles appeared in January of 1850, this time not anonymously. John Stuart Mill wrote a letter to the editor of *Fraser's Magazine* titled "The Negro Question." Mill had read both anonymous articles. It is an act of cowardice on Carlyle's part to have published the initial "Discourse" anonymously, and probably an act of self-preservation on the part of the author of *The Inquirer* response, as he (or she) was probably a literary contemporary of either or both of Carlyle and Mill. The tone of the text of the initial anonymous respondent implies that the author may indeed have been a woman. To avoid confusion in the body of this text I refer to the initial respondent to Carlyle as she when it is necessary to use a pronoun.

Although our first respondent clearly implicates Carlyle as the "detestable" culprit responsible for the "Discourse," and it is clear Mill has read both articles, Mill does not mention Carlyle by name in his letter to the editor.<sup>116</sup> This omission serves as a dismissive act on Mill's part rather than as a politeness towards Carlyle. It is important that one read the correspondences in the order of their appearance in time, rather than in the order in which they are presented in the contemporary compendium of Carlyle's pamphlets. The order in this collection gives priority to Mill over the initial anonymous respondent, which in some ways further confuses a contemporary reading of the texts.

Further complicating our contemporary reading of the text is that Carlyle added twenty-three paragraphs to the original "Discourse" in 1853. These twenty-three paragraphs appear in the current publication slotted neatly into the middle of the original text just as Carlyle intended when the text was republished as a separate pamphlet titled "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question," four years after the initial appearance of the "Discourse" in *Fraser's Magazine*.

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<sup>116</sup> Anonymous, "Mr. Carlyle on the Negroes," *Carlyle: The Nigger Question, Mill: The Negro Question*, ed. Eugene R. August, n.p., 1971, 53; reference in DeLaura, *Victorian Prose*, 92.

Carlyle does not mention by transition or note that these paragraphs are an addition to the original publication. The change in title to the more inflammatory choice of terms indicates that Carlyle had not stepped back from his initial argument in this second publication, but that he held his position as strongly as ever. The twenty-three paragraphs constitute a rather weak justification of Carlyle's initial motivation rather than a defense of his continued position. Because the additional twenty-three paragraphs do little to alter Carlyle's original position and because they do not directly reference either Mill or the initial anonymous respondent, for my purposes, I focus my attention on the original work as published in 1849 and the two immediately available responses. Also, I propose that another respondent be drawn into the conversation. The third respondent I propose is Webb, the little known free born black American author of *The Garies* published in London in 1857.

**Bridging Victorian and Black Studies.** Because *The Garies* was written by an American, it may initially seem unclear why it is indeed a Victorian novel. Recently, some scholars have sought to bridge the gap between Victorian Studies and the Black Americas for very viable reasons. *The Garies* has until now not been drawn into the conversation. There has been a lack of understanding of the historical relationships between Britain, her West Indian colonies, Africa, and Africans in the Americas and in the British Isles and activities in other nations such as Haiti. Carlyle's "Discourse," which he so unfortunately retitled in 1853, offers a starting point from which to consider the competing interrelationships amongst these post-colonial contenders for our attentions. Paul Gilroy has established the term the "Black Atlantic" as an all encompassing way for scholars and historians to conceptualize the processes of transmigration that occurred amongst the above named regions beginning with the initiation of the intercontinental trade in African bodies as slaves in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth



centuries.<sup>117</sup> That the effects of this colonial enterprise have yet to be resolved was noted popularly as I turned on the radio to begin work. The announcer on WRFG, Atlanta, said in a bit of understated hyperbole, “the colonial mentality is still affecting us today.” Because this belief is popularly held, it is imperative that we examine these relationships as they have been presented historically in literature and art.

Several contemporary authors have taken on the charge of establishing a relationship between antebellum American and Victorian literature. Jennifer DeVere Brody has written that “[t]here are several ways to challenge the discrete boundaries between ‘Victorian’ and ‘African American’ or ‘Black ‘ studies.’” She notes that

a reconfigured genealogy allows scholars to discuss Frederick Douglass’s and Ida B. Wells’s famous lectures in England, reactions to American Ira Aldridge’s Shakespearean performances at Drury Lane, the highly acclaimed Fisk Jubilee singers in various London venues, or to focus on Charles Dickens’s and Oscar Wilde’s American tours, as well as the fact that Harriett Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* created a sensation on both sides of the Atlantic. These historical connections between England and America begin to realign national and rhetorical borders by revealing the tenuousness of such sociopolitical, ideological, and even economic boundaries.<sup>118</sup>

Brody’s specific analysis, *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture* goes on to engage in a “sustained discussion of gender and sexuality.”<sup>119</sup> Her mention of both Stowe and the popularity of black American oratory performance in nineteenth-century Britain allows for a neat inclusion of both Frank Webb and his wife, Mary, in this opening field of discussion.

In addition to Brody, David Ikard briefly offers a secondary argument for the inclusion of at least one specific African American novel within Victorian textual studies. In *Breaking the*

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<sup>117</sup> Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, 6-7.

<sup>118</sup> Brody, *Impossible Purities*, 7; she adds, “Thomas Carlyle and even Dickens, attempted to ‘use’ racial tropes as a means to consolidate a racialized idea of class power,” 79.

<sup>119</sup> Brody, *Impossible Purities*, 7.

*Silence: Toward a Black Male Feminist Critique*, for example, Ikard provided that in *Marrow of Tradition*, author Charles Chesnutt (1901),

elevates Janet above Mrs. Carteret [two main female characters, black-white half-sisters] and white women in terms of morality and virtue . . . he bankrupts her [Janet] of complexity and agency . . . radically in line with the ideal of Victorian white womanhood she embodies.<sup>120</sup>

Ikard's analysis of black male agency in feminist approaches to African American writing also sways towards a concretely gendered analysis. Though I think Webb's text certainly warrants a reading along these lines, especially in his deconstruction of the female characters in the text and the structures of power which they nimbly negotiate, I step away from gender and focus on the racial constructs volleyed about between Webb and Carlyle.

Although neither Brody nor Ikard specifically refers to Webb, *The Garies*, or Carlyle, in their analysis they lay the groundwork to do so, establishing this precedent by the inclusion of works much less sublime than Webb's as offerings. More significantly, Ikard writes:

Exposing these patterns of complicity [with patriarchy] will show that, despite our [black males'] staggering social and economic disadvantages, we have the power to alter significant aspects of our racial and gender realities. The emotional, psychological, and material costs of ignoring complicity are far more than one of us can afford to pay.<sup>121</sup>

I argue that Webb is ahead of his time in recognizing Ikard's call to action; Webb's nineteenth-century novel does the very thing Ikard calls on other black male critics of the twenty-first century to do. Webb critiques the complicity of his characters in their downfalls and successes in a way that is at once startling and for which his immediate audience was entirely unprepared.

**The Webbs in the Americas and Britain.** Webb wrote and published *The Garies* in London. Webb and his wife Mary traveled to Europe, including a stint in England as part of her

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<sup>120</sup> David Ikard, *Breaking the Silence: Toward a Black Male Feminist Criticism*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007, 9.

<sup>121</sup> Ikard, *Breaking the Silence*, 27.

career as a performer of oratory.<sup>122</sup> Much of her oratory was written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, as was the introduction to Webb's *The Garies*. They were not alone in their travels to England as noted earlier. Many black Americans, especially free blacks, traveled to Europe during the nineteenth century. Many made England, France and Italy, among others their homes, especially in cases wherein individuals could possibly pass for white to blend into local communities undetected or unbothered, escaping the harsh slavery of antebellum America. Free blacks (and runaway slaves) also frequently made it into British settlements in Canada after the War of 1812, increasing their mobility and communication with the mother country as well.<sup>123</sup> They also traveled and lived in the British West Indies, the subject of Carlyle's scathing text. As noted earlier, the Webbs moved to Kingston, Jamaica, after Mary's health declined in the unwelcoming and unhealthy physical environment of Victorian England. She died in 1859 of consumption.<sup>124</sup>

The presence of light-skinned blacks in England is noted in the anonymous response to Carlyle that is part of the subject of this text. The anonymous respondent was concerned for the welfare of those passing in her community. She wrote, "Men and women, faithful and diligent, loving and worthy to be loved, and bearing, it may be no more than an almost imperceptible trace of African descent, will continue yet longer to be banished from the social meal of the white man."<sup>125</sup> Indeed, one of Webb's characters, a Mr. Watson, who was once a slave in New Orleans, emigrates to London where he is successfully and invisibly absorbed into society after the death and subsequent manumission by his owner.

The initial respondent has a much more pointed concern that reaches far beyond the boundaries of her own country. She is concerned that Carlyle's reactionary "Discourse" will

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<sup>122</sup> Gardner, "A Gentleman of Superior Cultivation," 299-300.

<sup>123</sup> See Harvey Armani Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border: The Black Refugees in British North America, 1815-1860*, Burlington: University of Vermont Press, 2006.

<sup>124</sup> Gardner, "A Gentleman of Superior Cultivation," 301.

<sup>125</sup> Anonymous in August, DeLaura, *Victorian Prose*, 56.

have negative effects on the cause of abolition in America and directly feed the inflammatory actions of anti-abolitionists there. She is also concerned with the effect it will have upon free blacks.

But in America, whatever proceeds from Mr. Carlyle's pen is sure to be read with avidity; and with the fatal prejudice of colour which is there so intense, we cannot imagine a more deadly moral poison for the American people than his last composition. Every cruel practice of social exclusion will derive from it new sharpness and venom. The slaveholder, of course, will exult to find himself not apologized for, but enthusiastically cheered, upheld and glorified, by a writer of European celebrity. But it is not merely the slave who will feel Mr. Carlyle's hand in the torture of his flesh, the riveting of his fetter, and the denial of light to his mind. The free black will feel him too.<sup>126</sup>

Though, the initial respondent does not mention Webb by name, we can be clear from reading *The Garies* that Webb does indeed read Carlyle's "Discourse" and has also been following Carlyle's career for three decades, as he is also quite familiar with *Sartor Resartus* (1833-4).

**Frank J. Webb's Caricature of Thomas Carlyle, meet George Stevens.** Webb was a Philadelphia-born free black American who wrote as a journalist for several journals in America before and after his tour of Europe. The Webbs were in England from 1856-57. Frank Webb accompanied his wife, Mary, on a performance contract that included Paris, London, and other developing industrial cities in England. Abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic sponsored her tour. While she actively performed, her husband Frank found himself recovering from a lingering illness. During his invalidism, Webb wrote *The Garies*.<sup>127</sup> It is not known if the work is in anyway autobiographical, but the text itself reveals that Webb was highly influenced by the literary milieu in which he found himself. His criticism of domestic Victorian life and satire of its major cultural critic reveal the extent of his exposure to and awareness of the complexities of race relations as they unfolded around him.

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<sup>126</sup> Anonymous in August, DeLaura, *Victorian Prose*, 56.

<sup>127</sup> Gardner, "A Gentleman of Superior Cultivation," 300.

Webb engages in a scathing critique of Carlyle while recuperating in England. Although the stage he chooses is free black neighborhoods of his own Philadelphia, he illustrates just what type of action Carlyle's thoughts instigate, confirming our first respondent's fears. Webb is just the kind of man the initial anonymous respondent was concerned about. Her concerns about the effect of Carlyle's "Discourse" on white America and the anti-abolitionist cause play out in Webb's text. The pages I focus attention on outline the preliminary events that take place before race riot breaks out in Philadelphia.<sup>128</sup> Race riots in Webb's text are described in excruciatingly violent detail. The riots in the text are instigated by Mr. Stevens. Mr. and Mrs. Garie, a mixed-race Southern couple who are the intended targets of the violent attack are killed. Their unborn child also dies and a Mr. Ellis is permanently physically and psychologically damaged. The marking of class through the physical transgressions of violence is nowhere more apparent than on the body of Mr. Ellis in Webb's novel. Mr. Ellis is attacked by an all white mob in Philadelphia in "a riot based on actual assaults in the 1830s and 1840s."<sup>129</sup>

Two of Mr. Ellis's fingers are severed with the blade of a hatchet while he dangles precariously from the rooftop of an unfinished building, echoing clearly an image of lynching. Mr. Ellis falls several stories breaking his legs and two of his ribs, and is "kindly . . . conveyed to the hospital" by a "gentleman and some of his friends" who happen to live near enough in proximity to witness the crime, but prove ineffectual (if they make an effort at all) in stopping the mob.<sup>130</sup> The gentlemen (presumably white) make pathetic declarations of sympathy as they send for a doctor.<sup>131</sup> Sending Mr. Ellis to a hospital clears them of any "Christian" responsibility.

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<sup>128</sup> Webb, *The Garies*, 151-193.

<sup>129</sup> Anna Engle, "Depictions of the Irish in Frank Webb's *The Garies and their Friends* and Frances E. W. Harper's *Trial and Triumph*," *Melus* 26 (2001): 158.

<sup>130</sup> Webb, *The Garies*, 217-19.

<sup>131</sup> "'Poor fellow!' said he [the gentleman], 'he is killed I believe. What a gang of wretches. These things are dreadful; that such a thing can be permitted in a Christian city is perfectly appalling,'" Webb, *The Garies*, 219.

But, for Mr. Ellis, his injuries are severe. He lives, but barely, in the care of his devoted wife and daughters, Esther and Caddy and their simultaneously acquired adopted daughter, Emily. The same mob that disables Mr. Ellis murders Emily's parents, the Garies, for whom the novel is titled. Mr. Ellis and Emily are both traumatized by the violence acted out here in one night against a black man, a mulatto woman and her white husband by an all white fear inspired mob.<sup>132</sup> There is nothing here that surprises in Webb's testimony of the experience of free blacks in a free state prior to the Civil War. Interestingly, Webb does not qualify himself here as expert, but lets the details of the story work that out. It is in the details of Webb's description of Mr. Ellis' injury and limited recovery that the story validates itself. This fictional description of racial violence is modeled on riots that actually occurred during the mid nineteenth century in Philadelphia and other American cities, just a few short years after the release of Carlyle's "Discourse," reflecting again the anonymous respondent's fears that Carlyle's "Discourse" would inflame already latent violence against more blacks as U.S. America dangled precariously on the edge of civil war.

In the pages preceding the attacks in Philadelphia, Mr. Stevens's complicity in the events is outlined in detail. It is here also that Webb begins to model Mr. Stevens after Thomas Carlyle. He does not necessarily model Stevens after any personal knowledge of Carlyle but after Carlyle as presented by himself in the "Discourse," *Sartor Resartus* and other writings. Prior to publication of the "Discourse" Carlyle was widely read and recognized as a satirist. *Sartor Resartus* was originally published in serial form and its chapters anxiously awaited by its readers. Within both *Sartor Resartus* and the "Discourse" Carlyle writes from two perspectives. Within *Sartor Resartus* he assumes the voice of both editor and author. In the "Discourse" he

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<sup>132</sup> I am purposely not engaging in the discussion of the mob's ethnicity as Engle covers that well in her article. I really want to hone in on violence and its effect in systematizing power.

assumes the voice of both presenter and narrator. In both it is unclear which voice Carlyle endorses. This clever switching of voice throughout each text allows Carlyle the freedom to enunciate quite extreme opinions about the condition of modern society and to absolve himself of responsibility for such extremes by creating an artistic distance from the stated opinions of both the narrator/editor and presenter/author in each case. Whether Carlyle believed personally in the opinions of his characters is not in question here. Carlyle used *Sartor Resartus* to comment on rapidly developing capitalism and its potential social effects, effects he was quite uncomfortable with. He used the “Discourse” to comment on the rapid unfolding of colonialism.

In the “Discourse,” Carlyle’s speaker calls for the reinstatement of slavery in post-emancipation Jamaica. Likewise, “Many colonists from the north of [Haiti], forced to flee by sea, found refuge in the States, and for a long time held out hope of reestablishing slavery in Haiti.”<sup>133</sup> Carlyle shares concerns that the plantation system based on conscripted African labor in Jamaica is breaking down. He worries that liberated slaves on the island might employ strategies of labor movements in England and other European countries to exact equitable pay for their labor. He is concerned that liberated slaves are requiring better treatment than many Scots, Irish, and English laborers receive at home. He is worried that the Crown’s resources are being wasted in Jamaica. He states in classic Carlyle style that the former slaves should be happy to do the work immediately at hand and serve the needs of the Empire for spices, sugar, wood, rum, labour, etc., regardless of compensation. He states that should they not be willing to work for little or no wage, they should be allowed to starve. Should this result in a labor shortage he advocates the reinstatement of the slave trade and importation of fresh Africans to reinvigorate the plantation economy and increase production of exports to England. He is concerned that

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<sup>133</sup> Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 182.

whitemen cannot work in the islands, and that Africans must.<sup>134</sup> Carlyle further implicates God here. He uses biblical language to insist that it is the African's God-given right to labor under the hand of those of paler skin than they, stretching his argument to equate God with Empire.

To appeal to his rational audience, Carlyle disparages the efforts of philanthropists and abolitionists as unpatriotic. He uses outrageously inflammatory language his immediate critics disparage as irresponsible in light of the developing tensions in pre-Civil War America. What is read in England is read in America and Americans anxiously anticipate the release of current English publications.<sup>135</sup> Carlyle as well as his respondents know that Americans will read the "Discourse" and respond.<sup>136</sup> Webb's response is well worth our consideration.

In the same radical vein in which Carlyle's speaker seeks to instigate his audience, Webb's character Stevens works to instigate a race riot. Both are motivated by economics. Carlyle's speaker makes it clear that the island of Jamaica is the property of the English Empire and that any confusion about this amongst the emancipated slaves must be obliterated immediately. This line of thought closely parallels that of Stevens's expressed attitude that black-owned neighborhoods must be evacuated so that whites like Stevens can invest in the property. Both Carlyle's speaker and Stevens advocate force as a means of exacting their ends if blacks prove uncooperative in surrendering their property rights. Where the two men diverge is that Stevens actually takes the action of sanctioning an outbreak of racial violence. Stevens notes that

a large amount of property in the lower part of the city is owned by niggers; and if we can create a mob and direct it against them, they will be glad to leave that quarter . . . When, through their agency, we have brought property down sufficiently low, we will purchase all that we can, re-establish order and quiet, and sell again at an immense advantage.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Toni Morrison used "whitemen" as one word in "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," 369.

<sup>135</sup> See Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistresses: Woman's World in the Old South*, New York: Pantheon, 1982.

<sup>136</sup> See DeLaura, *Victorian Prose*, 103-104, on American responses to Carlyle.

<sup>137</sup> Webb, *The Garies*, 166.



To that end Stevens (like Carlyle) published a series of editorials. They appeared daily,

in the public journals (particularly those that circulated amongst the lowest classes) [like Carlyle's pamphlets], in which the negroes were denounced, in the strongest terms. It was averred that their insolence, since the commencement of the abolition agitation, had become unbearable; and from many quarters was suggested the absolute necessity for inflicting some general chastisement, to convince them that they were still negroes, and to teach them to remain in their proper place in the body politic.<sup>138</sup>

In addition, Stevens blackmails an Irish laborer, known by his last name, McClosky, to carry out the dirty work of instigating the mob. Stevens equates McClosky's fate with that of American slaves when he says, "You shall do as I wish; you are in my power. . . . Don't think you can escape me . . . I'll hang you as unhesitatingly as if you were a dog."<sup>139</sup> In this way Webb further inscribes *The Garies* in ongoing debates about the condition of the poor Irish both at home and abroad, also a concern of Carlyle. At mid-century the poor Irish of both the British Isles and America were equated metaphorically with blacks.<sup>140</sup> This is clear in Carlyle's "Discourse" and substantiated by contemporary studies of the Irish arrival and reception in nineteenth-century America. That at mid-century the fates of black Americans and the Irish were perceived to be inextricably bound is not insignificant in Webb's text. That McClosky effectively resists Stevens's control by the novel's end speaks to the individuation of black from Irish in America as the century progressed.<sup>141</sup>

Further evidence that Webb modeled Carlyle on Stevens appears on page 124. Webb originally introduces Stevens as "Mr. Thomas Stevens," whom he subsequently refers to as George, as I have also done throughout. Whether this is a typo or what we might call a Freudian

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<sup>138</sup> Webb, *The Garies*, 170; the problem revealing itself here is the strong parallel between the sentiments of Carlyle, expressed here in the voice of George Stevens, and Toussaint Louverture in the Proclamation of November 25, 1801, in Nesbitt, *Toussaint Louverture*, 65-72.

<sup>139</sup> Webb, *The Garies*, 177-178.

<sup>140</sup> See discussion in the following chapter of An Onlooker, "America's Ireland: Haiti-Santo Domingo," *The Nation* 110.2851 (21 Feb. 1920): 231-234, 231.

<sup>141</sup> Engle, "Depictions of the Irish," 151-171.

slip, it is our first hint that Mr. George Stevens is indeed modeled on Thomas Carlyle. Their shared first names are complemented by the similarity between their wives' first names: Jule Stevens and Jane Carlyle.<sup>142</sup> A singular difference between the Stevens and the Carlyles is the Stevens have children: Lizzy (after Eliza in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) and little George, who proves as viciously cruel and ultimately ineffectual as his father, a "naturally evil-disposed boy."<sup>143</sup> Jule Stevens echoes her husband's and Carlyle's sentiment as she says, "I think all those that are not slaves ought to be sent out of the country back to Africa, where they belong; they are, without exception, the most ignorant, idle, miserable set I ever saw."<sup>144</sup>

A more thorough analysis between the relationship of Thomas Carlyle and Webb's parody is outlined in a play on *Teufelsdröckh*. Here Stevens dons the clothing of a poor white migrant in order to avoid suspicion and repercussions from the riots. In a neat twist of textual language, Webb adopts Carlyle's treatise on the meaning of clothes. In his "new" clothes and new persona, Stevens is accidentally singled out in a case of white-on-white violence that reaches beyond the scope of this text in which he is tarred and feathered, and ultimately abused as a black man in his disguise. As an inversion of blackface, Webb references his wife's career, while exacting revenge against Carlyle in the guise of Stevens for the irresponsibility of presenting the "Discourse." There are references throughout Webb's texts that indicate his complete and total immersion in the rhetorical discourse of his time. He is a Victorian writer caught in a triadic Victorian mid-colonial world. Although his text was not well received by his contemporaries, it is well worth reconsideration as a multi-functional Victorian novel. The relationships between this text and others produced by black authors must be considered within the context in which they were published, a Victorian context. As I continue to explore the black

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<sup>142</sup> Webb, *The Garies*, 125.

<sup>143</sup> Webb, *The Garies*, 128.

<sup>144</sup> Webb, *The Garies*, 130; these echo the words of many observers discussed in the following chapter.

world and its relation to the colonizing mind, I will keep Carlyle in my mind, gratefully, that he expressed in such clear text the virulence of some nineteenth-century racist ideation—ideation we see persistent in the U.S. Marines' treatment of Haitians during the Occupation.

*The Garies* provides ample material for an investigation into the ways power performed through violence works to inscribe and re-inscribe individuals within assigned or perceived social and economic hierarchies of a particular historical time and place. This inscription of class marks in irrevocable ways the body through acts of violence. Sometimes visible and at others invisible these marks scar. The marking of class through the physical transgressions of violence appears no more outwardly than on the body of Mr. Ellis in Webb's novel. The invisible scars signified by the physical symptoms of disability may present more alarming challenges in their pernicious ability to recycle through generations.<sup>145</sup>

Metaphorically cyclical transgressions against the personal body reflect the larger narrative of violence and healing at work in the larger Haitian project. This work repairs the alarmingly deficient literary analysis Webb deserves. Throughout, Webb links his narrative metaphorically with the Haitian struggle through the image of Louverture in Mr. Walters's entrance way at its center around which this narrative of resistance and resilience unfolds. The image acts as a *vèvé* at the foot of the *poto mitan* (center pole) at the crossroads, here, threshold, of the home (*hounfort*) of a multi-racial mixed community of free blacks in pre-Civil War America. In carrying out the work of psychological bonding and healing, Webb's text works in the same ways that Vodou communities do with few references to any form of African-derived spiritual practice.

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<sup>145</sup> “This relation to what is not itself constitutes the human being in its livingness, so that the human exceeds its boundary [*sic.*] in the very effort to establish them. . . . This paradox makes it imperative to separate the question of a livable life from the status of a human life, since livability pertains to living beings that exceed the human,” Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, New York: Routledge, 2004, 12.

## CHAPTER III

AMERICAN INVESTMENT IN  
THE U.S. OCCUPATION OF HAITI (1915-1934)

When Americans learn to work *with* Haitians and not merely *for* Haitians, and not until then will their efforts be truly fruitful.

—Charlotte Atwood in Emily Green Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, Intro. Mercedes M. Randall, New York: Garland, 1972, 90.

But it is only the modernists in history who are willing to look at the masses as factors in the life and development of the country, and its history.

—James Weldon Johnson, “Self-Determining Haiti: The Haitian People,” Pt. 4, *The Nation* 111.2882 (25 Sept. 1920): 346.

Arriving in Port-au-Prince, I found the situation quite different and similar to that described by the following commentators. Some accomplishments credited to the U.S. Marine Occupation include, “The building of the road from Port-au-Prince to Cap Haitien; the enforcement of certain sanitary regulations in the larger cities; and the improvement of the public hospital at Port-au-Prince.”<sup>1</sup> Arriving in the midst of a time of unrest I had the opportunity to evaluate such claims personally. James Weldon Johnson wrote in 1922, “The writer has been in the midst of three of these revolutions and must confess that the treatment given them on our comic opera stage is very little far removed from the truth than the treatment which is given in daily newspapers.”<sup>2</sup> Hurricanes and earthquakes can have a far more profound effect on a larger number people in a shorter amount of time than any short-term period of instability. Prolonged

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<sup>1</sup> James Weldon Johnson, “Self-Determining Haiti: What the United States has Accomplished,” Pt. 2, *The Nation* 111.2879 (4 Sept. 1920): 265-267, 265.

<sup>2</sup> James Weldon Johnson, “Self-Determining Haiti: The Haitian People,” Pt. 4, *The Nation* 111.2882 (25 Sept. 1920): 345-347, 347.

instability allows deeper psychological effects not so easily accounted for or witnessed by an untrained or unbiased eye. The acrid odor of burning tires permeated the air. For twenty-four hours people kept close to home, scarcely seen on the streets. Within a day word had passed that Aristide had returned and remained ensconced in power. Amid sighs of relief, gentle smiles, and looks of skepticism, the streets came alive shortly before the sun began to rise. Roosters crowed in the crowded city. The buzzing hub of activity below roused me from sleep. I breakfasted and waited for Jean-Claude at seven am. Life begins early here. Adulthood begins early for most. From the balcony of the Hotel Montana, I surveyed the world below anxious to begin my studies, anxious to have my feet on the ground, to join in this new world.

Nothing prepares you. Several frequent and prolonged periods of unrest and neglect had destroyed the roads Johnson bragged that Haitians had maintained themselves in Port-au-Prince during the Occupation. Traffic lights dangled precariously from hurricane worn thin wires, intermittently flashing, if lit at all, in unsynchronized cycles, creating a light show of their own design. Electricity itself only flowed through the flailing wires and shattered transmitters at random intervals. Complaints that summer of “rolling blackouts” in California due to the heat seemed nonsensical here. Only those with the resources to own and run generators had anything like consistent electricity in what some had once envisioned a modern city. Built to sustain 200,000, Port-au-Prince, appeared to burst with humanity at 3.5 million. Trash pickup ceased in the 1980s. Pigs and roosters rooted around in the mountains of rotted refuse along the sides of roads. Trash piled higher than my shoulders within two miles of Le Marche de Fer forced us to abandon the car at the wharf and walk a narrow trail gingerly trying to avoid overflow from open sewers. I loved the careful dance required in physically negotiating the city.

**Introduction.** Many black and other American travelers, scholars, artists, writers and observers, deeply politically motivated, visited or wrote about others' visits and subsequent commentaries, noting parallels with the American struggle for civil rights and equal recognition.<sup>3</sup> James Weldon Johnson "made an investigation of the brutality of the U.S. Marines and of U.S. Imperialism on the island of Haiti."<sup>4</sup> He was concerned with the inhumane treatment of Haitians by military officials steeped in U.S.-style southern racism intent on enforcing Jim Crow-like prohibitions on a nation of free blacks. Unfortunately, although, "Many American Black personalities expressed their solidarity with occupied Haiti[,] . . . Haitian public opinion has never been conscious of this support," as shown by Michael Dash (1992).<sup>5</sup> In fact, Hurbon proposes that the Occupation may have worked in a fatal act of reciprocity to effect "on American ground a reinforcement of anti-Black racism."<sup>6</sup> One hundred and eleven years after Haiti's declaration of Independence by Jean-Jacques Dessalines, following the death of Louverture in 1803, the U.S. Marines invaded Haiti under the auspices of recuperation. Dessalines reclaimed the name of Haiti for the former colony of St. Domingue, in his official declaration of independence on January 1, 1804. The Western hemisphere's second colony to claim its independence from its European masters remained ruled by descendents of African slaves for a little over a century. Though not peaceful years, in this century, Haiti worked to reform itself as a nation from very little, following the thirteen-year siege required to secure her freedom. As seen in the previous chapter, the freedom of the colonies of the Caribbean was at stake throughout the century and Haiti's proximity to other colonial nations instigated international fears for the interests of other islands. Spain, Portugal, England, the Dutch, the

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<sup>3</sup> Long, personal communication, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Adelman, "A Study of James Weldon Johnson," 143-4.

<sup>5</sup> See Hurbon, "American Fantasy," 190.

<sup>6</sup> Hurbon, "American Fantasy," 190.

U.S., and even the French, after their fatal blow in Haiti, maintained a strong presence across the Caribbean. Events in Haiti stirred unrest elsewhere and led to mass evacuations and transigrations between the U.S., France, Haiti, Cuba, and other neighboring communities. The seas were not calm as colonizers sought to compete with each other in profiting from the continuing production of sugar, coffee, tobacco, beef, and other crops and minerals in growing European capitalist markets. Mapping the competing interests in the Caribbean through the nineteenth century is beyond the scope of this paper, but a basic working knowledge of the intertwining interests in national and personal gain, and especially the possession of property is essential to answering the question: Why Haiti? Or as Zora Neale Hurston wrote in *Tell My Horse* (1938), “Whither Haiti?”

The U.S. Marines arrived in Haiti “after a popular uprising in Port-au-Prince itself drove” President Guillaume Sam “from the Presidential Palace to the French Legation, where he sought sanctuary. A large number of the President’s political opponents were confined in the national prison, and the Commander of the Prison, General Oscar, then murdered no less than 164 of them. This so infuriated the populace of the city, who believed that the massacre had been committed by the order of the President, that a mob invaded the French legation, murdered President Sam, and tearing his body to pieces, marched through the streets of the city with the dismembered parts.”<sup>7</sup> This single event does not provide sufficient motivation for U.S. involvement. Six revolutions had occurred in a four-year period between 1911 and 1915.<sup>8</sup> “It is

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<sup>7</sup> Emily Greene Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, Introduction Mercedes M. Randall, New York: Garland, 1972, 19; Zora Neale Hurston provides a detailed fictionalized account of the events surrounding the Occupation of Haiti in *Tell My Horse*, considered in detail in Ch. 5. Also see other discussions throughout Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*, J. B. Lippincott, 1938, reprint, New York: Harper & Row, 1990.

<sup>8</sup> Beyond the death of President Sam these assassinations included: “Antoine Simon, . . . driven out of Haiti in 1911 by groups which charged that he had sold out the country to the foreigners; his successor, President Leconte, . . . blown up in the presidential palace, and President Auguste [who] died mysteriously after eating food which did not agree with him,” presumably by poisoning, Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 59.

no secret that the revolutions were financed by foreigners and were profitable speculations.”<sup>9</sup> Violent uprisings, revolts, conflict between and among, especially, the eastern, northern and southern regions were the norm, marking residual contests of power yet unresolved from the post-Revolution era. “In Haiti’s 116 years of independence, there have been twenty-five presidents and twenty-five different administrations. In Mexico, during its 99 years of independence, there have been forty-seven rulers and eighty-seven administrations.”<sup>10</sup> Still involved in the shadow of World War I, the U.S. held other concerns within Haiti and wished to exercise some kind of “extra-constitutional” arrangement there to establish U.S. solvency over the nation.<sup>11</sup> Under the guise of rising debts, increases in political violence, foreign interest (including French and German financial interests), and building infrastructure, the U.S. spent a year prior to the invasions in Haiti negotiating such sovereignty as they were also engaged in with the Dominican Republic. Beginning in 1912, the U.S. proposed a similar series of conventions to the Dominicans, who “absolutely declined,” forcing the Marines to officially land there on May 5, 1916, and establish “The Military Government of the United States in Santo Domingo” a few months later on November 4.<sup>12</sup> The U.S. wanted strategic financial and military control of the island as a whole, negotiating contracts prior to the invasion for at least a year. Haitians resisted turning over constitutional governance to the United States until the brutal death of President Sam. Dismembered presidents get attention. But, as some observers have pointed out, once the trouble with Sam resolved and a new government established, why not leave? Instead the U.S. occupied Haiti for nineteen years, the longest occupation in U.S.

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<sup>9</sup> John H. Allen, vice-president, National City Bank of New York, *The Americas* May 1920, in Johnson, “The Haitian People,” 347.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, “The Haitian People,” 347.

<sup>11</sup> An Onlooker, “America’s Ireland,” 231.

<sup>12</sup> Carl Kelsey, “Haiti,” 177, in L. S. Rowe, ed., “Haiti/Dominican Republic,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 100 (March 1922): 110-202.



history—one that has set the tone for U.S. involvement in Haiti ever since. The U.S. Marines left Haiti, April 16, 1934, leaving behind an unstable peace, a humiliated populace, and beautiful roads, with little infrastructure for the maintenance thereof. A newsreel announced, “A long American occupation of the Island Republic ends as the last company of ‘Devil-dogs’ return home under orders from President Roosevelt, restoring self-rule to the Caribbean country.”<sup>13</sup>

For the first five years of the Occupation, censorship ruled.<sup>14</sup> Very little information reached American soil about the U.S. intervention in Haiti.<sup>15</sup> As late as March 17, 1926, when Grace D. Watson and Emily Greene Balch traveled to Haiti, they reported that, “The press law has been repeatedly modified (1922, 1923, 1924) each time in the direction, so we are told, of severity.”<sup>16</sup> Carl Kelsey, who traveled to Haiti for six months in 1921, reported that Henri Chauvet, editor of *The Nouvelliste*, announced the “impending recall of the financial advisor, Mr. Ruan,” November 22, 1918, and was summarily punished even though the story proved true.<sup>17</sup> Details of William Seabrook’s luncheon as described in *The Magic Island* (1929) with Chauvet appear in the following chapter.

In February of 1920, *The Nation* began to publish articles critical of the U.S. Occupation of Haiti. Other authors in support of the U.S. Occupation responded with detailed reports justifying the U.S. Marine presence on the island and excusing abuses first reported in *The*

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<sup>13</sup> “Marines Back from Haiti,” Norfolk, Virginia, Universal Newspaper Newsreels 241 (16 April 1934), Universal Pictures Company, 1934, Alexander Street Video, 2013, 19 Oct. 2012, 10:12 minutes. Another newsreel dated four months later also announces the withdrawal, “Marines Back from Haiti,” Universal Newspaper Newsreels 278 (24 August 1934), Universal Pictures Company, 1934, Alexander Street Video, 2013, 19 Oct. 2012, 9:30 minutes.

<sup>14</sup> An [anonymous] Onlooker wrote, “the censorship on Caribbean affairs has been so severe that the last American newspaper man to visit Haiti was compelled to assume the disguise of a sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corps (which became him mightily) so as not to offend the susceptibilities of [Secretary of the Navy] Mr. Daniels’s friends down there; and he seems to have been obliged to view things through Marine Corps spectacles, which possess the gift of making everything appear for the best in this best of all possible worlds,” *America’s Ireland*,” 231. This appears to parallel the contemporary implementation of imbedded reporters in Iraq and Afghanistan.

<sup>15</sup> James Weldon Johnson. “Self-Determining Haiti: The American Occupation,” Pt. 1, *The Nation* 111.2878 (26 August 1920): 236-238, 237.

<sup>16</sup> Grace D. Watson and Emily Greene Balch, “The Press and the Prison,” in Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 146.

<sup>17</sup> Kelsey does not state the quality or duration of the punishment, though “preventative imprisonment” was very common in 1926, “Haiti,” 140-141; Watson and Balch, “The Press and the Prison,” 145.

*Nation*. Interested parties began traveling to Haiti to validate or invalidate such claims. A variety of materials came out of the Occupation period worthy of consideration here. A few years later, silent and again later narrated newsreels circulated within U.S. American theaters. Haiti began a second wave of literary presence and of visual presence in the American imagination. This chapter deals specifically with those political reports as they set the stage for the more fantastical investigations that follow. Some argue that Vodou brought the Marines to Haiti, but that is a misnomer. Financial and political interests stand at the core of the U.S. mission; Vodou only served as a convenient excuse, a sideshow spectacle aimed in some outlets at developing carnivalesque notions of the primitive. The emotional and visceral appeal of such horror tales perpetuated by some nineteenth-century and Occupation period authors may have served U.S. interests but do not represent the foundation upon which the intervention was launched.<sup>18</sup>

Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat addresses each of the purported abuses described in the following accounts in her fictional rendering of the contemporary life of Sophie Caco in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). Set during the latter Duvalier years, through the subtle artistry of her fiction, Danticat reflects on the Caco women's pride in their resistance to the Occupation and the persistence of problems created by the U.S. forces into the late twentieth century in Haiti. Set against a modern reading of Vodou treated in the final chapter of this text, Danticat's numerous reflections on the specific incidents of Occupation abuses and their transformations under the dictatorships of the Duvaliers indicate her knowledge of these reports. Where appropriate her fictionalized concerns appear alongside the commentary. In the final

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<sup>18</sup> For a fascinating history of pre-Occupation non-fiction descriptions of Vodou, including Spenser St. John's *Hayti, or the Black Republic* (1884), James Anthony Froude's *The English in the West Indies* (1888), and William W. Newell's "Myths of Voodoo Worship and Child Sacrifice in Hayti" (1888) and "Reports of Voodoo Worship in Hayti and Louisiana" (1889) in *The Journal of American Folklore*, and Hesketh Pritchard's *Where Black Rules White: A Journey Across and About Hayti* (1900), among others, see Gary D. Rhodes, "Casting the Mold: The Pre-Halperin World of Voodoo and Zombies," *White Zombie: Anatomy of a Horror Film*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2006, 70-88, 72-76.

analysis, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* provides evidence of the perpetuation of Occupation concerns into the present uniting the prolonged discourses of interested Americans and Haitians alike.<sup>19</sup>

*The Nation*. An anonymous “Onlooker” first commented on the Haitian situation in *The Nation* on February 21, 1920.<sup>20</sup> The article, titled “America’s Ireland: Haiti-Santo Domingo,” plays on fears expressed by Carlyle in the previously discussed “Discourses,” in which he expressed concern that Jamaica’s freed slaves fared better than Britain’s Irish due to the hyper-extenuated efforts of abolitionists to secure social security for former slaves while the Irish starved.<sup>21</sup> The Onlooker implies in his or her opening remarks that the U.S. has ignored “Caribbean affairs” while settling into a post-war peace and calls for a re-examination of the role of the U.S. Navy Secretary, Mr. Josephus Daniels, as the “Czar of Haiti and Lord Protector of Santo Domingo.”<sup>22</sup> Here, the Onlooker responds to prior justifications that Haiti and the Dominican Republic required protection through pacification from the Germans, specifically “Kaiser Wilhelm,” during World War I, by equating the Secretary of the Navy with a Russian title. The Onlooker punctuates certain important points throughout this short essay by applying titles of royalty to U.S. Americans employed in the invasion of Haiti and the pacification of the Dominican; i.e., “viceregal,” and “Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary.”<sup>23</sup> Replete with humor, satire and sardonic twists, the Onlooker does not seek to devalue the abuses of the Occupation, but to reveal the very impotence with which the U.S. officials carry out their strategies, posing as more than they are, drawing large salaries, accomplishing little. In fact, the Onlooker is concerned with specific forms of abuse performed against both Dominicans and Haitians during the early years of the Pacification and Occupation. In both countries, U.S. forces

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<sup>19</sup>See Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 2nd ed., New York: Vintage Contemporary Books, 1998.

<sup>20</sup> See An Onlooker, “America’s Ireland,” 231-234.

<sup>21</sup> See Carlyle, “Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question,” and DeLaura, *Victorian Prose*.

<sup>22</sup> An Onlooker, “America’s Ireland,” 231.

<sup>23</sup> An Onlooker, “America’s Ireland,” 233.

commandeered free individuals to work without pay. The logistics of the Constitution negotiated between the Dominicans allowed the U.S. to apply the “Weyler *reconcentrero* system” of conscripted labor.<sup>24</sup> Even though Haitians had resisted the complete disavowal of their own constitution, insisting on maintaining power over certain segments of government operations, the U.S. employed the *corvée* system, three days labor per year required of able-bodied Haitians to maintain roads within the prior Haitian Constitution, to force Haitians into chain gangs to perform manual labor, specifically building roads, but extended to other areas as well.<sup>25</sup> The roads took much longer to build than three days and kept families separated across vast geographical distances. The Haitian people did not appreciate forced labor, or the abuses of white Marines charged with the execution of the work, in 1915 anymore than they did Napoleon’s attempt to restore slavery to the nation in 1802. Although the U.S. formally abolished the *corvée* system in 1918, news did not reach all until much later nor did change occur in a way satisfactory to all Haitians. By 1922 the alternate “process of ousting peasants from their land and making of them itinerant laborers at the prevailing wage of twenty cents a day ha[d] already begun.”<sup>26</sup> In outlying areas, U.S. Marines continued the practice of *corvée* in the name of agricultural development much longer.<sup>27</sup> An Onlooker describes the *reconcentero* as nothing less than “concentration camps.”<sup>28</sup> In an article published five months later in *The Nation* titled “The Conquest of Haiti,” Herbert J. Seligmann describes the *corvée* system of

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<sup>24</sup> Forced labor of the Dominicans under U.S. Occupation followed the name employed in Cuba. When “Weyler was Captain-General of Cuba, he put into effect a system of concentration camps. Barbed wire netting . . . stretched over beautiful, well-shaded and well-watered park lands, and Cubans who refused to be good were invited to picnic with their families in these enclosures, where everything was provided for their comfort except food, clothing and medicines. Sometimes one of these wicked Cubans would break through the net, and then, of course, Captain-General Weyler’s soldiers shot him. This method of pacification” established a tradition amongst U.S. Occupation forces, prefiguring the abuses of the *corvée* in Haiti, and was criticized within the U.S. as well, An Onlooker, “America’s Ireland,” 232.

<sup>25</sup> “General Butler, in 1917, revived a law, dating from 1865, requiring citizens to work on local roads,” Kelsey, “Haiti,” 137.

<sup>26</sup> Frank P. Walsh, “American Imperialism,” *The Nation* 114.2952 (1 Feb. 1922): 115-116, 115.

<sup>27</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 137.

<sup>28</sup> An Onlooker, “America’s Ireland,” 232-3.

coercive labor as “actual slavery imposed upon [Haitians] by white Americans.”<sup>29</sup> The Onlooker also objects to the operations of “the International Banking Corporation, a subsidiary of the National City Bank of New York” in both Haiti and the Dominican, the declaration of martial law in Haiti, censorship of the press and freedom of speech, and the immediate corrupted election of a U.S.-chosen President for Haiti. Seizure of the national funds of Haiti by the U.S.-based bank allowed the U.S. government full control over collection of tariffs, distribution of salaries, and management of Haitian debts. The Onlooker finds appalling a state of affairs that allows the executive powers of U.S. President Wilson to impinge those of Congress. In other words, the means do not justify the ends. The Onlooker argues for “self-determination,” a subject taken up subsequently in four serially published articles by James Weldon Johnson in the same publication, also in 1920.<sup>30</sup> “The world cannot be made safe for democracy while the secretary of the Navy rules, with absolute power and without the consent of the governed, an island which compares with Ireland in area, in the number of inhabitants [900,000 Dominicans; two million Haitians], and in the intensity with which two races of widely different characteristics hate each other.”<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, in an interview, published in the same issue of *The Nation*, L. J. de Bekker writes, “If the Occupations of Haiti and Santo Domingo is brought to an end as soon as the circumstances permit it, I have no doubt that the Latin-American sentiment in favor of the United States will receive a powerful impulse.”<sup>32</sup> As Haiti and the Dominicans’ nearest neighbor, Cuba could potentially have received the same treatment. In fact, the U.S. did occupy Cuba from 1898 to 1902, a state of affairs Cubans had no desire to return to.<sup>33</sup> Occupation could be

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<sup>29</sup> Herbert J. Seligmann, “The Conquest of Haiti,” *The Nation* 111.2871 (10 July 1920): 35-36, 35.

<sup>30</sup> An Onlooker, “America’s Ireland,” 231; See Johnson, “The Occupation,” “Accomplished,” and “The Haitian People;” James Weldon Johnson, “Self Determining Haiti: Government of, by, and for the National City Bank,” Pt. 3, *The Nation* 111.2880 (11 Sept. 1920): 295-297.

<sup>31</sup> An Onlooker, “America’s Ireland,” 232, 234.

<sup>32</sup> L. J. de Bekker, “Cuba and her President,” *The Nation* 110.2851 (21 Feb. 1920): 230-231.

<sup>33</sup> Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 182-183.

infectious in the Caribbean, and, in Cuba's defense at the time of the Pacification in Haiti, the same previous commentator said, "I cannot see what benefit could accrue to Cuba as a result of closer political relations with the United States. The character of its people and our past history entitle Cuba to rank among the free nations of the world; our contribution to literature, commerce, science, and sports, show that, though a geographically small country our people compare favorably with the most civilized nations, and their sentiment of nationality is too strong to permit of annexation or incorporation with a foreign power."<sup>34</sup> Who would want such intervention as painted by this portrait? And this only represents the beginning of such criticism.

**Herbert J. Seligmann.** Five months after the anonymous Onlooker's article appeared in *The Nation*, Seligmann offered his commentary in another short essay where he elaborated more specifically on the abuses of power exercised by the U.S. Marines in the first five years of the Occupation of Haiti. Seligmann spent over a month in Haiti prior to publication traveling with James Weldon Johnson.<sup>35</sup> Seligmann speaks out against the censorship imposed on the press. "Of all this Americans at home have been kept in the profoundest of ignorance[;]. . . the United States government and the American military occupation which has placed Haiti under martial law do not want the people of the United States to know what has happened in Haiti"<sup>36</sup> He estimates that 3,000 Haitian men, women, and children "have been shot down by American machine guns and rifle bullets; black men and women have been put to torture . . . by white men wearing the uniform of the United States," while "less than twenty Americans have been killed

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<sup>34</sup> de Bekker, "Cuba," 231.

<sup>35</sup> "Herbert Seligmann sailed with me, but after several weeks there he was taken seriously ill and returned home," Johnson, *Along this Way*, 345. As first colored president of the NAACP, upon Johnson's hurried return from Haiti, which was an affair in itself, for their first meeting at Atlanta, "Seligmann was not yet fully recovered from his Haitian illness and so could not go," Johnson, *Along this Way*, 356. Johnson was concerned about the reception they would receive there. Welcomed by the mayor no incidents occurred. What illness did Seligmann acquire in Haiti and did he ever recover?

<sup>36</sup> Seligmann, "The Conquest of Haiti," 35.

or wounded in action,” during what he describes as a “five years’ massacre.”<sup>37</sup> Johnson later notes, “General Barrett, of the marines,” confirmed “in a published report . . . the number of ‘indiscriminate killings of Haitians’ at 3250; the number of marines killed at 13; and the number of Haitians wounded ‘impossible to estimate’.”<sup>38</sup> Having been asked to turn in their weapons, few Haitians had much to fight back with, but Seligmann makes first mention here of the *cacos* resistance, heretofore believed by him to have not “been published in any newspaper of the United States.”<sup>39</sup>

Although Seligmann repeats the ever-repeating story of the brutal massacre and dismemberment of President Sam as the motivation for U.S. intervention, he also points to deeper U.S. political concerns that have less to do with the welfare of the Haitian people and more to do with the sovereign rights of the U.S. under the Monroe Doctrine to implement “defense against any Power which taking control of Haiti, a weaker state, might use its territory as a base for naval action against the United States.” Here, that power presented as threats from France prior to World War I and Germany during World War I. Both did hold land investments in Haiti prior to the Occupation. The Convention, articulated by the Onlooker as the “extra-constitutional” proclamation, disallowed any foreign investment in property in Haiti by any but U.S. enterprise. In fact, U.S. enterprise forcibly removed lands from rightfully landowning Haitians.<sup>40</sup> In just a few short pages, Seligmann draws our attention to censorship; unjustified murder, torture, and enslavement of Haitian peoples; illegal foreign policy moves executed by the U.S. in conquering Haitian territory; mixed emotions of some U.S. personnel who fear to

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Johnson adds, “I told [Republican Presidential candidate Warren G. Harding] that I had arrived at the number after the widest inquiry I could make and upon what I believed was a conservative estimate,” *Along This Way*, 359.

<sup>39</sup> Seligmann, “The Conquest of Haiti,” 35.

<sup>40</sup> Danticat explores this issue of land rights in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, when Sophie’s grandmother makes of show of securing her land title prior to her projected death so that multiple generations of women cannot be stripped of their homeland property rights should any of her descendents choose to return to Haiti and to provide for Tante Atie should she succeed her mother, 167.

speak out against such atrocities; specific resistance movements; lack of any effort on the U.S. part to solve illiteracy; extortion by the customs administration; and blatant racism enacted against the Haitian people—“nicknamed ‘Gooks’ . . . and treated with every variety of contempt, insult, and brutality.”<sup>41</sup> Seligmann presents the first known eye-witness accounts of such abuses.

Like others that follow Seligmann closely watches and listens to those around him. Echoing the words of Thomas Carlyle in the nineteenth-century “Discourses” (1849), so brilliantly brought to our attention by Frank Webb (1857), Seligmann writes,

I have heard officers and men in the United States Marine Corps say that they thought the island should be ‘cleaned out’: that all the natives should be shot; that shooting was too good for them; that they intended taking no prisoners; that many of those who had been taken prisoners had been ‘allowed to escape,’ that is, shot on the pretext that they had attempted flight. I have seen prisoner’s face disfigured by beatings administered to them and have heard officers discussing those beatings; also a form of torture—‘sept’—in which the victim’s leg is compressed between two rifles and the pressure against the shin increased until agony forced him to speak. I know that men and women have been hung by the neck until strangulation impelled them to give information.<sup>42</sup>

Seligmann echoes Webb’s fictional description of the brutal mob murder of the Garies and the dismemberment of Mr. Ellis. But this is not fiction. Seligmann claims to have witnessed these events or heard officers bragging thereof. Seligmann claims to have in his “possession a copy of a ‘bon habitat’ (good citizen) pass which all Haitians in the interior have been required to carry . . . Failure to carry the pass formerly involved being shot or arrested.”<sup>43</sup> In Louverture’s time he would only have required those without proper papers be sent to work or out of the country. Inflammatory in nature, Seligmann shared the attention of James Weldon Johnson, who had served the U.S. government in diplomatic relations with Latin America for many years.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Seligmann, “The Conquest of Haiti,” 35.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Seligmann, “The Conquest of Haiti,” 35-6.

<sup>44</sup> Seligmann, “The Conquest of Haiti,” 36; also see Bakhtin, Babcock, and Danticat on the social nature of political performance of spectacle in the carnivalesque; M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael



**James Weldon Johnson.** Six months after the initial anonymous Onlooker's article appeared and two months after Seligmann, Johnson published a series of commentaries under the recurring title "Self-Determining Haiti" split into four articles in 1920 in *The Nation*, separately titled: 1) "The American Occupation" on August 28; 2) "What the United States has Accomplished" on September 4; 3) "Government of, by and for the National City Bank" on September 11; and 4) "The Haitian People" on September 25. Each addresses specific points made by the previous authors and draws into question new issues. In the first articles Johnson inscribes himself in the current discourse by repeating language in the previous two articles, announcing he will expound on the chronology of the events of which, "Most Americans have the opinion—if they have any at all on the subject—that the United States was forced on purely humane grounds to intervene in the black republic because of the coup d'état which resulted in the overthrow of President Guillaume Sam and the execution of political prisoners confined at Port-au-Prince, July 27-28, 1915; and that this government has been compelled to keep a military force in Haiti since that time to pacify the country and maintain order."<sup>45</sup> In order to dispel that myth and clarify the U.S. position in Haiti, Johnson notes actual historical precursors of political attempts by the U.S. under the direction of the Ford mission to exact a "'peaceable' intervention" through the negotiation of a convention "on the model of the Dominican-American Convention" during the four years prior to "forcible intervention."<sup>46</sup> The Haitian government, under the leadership of prior President Theodor Davilmar, emphatically stated: "The Government of the

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Holquist, translated Caryl Emmerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981; Barbara A. Babcock, ed., *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978; Edwidge Danticat, *After the Dance*, New York: Crown Journeys, 2002. Seligmann's closing comments imply metaphorically and metonymically that he had also witnessed some of the beauty of Haitian social performance, though he makes no direct description thereof. Such direct mention of Haitian strategies of performative community resilience might have misdirected his audience away from the crucial issues at hand—the abuses of the Haitian people enacted by U.S. Marines, personally and politically; on James Weldon Johnson, see *Along this Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*. New York: DaCapo, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> Johnson, "The Occupation," 236.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

Republic of Haiti would consider itself lax in its duty to the United States and to itself if it allowed the least doubt to exist of its *irrevocable intention not to accept any control of the administration of Haitian affairs by a foreign Power.*<sup>47</sup> After the execution of President Sam, the U.S. government employed “somewhere near three thousand Americans under arms in the republic;” roughly equal to the number of unnecessary Haitian deaths claimed by Seligmann and Johnson. “The overthrow of Guillaume and its attending consequences did not constitute the cause of American intervention in Haiti, but merely furnished the awaited opportunity.”<sup>48</sup>

Haitians were compelled to agree to the ensuing Convention by the U.S. government’s dissolution of the Haitian Assembly, with far more severe consequences than the Convention Ford and Fuller attempted to negotiate prior to U.S. intervention. The forced Convention provided Haiti with a U.S.-chosen and backed president, granting the U.S. de facto executive power over the Haitian government, and imposed a new Constitution directly opposed to long-standing Haitian desires to limit private ownership of land and property by foreign investors. “Haiti had long considered the denial of this right to aliens as her main bulwark against overwhelming economic exploitations.”<sup>49</sup> Without a legislative body, Haiti had little power to enforce civil courts or to prosecute crimes committed by Americans. Johnson considers all of this unconstitutional because it ignored the rights of Haitians, and the Convention and imposition of a new Constitution was executed “without any act by Congress and without any knowledge of the American people” due to strict “censorship” immediately imposed. Johnson points to the irony that, “No Haitian newspaper is allowed to publish anything in criticism of the Occupation or the Haitian government,” including the injunction against doing so.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Italics mine; Johnson, “The Occupation,” 236.

<sup>48</sup> Johnson, “The Occupation,” 236.

<sup>49</sup> Johnson, “The Occupation,” 237.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

Instituting the “unconstitutional” Constitution’s “financial, military [and] bureaucratic” policies aggravated “the conditions they themselves have created” in a largely “self-perpetuating” cycle. In spite of reported physical human rights abuses, Johnson claims the financial and psychological effects of the Occupation “the most sinister” represented by the financial engulfment of Haiti by the National City Bank of New York.<sup>51</sup> His complaints include the staffing of administrative positions with ineffectual Southern U.S. officials who bring “their wives and families to Haiti . . . to live in beautiful villas” with a staff of servants and ample supply of motor vehicles that “seem to be chiefly employed in giving the women and children an airing each afternoon.”<sup>52</sup> He notes Haitian officials of equal status are paid significantly less. In fact, Johnson notes, “While I was there, the President himself was obliged to borrow an automobile from the Occupation for a trip through the interior.”<sup>53</sup> He speaks to the humiliation such actions bring to Haitians, to the confiscation of customs and tariffs, and to the sovereignty of Mexico (remembering de Bekker’s reference to the sovereignty of Cuba in 1920).<sup>54</sup> He notes that although prior to the Occupation Haiti had never “slaughtered an American citizen, . . . never molested an American woman, . . . [and] never injured a dollar’s worth of American property,” the U.S. had indeed conquered Haiti and that “‘pacification’ means merely the hunting of ragged Haitians in the hills with machine guns.”<sup>55</sup> Speaking of his trip to the interior with the President qualifies him as witness to provide testimony of his experiences there on equivalent grounds with others considered within this text. In fact, Zora Neale Hurston maintained correspondence with Johnson through letters both before and after her studies in Haiti.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Johnson, “The Occupation,” 238

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> de Bekker, “Cuba,” 231.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, “The Occupation,” 237, 238.

<sup>56</sup> See four letters written to Johnson in 1934 before Hurston went to Haiti and three in 1937 upon her return; Carla Kaplan, ed., *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, New York: Doubleday, 2002, 287, 295, 302, 309, 395, 410, 413.

In Johnson's second article, "What the United States has Accomplished," he enumerates three points of general success: "The building of the road from Port-au-Prince to Cap Haitien; the enforcement of certain sanitary regulations in the larger cities; and the improvement of the public hospital at Port-au-Prince."<sup>57</sup> These three points provide what Johnson believes apologists for the Occupation will hang on to in a rather satirical tone commenting on events he personally witnessed or heard Marines tell him of while in Haiti. Mostly voiced as a travel account, with less focus on the historical detail of the preceding article, Johnson gives voice, briefly, quickly, and in-short of his opinions of the "accomplishments" of the Occupation making no effort to disguise his criticism of U.S practices on the ground in Haiti. He draws attention to each of the aforementioned successes and their consequences, the worst being the building of the road from Port-au-Prince to Cap Haitian. Johnson argues the U.S. built this "monumental piece of work . . . to construct a military road which would facilitate the transportation of troops and supplies from one end of the island to the other."<sup>58</sup> He calls it "the most brutal blunder of the Occupation" in terms of its execution.

The *corvée*, or road law, in Haiti provided that each citizen should work a certain number of days on the public roads to keep them in condition, or pay a sum of money. In the days when this law was in force the Haitian government never required the men to work the roads except in the respective communities, and the number of days was usually limited to three a year.<sup>59</sup>

The U.S. used this outdated law from a prior Constitution to impose what "most closely resembled the African slave raids of the past centuries. And slavery it was—though temporary."<sup>60</sup> Workers "were herded into compounds. Those attempting to escape were shot."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> He notes that, "The characteristics, alleged and real, of the Haitian people will be taken up in a subsequent article," Johnson, "Accomplished," 265; see Johnson, "The Haitian People."

<sup>58</sup> Johnson, "Accomplished," 265.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

Johnson argues that these methods led directly to the defection of potential Haitian workers to the hills where they formed groups of *caco* rebels, most famously under the leadership of Charlemagne Peralte, an educated Haitian “sentenced, not to prison, but to five years hard labor on the roads, and . . . forced to work in convict garb on the streets of Cap Haitien.”<sup>62</sup> A self-styled revolutionary on the model of his eighteenth and nineteenth century predecessors, “he was shot in cold blood by an American Marine.”<sup>63</sup> In Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) she ties the entire lineage of female characters in her fictional text to Peralte through their connection to the fictional *caco* leader, Charlemagne Le Grand Caco, the grandfather of the main character, Sophie Caco.<sup>64</sup> In addition to murdering resisters to the *corvée* system, the highways intruded upon small plots of land Haitian families had subsisted on since the breakdown of the plantation economy a century before without regard to recompense or property rights. Americans traveled the road at fast speeds in their U.S. funded cars with little regard for the Haitian peasants making their ways up and down the roads daily to markets. Although the paving of roads in Port-au-Prince was largely carried out during the Occupation, “*the Occupation did not pave, and had nothing to do with the paving of a single street in Port-au-Prince.*”<sup>65</sup> Haitians paved the roads in Port-au-Prince under contracts negotiated prior to the Occupation.

Johnson finds the education system in Haiti dismal and expresses disappointment that in the revised Constitution the U.S. entirely ignores any attempt to resolve the problem of illiteracy, to build proper school buildings, or to pay teachers properly. He notes that “Haiti has been a

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 150; Ishmael Reed defends the legendary *caco* leader in his novel, *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), “Charlemagne Peralte was hardly a bandit. Our leader was a member of the Haitian elite. He did not invite the American Marines to land in our country on July 28, 1915. The U.S.S. Washington landed uninvited. They came on their ships without an Act of your Kongress [*sic.*] or consent of the American people,” 132.

<sup>65</sup> Italics Johnson, “Accomplished,” 266.

remarkably healthy country” compared to Cuba and Panama, of which he also has experience and that Occupation claims to have improved “sanitation” mean little. He also notes that U.S. claims to have improved the hospital at Port-au-Prince are largely unfounded. He acknowledges that the introduction of skilled U.S. surgeons benefits Haitians but that Haitians had that covered before the U.S. got there, training their doctors in Europe through state-sponsored scholarship and private funding.<sup>66</sup> The most glaring success of the Occupation that concerns Johnson here is the introduction of “rough, uncouth, and uneducated” Americans serving in the developing Gendarmerie, who derive “a great number from the South, . . . violently steeped in color prejudice.”<sup>67</sup> Hurbon draws attention to Johnson’s concern: “Certain historians have wondered if the American government didn’t specifically choose to have most of the marines sent to Haiti come from the South, to be sure of their racist behavior.”<sup>68</sup> “Brutalities and atrocities on the part of American marines have occurred with sufficient frequency to be the cause of deep resentment and terror” undermining any “hopes” some Haitians might have had that U.S. intervention could have succeeded. Johnson cites cases of extreme brutality he has “seen” and “heard about” from torture to battering to rape of Haitian women to *caco* hunts. Other spectators, economists, sociologists, and journalists confirm these atrocities with their own staggering accounts. Apparently, in “hotels and cafes” in Port-au-Prince, Marines happily brag of such exploits to his ears.<sup>69</sup> “Americans have carried American hatred to Haiti. They have planted the feeling of caste and color prejudice where it never before existed.”<sup>70</sup> He closes noting how deeply the Marines

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<sup>66</sup> Before the Occupation the Haitian government provided scholarships “for study in foreign universities [that] are no longer allowed under the Occupation,” Charlotte Atwood and Emily G. Balch, “Problems of Education,” in Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 104.

<sup>67</sup> Johnson, “Accomplished,” 266.

<sup>68</sup> Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 194.

<sup>69</sup> Johnson, “Accomplished,” 266.

<sup>70</sup> Johnson, “Accomplished,” 267; this ignores Haitian observers’ analysis of the color and caste system apparent in Haiti; see Blair Niles, *Black Haiti: A Biography of Africa’s Eldest Daughter*, with illustrations by Robert Niles, Jr.,

have planted those seeds, “If the United States were to leave Haiti today, it would leave more than a thousand widows and orphans of its own making, more banditry than has existed for a century, resentment, hatred and despair in the heart of a whole people, to say nothing of the irreparable injury to its own tradition as the defender of the rights of man.”<sup>71</sup>

In Johnson’s third article in *The Nation*, “Government of, by and for the National City Bank,” he returns to concrete analysis of fiscal and financial investment as the larger political motivation for the U.S. remaining after making his previous argument so clearly that in terms of human rights, nothing can be done to excuse or right such wrongs. Do the means justify the ends? The U.S. clearly has more invested in Haiti than simply humiliating her people. The objective must come down to economics; otherwise, the U.S. would not allot so much money to people they think so little of. Utilizing the common strategy of serial publication, Johnson provides his argument in deliberate persuasive bites allowing his audience time to digest before he hands them another difficult bit to swallow.

The following and concluding articles by Johnson lack the empathetic outrage. The third article questions the U.S.’s true motivation for intervention in the first place. In a step-by-step documentation of events as they occurred regarding the national treasury of Haiti and collection of tariffs, customs, and repayment of debts, Johnson points to the National City Bank of New York, which acquired all Haitian assets with the Constitution of 1918 including the Banque Nationale d’Haiti. He argues that the intervention has less to do with concern for stated humanitarian violations within Haiti and everything to do with “constantly bringing about a

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New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1926, quoted in Addie Hunton and Emily G. Balch, “Racial Relations,” in Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 114.

<sup>71</sup> Johnson, “Accomplished,” 267; in “American Fantasy,” Hurbon adds, “The marine’s manifest preference for a mulatto mistress from the Haitian bourgeoisie—making her a collaborator of the apparatus of the state and government—came out of an attitude of scorn for such women. She was used to reinforce battles of color in the bosom of Haitian society. The humiliation that the occupier willed on Haiti struck at the entire society,” 194.

condition more suitable and profitable to itself.”<sup>72</sup> U.S. officials employed in Haiti in the name of stabilization receive much higher salaries than their Haitian equals in service, but simple self-interest of pioneering individuals cannot fully explain the financial interest of the U.S. in Haiti. Johnson explains that with control of the railways the bank expects to gain control of the “\$5,000,000 sugar plant at Port-au-Prince.”<sup>73</sup> Instead of Haitians maintaining the decree they held since the Revolution against foreign ownership of property, the U.S. seized, maintained control of, and invested in land for agricultural production benefiting U.S. enterprise, effectively taking all such profits from any industry on newly acquired American-owned lands to the National City Bank for redistribution as seen fit by a government maintained by imposed martial law, and not by Haitian citizens. Paul H. Douglas, in a study published in *The Nation* after his own travels in Haiti in 1926, clearly demonstrates the particulars of the relationship between The National City Bank and the acquisition of the railways and nearly half the land in Haiti along the corridor from Cap Haitien to Port-au-Prince.<sup>74</sup> Where Johnson remains somewhat vague about how this occurred, Douglas provides the specific details preceding the Bank’s actions.

The U.S. apparently perceived that Haitian foreign debt, including an extended debt to France resulting from the Revolution needed external management. The Dominican had defaulted on its internal debt, but “Haiti for over one hundred years scrupulously paid its external and internal debt—a fact worth remembering when one hears of ‘anarchy and disorder’ in that land—until five years ago,” when the U.S. secured “financial guardianship.”<sup>75</sup> Not only does this dishonor Haiti’s national reputation, it bears directly on the finances of individuals. Haitians held much of the “interior debt” in the forms of government issued bonds and securities much like we

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<sup>72</sup> Johnson, “National City Bank,” 295.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> See Paul H. Douglas, “The National Railway of Haiti: A Study in Tropical Finance,” *The Nation* 124.3211 (19 Jan. 1927): 59-61.

<sup>75</sup> Johnson, “Government,” 295.



do here in the U.S. “Non-payment on these securities has placed many families in absolute want.”<sup>76</sup> Imagine going to the bank to find the worth of your investments diminished to nothing, not due to failure of your own government, but the intervention of foreigners. The bank under U.S. control maintained “exclusive note-issuing privilege” denying Haitian businesses credit, but extending it to its own interests and subsuming responsibility for repaying any foreign debt on U.S. terms, as renegotiated for U.S. profit rather than Haitian future stability. Under the leadership of Mr. John Avery McIlhenny, whom Johnson discredits for his Southern heritage, as well as his destructive financial measures in Haiti, The National City Bank has completed the “riveting, double-locking and bolting of its financial control of the island.”<sup>77</sup> Protest against such a monopoly from Haitians, Europeans and leading U.S. American investments in Haiti remain ignored, while McIlhenny held “up the salaries of the President, ministers of departments, members of the Council of the State, and the official interpreter” in an attempt at financial blackmail. Such a situation can only create resentment, increasing brewing hostilities between U.S. officials, Haitians, and competing business interests on the ground, especially amongst Haitians with the competencies and reserves to develop and run the country and outside interests also willing to engage in supporting the project of “self-determination,” the headline theme of Johnson’s four essays also expressed in the initial report by the anonymous Onlooker.

Johnson’s fourth and final offering in this serial is a portrait of “The Haitian People.” He makes no negative judgments based on his personal experience on the island having spent time with Haitians from the President down to peasants in the outlying areas. Johnson repeats none of the snide and derogatory remarks made by others, gingerly and carefully painting a portrait of a

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<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Johnson, “Government,” 296.

peaceful people, no more bent towards “anarchy” than any other Latin American country. And he has spent extended time in plenty of other Latin American countries.<sup>78</sup> Johnson further argues,

Haitian history has been all too bloody, but so has that of every other country, and the bloodiness of the Haitian revolutions has of late been unduly magnified. A writer might visit our own country and clip from our daily press accounts of murders, robberies on the principal streets of our larger cities, strike violence, race riots, lynchings, and burnings at the stake of human beings, and write a book to prove that life is absolutely unsafe in the United States.<sup>79</sup>

Where others see deficits in illiteracy, he sees linguistic difference and general lack of education as problematic. Instead of blaming Haitians for this condition, he posits a justifiable reason, albeit a bit different than solutions advocated by literacy experts in Haiti today. Johnson writes that, unfortunately, Haitians are left with the linguistic legacy of France. With French as the national language (then spoken by 500,000 of the people) and Kreyole the language of the vast majority (then spoken by 2,000,000), he feels Haiti has been unjustifiably isolated from her Spanish-speaking neighbors.<sup>80</sup> Johnson appears to feel comforted by the “hotels and cafes” in Port-au-Prince “where the affairs of the world are heard discussed in several languages,” but exhibits concern that most Haitians “have no means of receiving or communicating thoughts through the written word.”<sup>81</sup> His words echo the mood of Haitian literacy experts today who advocate for bilingual education and the formalization of Kreyole as a written language.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> See Johnson, *Along This Way*.

<sup>79</sup> “The seriousness of the frequent Latin-American revolutions has been greatly overemphasized,” Johnson, “The Haitian People,” 347. The week I wrote this I went looking for a place in the sun to walk, to find some peace of my own within the disquieting world of the Haitian conflicts that comprise the majority of this dissertation. Randomly searching nearby sites for such exercise I found myself on Old Nashville Pike leading from Murfreesboro to Nashville walking along the Trail of Tears in the middle of a Civil War Battlefield. My simple incursion illustrates the physicality of Johnson’s claim. It is so easy to lay claim and afford blame to contested territory in the name of civilization, with “‘inferiority’ always . . . the excuse for imperialism,” Johnson, “The Haitian People,” 347.

<sup>80</sup> Johnson, “The Haitian People,” 346.

<sup>81</sup> Johnson, “The Haitian People,” 345-346.

<sup>82</sup> Even in 1939, influenced by the U.S. Occupation of Haiti, Maurice Dartigue, education reformer, “emphasized the role of education in helping the mass of Haitian citizens to ensure that ‘public services function[ed] properly,’” including advocating for teaching in Creole “during the first two years of primary schooling,” Chantalle Francesca Verna, “Maurice Dartigue, Educational Reform, and Intellectual Cooperation with the United States as a Strategy for Haitian National Development, 1934-46,” *Journal of Haitian Studies* 13.2 (Fall 2007): 24-38, 30, 33.

Johnson later wrote upon some reflection after leaving Haiti, “that Creole be made a written language; . . . the common written and printed tongue; that it be used in much the same way that Papaimento is used in Curaçao.”<sup>83</sup> Instead of simplifying linguistic difference by promoting a monolingual approach, these discussions promote further disruption of master narrative/colonial languages and multi-linguistic capacities as viable solutions. In 1920, Johnson wrote, “In order to abolish Haitian illiteracy, Creole must be made a printed as well as a spoken language.” He attributes failure to do this as “the worst indictment against the Haitian Government,” who under the Constitution of 1918 retained control of the education system in Haiti, realizing little under U.S. control.<sup>84</sup>

Further in this essay, Johnson comments on the intellectual achievements of Haitians from engineers to authors. If in the previous description of Cuba, as standing out as unique in its civilization in the face of U.S. intervention due to the quality of its literary production, Johnson posits that the work of Fernand Hibbert, Georges Sylvain, Oswald Durand, and Domocles Vieux demonstrates Haiti’s “inherent potentialities,” in opposition to arguments that Haiti needs civilization.<sup>85</sup> In contrast to other writers of the time, Johnson describes the “Haitian country people [as] kind-hearted, hospitable, and polite, seldom stupid but rather quick-witted and imaginative.”<sup>86</sup> He describes the women “like so many Queens of Shebas” in much the same exoticized (nearly erotic) manner as Seabrook will in the following chapter.<sup>87</sup> With “an aesthetic touch [that] is never lacking, . . . [t]he masses of the Haitian people are splendid material for the building of a nation. They are not lazy; on the contrary, they are industrious and thrifty.”<sup>88</sup> In a

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<sup>83</sup> Johnson, *Along this Way*, 353.

<sup>84</sup> Johnson, “The Haitian People,” 346.

<sup>85</sup> Johnson compares revolutions in Haiti to Mexico, “The Haitian People,” 347; “Haiti and the Dominican republic are struggling with an age-old problem, the attainment of civilization,” Kelsey, “Haiti,” 114.

<sup>86</sup> Johnson, “The Haitian People,” 346.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*

typical description by those sympathetic to the Haitian cause, Johnson calls on us to look to the Haitian people for solutions, not just the elite. In painting a visual picture of life in Haiti he concludes that modernization of transport and education are key.

Anyone who travels Haitian roads is struck by the hundreds and even thousands of women, boys, and girls filing along mile after mile with their farm and garden produce on their heads or loaded on the backs of animals. With modern facilities, they could market their produce much more efficiently and with far less effort.<sup>89</sup>

In total, Johnson's four articles comprised twelve pages over a five-week period in *The Nation* in late 1920, five years into the U.S. Occupation of Haiti. He accomplished much in drawing attention to the personal and political problems faced by Haitians and the U.S. financial complicity in contributing to creating a situation in which intervention and pacification became necessary.

**Frank P. Walsh.** Two years later, Frank P. Walsh revisited the series of articles written by Johnson, Seligmann, and the initial Onlooker in 1920, in an article titled, "American Imperialism," also published in *The Nation*.<sup>90</sup> In the Dominican Republic and Haiti, Walsh found that, "Martial law has for six years held these tiny republics in its own iron bondage," if not in physical slavery, certainly bound in a form of mental slavery which he compares to the relationship between Britain and Ireland.<sup>91</sup> Censorship of journalists, "protesting in the name of our own immortal principles, the crime against their country, have been 'tried' by court martial and thrown into jail at hard labor."<sup>92</sup> Local Haitians witnessing such occurrences experience repression of freedom of speech themselves. Proliferation of descriptions of Haitians as meek and mild certainly reflect internalization of oppression, a symptom of systematized abuses of power. Seeing reporters humiliated in prisons or serving hard labor leaves a strong impression.

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<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Walsh, "American Imperialism," 115-116.

<sup>91</sup> Walsh, "American Imperialism," 115.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*

Using illiteracy as an excuse, most commentators have little connection with the lives of the Haitian people. Whether or not Haitians communicate with observers or U.S. servicemen or the gendarmerie, they communicate with each other. Messages of abuse, torture and imprisonment of the press reach the ears of the people. In an apologist report Carl Kelsey notes, “Information spreads rapidly from mouth to mouth. Military men . . . never make a patrol or inspection without finding themselves expected at the destination.”<sup>93</sup> It should come as no surprise that people with history of marronage and resistance kept their distance from potential threats of abuse, fleeing to the hills and forming their own systems of self-defense. Forming what Walsh referred to as “murder gangs” and, elsewhere, “called *Cacos* and bandits. . . . [t]hose patriots who took to the hills with inadequate weapons and tried to cope with the Imperial United States’ Forces were ruthlessly exterminated.”<sup>94</sup> Johnson reported additional information about his time in Haiti beyond *The Nation* articles in *Along this Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* (1938). Given enough rum Marines confided in him abuses they had committed including,

‘bandit hunts’; how they finally came upon a crowd of natives engaged in the popular pastime of cock-fighting, and how they ‘let them have it’ with machine gun and rifle fire. It was evident that for many of the American boys who had enlisted in the marines and been sent to Haiti, ‘hunting bandits’ was a great adventure and a very thrilling sport.<sup>95</sup>

Walsh brings his argument full-circle to that first posited by the Onlooker in comparing Haiti and the Dominican to Ireland, a subject taken up by Webb’s commentators in the previous century in comparing black Americans to Irish immigrants. “To Irish-Americans familiar with imperial methods in their own motherland, as well as to the Americans who know American history, the tale of usurpation, terror, and murder in Haiti and in Santo Domingo sounds like an

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<sup>93</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 131.

<sup>94</sup> Walsh, “American Imperialism,” 115.

<sup>95</sup> Johnson, *Along this Way*, 349-350.

old, old story.”<sup>96</sup> As the British were held “morally and legally culpable for the murder and oppression of the Irish, . . . As Americans we are responsible for the murder done in our name in Haiti and in Santo Domingo,” hauntingly, echoing the “Not in our Name” campaign that rallied against the U.S. attacks on and invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq following September 11, 2001.<sup>97</sup> Walsh argues that, “Our fundamental atrocity in Haiti and in Santo Domingo is our continued presence there” calling for “a third Evacuation Day” as occurred in Ireland on the seventeenth of March, now celebrated as St. Patrick’s Day in America, for the Dominican and Haiti “from our Wall Street General Staff Imperialism.”<sup>98</sup> He further calls for impeachment of “those who perverted the United States forces to their imperialist purposes.” As taxpayers, “We pay these administrators” of the Occupation; “[t]hey are our servants. We are their accomplices.”<sup>99</sup>

**Political, Legal and Socio-Economic Responses to Accusations Posed in *The Nation*.**

In 1922, Carl Kelsey and Phillip Marshall Brown responded to the accusations posed by the Onlooker, Seligmann, Johnson, and Walsh in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* and *The American Journal of International Law* respectively. Each defends the position of the United States but differs in their opinion as to whether the U.S. should withdraw or not and how. Chosen by the Board of the American Academy of Political and Social Science to undertake “a survey of the economic, social, and political conditions in Haiti and the Dominican Republic,” Kelsey, Professor of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, bases his recommendations on thorough detailed factual accounts of the nature of the people, military intervention, civil involvement, and financial problems of both countries

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<sup>96</sup> Walsh, “American Imperialism,” 115.

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Walsh, “American Imperialism,” 115-16; Danballah, the serpent *loas* of Vodou, is depicted in chromolithographs of St. Patrick throughout Haiti.

<sup>99</sup> Walsh, “American Imperialism,” 115.

including detailed topographical mapping of terrain, rainfall, crops and industrial development.<sup>100</sup> In light of the “political discussions relating to these two republics [that] have contained so much of a political and partisan nature . . . the Board deemed it important that the public opinion of the country should be enlightened by an impartial and unbiased study of the situation.”<sup>101</sup> Kelsey approaches his subject in a balanced, unbiased way reflecting on and presenting facts based on careful examination of government reports, editorials, and an extensive bibliography of sources. Kelsey reports from statistical data and historical documents in addition to observations made during “nine months traveling through Haiti and the Dominican Republic.”<sup>102</sup> Instead of inflamed personal testimony, he presents a level-headed analysis of the Haitian situation that concludes: “Get in, or get out.”<sup>103</sup> Kelsey stayed in Haiti from February through the beginning of July 1921. “I saw every important town of Haiti with the exception of Jacmel, and spent two weeks on a trip to the interior.”<sup>104</sup> Humble in his approach, Kelsey writes,

During this time I had opportunity to talk to people in all walks of life. I had no fixed itinerary or set program. I roamed about as opportunity presented trying to see things for myself. I had no official connection of any sort with the government though it was difficult to persuade the natives that an American civilian traveling about was not on some secret mission. While there I read all the best available books written by Haitians or Dominicans, and kept in touch with the newspapers. Perhaps I might add here that if any strictures seem severe they can be duplicated from the works of reliable native writers.<sup>105</sup>

Thankfully, he includes a full bibliography of resources consulted, unlike any commentator reviewed thus far. He notes, “It is my own fault, if I failed to get an accurate picture of the

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<sup>100</sup> Rowe, *Annals*, 110.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 165; The Academy, having chosen “a man of mature judgment and thorough scientific preparation . . . by unanimous agreement” endeavors to “provide for a series of research fellowships; this placing at the disposal of the country the results of careful and impartial investigation of the problems concerning which the public opinion of the country is called upon to make momentous decisions,” Rowe, *Annals*, 110.

<sup>104</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 113.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*

situation,” taking personal ownership of his account and recommendations.<sup>106</sup> I will return to Kelsey’s apologetic analysis shortly. But, first, let me introduce Emily Green Balch and the five “disinterested” Americans who traveled with her. They published their collective report under the title *Occupied Haiti* in 1927, offering some startling contrasts to both Kelsey and Brown that warrant close attention.

**The Emily Balch Delegation, 1926.** Four years after the U.S. Senate’s decision to uphold and support the continued actions of the U.S. Marines in Haiti in the name of the Occupation, economist and sociologist Emily Greene Balch organized a group of individuals to travel to Haiti and report back to President Coolidge. “Haitian members of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom requested the international executive to look into conditions in Haiti.”<sup>107</sup> As a result, “a mission of six ‘disinterested’ Americans” including “two women professors, two well-known black women, a member from the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and a ‘brilliant young professor of economics at the University of Chicago,’ Paul Douglas, later to become Senator from Illinois.”<sup>108</sup> In addition to Douglas and Balch, the mission included Charlotte Atwood, Zonia Baber, Addie Hunton, and J. Harold Watson.<sup>109</sup> Considering the credentials of this team, they comprised an informed and sensitive group bent on uncovering the truth of events as reported in the press by consulting with U.S. and Haitian officials and the Haitian people. They sailed for Haiti, February 19, 1926, eleven years into the Occupation and

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<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Mercedes M. Randall, “Introduction,” Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 6.

<sup>108</sup> Randall in Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 6.

<sup>109</sup> Atwood had attended Wellesley, securing a B.A. in 1903, and worked as a teacher of English at Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C.; Baber of Chicago formerly served as Professor of Geography in the University of Chicago School of Education; Balch achieved her A.B. at Wellesley as well, here representing the International Executive Committee of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom including holding a post as Vice-President of the U.S. Section, and later became associated with Bryn Mawr College as an economist and sociologist; Douglas held a Ph.D. and served as Professor of Industrial Relations at the University of Chicago, here representing the Foreign Service of the Society of Friends; Hunton of Brooklyn, New York, served as President of the International Council of Women of the Darker Races and Vice-President of the National Association of Colored Women; and Watson of Germantown, Pennsylvania, represented the Fellowship of Reconciliation; Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, viii. Hunton was later added to the staff of the NAACP, Johnson, *Along this Way*, 358.



four years after the publication of reports by Kelsey and Brown. Included in the textual report they submitted for publication, is a letter to Balch, written in 1926 by Dr. Normil Sylvain, depicting “how things may look from the Haitian side.” Published anonymously for his own protection at the time as Appendix C at the end of the book, “Sylvain, who became a special friend, ‘a poet and a scholar, as Haiti breeds them in surprising numbers, considering how small and poor it is,’ . . . came from an old distinguished family.”<sup>110</sup> Although Kelsey sometimes found “it difficult to persuade the natives that an American civilian traveling about was not on some secret mission,” both Kelsey and the Balch team endeavor to hear the Haitian voices called for in Sylvain’s appeals, though with somewhat different revelations and conclusions. Kelsey leans towards apologizing for U.S. actions by placing much of the blame for human rights abuses on individuals, while ultimately holding Washington accountable. The Balch team also found that “[e]ven more than they anticipated they found the problems in Haiti to consist not in individual instances of misused power, but in the fundamental fact of the armed occupation.”<sup>111</sup>

The Balch team presents what I call a mirror discourse. The body of the text itself is composed of the six participants in the investigation with Balch serving as general editor and project director. The body of the text carries the main themes of their investigations relying as Kelsey does on reputable fact, reports, and statistics and bibliography. A second narrative develops within the body of the text and the footnotes that accounts for the Haitian voice. Two simultaneous appeals occur: one to the scientific nature of the research carried out by the Balch team, and a second that allows Haitians to speak for themselves, or in the absence of their voices the Balch team speaks for them, refusing to gloss over events as they saw them. This dual voice

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<sup>110</sup> “This painfully moving letter . . . might be instructive to contrast . . . with Frantz Fanon’s equally painful and moving *The Wretched of the Earth*, written in 1961, especially the chapter on decolonization and the role of violence in effecting social change,” Randall in Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 10.

<sup>111</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, vii.

carrying the narrative anticipates a dual audience. *Occupied Haiti* will be read by the President of the United States and result in the establishment of the Hoover inquiry into the actions of the Occupation that ultimately results in withdrawal. Other more sensitive, maybe sentimental, readers will be drawn to the Other voices appearing like shadows surrounding and undermining the objective intent of the surface of this text.<sup>112</sup> I do not mean undermining in a negative sense, but a positive one, in which, in the fissures (the gap) between the parallel discourses at work here another truth is revealed or rather felt.<sup>113</sup> Trauma assumes a voice in the abject descriptions of the brutalities exhibited against the bodies of Haitian men, women and children.<sup>114</sup>

In a follow up study to the results of the investigations of the Balch team, one of the original party that traveled to Haiti with her, Paul H. Douglas, published a concrete analysis of the problems with the National City Bank presented by earlier authors. The research necessary for the publication of “The National Railway in Haiti: A Study of Finance,” published in *The Nation*, January 19, 1927, could not be conducted on the ground in Haiti, but required study of U.S. policy and financial documents available to him only in the U.S., prompted by questions that arose while on the ground in Haiti. He provides well-documented footnotes to substantiate his claims rather than simply reverting to inflammatory language as some others have and will continue to do. He separates the National Railway from the larger discussion of the Occupation, as financial negotiations for the project began in 1905, ten years prior to Occupation. Hurbon confirms Douglas’s claim. “But from the start of the century, as early as 1905, the United States was already prepared to debark in Haiti. They had begun by investing in a national railway

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<sup>112</sup> On the role of shadows in Caribbean texts see Kathleen Renk, *Caribbean Shadows & Victorian Ghosts: Women’s Writing and Decolonization*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999; for a lyrical interpretation of how undermining works to form new, possibly progressive, social constructions, see Amy Ray, “Go,” on Indigo Girls, *Come on Now Social*, Sony, 1998, CD.

<sup>113</sup> See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, translated Alan Sheridan, New York: Norton, 1998.

<sup>114</sup> See Julia Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection,” in *The Routledge Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, eds. Neil Badmington and Julia Thomas, London: Routledge, 2008, 247.

company,” named the McDonald contract, “for the America negotiator who obtained control of a good part of the lands situated on either side of the railroad, for a period of 50 years.”<sup>115</sup> Douglas clarifies how the Railway became implicated in the intervention and somewhat conflated with other issues relating specifically to the profits of unnamed individuals through their probable relations with the New York City Bank. His analysis allows that the New York City Bank may have held spurious interests in Haiti prior to its takeover of the Banque National d’Haiti through the “treaty which gave the United States economic and military control of Haiti,” drafted and ratified “after some opposition” shortly after the U.S. sponsored and endorsed election of President Sudre Dartiguenave, subsequent to landing Marines on July 28, 1915.<sup>116</sup> Douglas writes, “There are few more striking cases of financial imperialism than that of the National Railway of Haiti,” as he looks for and finds deeper root causes for the intervention.<sup>117</sup>

The appearance of Douglas’s short but detailed essay in *The Nation* reveals that the Balch team had read the initial reports published in that journal discussed previously. Balch confirms that, “It is obvious that a brief stay in Haiti was quite inadequate for anything like a thorough study of Haitian problems, even though different members of the party devoted themselves to different aspects of these, and observation on the spot was supplemented by study before and after the visit to Haiti.”<sup>118</sup> Events that occurred prior to the intervention were probably brought to Douglas’s attention while conducting research in Haiti. Such follow up indicates the team’s continuing concern for Haiti. Their collective reports throw “light, from various angles, on the question whether the United States should renew the Treaty [extending the Occupation from 1926 to 1936], or should withdraw just as soon as may be consistent with leaving the Haitians in

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<sup>115</sup> Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 184.

<sup>116</sup> Douglas, “National Railway,” 60.

<sup>117</sup> Douglas, “National Railway,” 59.

<sup>118</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, vi.

a position to resume independent self-government.”<sup>119</sup> The members of the Balch party “are unanimously in favor of such earlier withdrawal.”<sup>120</sup> All parties signed the preface to *Occupied Haiti* endorsing this recommendation.

**State of Affairs in Haiti.** It might prove expedient to the completion of this dissertation to stop here, but to leave out the details of the reports of these combined commentators would work as a disservice to Haiti and developing literatures. The texts addressed in the following chapters must be considered in light of actual events. For example, Douglas found that in

1922, however, Brigadier General John H. Russell, U. S. M. C., was appointed by the President as High Commissioner of Haiti, and since then no Minister to the country has been appointed. General Russell, is, therefore, at once the representative of the State Department and of the Navy, and even though he makes the Legation his headquarters and appears primarily as a civilian, our Occupation is nevertheless a thinly disguised military control.<sup>121</sup>

The earlier commentators make serious charges against the U.S. and certain Haitian officials as well. Further analysis of U.S. American literary and artistic production requires a firm grounding in the fine details of the discourse which they wrote in response to. Many of them wrote in defense of Haiti, with the intent of enlightening the American public about the practices of the Haitian people with sensitivity and honesty. They wrote and performed to correct misapprehensions and prejudices born of the Occupation (and of the Revolution through the lens of Occupation). Such conflicting and sometimes controversial representations as occur in Kelsey and Balch and inflammatory conclusions such as found in Phillip Marshall Brown’s “American Intervention in Haiti” (1922) require attention for the effect they had on the American public one hundred years ago and how such ideas persist into the present century.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, vii.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Douglas, “Political History,” 33.

<sup>122</sup> See Phillip Marshall Brown, “American Intervention in Haiti,” *The American Journal of International Law* 16.4 (Oct. 1922): 607-610.

Kelsey argues that in spite of some very detailed descriptions of abuses reported by Haitians, “Unfortunately much of the material which has appeared in our press is so grotesque, or deliberately twisted that the reader gets a very false impression.”<sup>123</sup> He claims to “have tried to tell the truth as it appeared to me. Some things impress the foreigner differently than the native. I am confident that all will find running through these lines the same friendly feeling which I find in my heart.”<sup>124</sup> Immediately he establishes a difference between the foreign and the “native” experience and expression of such experience, repeatedly referring the Haitian as the “native” in a confusing turn of phrase that ignores the facts of history, essentially erasing all Taino or Arawak presence from Haiti in a literary if not a literal sense. Rather than review what other commentators have already noted I address where Kelsey diverges from and complements prior critics. He takes this work well beyond the boundaries of pure journalism and into the realm of ethnography as many other subsequent authors do. He also compares Haiti to Ireland. “The total area is over 28,000 square miles, or a little less than that of Ireland,” indicating his awareness of the arguments made by the Onlooker and Walsh in *The Nation*. Kelsey notes that the terrain makes “road building both difficult and expensive,” that the rivers provide little usefulness as waterways because of the inconsistency of the flow of water within them, and that the difficulty of access of a few “scattered” available trees “hardly repay the costs of transportation” though “some trees little used heretofore may prove available for ties for American railroads” instead of requiring that “most building lumber [be] imported from the United States.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 113.

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 115, 117; Both Kelsey and Balch note that providing irrigation will prove difficult. Balch writes that irrigating of the Artibonite Valley and plain through a dam system is “still being studied,” 84, but Kelsey expresses that “the Artibonite will be hard to dam,” 133. The idea of the dam, initiated under Occupation has been built displacing many Haitians and causing some troubles; for details see Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti*.

In introducing the Haitian people, Kelsey notes that little immigration has occurred since the revolution except for a significant number of Syrian merchants driven out by the U.S. Marines but recently allowed back in, who “claim to do \$3,000,000 business yearly with the United States.”<sup>126</sup> On the other side of things, Kelsey describes the “migration of Haitians to Cuba to work on sugar plantations” during the Occupation as “a disguised slave trade” where each is paid \$500 as an indentured contract laborer.<sup>127</sup> “[E]migration from Haiti . . . [is] regarded by many Haitians not only as a tragic loss of population, and especially of its more energetic elements, but as evidence of unsatisfactory economic conditions under American administration.”<sup>128</sup> Of those that do emigrate to Cuba, two-thirds return; for Kelsey this is a positive in the process towards progressive modernization and civilization: “emigration from a region of less production and lower wages to a better, brings in to the home country not only a very useful flow of money . . . but new standards of living, and above all, . . . receptivity of new ideas.”<sup>129</sup> Kelsey largely ignores the immigration of black Americans to Haiti during the nineteenth century, except for his perception that they account for the presence of Protestantism. “There are a few Protestants on the island, some being descended from a company of American Negroes who migrated there many years ago.”<sup>130</sup> He notes that most Haitians are constituted of ninety percent “pure Negro stock.”<sup>131</sup> Hunton and Balch report, “Haitians are like the colored people of the United States in having an African inheritance, of greater or less volume, of white blood and Western civilization. It is unscientific to assume that the valuable contributions came from one side alone, and few studies could be more fascinating than that of the reciprocal

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<sup>126</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 118.

<sup>127</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 151.

<sup>128</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 76.

<sup>129</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 76-77; see table page 77.

<sup>130</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 122; on immigration of American blacks to Haiti see Bardolph, “Social Origins of Distinguished Negroes,” 234, 236, and Harris, “H. Ford Douglas,” 224, 228.

<sup>131</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 118.

modifications and fusion of the diverse elements.”<sup>132</sup> Kelsey claims, “The original Indian stock seems to have left no trace.”<sup>133</sup> This has been disputed by both American and foreign scholars alike. Evidence from Columbus’s journals to the visual work of contemporary arts scholars reveals traces of native performance and artistic practice.<sup>134</sup>

Kelsey credits the Americans with “having ‘cleaned-up’ and for prohibiting the dumping of refuse in the streets.”<sup>135</sup> He notes that lack of sewers, “hordes of mosquitoes,” and “armies of rats” may contribute to the “prevailing diseases,” which “are gonorrhea, syphilis and yaws, tuberculosis, malaria, filariasis and intestinal parasites.”<sup>136</sup> Charlotte Atwood, traveling with Emily Balch, concurred, “The most prevalent diseases in Haiti are fevers, chiefly malarial those caused by intestinal worms; syphilis and yaws; tuberculosis. There are also filariasis, though not to a large extent, and dysentery.”<sup>137</sup> Commonly spread “through mosquitoes, human feces, and body contact,” Atwood doubts the accuracy of figures on the prevalence of these diseases, “as many people live and die without medical care.”<sup>138</sup> Kelsey estimates that lepers number “about 500 or 600, the insane at about 600” for which “no special provision is made.”<sup>139</sup> Atwood

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<sup>132</sup> Hunton and Balch, “Racial Relations,” in Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 113.

<sup>133</sup> On the Taino and Arawak influence and their trade relations within the Caribbean and excerpts from Columbus’s journals about the indigenous peoples he encountered in Hispaniola, see Fatima Bercht, et al., *Taino: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, New York: El Museo del Barrio, Monicelli Press, 1997; for more on Pre-Columbian influence on Haitian culture see Barbara Nesin, “The Influence of Native American and African Encounters on Haitian Art,” *Journal of Haitian Studies* 11.1 (Spring 2005); and Edwidge Danticat’s young adult novel, *Anacoana Golden Flower, Haiti 1490*, New York: Scholastic, 2005; Kelsey, “Haiti,” 118.

<sup>134</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 118.

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 118; in 2001, during my research in Haiti I acquired lymphatic filariasis. I reveal this to show that not much has happened in prevention of certain diseases. “A nationwide survey in 2001 found that lymphatic filariasis affected more than 5 percent of the population.” Further studies in 2007 and 2008 reveal that nearly one hundred years after the beginning of the Occupation, 8 million Haitians are at risk of exhibiting symptoms of a disease that “often devastates victims socially, emotionally, economically, and physically.” Filariasis is carried by mosquitoes. The Carter Center initiated a program in September 2008 to help Haiti and the Dominican Republic “accelerate the elimination of” lymphatic filariasis as a part of a worldwide initiative currently being implemented in Nigeria and Ethiopia; for more information see The Carter Center online, “Fighting Disease: Haiti; Catalyzing Disease Elimination in the Caribbean,” accessed 6 April 2013.

<sup>137</sup> Charlotte Atwood, “Health and Sanitation,” in Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 86.

<sup>138</sup> Atwood, “Health and Sanitation,” 86.

<sup>139</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 120.

reported that by 1926, “The Service d’Hygiene now plans . . . the construction of a 400-bed hospital for the insane, at present cared for at the prison.”<sup>140</sup> In 1936, Hurston visits the only hospital for the insane at Gonaives and photographs a “zombie,” instigating vigorous and serious criticism of her ethnographic account of her research in Haiti, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*.<sup>141</sup> Traditional African societies absorb the insane and otherwise disabled into local communities, in various different ways. Kelsey likely understates his figure given the enormous factors of malnutrition and deep poverty described by almost every writer. “A doctor at the head of one of the hospitals said that to understand the handicap under which these people labor, from the joint burden of undernourishment and disease, an American would have to imagine what it would be like to wear a 50 pound load on his back, night and day.”<sup>142</sup>

In the face of this fairly Dickensian picture, Kelsey draws the reader’s attention to the “favored” pleasures of Haitian life, which include gambling,

cock-fighting and dancing. Cockfights are found everywhere. Gambling is universal. Dancing in the country is to the thumping of the drum, almost the only music of rural Haiti. These dances get pretty hilarious at times if the rum supply is adequate. The tourist hails every simple dance as ‘Voodoo’ but he exaggerates.<sup>143</sup>

This is the first mention of Vodou in any of the early accounts and criticism of the Occupation in the 1920s reviewed here. Kelsey also brings into the conversation drinking and tourism, serious concerns of the other commentators. Johnson previously expressed concern about drunkenness, violent abuses of Haitian people, and the number of orphans created during the Occupation, but carefully avoided the topic of Vodou out of concern for exacerbating U.S. America’s spectacular

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<sup>140</sup> Atwood, “Health and Sanitation,” 90.

<sup>141</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 195; Long, personal communication, 2012; “Richard Long: Harlem Renaissance Personages & Haiti,” The Drescher Center for the Humanities at UMBC, *Youtube.com*, 13 April 2011. Professor Long passed away on 3 January 2013.

<sup>142</sup> Atwood, “Health and Sanitation,” 87.

<sup>143</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 120.



fear of Haitian folk belief. But he may have also shared concerns with others “among the black literati,” who in

an attempt to challenge the popular notion that African Americans were ill mannered and incapable of learning and living in equal status with whites, Douglass, Brown, Delaney, and other former bondsmen who were often in the public eye believed that renouncing folk beliefs about sympathetic magic and communication with the dead was the first necessary step toward racial uplift and progression.<sup>144</sup>

Johnson was never a slave but he would be careful in avoiding adding to the accumulating stereotypes of Haitians abroad. In fact, Johnson later writes in his autobiography that he indeed did witness signs of Vodou dance performance in Haiti.

I stopped in a village where they were celebrating a feast day, and saw a native dance. The men and women danced in a thatched-roof pavilion without walls. They danced in a ring, to the music of drums of various sizes and pitch. There was the ring going round and round on shuffling feet, one heel stamping out the rhythm of the monotonous chant, in the same manner that I had seen as a child in the African village in Nassau, and observed later in the ‘ring shouts’ in Negro churches in the South.<sup>145</sup>

Johnson’s description fits well with Lynne Fauley Emery’s chronology of development of African-derived dance forms in the Caribbean and African America.<sup>146</sup> In the same text in which Kelsey previously wrote that, “These dances get pretty hilarious at times if the rum supply is adequate,” he also writes, “Voodoo dances of today, therefore, often degenerate into sexual orgies.”<sup>147</sup> This represents the prevailing myth of the time and a source of great confusion for those not familiar with African-derived spiritual and religious practices and the types of stereotypes Johnson may have wanted to avoid in his *Nation* articles by making no mention of his observations of dance and performance there.

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<sup>144</sup> Kameelah L. Martin, *Conjuring Moments in African American Literature: Women, Spirit Work, and Other Such Hoodoo*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 60.

<sup>145</sup> Johnson, *Along this Way*, 350.

<sup>146</sup> See Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance in the United States from 1619 to 1970*, foreword Katherine Dunham, Palo Alto, California: National Press Books, 1972; Dunham endorses Emery’s analysis of the historical roots of Vodou and other dance forms.

<sup>147</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 120, 122.

Brown, who advocates for remaining in Haiti, referring to the Senate Commission report of 1921, cites one of the major “reasons for the original intervention” in Haiti, “the Voodoo practices, of course.”<sup>148</sup> Even the Balch team shows little sympathy for Vodou. The Catholic priests, of who too few are Haitian-born due to celibacy, “are putting up a fine fight against old degrading pagan superstitions and practices on which witch-doctors and Mamalois and Papalois (Voodoo priestesses and priests) too often trade.”<sup>149</sup> Kelsey notes that, “In the country food is usually placed on the grave,” and with “belief in charms and witchcraft, the simple mind runs the entire gamut.”<sup>150</sup> He offers the following elaboration, that the

real religion of the people is of African origin with a veneer of Christianity. It is common to speak of the African rites under the name ‘Voodoo,’ a term overworked. The different tribes originally had different customs but as no tribal distinctions have survived in Haiti the resultant is a blend. Based as African religions were on fear, appropriation of the deities was very important. With this, as every student knows, was a curious emphasis on sex. Several attempts were made by the Haitian government to suppress these Voodoo dances but the government dared not be too stringent, and probably was not very enthusiastic in the first place. They are now under the ban of law but they still exist, though seldom seen by whites.<sup>151</sup>

Kelsey paints a horribly distorted picture of the community-binding spiritual practices derived from African belief systems; all parties here miss the potential within Vodou for social and personal healing.<sup>152</sup> He claims as informants the “two or three Haitian priests,” in addition to 635 “priests and sisters . . . sent over from France . . . [who] form the best informed foreign group resident in Haiti,” and his own personal eye-witness testimony.<sup>153</sup> “I once witnessed a memorial service for a recently deceased child. The priest was busy with Voodoo rites as we approached the cabin but seeing us shifted to the opposite side of the room where Christian emblems were

<sup>148</sup> See Report No. 794, 67<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2nd Session, in Brown, “American Intervention,” 607-8.

<sup>149</sup> Charlotte Atwood and Emily G. Balch, “Problems of Education,” in Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 97.

<sup>150</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 123; see Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, “Graveyard Dirt and Other Poisons,” 237-245.

<sup>151</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 122.

<sup>152</sup> See Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Voodoo Priestess in Brooklyn*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

<sup>153</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 122.

displayed,” as if the *papaloi* were trying to deceive the conspicuous white observer, instead of avoiding persecution and prosecution due to the stringent anti-Voodoo campaigns enforced through the gendarmerie of the Occupation, as “permitting a Voodoo dance . . . is prohibited by law.”<sup>154</sup> As a syncretic philosophy, Vodou often incorporates symbols of many different religions in one, most obviously, the keeping of images of Catholic Saints as allusions to specific Haitian *loas*, but also the inclusion of Pre-Columbian archeological artifacts on home and community altars. In gentler language Balch concludes:

The old African ceremonies, commonly known as Voodoo, were deliberately employed in the closing days of slavery by those who were planning the insurrection as a means of bringing the people together. When the conspirators became the authorities, they tried to put down what had proved to be such a convenient instrument of the revolution, of course the priests and teachers have done their best to root out superstitious practices but naturally, given the conditions, without complete success.<sup>155</sup>

The Americans seem to have developed a healthy superstitious fear of the prevalence of Haitian superstition. The most prevalent superstition the Marines fear is cannibalism. Having looked into this closely, Kelsey reports that human sacrifices occur at the rate of one per year and “are said to be of children only,” but, “The American marines in Haiti firmly believe that [cannibalism] happened in at least one case, for a native confessed he had taken part therein.”<sup>156</sup> With questionable torture practices it is hard to believe this is true, unless the myth of cannibalism serves as a form of passive resistance, instilling fear in U.S. Marines to secure the safety of some Haitian peasants. “If it ever happens it is certainly rare and is viewed by nearly all Haitians just as we view it.”<sup>157</sup> In a subtle twist of language, Kelsey equates Haitian sensibilities with his own.

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<sup>154</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 123, 150.

<sup>155</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 7.

<sup>156</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 123.

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*

Other “reasons for the original intervention” posited by the Senate Committee of 1921 and reported in Brown include “chronic anarchy,” “wretched poverty,” “illiteracy,” and “the predominance of Creole as the spoken language.”<sup>158</sup> From the beginning of the seventeenth century, notes Hurbon, in relation to U.S. justification for the invasion of Haiti, Westerners believed “Black Africans left to themselves, could only sink into anarchy;” they needed governance and guidance by “Whites” as “they have neither faith nor law, in the sense of no coherent language, clear family organization, or concept of work.”<sup>159</sup> The Senate Committee reiterates that in addition to such concerns, “the threatened intervention of the German Government and actual landing of the French naval forces, all imperiled the Monroe Doctrine.”<sup>160</sup> Kelsey concurs in explaining that “after 1912, there came to the State Department evidence that Germany was talking to Haiti about a loan of \$2,000,000 to be secured by certain port rights, control of customs, and rights in a coaling station at Mole St. Nicholas.”<sup>161</sup> “Germany denied the charge” issuing the following statement, “The German government has joined with other European governments in representing to Washington that the interests of Haiti are so large that no scheme of reorganization or control can be regarded as acceptable unless it is undertaken under international auspices.”<sup>162</sup> Perceived as a challenge to the Monroe Doctrine, Germany’s “statement could not be ignored. Moreover the incessant revolutions in Haiti were producing a state of anarchy.”<sup>163</sup> In addition, according to Kelsey, the French landed marines at Cape Haitien June 15, 1915, forcing “the hands of the United States, which seems to have had no thought, let alone plan, of active intervention.”<sup>164</sup> Having first landed at the Cape, U.S. Marines arrived July

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<sup>158</sup> Senate in Brown, “American Intervention,” 607-8.

<sup>159</sup> Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 182.

<sup>160</sup> Brown, “American Intervention,” 608.

<sup>161</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 134.

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 135.

26, 1915, at Port-au-Prince to quell the violence surrounding the overthrow of President Sam. “This was done against the protests of the Haitian government.”<sup>165</sup> The Occupation “forced Haiti to take action against Germany and to sequester German property.”<sup>166</sup> It took two years to get Haitian civilians to agree to participate in such actions because many prominent families had married Germans.<sup>167</sup> This analysis of the initiation of intervention differs dramatically from Douglas. The threat of foreign intervention provides the U.S. justification as presented to the American public.

Behind the scenes important financial negotiations regarding railway construction provide another narrative. I present Douglas’s argument, which is clear and concise, unmuddied by disingenuous claims of a humanitarian nature. Here, the Senate committee denigrates the Haitian population, then invokes American foreign policy. Regardless of the situation in Haiti, had the French and Germans not been involved, the U.S. really could have cared less. “It seems, therefore, that there was virtually no danger of foreign intervention, and that if the authorities in Washington believed that there was, the cause was in the state of their nerves rather than in any actual menace.”<sup>168</sup> Why show such concern for one impoverished neighbor when so many impoverished neighbors live in our own backyards? In response to the outcry expressed in the American press and from Haitian officials on the ground, who had sent a delegation to Washington to appeal their case, “Such protests would seem to imply that there is no international responsibility on the part of more fortunate nations towards those peoples who become the victims of bad government and of progressive anarchy.”<sup>169</sup> Brown mentions anarchy four times in a short four page essay. For Brown, anarchy looks like political instability, deep

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<sup>165</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 136.

<sup>166</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 141.

<sup>167</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 142.

<sup>168</sup> Paul H. Douglas, “The Political History of the Occupation,” in Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 21.

<sup>169</sup> Brown, “American Intervention,” 608.

poverty, and illiteracy. Kelsey states, “Revolution followed revolution.”<sup>170</sup> “The alternative to the course herein suggested is the immediate withdrawal of American support and the abandonment of the Haitian people to chronic revolutions, anarchy, barbarism, and ruin.”<sup>171</sup>

Brown and Kelsey represent two voices of the U.S. government’s justification of its initial intervention and the needed continuance of such a program. In order for this to work, the U.S. government is willing to make certain limited concessions to Haiti while enforcing a form of neo-colonial rule not previously imposed on any foreign nation. The justifications of “backwardness” provided do not warrant the extremes imposed on Haiti. This is not a cooperative agreement, but an imposed one. “It is obvious that as a matter of fact the real power in Haiti is exercised, not by the Haitian officials, but by the American Occupation.”<sup>172</sup> The presence of the U.S. Marines stationed there, “most of whom are quartered behind the President’s palace, . . . is not specifically authorized in the Treaty, and hence, even if that instrument should be accepted as binding, is of more than doubtful legality.”<sup>173</sup> And that is the problem for American critics. The U.S. government feels justified in exercising out race prejudice as evidenced in the description of Haiti as incapable of self-rule; “twelve constitutions had been effected before 1918.”<sup>174</sup> Balch illustrates the frequency of revolutions in Haiti in a Chronological Table. “It was a particularly barbaric outbreak of violence in Port-au-Prince which in July, 1915, furnished a least the pretext for the landing of United States Marines. Naturally the frequent disorders were costly in every way, though loss of life, taking the century together, is said not to have equaled the number killed by the United States in suppressing the uprising which grew out of the use of forced labor in road making, and the lives and property of foreigners seem

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<sup>170</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 155.

<sup>171</sup> Brown, “American Intervention,” 610.

<sup>172</sup> Douglas, “Political History,” 32.

<sup>173</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 128.

to have been scrupulously protected, if only for fear of consequences.”<sup>175</sup> Balch does not address the issue of the railway in her sweeping conclusion here but leaves that to Paul Douglas.

**The Douglas Report.** In Paul Douglas’s report, completed upon his return from Haiti, he researches and delivers further implicating material regarding the role of the National City Bank and the National Railway in the takeover of Haiti. The data he needs to make informed comments he finds in the U.S. and not in Haiti where adequate records are scarce. The idea of a railway project to connect Cap Haitien to Port-au-Prince was initially conceived in 1905 by a group of Philadelphia investors “which secured it for the purpose of fleecing investors in the United States rather than for the construction of any line.”<sup>176</sup> Five years later, an American adventurer, James P. McDonald, came to Haiti and “bribed” the Haitian Congress and then President, Antoine Simon, to pass a bill turning over the railroad project to him under the title, the National Railway of Haiti, and to grant him “exclusive control over twenty miles of land on either side of the railroad for the growing of tropical fruits,” in effect establishing an “export monopoly” over half of the nation’s land or 14,000 square miles.<sup>177</sup> Due to reluctance on Simone’s part, McDonald took matters into his own hands to blackmail Simone into accepting the bribe by appealing to his notorious daughter, Celestine. The story bears repeating as other variations of the mythical Celestine recur in Seabrook and Hurston constituting quite a body of folktales about this disreputable woman and “voodoo priestess with a great deal of influence over her father.”<sup>178</sup>

‘All the crown princesses of Europe have costly jewels,’ McDonald is said to have declared, adding: ‘Where are yours?’ It is stated that Celestine replied that she had none and that McDonald then reached into his pocket, took out a box, opened it, and held up a string of pearls. He told Celestine that the pearls were

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<sup>175</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 9-10.

<sup>176</sup> Douglas, “National Railway,” 59.

<sup>177</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *ibid.*

hers if and when her father signed the railway commissions. Antoine Simone signed the act that afternoon and the pearls are said to have been delivered to his daughter that evening. They had cost five dollars! Thus a string of paste baubles launched Haiti into a financial venture which will in the end cost her people more than \$8,000,000, and which was one of the causes for the American intervention in 1915.<sup>179</sup>

Both French and British companies purchased bonds for the construction of the railway system.

The British company, Ethelburga, defaulted, filing bankruptcy, making “a considerable profit that is still an object of dispute” at the time of Douglas’s writing.<sup>180</sup>

By 1914, “three disconnected sections of the railway (through level country) had been finished:” sixty miles connecting Port-au-Prince to St. Marc; twenty miles running from Gonaives to Ennery; and twenty-eight miles from Cap Haitien running south into “logwood country” for a total of 108 miles.<sup>181</sup> The Haitian government made an honest attempt to make payments on the interest of the bonds in two payments that totaled \$108,000, but “in 1914 refused to make further payments—on the ground that it had contracted for a complete road,” not the disjointed segments that obviously allowed for no through traffic or continuity.<sup>182</sup> “The future of railroads in such a rough country is very problematic.”<sup>183</sup> Mountainous terrains prevent completion of the railroad to this day. “We were told that a train ran three times a week, but all we saw was barefoot people walking the sleepers between the rust-red hills.”<sup>184</sup>

Douglas did not find any evidence that the National City Bank was involved in the initial bribery, but by 1911, Roger L. Farnham, in the employ of the National City Bank, had been appointed president of the National Railway, assuming control of its assets while McDonald

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<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 131.

<sup>184</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 111.



disappeared, also abandoning his “banana concession.”<sup>185</sup> Mr. Farhham blamed the frequent revolutions, of which six occurred in a four year period between 1911 and 1915, for the company’s inability to complete the line demanding that interest be paid on the three subsections; “payments were not contingent upon the construction of a completed line.”<sup>186</sup> Douglas has a hard time seeing “how these assassinations impeded the construction of the road” since most “of the later revolutions occurred after construction had been abandoned rather than before.”<sup>187</sup>

The National City Bank owned some interest in the Banque National d’Haiti and desired American control. To this ends, the State Department issued a decree in July 1914 denying the disbursement of funds to Haiti if it did not “renew the budgetary convention of 1910.”<sup>188</sup> Haiti responded that such withholding of funds would effectively shut their government down. That is just what the U.S. wanted to happen, to force Haiti into a position through an act of financial blackmail that would require U.S. presence to adjust Haiti’s financial tangle through “American supervision of customs.”<sup>189</sup> Refusing to comply established one of the reasons for intervention. Further, “Mr. Farnham in his capacity as president of the railroad would also have been helped by American intervention.”<sup>190</sup> Douglas repeats the details of President Sam’s death/revolution in Port-au-Prince, July 27, 1915: Sam’s “commander of the National Prison shot 164 of Sam’s imprisoned political opponents. This massacre inflamed the city; a mob broke into the French Legation and murdered Sam, and crowds paraded the streets with Sam’s remains.”<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Douglas, “National Railway,” 59.

<sup>186</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> Douglas, “National Railway,” 60.

<sup>189</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> *ibid.*

In 1919 a protocol was established to convey the bonds of the railway to the Haitian treasury, by then held securely by the National City Bank. No interest was paid on bonds until 1923, and then at a greatly reduced rate of twenty-two percent. The balance fell on “the Haitian peasant, who ultimately paid the taxes.”<sup>192</sup> In 1927, at the time of Douglas’s writing, “Mr. Farnham, who is now no longer connected with the National City Bank, is at present receiving \$18,000 a year as president of the railroad, although he spends but little time in Haiti. He has been an expensive luxury for the Haitian peasant.”<sup>193</sup> In 1924, the value of the bonds reduced to \$2,660,000 but “this railroad will cost the Haitians well over \$8,000,000.” Douglas asks, “Who then did buy the bonds?” He finds two-thirds to three-quarters of the bonds now owned by the National City Bank and subject to their terms of definition of value. Although Douglas cannot pinpoint “from whom the bonds were taken and what they cost the National City Bank,” he “is certain someone made a large profit from the transaction” in a sum upwards of \$2,000,000, be it the bank or some other individuals.<sup>194</sup> While Douglas credits the Occupation with “building roads, reducing disease, collecting the revenue honestly, and in putting down robber bands,” he holds that the grossest aberration of the Occupation, the giving of “a large profit to American interests, cannot be excused. The Haitians can hardly be blamed if they are somewhat cynical when our Government talks about the ‘sanctity of contracts.’”<sup>195</sup> Balch concludes, “The whole situation is a false one, and, as it appears to some Americans, at least, can be solved in only one way, by withdrawal of American control, not with inconsiderate suddenness, but just as soon as may be consistent with giving the Haitians a chance to prepare for the change.”<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> For the fine details of debt reduction, bond value fluctuations, and ameliorization of interest, see Douglas, “National Railway,” 60.

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 81.

The Haitian people “fully expected that the Americans would take complete control and work order out of chaos. In fact they expected the impossible.”<sup>197</sup> They “lost faith in the ability of the Americans” for the following reasons: 1) the reenactment of the *corvée* system; 2) the establishment of the gendarmerie; 3) the operation of the prisons by the gendarmerie; 4) the declaration of martial law; 5) the restrictions on the press and freedom of speech; 6) the takeover of the public works; 7) the behavior, performance and attitudes of the Marine Corps; and 8) atrocities committed against the Haitian people.

**Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, and Edwidge Danticat offer Critique through the Tools of Literature.** During and after the Occupation several key literary figures engaged in criticism of the U.S. policies. In 1932, Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes issued *Popo and Fifina*, a young readers’ novella. Having met in 1924 in New York during the heart of the Harlem Renaissance, the two men shared in many projects exchanging 2,500 letters during the course of their productive literary friendship.<sup>198</sup> Hughes stayed in Cap-Haïtien, the setting for the novel, from April to July in 1931.<sup>199</sup> Bontemps relied on Hughes’s experience in the Caribbean. Narrated from the perspective of eight year old, Popo, Bontemps and Hughes utilize the form to offer a subtle but careful critique of many of the claims of the political and social commentators that appear in this chapter. Fifty-two years later Edwidge Danticat addresses each of these criticisms in her contemporary novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). This work of fiction, like any well-written text, operates along several narrative lines at once. The foregrounding narrative within *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is the legacy of the Occupation. Danticat sets the novel in the 1980s, during the later Duvalier years, drawing parallels between contemporary and historical political and social practice. Other narrative lines Danticat employs include recurring multi-

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<sup>197</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 136.

<sup>198</sup> Arnold Rampersad, afterword, in Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*, 101.

<sup>199</sup> Rampersad, introduction and afterword, in Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*, viii, 102.

generational trauma, emasculation of male figures in Haiti, systemic violence, interrupted motherhood and other mothering, escape and transnational identity, fractured and malfunctioning metaphors of psychological healing, and a reclamation of Vodou themes from the devouring machine of political and social history. Vodou themes in the text are explored in the conclusion here. Pride in resistance to the Occupation and Danticat's critique of Occupation practices appear here in the context of recommendations made by the commentators presented in this chapter towards a withdrawal of troops and resolution of the Haitian problem. Bontemps and Hughes's critique appears as well where it intersects with the claims of the commentators and the contemporary assessments of Danticat. Clearly aware of the history of the U.S. Occupation of Haiti and having read Hughes and at least some of the other commentators enumerated above, Danticat addresses each of their claims within the body of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, grounding Sophie Caco, the main character, in the rift created by diverging narratives of independence. As a child of diaspora, born in Haiti and transported to New York at the age of twelve (like Danticat), Sophie speaks to the voices of both Haitians and interested U.S. Americans alike.<sup>200</sup> Her name alone speaks resistance, Caco.<sup>201</sup> Aware of the power of her name, Sophie defends her decision to bring her six-month old daughter to her grandmother's house in La Nouvelle Dame Marie, a trip that "took five hours in a rocky van" over "roads too rough for anything but wheelbarrows, mules, or feet," stating, "She is a true Caco woman; she is very strong."<sup>202</sup>

*Corvée*. Kelsey reports that, "General Butler, in 1917, revived a law, dating from 1865, requiring citizens to work on local roads and thus initiated the *corvée* system. The execution of

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<sup>200</sup> Danticat utilizes the spelling diaspora to distinguish between first- and second-waves of diaspora from Africa. For Danticat, diaspora indicates people of African ancestry living in the Americas and other regions outside of Africa; she chooses diaspora to indicate Haitians dispersed to other areas; see the title of *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States*, ed. Edwidge Danticat, New York: Soho, 2001.

<sup>201</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 35.

<sup>202</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 22, 102.

this law and the general supervision of the road work turned over to the Gendarmerie. Prominent American residents have told me that they advised against this system but were met with the answer that it was a military necessity.”<sup>203</sup> Prior to and following the Occupation Haitians voluntarily participated in another similar practice known as *kombit*. In a similar vein as the tradition of barn raising in U.S. America, Danticat, as narrator, describes the practice:

a whole village would get together and clear a field for planting. The group would take turns clearing each person’s land, until all the land in the village was cleared and planted. The women would cook large amounts of food while the men worked. Then at sunset, when the work was done, everyone would gather together and enjoy a feast of eating, dancing, and laughter.<sup>204</sup>

For Sophie, this practice translates into a community wide “potluck” supper in the town of Croix-des-Rosets, where she lives as a child with her mother’s sister, Tante Atie. The fictional Croix-des-Rosets serves the metonymic function of referring directly to *caco* rebellions, which were most active and most successful in the real town of Croix-des-Bouquets from 1922 to 1929. Pointing to the practice of *kombit* as a voluntary form of work, nourishment, and entertainment early in the text serves her purposes well. Haitians actively cooperated in communal work activities on their own accord and for their own purposes prior to and following Occupation, further explaining Haitian resentment at being forced to do work in inhumane ways that they already agreeably performed.

Under the system enforced by the U.S., “Instead of working near their homes, men were being taken, sometimes driven manacled under charge of Haitian gendarmes, several days journey on foot from their homes.” Kelsey adds that, allegedly, no shelters and little food were provided. Bontemps and Hughes offer a third perspective on the system of coercive labor through the eyes of Popo. Using art as metaphor for literature, Bontemps and Hughes give voice

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<sup>203</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 137.

<sup>204</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 11.

to the work of creative production through “old man Durand,” a local furniture designer, who says, “when people look at your design [here, read your book] . . . , they will feel as you felt when you made the design.”<sup>205</sup> They credit the creative arts with allowing the audience to feel what the author or artist feels. With this prefiguring statement, Bontemps and Hughes turn to Popo’s first sighting of the Citadel built by Henri Christophe to fend off any future threats from foreign attack after the Revolution.

It seemed that the grandfather of Uncle Jacques and Papa Jean had lived to be more than a hundred years old. Before his death he had told his grandsons some things he had remembered. He told them how the great stone fort called the Citadel of King Christophe came to be on the high, far-away mountain overlooking the town of Cape Haiti. For old grandfather Emile, as a boy, had seen it built.

Away back in those old days many heroic things were done. Grandfather Emile had seen the black working men drag large bronze cannon through the streets to the foot of the mountain. Later he had seen them drawn up the steep sides of the hill by an army of half-naked people who tugged and pulled like animals. Grandfather Emile had told about the men who left their homes to work on the Citadel and remained away for ten to twelve years at a time without returning to their families for a single holiday. He had seen King Christophe pass through the town on a white horse, surrounded by bodyguards in flashing uniforms.

That was wonderful, Popo thought. It was a pretty story. But somehow it made Popo feel sad. He could see the ruins of the Citadel from the door of the workshop, and it made him sad to think how hard people had worked to build it. He could not forget those poor men.<sup>206</sup>

And neither could Hughes, or even Henry Louis Gates, Jr., shown standing next to one of those cannons within the Citadel in his 2011 television series *Black in Latin America*. Gates queries the audience but provides no answer to how such a feat of human achievement could have been accomplished without the help of modern machines.<sup>207</sup> Uncle Jacques brings the story full circle to one of Haitian pride in their ability to defend themselves from ever having to return to slavery as Bontemps and Hughes carefully avoid any direct critique of the U.S. Occupation; Hughes’s

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<sup>205</sup> Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*, 73.

<sup>206</sup> Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*, 77-78.

<sup>207</sup> Gates, *Black in Latin America*.

biographer Arnold Rampersad notes in the afterward to the novel, “both men would have to be careful to camouflage or even suppress some of their main concerns if their book were to be successful—or even to be published.”<sup>208</sup> The equation of Popo’s feeling of concern about men forced to work like slaves cannot be ignored in the context of Hughes having witnessed the effect of the *corvée* during his time in Haiti.

Kelsey reminds his audience, “In practice, too, the local head, known as the ‘Chef de Section,’ whenever called on for men sent whom he pleased, even destroy[ed] the cards showing that given individuals had done their share.” Some “individuals worked two or three months instead of the two weeks theoretically required. Many, naturally enough, took to the hills” and added themselves to the growing numbers of *cacos*, who existed in Haiti long before the Occupation.<sup>209</sup> The testimony of “Mrs. Helen Hill Weed, wife of a mining engineer and geologist, . . . in 1925 before a Senate Sub-Committee that, in 1906, nine years before the Occupation, when ‘there probably weren’t more than 75 or 100 white people in Haiti,’ she traveled on horseback ‘all through the mountains where the caco [bandits] are supposed to kill people on sight, and found the Haitians always kind and courteous,” testifies to the presence of the *cacos* prior to the Occupation.<sup>210</sup> The implementation of the *corvée* simply increased the numbers of *cacos* who took to the same hills and self-sustaining mountain communities they had over a century earlier, many perceiving themselves as twentieth-century liberators along the likes of the Revolutionary era heroes. Danticat ties Sophie further to this heritage of resistance by connecting her to the *caco* leader, Charlemagne Le Grand Caco, her fictional grandfather buried

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<sup>208</sup> Rampersad, afterward, in Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifiana*, 103.

<sup>209</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 137; Hurbon adds, “Americans fabricated an image of the Caco: it was not at all that of a rebel and a combatant, but that of a ‘bandit’ incited to disorder, pillage and blind violence, who found his inspiration essentially in the strange cult of Vodou,” “American Fantasy,” 184.

<sup>210</sup> Hearings before the McCormick Commission, 114; Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, U.S. Senate, 67 Congress, First Session, pursuant to S. Res. 112, 1921, in Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 11-12.

at La Nouvelle Dame Marie. Tante Atie explains, “Our family name, Caco, it is the name of a scarlet bird. A bird so crimson, it makes the reddest hibiscus or the brightest flame trees seem white,” after naming all of the Caco ancestors buried alongside Charlemagne “on sight.”<sup>211</sup> Her naming them speaks to the question of literacy and the viability of co-existence of oral and written literary forms in the Haitian tradition as exemplified in Danticat’s body of work.

In a nation with a “great need of roads into the interior” and “some system of trails in the hills,” Kelsey argues that the system was not always abusive.<sup>212</sup> “Captain B—. . . carried some 800 men as volunteers with him” between St. Marc and the Pilboro Mountains. He provided cooks and regular pay, employing as many as 8,000 men. He “lived with the men and was the only white man with them.”<sup>213</sup> Thus, Kelsey argues, “It was not the system itself, then, but the way it was handled that seems to have been at fault.”<sup>214</sup> The *corvée* system came across as a reintroduction of “slavery . . . making men afraid to come to the towns lest they be seized” like runaway slaves under the U.S. Fugitive Slave Laws predating the end of the Civil War there.<sup>215</sup> An anonymous character in a contemporary Haitian restaurant in New York in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* shouts over the others in a heated political argument, “Never the Americans in Haiti again. . . . Remember what they did in the twenties. They treated our people like animals. They abused the *kombit* system and they made us work like slaves.”<sup>216</sup> Balch concurred, “The disastrous policy of the revival of the ‘corvée . . . [simulated] conditions very close to slavery.’”<sup>217</sup> According to Kelsey, “So great was the outcry that it was stopped on October 1,

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<sup>211</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 150; “[P]ractically all of these revolutions started in the North. The later revolt against the Americans was in the same district,” Kelsey, “Haiti,” 128.

<sup>212</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 113.

<sup>213</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 137.

<sup>214</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 137-138.

<sup>215</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 138.

<sup>216</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 54.

<sup>217</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 76.



1918.”<sup>218</sup> But word did not reach all employees of the U.S. The *corvée* continued in the Hinche-Maissade district under the guidance of a man whose name Kelsey refused to reveal, though he was admonished as “a murderer and a liar and unfit to be in service [and] . . . transferred.”<sup>219</sup> Kelsey claims to have heard from “well-informed men . . . that it would have been an easy matter to have got all the men needed for a small payment of and that the total cost to the United States would have been vastly less than that of the suppression of rebellion.”<sup>220</sup>

When Balch appeared she noted, “forced labor has been given up, and that labor, except for that of convicts, is now paid for.”<sup>221</sup> Hailing from the “north central and eastern sections of Haiti, “Bands of ‘cacos,’ the local term for revolutionary bandits, which also included all sorts of lawless and criminal gentry, roamed the hills and offered opposition to the Americans wherever possible.”<sup>222</sup> “After January 1, 1919, there was a great increase in caco activity” resulting in “considerable loss of life” leading to increase of Marines from 1000 to over 2000 in 1920.<sup>223</sup>

It is a country where the tradition of having overthrown the flower of the French army still survives and where orators still boast of their ability to overcome any invader, a land where the simple peasants still believe that they can be rendered immune from bullets by charms. The caco leader, Benoit, carried a book of charms with him and yet evidently was a bit skeptical when urged, only a couple of days before his death, to surrender, he said he did not dare to for his followers would kill him if he admitted his inability to win out.<sup>224</sup>

“[S]uppression of opposition is always difficult” due to the terrain of the country, but after “the foolish and futile attack on Port-au-Prince early in 1920, . . . organized warfare decreased.”<sup>225</sup> Kelsey argues,” the chief sufferers have been the Haitian peasants” in the *caco* uprisings.

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<sup>218</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 137-138.

<sup>219</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 138.

<sup>220</sup> “In my opinion, this was the greatest mistake made by the Marines Corps in Haiti,” Kelsey, “Haiti,” 138.

<sup>221</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 76.

<sup>222</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 136.

<sup>223</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 138.

<sup>224</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 136; compare to Aponte’s sketchbook in Childs, *Aponte Rebellion in Cuba*; see Boukman’s oratory in Edwidge Danticat, “Wall of Fire Rising,” *Krik? Krak!* New York: Soho Press, 1995.

<sup>225</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 136, 142.

*Gendarmerie*. “One of the first efforts of the Marine Corps was to establish a Gendarmerie of Haitians, officered at first by Americans with the plan of gradually replacing these by competent Haitians.”<sup>226</sup> In Bontemps and Hughes’s fictional description of Christophe, he is surrounded by “bodyguards in flashing uniforms,” evidence of the Haitian guards disbanded by Occupation forces.<sup>227</sup> “One of the most frequent complaints that one hears in Haiti is of the exclusion of Haitians from the more important administrative posts, which are filled by Americans,” who receive salaries from both the U.S. and Haiti, “which pays an additional salary” for “services lent.”<sup>228</sup> Kelsey adds,

Moreover, it was galling to the Haitians to see Americans who had never had a servant at home putting on airs, raising the price of house rents by bidding for desirable houses, riding in automobiles in which they paid no duty and burning gas which they could buy at a little over twenty cents a gallon, while the civilian, native, or foreign, was paying from seventy to eighty.<sup>229</sup>

In July 1, 1921, the U.S. employed “2,532 gendarmes officered by 16 Haitians and 122 Americans,” following the abolishment of the Haitian police and requirements that all Haitians turn in their weapons.<sup>230</sup> Both the U.S. government and the Haitian government paid the Americans, the U.S. Congress having “passed a special act to allow the men to accept this service” creating a private military police force funded “by the citizens of the United States, not, as many Haitians believe, and as some Americans writers have intimated by the Haitian Government.”<sup>231</sup> Kelsey outright contradicts himself feeding further confusion. About the training of the gendarmerie, Balch shares a common concern expressed in Danticat’s contemporary novel. “One meets the complaint that the Americans are training not police but

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<sup>226</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 138.

<sup>227</sup> Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*, 78.

<sup>228</sup> Douglas, “Political History,” 34-5.

<sup>229</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 142; Seabrook exhibits evidence of his own drunkenness, *Magic Island*, 43-44, 148-149.

<sup>230</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 138.

<sup>231</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 138-139.

soldiers, and one cannot help wondering what the effect of such a force would be after American withdrawal.”<sup>232</sup> In the early years of Francois Duvalier’s rule of Haiti he created a police force drawn along similar lines including some of the same men employed during the Occupation years in the gendarmerie as *Tonton Macoutes*. Balch is rightly concerned as Danticat describes these men in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*.

In the fairy tales, the *Tonton Macoute* was a bogeyman, a scarecrow with human flesh. He wore denim overalls and carried a cutlass and a knapsack made of straw. In the knapsack, he always had scraps of naughty children, whom he dismembered to eat as snacks. *If you don’t respect your elders the Tonton Macoute will take you away.*

Outside the fairy tales, they roamed the streets in broad daylight, parading their Uzi machine guns. *Who invented the Macoutes? The devil didn’t do it and God didn’t do it.*<sup>233</sup>

The answer is the U.S. Marines.

In 1926, Balch wrote, “Today a foreign power enforces order in Haiti, and puts down all lawlessness but its own.”<sup>234</sup> Through the footnotes Balch creates a picturesque counter-narrative/metanarrative to her own report. She blames many of the crimes listed above on overzealous Haitian gendarmes, trained under U.S. direction to carry out violence against their own people, in keeping with Danticat’s implication that the later *Tonton Macoutes* exhibit the residual effects of U.S. training. In Balch’s “interviews” with “Haitian Nationalists,” they state, “The gendarmerie is a menace. It is recruited from the lowest elements.”<sup>235</sup> Danticat describes the fictional murder of Dessalines, a coal vendor named after the famous revolutionary hero,

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<sup>232</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 131.

<sup>233</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 138.

<sup>234</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 129.

<sup>235</sup> Balch somewhat agrees but undermines her own line of thought in placing blame on the few badly trained Haitian gendarmes, “Doubtless many of the worst abuses were committed by subordinates, often by negroes, who lost their heads when entrusted with unaccustomed power,” *Occupied Haiti*, 126, 133-34, fn4.

“*Li allé*. It’s over,” Louise said, panting as though she had both asthma and the hiccupps at the same time. They killed Dessalines.”

“Who killed Dessalines?” asked my grandmother.

“The *Macoutes* killed Dessalines.”<sup>236</sup>

In Danticat’s novel, Dessalines had been beaten previously by the *Macoutes* for allegedly stepping on one of their toes, “He rammed the back of his machine gun into the coal vendor’s ribs.” As Sophie looked back over her shoulder while her grandmother pulled her away, she saw Dessalines, “curled in a fetal position on the ground. He was spitting blood. The other *Macoutes* joined in, pounding their boots on the coal sellers’s head. Every one watched in shocked silence, but no one said anything.”<sup>237</sup> Sophie is the child of rape.

My father may have been a *Macoute*. He was a stranger, who when my mother was sixteen years old, grabbed her on her way back from school. He dragged her into the cane fields, and pinned her down on the ground. He had a black bandana over his face so she never saw anything but his hair, which was the color of eggplants. He kept pounding her until she was too stunned to make a sound. When he was done, he made her keep her face in the dirt, threatening to shoot her if she looked up.<sup>238</sup>

Upon hearing of Dessalines’s death, Sophie’s grandmother remarks, “We already had our turn.”<sup>239</sup> Even the fictional wife of the famous Charlemagne *caco* leader cannot protect her own daughter from the legacy of the Occupation gendarmerie.

In defense of the gendarmerie during the Occupation period, “Haitians complain that the pay given them is so small that the best grade of men will not enlist and that many *cacos* and other unfit men are enrolled; also that many incompetent Americans have been appointed”—they want equal pay for equal work, plus the side benefits the Americans have such as cars and servants.<sup>240</sup> Kelsey concedes, “Some of the marines advanced from the ranks to become

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<sup>236</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 138.

<sup>237</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 118.

<sup>238</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 139.

<sup>239</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 138.

<sup>240</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 139.

lieutenants in the Gendarmerie lacked the necessary tact and executive capacity and some of the commissioned men lacked the proper personality.”<sup>241</sup> Outraged at hearing of such real time abuses by the gendarmerie Balch notes, “It seems to be a marvel that these young marines, recruited as they are, with very commonly the extreme Southern attitude toward negroes, trained as they are, isolated in black villages, do as well as they do, but this does not mean that it is a proper system!”<sup>242</sup> Kelsey concurs, “The average officer in little rural communities, living in what we would call a shack, isolated from all white society and deprived of all opportunities for amusement, deserves much credit for his work. Such men are often petty kings and it is to be expected that they fail at times.”<sup>243</sup> These men are responsible for training Haitian citizens to take over the internal police force after Occupation.

*The Prison System.* In contrast to the *Macoutes* of Danitcat’s world, the Occupation gendarmes wore uniforms “made in the prisons,” but they do comprise the “police force of the nation replacing the old army which was disbanded at the time of the Occupation.”<sup>244</sup> Prisons “under the control of the Gendarmerie” held an average population of two thousand prisoners per day.<sup>245</sup> In May of 1921, the prisons held 4,179 inmates; in 1920 they held 3,393 prisoners with 1,497 deaths caused by “tuberculosis, prison edema (probably beri-beri), pneumonia, and smallpox.”<sup>246</sup> Kelsey claims, “The inmates are better cared for than are the great number of Haitian peasants.”<sup>247</sup> Although the buildings are “not very satisfactory,” they are clean and the food provided is “vastly better than in the old days” when “filthy” prisoners “depended on their

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<sup>241</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 139.

<sup>242</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 133.

<sup>243</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 139; is he apologizing for these abuses? See King Wirkus in Seabrook, *Magic Island*.

<sup>244</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 139.

<sup>245</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 140.

<sup>246</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> *ibid.*

families or on alms for practically everything they had.”<sup>248</sup> Kelsey provides no numbers for how many were imprisoned prior to Occupation. Haitians are concerned with the high death rate in prisons probably due to overcrowding and with increasingly severe punishments. In the case of arrests on charges “of vagrancy, . . . local justices . . . under pressure from the gendarme,” unfairly sentenced offenders to imprisonment and hard labor, such as road building.<sup>249</sup>

For Grace D. Watson and Emily Balch the situation of the press illustrates the abuses of the prisons. The “Haitian press is an offspring of that of France, where journals are far more organs of personal opinion and of literary expression than with us.”<sup>250</sup> When a journalist is convicted of reporting against the Occupation, “the action taken is very commonly the unconventional method of punishing the offender, first, by ‘preventative imprisonment,’ often long continued, the case not being allowed to come to trial.”<sup>251</sup> On March 14, 1926, “when the authors of this report were in Haiti, four editors were confined in the prison at Port-au-Prince, experiencing ‘preventative imprisonment’.” They found imprisoned M. Jolibus, editor of the *Courier Haitien*, who had been imprisoned ten times since May 1921 for a total of twenty-five months and twenty-two days. Brought to court twice, he was sentenced to six months hard labor on one account and acquitted but retained another month on another. They also found in custody Charles Moravia, former Haitian Minister to Washington, and editor of the *Temps* who had been waiting trial for nearly a month.<sup>252</sup> He was subsequently “arrested again, and held without trial for several weeks, because he criticized the reception of President Borno in Washington.”<sup>253</sup> They found two assistants of M. Jolibus “who had continued the paper after his arrest.”<sup>254</sup> “We

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<sup>248</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>249</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 141.

<sup>250</sup> J. Harold Watson and Emily G. Balch, “The Press and the Prison,” 143.

<sup>251</sup> Watson and Balch, “The Press,” 145.

<sup>252</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>253</sup> Watson and Balch, “The Press,” 146, fn2.

<sup>254</sup> Watson and Balch, “The Press,” 146.

were informed that during the preceding three years 27 journalists had been similarly imprisoned.”<sup>255</sup> Watson and Balch conclude that “the sight of M. Moravia in prison for criticizing the Occupation is not calculated to help its cause.”<sup>256</sup> Danticat certainly could not have written her critique of the Occupation under its terms. Only in the contemporary discursive space of the transnational diaspora could a Haitian woman veil her criticisms within fiction and present them to an international audience.

*Martial Law and Freedom of Speech.* Proclaimed at Port-au-Prince and extended to the whole country, martial law went into effect September 3, 1915. “Provost courts were established and the press prohibited from criticising [*sic.*] the Haitian Government or the Occupation.”<sup>257</sup> Haitians believe sentences issued by the courts “severe.”<sup>258</sup> Americans believe “native” courts do little to help them and express “unwillingness of the courts to cooperate with the Americans.”<sup>259</sup> “Later on the press restrictions were removed and in 1921 there began a great campaign of abuse and vilification of everything American.”<sup>260</sup> Censorship was reinstated May 26, 1921:

While the freedom of the press and of speech are practically unrestricted, articles or speeches that are of an incendiary nature or reflect adversely upon the United States forces in Haiti, or tend to stir up an agitation against the United States officials who are aiding and supporting the constitutional government of Haiti, or articles or speeches attacking the President of Haiti or the Haitian Government are prohibited and offenders against this order will be brought to trial before a military tribunal.<sup>261</sup>

*Internal Affairs.* Concerning the public works, the U.S. military takeover provided “another source of irritation in connection with the Occupation.”<sup>262</sup> One such small example included the takeover of “control of the ice-plant at Port-au-Prince, a German-owned enterprise.”

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<sup>255</sup> Watson and Balch, “The Press,” 145.

<sup>256</sup> Watson and Balch, “The Press,” 148.

<sup>257</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 140.

<sup>258</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 129-30; Kelsey, “Haiti,” 149.

<sup>260</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 141.

<sup>261</sup> Actual order in Kelsey, “Haiti,” 140.

<sup>262</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 141.

Léger spoke “of an ice factory at Port-au-Prince.”<sup>263</sup> All ice was taken to hospitals and for the use of the Occupation forces. “Thus officers’ families were supplied while American civilians as well as Haitians went without.”<sup>264</sup> Obviously, such petty actions drew resentment from Haitians. “Haiti is sensitive, oversensitive, perhaps. Her pride is hurt. Under such conditions people are always extreme in their reactions, and likely to be hypercritical. Much of the antagonism reported as coming from the Haitians is a smoke screen to cover their feeling. With few exceptions, the Haitians are not antagonistic to Americans but they are critical of the policies of our government.”<sup>265</sup>

*Psychological Effects.* “The cost of the Occupation is not primarily financial, but psychological and political.”<sup>266</sup> Agreeing with the psychological dimension, contemporary commentator Hurbon notes, “The American Occupation is certainly known for the enduring trauma which it inscribed in a population aware that its own history had begun with a victorious war against the white colonists.”<sup>267</sup> Marines and their families brought “color prejudice[;] . . . not all of the Americans treated the natives with due respect and this attitude was resented, naturally enough.”<sup>268</sup> Kelsey does not know “how much emphasis to give this factor.”<sup>269</sup> But Blair Niles apparently does, “There was almost nothing before the Occupation to make Haitians racially self-conscious or to create an ‘inferiority complex’ with its inconsistent but equally natural resultants—a morbid lack of self-confidence and self-assertiveness.”<sup>270</sup> Niles traveled to Haiti in 1925 with her husband, Robert Niles, Jr. She read *The Nation* articles and Kelsey’s report prior to her arrival. The Balch team consulted with her and read her travel memoir, *Black Haiti: A*

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<sup>263</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 60, fn5.

<sup>264</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 141.

<sup>265</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 161.

<sup>266</sup> Douglas, “Political History,” 36.

<sup>267</sup> Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 184.

<sup>268</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 142.

<sup>269</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 126.

<sup>270</sup> Blair Niles, *Black Haiti: A Biography of Africa’s Eldest Daughter*, New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1926, 193.



*Biography of Africa's Eldest Daughter* (1926), concerned with dispelling myths propagated by some nineteenth-century authors and early reports of the Occupation and simply reporting her own personal impressions of Haiti, which are quite favorable. Kelsey concurs with Niles that, "The first strong impression I got of the Haitian people was their manly self-respecting bearing. There was no subserviency in their attitude towards whites."<sup>271</sup> Niles reminds the reader, "Self-won freedom is incarnated in this nation of blacks, whose poverty is to us appalling, but whose simple dignity is matchless."<sup>272</sup> For her, color prejudice in Haiti, where "there are more degrees of blackness than the grades of society," is "not so violent or wholesale" as prejudice in the U.S. but remains "quite definite in those social circles where mahogany hesitates to marry with Teakwood."<sup>273</sup> Hughes disagrees. "The poverty of Haiti had appalled Hughes. U.S. Marines had been occupying the country for almost 20 years (under a treaty never ratified by the Senate), but Hughes had observed little that was positive as a result of this repudiation of Haitian sovereignty and autonomy. He had come to despise the Haitian elite, whom he characterized as mainly effete, snobbish mulattoes, content to hold lucrative government sinecures, send their children to school in Europe, engage in petty party strife, ape the manners of Europeans, and relentlessly keep the masses of black Haitian in a state of poverty and powerlessness."<sup>274</sup> He articulates this in *Popo and Fifina* by erasing the elite. They appear nowhere in his children's novel nor do they make any significant appearance in Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, except by allusion. The only elite character in Danticat's text appears as Martine's partner Marc in New York, not Haiti. He does not travel to Haiti with her. Danticat provides evidence of the persistence of Haitian class consciousness on American soil when the fictional Martine Caco describes her relationship with

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<sup>271</sup> Kelsey, "Haiti," 123-124.

<sup>272</sup> Niles in Hunton and Balch, "Racial Relations," 114.

<sup>273</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> Rampersad, afterword, in Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*, 103-104.

Marc Chevalier, “In Haiti, it would not be possible for someone like Marc to love someone like me. He is from a very upstanding family. His grandfather was a French man,” where Sophie’s grandfather was a *caco* rebel.<sup>275</sup> Although Sophie fears entering school in New York because of stories her mother tells her about the ways Haitians are received in America (based on attitudes partially dating back to the Occupation), Hurbon concurs with Niles that “it would be wrong to get stuck on the racial problem as such, for this is always symbolic and can only be understood in reference to the intentions and hidden aims for enforcing social and political domination.”<sup>276</sup>

More of a social and civil dilemma than one of hatred prior to the Occupation, critics complain that U.S. American attitudes about race, especially those derived from the American South, present a virulent disease amongst Marines employed in Haiti. Hunton and Balch explore this further noting “when the Occupation . . . wives came to join their husbands, there was a change in the atmosphere. Haitians felt that the color line was drawn much as it is in the southern part of the United States. They were hurt and offended, and withdrew into their shell.”<sup>277</sup>

Seabrook also noted this attitude amongst the wives of the Marines.<sup>278</sup> Kelsey noted that he saw the intermarriage of whites with Haitians, “Low grade foreign whites marry at times into high grade native circles,” and others are said to live with “native” girls.<sup>279</sup> “Such incidents have left bad impressions. Other men have lost esteem by trying to bid for the favor of the natives.”<sup>280</sup> A member of the Balch party who preferred to remain anonymous “summed up” what happens

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<sup>275</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 59.

<sup>276</sup> Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 182.

<sup>277</sup> Hunton and Balch, “Racial Relations,” 115.

<sup>278</sup> “It seemed to me that the whole group-social-American attitude in Haiti was a piece of sheer craziness—Alice in Wonderland idiocy, without the mad logic which integrates *Alice*. So far as I could gather, no wife of a Marine Corps captain or major had ever attended or wanted to attend a ‘nigger gathering’ socially, even at the presidential palace; and I think 99 percent of the sergeants’ and corporals’ wives would have turned up their noses in honest disgust if they’d been invited. To Judy O’Grady a coon was a coon and that was that, no matter if he’d been a king instead of a president, no matter if he’d been through three universities at Paris and spoke eleven languages instead of four and had sat as a member of a dozen Hague Tribunals,” Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 155-6.

<sup>279</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 125, 152.

<sup>280</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 152.

when a white American group that prides itself “on absolute exclusion of the black American” arrives in a place of “black people, the powerful group of whom are educated, cultured, ambitious, [and] proud.”<sup>281</sup> The anonymous member tells this story. A Marine who married into an elite Haitian family “is a Marine no more. . . . A man may drink and carouse with black or white. Let him, however, offer honorable marriage to a Haitian girl, and he has performed an act ‘unbecoming a soldier and a gentleman’,” and discharged from U.S. service.<sup>282</sup> Seabrook confirms this story with more specific detail:

Mr. Perry, who had been, I believe, an officer in the Marine Corps, had married a niece of President Borno, and had told the American colony individually and collectively that it could go to hell, before the surprised American colony could ask him to do so. He had resigned from the corps, the clubs, etc., had been found a good job at which it was said he was efficient, had cast his lot in with his wife’s people. Among his young ranking fellow officers he was generally regarded as a “low-down son of a bitch who had disgraced the service.” Among the higher-ups he was regarded, without peculiar condemnation, as a peculiar phenomenon, who had gone out of their lives. ‘After all,’ said Mrs. Deppler, “if he’d merely seduced the president’s niece we’d still be inviting him to our houses.”<sup>283</sup>

James Weldon Johnson provides a positive example of international marriage in Haiti during the Occupation. At Cap Haitien, Johnson met with an old friend, Lemuel W. Livingston, who “married a charming Haitian woman . . . Livingston’s marriage furnished his main reason for never wishing to be transferred from Cap Haitian.” For twenty years Livingston held the post of American consul at Cap Haitian and had “all that time been the correspondent of the Associated Press.”<sup>284</sup> The previous anonymous member of the Balch team concludes, “The traditional attitude of the white American to black men is merely intensified in Haiti by the fact that the country is the black man’s, and that the white man is there without invitation and without

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<sup>281</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 116.

<sup>282</sup> Anonymous member of Balch group in Hunton and Balch, “Racial Relations,” 116.

<sup>283</sup> Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, 157.

<sup>284</sup> Johnson, *Along this Way*, 350.

welcome.”<sup>285</sup> The Americans in Haiti who do not share the southern race sentiment claim, “the Americans made a bad mistake that is impossible to remedy.”<sup>286</sup>

Kelsey claims the “lack of tact and courtesy on the part of American officials” may be due “to the number of Southerners sent down, but my observation does not confirm this.”<sup>287</sup> He reminds us that, “A southern writer on the race problem in the United States once said that there were but two solutions: The first was the removal of the Negroes to some other country, which was impossible; the second was race amalgamation, which was unthinkable.”<sup>288</sup> The “southerner” who suggested this was no less than third U.S. President Thomas Jefferson in his notes on the state of Virginia. Jefferson also suggested the removal of then slaves to the Southwest of America for placement on reservations much like the Native Americans experience to this day.<sup>289</sup> Kelsey appears unaware that what he sees in Haiti is persistent evidence of just such mixing. Metissage has already occurred at all levels of Haitian society from the initiation of contact with Europe in 1492. “I suspect that behind all surface explanations lies the resentment against the uniform, the symbol of an outside force preserving order, the reflection upon the inability to control self, which hurts the Haitian’s self-esteem.”<sup>290</sup> Whether symbolic or not, lived or witnessed unwarranted violence against one’s person defined as abuse damages self-esteem at local, community, and national levels. Such devaluation of the Haitian civilian in the face of discriminations previously unknown provides firm grounds for humiliation.

The contrasting elements that enter into Haitian history, and its hurrying incidents make it picturesque but also confused. It is hard to disentangle what is significant in this welter of personal fortunes. It is all capable of being interpreted either in a comic or a tragic sense, according as one takes it. The comic presentation is the

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<sup>285</sup> Hunton and Balch, “Racial Relations,” 116-7.

<sup>286</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 116.

<sup>287</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 152.

<sup>288</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 162.

<sup>289</sup> Thomas Jefferson’s greatest fear was the amalgamation of the races, see notes Query 14, “Laws.”

<sup>290</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 144.

cheaper, and has been popular among outsiders. Of all the black man's burdens perhaps the most tragic is that the uncultivated white man finds him funny. All peoples who have known oppression suffer something of this—the Jew, (the most tragic figure in history), the Irishman, the educated Hindu (compare Kipling's Babus), but none in such measure as the negro. There are many white men who conceive of themselves as men of the world who yet find it impossible to take seriously any man of a darker race than their own.<sup>291</sup>

*Education and Literacy.* Johnson's final most scathing criticism of the Occupation is that the U.S. took little to no action to aid the Haitian population in remedying the problem of illiteracy. The U.S. makes no provision for education in the Convention of the Republic of Haiti dated 1915. The U.S. forcibly imposed the Convention following landing of the Marines on July 27, 1915, following the death of President Guilliame Sam, leaving the improvement of the schools entirely in Haitian hands. The double-headed, duplicitous in nature Convention, "purports to do one thing while seeking to accomplish another, . . . which" with "no adequate attempt to achieve common ends" was found "unworkable" even by supporters of the intervention.<sup>292</sup> President Dartigunave, chosen and installed by the U.S. for seven years, beginning in August 1915, "proposed a new constitution which was adopted by popular vote and promulgated June 18, 1918," which also allowed no provisions for education.<sup>293</sup> The business of education and the problem of illiteracy was left to the Haitian government to work out while The National City Bank assumed all responsibility for collection of taxes, tariffs and customs and distribution of salaries to both military employees and Haitian officials and educators at all levels.<sup>294</sup>

The problem of education is complex involving high illiteracy rates, linguistic differences within Haiti, lack of adequate facilities and outrageously low salaries for teachers working in the

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<sup>291</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 7.

<sup>292</sup> Kelsey, "Haiti," 163, 164.

<sup>293</sup> Kelsey, "Haiti," 145.

<sup>294</sup> During the first six years of the Occupation, "One or two schoolhouses have been built and many repairs made," Kelsey, "Haiti," 48.

most difficult to reach urban and rural communities. In an anonymous letter dated March 13, 1926, at Port-au-Prince, from “A Group of Teachers” addressed to the “International League of Women in Haiti,” they wrote, “We beg you to make propaganda in your papers for the benefit of the suffering teachers in the rural schools of Haiti,” in which, “Directors receive \$6.00 and the Teachers \$4 per month, which is less than is received by a street-sweeper or an under-director of road building.” Representing the 400 teachers working in Rural Schools, they write, “Save us. This is an S.O.S. call, as we have enough of contempt, anguish, and suffering.”<sup>295</sup>

In order to understand the complexity of the issue at hand “we must try to look for a moment through Haitian eyes.”<sup>296</sup> Zonia Baber and Emily Greene Balch reiterate, “In general the American Occupation has done little or nothing for education in Haiti.”<sup>297</sup> Kelsey says, this is partially because in General Russell’s last report as High Commissioner he suggested the primary cause of low productivity in Haiti is the emphasis on classical education for the elite in “law, medicine, commerce, and clerical; a great portion of the latter seeking government positions. The members of this class do not know how to use their hands, and have no idea of the dignity of labor” resulting in lack of skilled workers and agriculturalists.<sup>298</sup> He does not consider the possibility of elevating peasants who know the land already to these positions but to devalue the education of those that have it and want to live on equal terms as the world elite and Officers of the U.S. Marine Corps. There is no crime in being educated and having ambitions. Does Mr. Russell want to turn hard rocky soil himself while bearing the dual handicap of disease and malnutrition? In correlation with Mr. Russell’s statements Baber and Balch report:

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<sup>295</sup> Charlotte Atwood and Emily G. Balch, “Problems of Education,” in Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 107-108.

<sup>296</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 103

<sup>297</sup> Zonia Baber and Emily G. Balch, “Problems of Education,” 93.

<sup>298</sup> Baber and Balch, “Education,” 93, fn5.

We did find an extreme dread of having education ‘Americanized.’ The feeling apparently is that Americans would make education purely utilitarian, and eliminate all the literary and cultural side. In the classic difference between the Tuskegee ideal and the Atlanta University ideal of negro education in the United States, they believe that they are to be allowed only the Tuskegee type of education.<sup>299</sup>

Under the Occupation many schools closed in the name of consolidation making access more difficult. Taking over of the school of medicine by the Occupation even though no provisions for such are made in the Convention presented an “occasion of bitter resentment.”<sup>300</sup> Before the Occupation the Haitian government provided scholarships “for study in foreign universities [that] are no longer allowed under the Occupation,” hindering Haitian educational and literary development for generations.<sup>301</sup> The Americans “regard classical and liberal studies as too expensive a luxury for a country like Haiti, a feeling that may be unconsciously accentuated in some cases by color prejudice.”<sup>302</sup> The poet Sylvain, whose letter is included in Balch’s text, “was educated in France, where his father had been a Haitian minister.”<sup>303</sup> Naturally, under the conditions of Jim Crow laws as experienced first-hand with the arrival of Southern color prejudice through some Marines, few Haitians desire to study in the U.S. “The mistrust of America is so great that it would probably be unwise for such students to first go the United States.”<sup>304</sup>

French was the law of the nation; Kreyole the language of the people. Though a few read and wrote in French and most schools taught in French, most Haitians spoke Kreyole comprised of French, Spanish, English and African admixtures of sounds, tones, and vocabulary, at the time an oral language. In both Bontemps and Hughes’s and Danticat’s fictional works, they include

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<sup>299</sup> Baber and Balch, “Conclusions and Recommendations,” in Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 158.

<sup>300</sup> Baber and Balch, “Education,” 104.

<sup>301</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>302</sup> Baber and Balch, “Education,” 103-4.

<sup>303</sup> Randall, “Introduction,” *Occupied Haiti*, 10.

<sup>304</sup> Baber and Balch, “Education,” 106.

Kreyole phrases, along with contextual clues to their meaning in the body of the text amidst the dialogue between characters. This signals to both Occupation and contemporary readers that the language spoken here is Kreyole even though all three authors wrote the original novels in English. Although Kreyole has recently been transcribed into literary form and is taught in schools across Haiti along with French and English, Kreyole terms signal to the reader that the characters speak from aural and oral memory devices rather than from printed records of history. In Danticat's text, the fictional Tante Atie takes on learning to read and write under the tutelage of her friend Louise. This move allows her to express her thoughts and feelings in poetry. "Tante Atie was writing in her notebook. My mother leaned over to look. Tante Atie pulled her notebook away and slammed it shut."<sup>305</sup> Atie's ability provides a certain agency previously denied. With her skills she can validate and verify that the notary and land titles procured for the Caco women are indeed correct. During the Occupation, the U.S. took advantage of the illiteracy rates and linguistic challenges to written communication. "Haitians themselves, condemn, and with good ground, the way in which before the Occupation the interests of the peasants were sacrificed to those of the upper classes, in taxation, for instance; and of the neglect of education, health, roads, and, generally, of the welfare of the poor and the weak."<sup>306</sup>

Considering the frequency commentators reviewed here cite illiteracy as a contingency for intervention, it is surprising to find it so little addressed by the Occupation. The High Commissioner issued a report calling for a broadcasting station "to be constructed at Port-au-Prince, with receiving sets installed in the open market places in the important towns where the people assemble in large numbers," so that, "Each market day, short talks or lectures are to be given in Creole to the illiterate peasants in such subjects as explanation of the Haitian laws,

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<sup>305</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 103, 134-135, 164.

<sup>306</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 11.



planting and care of coffee and cotton, and other crops, care of animals, *et cetera*.” In addition to mass education in farming, “This apparatus will also afford the possibility of giving the people the pleasure of hearing music [as opposed to banned drums?], and will tend to unify the country.”<sup>307</sup> Documentary of the effectiveness of such electronic aural communication for a still largely illiterate populace and the potential political implications of such work is captured in the film *The Agronomist* (2003), detailing the life, death, and continuing legacy of Haitian journalist Jean Dominique.<sup>308</sup> Danticat describes the continuing ways in which Haitians experience electronic media as a community affair in the short story “A Wall of Fire Rising” (1991).

Near the sugar mill was a large television screen in an iron grill cage that the government had installed so that the shantytown dwellers could watch the state-sponsored news at eight o’clock every night. After the news, a gendarme would come and turn off the television set, taking home the key. On most nights, the people stayed at the site long after this gendarme had gone and told stories to one another beneath the big black screen. They made bonfires with dried sticks, corn husks, and paper, cursing the authorities under their breath.<sup>309</sup>

The main characters in this short story, Guy and Lili, discuss the difficulties of gaining work at the mill and the future of their son’s education in the shadow of the public television. In Kelsey’s experience, “My impression is that the people are willing to work but their work standards are not ours,” nor do they particularly value farm labor.<sup>310</sup>

This concern with work is echoed throughout the commentaries and responded to by Bontemps and Hughes and Danticat repeatedly. As an insult to the Haitian people, this must have struck a deep nerve. Work serves as the overarching theme of *Popo and Fifina*. The authors describe in detail the physical labors of each character. Papa Jean leaves his position as a peasant farmer in the village to secure a position as a fisherman in the city heading to the wharf as soon

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<sup>307</sup> Fourth High Commissioner’s Report in Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 95.

<sup>308</sup> See Jonathan Demme, *The Agronomist*, score Wyclef Jean, ThinkFilm, 2003, DVD.

<sup>309</sup> Edwidge Danticat, “A Wall of Fire Rising,” *The Norton Anthology of Literature; Shorter Tenth Edition*, eds. Alison Booth and Kelly J. Mays, New York: Norton, 2010, 239-249, 241.

<sup>310</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 124.

as a room has been secured the same day they arrive in Cape Haiti. His wife, Mamma Anna, constantly moves with baby Persia on her hips while she collects water at the public fountain, washes clothes in open street aqueducts, cooks rice and beans and boils plantains one course at a time on a single charcoal burner, and cleans the one room hut in Cape Haiti, all while supervising the activities of her other children, Popo and Fifina, eight and twelve respectively. Popo trains as an apprentice wood carver with his Uncle Jacques, old man Durand, and cousin Marcel. Fifina assists her mother in her chores as well as collecting soap weed with Popo. Popo collects kindling for charcoal. Rarely at rest, the family takes one day out from work to picnic by the sea and visit the lighthouse in the shadow of the Marine's secured beach and the trade ships of the U.S., France, Germany, and Holland. If Bontemps and Hughes share one purpose, it is to dispel the myth of Haitians as lazy. With "only a single reference to the foreign soldiers," the "Marine controlled beach, . . . we see endless poverty (in a country where the average daily wage, as Hughes revealed elsewhere, was 30 cents) but virtually no pictures of affluence. The result is that the reader exists solidly in the world of the poor, without the sense of outrage that comparisons to wealth would have probably brought."<sup>311</sup> By concentrating "on showing the simple, ordered, industrious, resourceful lives of the typical Haitian poor," Bontemps and Hughes excavate them from a litany of justifications for the continued oppressive measures of the pacifying Occupation. Likewise, Danticat follows Bontemps and Hughes's lead in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. By presenting "these poor people" as "typical," we see them as such since "we are never invited to see Popo and Fifina, and their family, as anything else."<sup>312</sup> Sophie says to her mother, "I am sorry you work so hard . . . I never realized you did so much." Martine, who works several jobs to support herself, her daughter, her sister, and her mother, responds, "That's how it

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<sup>311</sup> Rampersad, afterword, in Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*, 107.

<sup>312</sup> *ibid.*

is. Life is no vacation. If you get your education, there are things you won't have to do." Sophie aspires to be *dactylo*, a Kreyole term here that implies both secretary and writer.<sup>313</sup>

The High Commissioner also expresses concerns about the unanimous reports that animals are cruelly treated in Haiti. "There is among the Haitians an indifference to suffering that seems to us heartless," notes Kelsey. "Open sores on animals are frightfully common. Animals are expected to work indefinitely without food."<sup>314</sup> Balch reports, "The shocking underfeeding and neglect of animals in Haiti is only too evident."<sup>315</sup> Hurston notes this in *Tell My Horse* as well. "Much of the same indifference is shown by the lower classes to human suffering."<sup>316</sup> Danticat illustrates this too; as the fictional Sophie and Martine leave Haiti to return to New York, they sit in the taptap "sadly ignoring the skeletal mares and even bonier women tugging their beasts to open markets along the route."<sup>317</sup> Bontemps and Hughes contradict this stereotype describing the gentle treatment, care and concern Popo and his family express towards the beasts of burden they employ, exemplified by Popo's attempt to rescue a goat from a rainstorm.

[Popo] ran to the goat and tried to push him toward the shed. But the goat was blinded by the rain and did not seem to understand that Popo was trying to help him. Suddenly, the confused creature turned around abruptly and butted Popo in the stomach. It was not a very hard butt, but it caught Popo off balance; and over he went into a mud puddle.

When Popo pulled himself out of the mud, he heard loud laughter. He was surprised and frightened but not hurt.

"That goat doesn't know what's good for him," he said sadly.

"That's the trouble with most goats, Popo," Papa Jean said. They don't know what's good for them."<sup>318</sup>

This reads like veiled criticism of the Occupation. If the U.S. government stands in as the goat, Hughes has given voice to his concerns about the U.S. servicemen on the ground in Haiti to Papa

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<sup>313</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* 56, 58.

<sup>314</sup> Kelsey, "Haiti," 124.

<sup>315</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 82.

<sup>316</sup> Kelsey, "Haiti," 124.

<sup>317</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 177.

<sup>318</sup> Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*, 97-98.

Jean. Veiled criticism appears again in the more detailed discussion of Hurston's *Tell My Horse*. It is probably not coincidental that Hughes and Hurston were good friends and formidable enemies over the course of their writing careers sharing parallel concerns about race, nationalism, artistic production, and Haiti, including how to present these to a generally unsympathetic public.

The tradition of *restavek* presents another concern of cruelty for Kelsey. In an effort to secure education for their children, or at least in hopes of a better life, or to relieve themselves of the burden of a child they cannot care for, "A couple will sometimes sell a child for a dollar or two but this involves an idea on their part that the child will be better off in some better situated family than at home." He says that, "Domestic slavery of this sort is very common, this child growing up in another house and being the servant of the family, rarely sent to school, and receiving nothing until grown save board and clothes."<sup>319</sup> Danticat defends the practice so easily dismissed as child slavery even by contemporary commentators. For the fictional Grandmè Ifé, the kind thing to do for Martine following her brutal rape is to send

her to a rich mulatto family in Croix-des-Rosets to do any work she could for free room and board, as a *rèstavèk*. Even though [Martine] was pregnant and half insane, the family took her in anyway because my grandmother had cooked and cleaned in their house for years, before she married my grandfather.<sup>320</sup>

In a reciprocal move Martine gives Sophie over to Atie to raise while she sets up house in New York and sends money back to Haiti to support her child, mother, and sister. Atie says, "In this country there are many good reasons for mothers to abandon their children."<sup>321</sup> In Bontemps and Hughes's novel, they confirm this when Papa Jean sends Popo to train as an apprentice to Uncle Jacques. After a month of kite flying and sneaking out to Congo dances at night, Popo's parents

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<sup>319</sup> Kelsey, "Haiti," 124-5.

<sup>320</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 139.

<sup>321</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 9, 20, 23, 39.

determine the eight-year old boy old enough to learn a skill and earn some income for the family. Papa Jean thanks his brother, “I’m leaving Popo in your care. See that he works hard and learns the trade. He will be yours till he has learned enough to earn money at woodworking.”<sup>322</sup> After Popo acquires this skill he will attend his father on the fishing boats. The more trades he knows the better his future.

The U.S. and Haiti came to a “tragic impasse” regarding education. For Kelsey, Haitians carry a handicap “because of ignorance,” that can be drawn along class lines.<sup>323</sup> He sees two Haitis: “The first is illiterate, the second, educated; one uncouth, the other, polished; two languages; two religions.”<sup>324</sup> He describes the first group as malnourished and underfed, whose children wear few clothes, evidenced by “washwomen along the streams [who] are often practically nude.”<sup>325</sup> Kelsey’s second Haiti “knows more of foreign languages than the corresponding groups of Americans and are more likely to talk in English to you than you are to talk in French to them.”<sup>326</sup> He attributes this to a slave mentality derived from the constituencies of colonization and Revolution, relayed in the following slanderous comments. “Haiti is suffering from a survival of slavery traditions: Educated Haiti does not like work, nor has it ever learned the dignity thereof; Haiti has no work ideal, and whenever possible the lower classes follow the example of the upper.”<sup>327</sup>

Hughes also shows concern for “the people without shoes,” the subject of the novel he cowrote with Bontemps. Neither describes naked women though Popo saves his only dress shirt

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<sup>322</sup> Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*, 66.

<sup>323</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 124.

<sup>324</sup> “An African mass struggling to keep itself alive in this physical world; a small handful struggling to attain equality with the civilized world!” Kelsey, “Haiti,” 126.

<sup>325</sup> Did Kelsey not also see nude men bathing in open sewers, taps, and other water sources? Or do male researchers just not see the world around them? Conditions were different during the Occupation but many men in Haiti today take open air baths with a bucket and little shielding from the public around them, see Asger *Ghosts*; Kelsey, “Haiti,” 125.

<sup>326</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 126.

<sup>327</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 126-7.

for traveling and special occasions, running about naked most of the time. In most of the twenty illustrations in the woodcut block print tradition common to the time period by artist E. Simms Campbell included in *Popo and Fifina*, Popo is the only character represented naked. Campbell avoids the caricature common to this form in early twentieth-century representations by obscuring facial features. The expert care Campbell executes offers an option that does not reinforce racial stereotypes based on physiognomic renditions.

The Balch team also witnessed economic and social differences but addressed them in more delicate terms indicating a much deeper understanding of the source of irritation Haitians might feel to imposition of American-style education modes.

This valuation of education in terms of livelihood is abhorrent to the Haitian, or at least to Haitians of one type. They do not believe that the value of culture can or should be expressed in money terms.

Haitians so far as we talked with them, dread American influence on their educational system, fearing that if it is “Anglo-Saxonized” it will be turned away from the French cultural tradition and given a materialist and purely utilitarian trend. Their sense of distress is acute. It is as if their soul itself were in danger of being tampered with by alien hands.<sup>328</sup>

The most articulate part of the Haitian population, the so-called elite, share the aristocratic European prejudice, which is not uninfluential in the United States either, which honors literary and professional work and despises manual labor—in this case especially work on the land, which is associated in their minds, if not with the slavery of a few generations back, at least with the characteristics of a very ignorant and poor peasantry. Haitians have marked literary talent . . . They are naturally most directly concerned with academic and professional education, both as a matter of sentiment and as a matter of class interest.<sup>329</sup>

“For forty years, or more, the rulers had tried various devices of compulsory labor to get the fields cultivated, yet production decreased.”<sup>330</sup> As a parting gift, Emily Balch was presented with “a copy of *The Anthology of Haitian Literature* collected by Dr. George Sylvain and others,”

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<sup>328</sup> “It is essentially the same issue as the old difference in the United States as to whether in the education of the negro all emphasis should be laid on education of the Tuskegee type, or whether the education typified by Atlanta University was also important,” Baber and Balch, “Education,” 104.

<sup>329</sup> Baber and Balch, “Education,” 103.

<sup>330</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 127.

proving the importance of literary culture in development of a humane and popular culture for Haiti.<sup>331</sup> Johnson wrote in *Along this Way* that George “Sylvain was the first to ask me what I thought were some of the things the Haitians themselves could do.”<sup>332</sup> In defense of Haiti and underdeveloped nations elsewhere, Balch ameliorates, “It is, however, fair to remember that an enlightened social conscious has been a slow and halting growth everywhere.”<sup>333</sup>

Based on the reports of the Senate committee, which Brown quotes extensively, he concludes that the U.S. should stay the course in Haiti with some admitted changes to the original convention. He argues that the military tribunals should be abolished upon the condition of “reform of the courts of first instance” and that the “Haitian government should restrict the great land holdings by foreign interests” redressing the change in land ownership imposed by the Constitution of 1918.<sup>334</sup> If the Marines continue in Haiti they can address the criticisms made by Americans that the United States has neglected its moral duty in administering “justice, schools, and agricultural institutions” for “the Haitian masses.”<sup>335</sup> Professor Knight writes, “The Haitian wants to own his own land and work it himself, and it is really for him that we are developing the country, we have no right to lay out a program which will violate his wishes.”<sup>336</sup>

*Physical Abuses.* The most difficult complaints for some observers and commentators to comprehend are the atrocities and “charges of cruelty brought against the marines.”<sup>337</sup> A signed memorial presented to [the Balch] party in Haiti which refers to the: 1) “burning alive of Cazo Noel, and of Médard Belony and his wife;” 2) the “summary execution of the three children of

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<sup>331</sup> Oeuvres des Ecrivains Haitiens: Auters Haitiens, Morceaux Choisis, precedes de notices biographiques, 2 volumes, one of prose, one of verse, Imprimerie de Madam Smith, Port-au-Prince, 1904; Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 63-64, fn10.

<sup>332</sup> Johnson, *Along this Way*, 348.

<sup>333</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 11.

<sup>334</sup> Brown, “American Intervention,” 610.

<sup>335</sup> Brown, “American Intervention,” 609-10.

<sup>336</sup> *Current History*, June 1926; quoted in Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 84.

<sup>337</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 142.

Hergéné, and of the twin sisters Athélia and Cloraine Etienne;” 3) the “beating and torturing with fire of the widow of Romain Bregarde;” 4) the “beating to death of the notary, M. Garnier, Jr.,” 5) the “burying alive of one Vixina in broad daylight in the court of the Gendarmerie at Maissade;” 6) the “execution by beating of Dorléan Joseph;” 7) the “execution by machine gun of the daughters of the widow Cécicour Rosier in the yard of their house, when their mother, aged 84, received two bullets in her thigh;” 8) the “daily shooting down of cattle;” 9) and “many burnings of fields full of crops, distilleries, mills, and houses.”<sup>338</sup> Although the later McCormick Committee concluded “that much native testimony is unreliable” and Emily Balch expresses her own concerns about the adequacy of legal evidence, I believe she supplies this list so that informed Americans are aware of the types of charges outlined in both the Senate Commission report and the abbreviated hand-delivered manuscript given to her party in Haiti. Kelsey “assigns all complaints . . . against individuals.”<sup>339</sup> The list of offenses Kelsey provides includes: “Drunkenness and the accompanying disorders;” “sexual assaults;” physical violence exacted against prisoners and others; and torture to obtain information.<sup>340</sup>

“Unfortunately, drunkenness was not unknown even on the part of high officials and their wives, while local standards were shocked by the sight of women in automobiles smoking in public.”<sup>341</sup> Among Haitians themselves, “Drunkenness is not common” as the medicinal “use of rum from childhood” conditions them against it.<sup>342</sup> “Of the rum itself there is no shortage. The wealthier classes drink whatever they like as no ‘amendment’ hinders them.”<sup>343</sup> Due to the prevalence of available rum, “The Occupation issued an order that no rum was to be sold to

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<sup>338</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 126-7.

<sup>339</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 142.

<sup>340</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 140-44.

<sup>341</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 142.

<sup>342</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 125.

<sup>343</sup> *ibid.*



marines. This order was, and is, frequently disregarded,” in opposition to the Prohibition against public sale and consumption of alcohol in the U.S. from 1920 to 1930 under the Eighteenth Amendment to our own Constitution.<sup>344</sup> In a bit of an apologetic tone, Hunton and Balch note, “The situation is complicated by the fact that they come from a land of at least partially effective prohibition, to one whose rum is both cheap and delicious.”<sup>345</sup> Kelsey reports, “In November, 1919, some marines sent a Haitian boy to the store of one Mangones, to buy rum for them. Mangones sold the rum and was sentenced to six months’ imprisonment at hard labor.”<sup>346</sup> The French consul secured the rum sellers release; neither the marines nor the Haitian boy were punished. “The Commanding Officer told me that 90 percent of his troubles with the men were due to alcohol,” leading to fights and to Marines threatening “natives” with guns to provide them with alcohol.<sup>347</sup> Hunton and Balch note that lower rank Marines, when “off duty and feeling bored and far from home and home standards among a people of a different race whom they were fighting not long ago, are sometimes rowdy and have a one-sided idea of fun, it is to say the least, not surprising.”<sup>348</sup> In a footnote representing Balch’s true personal feelings on this she writes, “The effort to prevent Marines from getting liquor appears to have broken down, and they are too often drunk and disorderly and offensive to quiet people in the streets, to judge by what we both saw and heard of. It was painful and humiliating also to find the impression made by fast and rowdyish elements among Americans in Haiti.”<sup>349</sup>

Sexual assaults occurred. One notable event was the “rape of a young girl of ten or eleven.” The perpetrator pled guilty by insanity and was sentenced for his crimes to fifty-one

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<sup>344</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 140.

<sup>345</sup> Hunton and Balch, “Racial Relations,” 118-119.

<sup>346</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 140.

<sup>347</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 142-3.

<sup>348</sup> Hunton and Balch, “Racial Relations,” 118.

<sup>349</sup> Is this Balch’s own testimony? Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 134.

years imprisonment. Kelsey claims to have witnessed the court proceedings and argues, “Severe punishment has always been meted out to such offenders.”<sup>350</sup> Sexual assaults should never have happened at all. Hunton and Balch quote Percevel Thoby, a lawyer and former Haitian chargé d’affaires at Washington, who makes the following complaint:

A great moral wrong is also done to Haiti. It is the rapid spreading of prostitution with its venereal diseases, inseparable from military occupation. From the neighboring islands and across the Dominican border, girls invade Port-au-Prince and Cap Haitien, lured by the dollars of the marines. Actually, there are in Port-au-Prince, a city of 100,000 inhabitant, 147 registered saloons and dancing places. All the dancing places are places of open prostitution. Before the Occupation, such things did not exist. The material as well as the moral welfare of Haiti demands the immediate abandonment of this policy and the withdrawal of the Occupation.<sup>351</sup>

Balch concurs, “Haitians complain of increase in prostitution and social evils as a result of the Occupation, and it is obvious that illegitimate children of soldiers and native women are being added to the population in Haiti, as in the Philippines. All this must be counted into the cost of the Occupation on both sides of the account, into the cost to us Americans as well as into the cost of the Haitians.”<sup>352</sup>

“Third degree methods to secure evidence;” i.e., torture have been “[a]dmitted” as “justifiable under field conditions” and are not considered unreasonable by Kelsey.<sup>353</sup> U.S. officials or those acting on their behalf carried out deliberate acts of violence including the “striking, shooting, etc., of escaping prisoners and others.” One such example includes, “A white man . . . spur[red] his horse between two women on the way to market, knocking them down and scattering their wares over the road. Then he rode off laughing.”<sup>354</sup> Kelsey provides another example, “An officer out after *cacos* met five men . . . and asked them where the *cacos* were.”

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<sup>350</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 143.

<sup>351</sup> Percevel Thoby in Hunton and Balch, “Racial Relations,” 119.

<sup>352</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 135.

<sup>353</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 143.

<sup>354</sup> *ibid.*

Failing to answer, “the officer shot them all and on his return reported that he had been attacked by 150 *cacos* and had killed five of them.”<sup>355</sup> This sport is otherwise known as *caco* hunting.

“I fear we must admit that such things have happened,” but Kelsey argues they are “to be expected” given the circumstances of martial law declared as if the U.S. were at war with Haiti.<sup>356</sup> The Occupation does not constitute a war and such legally sanctioned appellations do not apply though that is the attitude some Marines took in exercising power and carrying out their duties as charged. If “chaos” ruled in the four years of continuous revolution preceding the Occupation, the Marines certainly redefined chaos. Kelsey’s main concern is with the effect of such cruelties on the Haitian people, but not with any real fear of retaliation as he believes the *cacos* have been largely contained, but with U.S. foreign opinion within our borders. He fears the negative press generated in response to these cruelties and immoral and criminal acts and that effect on U.S. support of continuation of the intervention. Public opinion must run high with ever increasing pressure on Washington to explain just what their goals are. Terrorizing the people does not equal stabilization and pacification. Kelsey writes, “I fear that the emphasis laid on cruelty is because of the influence it may have in the United States rather than because of sympathy for the victim.”<sup>357</sup> Whether the reports skew opinion towards one audience or another cannot obscure the fact that such events occurred. “Haitians got the impression that guilty men were shielded” and “some cases were not investigated with sufficient care.”<sup>358</sup> “I regret that more searching inquiry was not made in connection with the few officers accused.”<sup>359</sup> “The Marines themselves are to blame for some of the criticism heaped upon them. A certain type of man likes

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<sup>355</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>356</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>357</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>359</sup> *ibid.*

to brag of his exploits and of his wickedness.”<sup>360</sup> Many Haitians and other contemporary scholarly observers strongly disagree with such justifications.<sup>361</sup>

*Land Rights and Development.* Property rights are a central concern to Haitians. “[F]oreigners were forbidden to own real estate until the adoption of the last constitution in 1918,” during the Occupation.<sup>362</sup> Limiting foreign ownership helped maintain political autonomy in the International World after the Revolution.<sup>363</sup> But, several factors worked together and separately to secure ownership of Haitian land particularly to U.S. foreigners. This project was already underway as early as 1905 with regards to negotiation of right-of-way for the railway and consolidation of surrounding lands into U.S. hands.<sup>364</sup> Danticat reminds readers in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* of one legacy of the Occupation. “In Haiti, there were only sugar cane railroads that ran from the sugar mill in Port-au-Prince to plantation towns all over the countryside.”<sup>365</sup> The business of roadway construction brought into question ownership and deed disputes since most Haitian had none to due illiteracy, difficulty of procuring documents, the instability of the Haitian climate in preserving paper documents, and previously recognized “squatter titles.”<sup>366</sup> Lack of land titles or “squatters” titles “have been abolished but the claims of the heirs of those who thus acquired property are valid” lead to much confusion. Further, though the State owns much property, “no one knows how much” as often it is “leased in small parcels to peasants,”

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<sup>360</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 143-4.

<sup>361</sup> For example, Paula Morgan and Valerie Youseff note that memory of and continuance of such abuses effect creative writers today; “Foreign influence, in particular from the United States, has characterized the twentieth century, and has been heinous in its oppressive, self-serving force,” *Writing Rage: Unmasking Violence through Caribbean Discourse*, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 104.

<sup>362</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 120.

<sup>363</sup> The old Constitution stated: “No one, unless he is a Haitian, may be a holder of land, regardless of what his title may be, nor acquire any real estate,” and the new one of 1918: “The right to hold property is given to foreigners residing in Haiti and to societies formed by foreigners, for dwelling purposes and for agricultural, commercial, industrial or educational enterprises. This right shall terminate five years after the foreigner shall have ceased to reside in the country, or when activities of these companies shall have ceased,” Kelsey, “Haiti,” 149.

<sup>364</sup> See Douglas, “National Railway.”

<sup>365</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 77.

<sup>366</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 120.

who may or may not believe after twenty years at the same place that they own it.<sup>367</sup> “With a dense population and industry, land is life, and more especially freedom.”<sup>368</sup> Land policy “is the foundation of the whole Haitian situation. The Haitian policy should be devoted to securing full and guaranteed legal title to peasant proprietors and occupants, and to converting small tenancies on state land into ownership on a fair trade basis. The taking of land for public purposes should be carefully guarded against possible abuse.”<sup>369</sup> Land ownership presents a central theme in Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Grandmè Ifè’s main concern with all four Caco women on the ground in the countryside is to settle the matter of the deed. “I need to see about my papers for this land and I need to have all the things for my passing. With all my children here, this is a good time. . . . I want to make the papers show all the people it belongs to.”<sup>370</sup>

“We are now landowners,” my mother said. “We all now own part of La Nouvelle Dame Marie.”

“Did this land not always belong to you and Tante Atie?” I asked my mother.

“Yes, but now you have a piece of it too.”

She flashed the new deed for the house.

“*La terre sera également divisée*,” she read the document. “Equally, my dear. The land is equally divided between Atie and me and you and your daughter.”<sup>371</sup>

Kelsey and Balch propose the propagation of wood, such as “*campêche*, a valuable dye wood which grows wild” and fruit trees for agricultural development.<sup>372</sup> “Everywhere the tourist sees ruins of old gateways and stone walls encircling acres of land. He rides down a muddy path in the centre of what was once a wide avenue. He crosses brick culverts built perhaps one hundred and fifty years ago. Before long he realizes that this must at one time have been a

<sup>367</sup> “Under the Haitian Civil Code, (1826), legal title to land could be acquired by 20 years’ occupancy, or even in shorter time where the occupant shows color of title,” Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 67-8.

<sup>368</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 75.

<sup>369</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 59.

<sup>370</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 164.

<sup>371</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 167.

<sup>372</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 84.

garden spot, and such it was, for here was the centre of the old French culture and from here went enormous quantities of sugar, 24,000 tons in 1796.”<sup>373</sup> “The French in 1791 with 792 mills produced 163,500,000 pounds of sugar. From the revolution down to 1919 no sugar was exported. In the year 1919-20, 8,798,877 pounds were exported—the product of one American-owned mill,” possibly operating on land secured by the acquisition of the railway corridor.<sup>374</sup> “There are not even coffee plantations. All the natives do is to pick berries from the wild plants descended from those brought in by the French after 1738.”<sup>375</sup> “Outside of the larger sugar plantations, largely though not wholly under foreign control, there is no real agricultural development” six years into the Occupation.<sup>376</sup> In growing rubber, “One frequently hears expressed the fear that Americans may wish to create big plantations and undermine the independent small owners.”<sup>377</sup> In addition to coffee and sugar exports during the Occupation, Haiti exported cotton, cocoa, and dye-woods to the U.S. and France in 1919 (44% to U.S.; 52% to France); imports arrived at Port-au-Prince, Cape Haitiene, and Cayes from the U.S. including wheat, rice, malt, soap, cloth, tobacco, iron and steel, liquor, beer, other beverages, autos, agricultural implements (93% from U.S.).<sup>378</sup> Locally, “The burning of charcoal is quite an industry.”<sup>379</sup> Daily, the “roads of Haiti are lined with women and burros bringing produce to village or town. These women often walk from fifteen to twenty-five miles and seem satisfied if they sell fifty cents worth of provisions;” Kelsey asks if this is not “Picturesque?” answering,

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<sup>373</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 132.

<sup>374</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 134; see Douglas, “National Railway.”

<sup>375</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 121.

<sup>376</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>377</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 83.

<sup>378</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 132; see Table.

<sup>379</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 122.

“Yes, but the waste of human effort in such a system is enormous,” confirming the assessment of Johnson in 1920.<sup>380</sup>

A concern for tourism is evidenced here. “Mr. Pritchard, writing in 1910, traveled all about the island alone, and his main inconvenience seems to have been the too insistent hospitality of the natives.”<sup>381</sup> What products can Haitians manufacture for purchase by visitors? “There is little for tourists, who consist mainly of cruise parties, spending only a few hours on shore, to buy as souvenirs. A cumbersome earthenware jar, a quaint little rush-bottomed chair, bags and baskets made of strips of palm leaf, native lace and embroidery, perhaps guava jelly and candied fruit, seem to complete the list.”<sup>382</sup> What local art forms can Haitians develop for sale to tourists? “The people make simple furniture, and presumably, tools and implements. They weave hats and baskets and bake coarse earthenware. They build their own houses, very commonly of wickerwork, overlaid with clay, which makes a sort of plaster; with roof of thatch, a door, and small unglazed windows, if any, and with solid shutters. The walls are often painted in ochre or dull red, perhaps with an ornamental band about the windows. They are charming.”<sup>383</sup> Not only does Balch list these skills as potential for making art for export, “Léger, writing in 1907 says: ‘In Haiti there are many skillful workmen, excellent joiners, cabinet-makers, tailors, tinsmiths, tanners, saddlers, potters, silversmiths, printers, bookbinders, etc. There are soap factories and brickyards.’ He also speaks of saw-mills.”<sup>384</sup> In Bontemps and Hughes’s children’s book, *Popo and Fifina*, they describe Uncle Jacques’ family at Cape Haiti who make their living carving and selling beautifully engraved wooden trays and furniture locally and to tourists.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 121; see Johnson, “The Haitian People,” 346.

<sup>381</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 11.

<sup>382</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 63.

<sup>383</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 60.

<sup>384</sup> Balch, *Occupied Haiti*, 60, fn5.

<sup>385</sup> See Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*.

Popo carves an image of a small boat out to sea on a mahogany tray. Old man Durand taught him that a design is “a picture of how you feel inside” and Popo “wanted everyone to know how glad he was to make something with his own hands.”<sup>386</sup> Having completed his first work of art at the age of eight, old man Durand predicted, “When you are older you will make many beautiful things, many much finer than this tray; but there will never be another first one. For that reason the first one is precious.”<sup>387</sup>

Although few modern readers are aware of the social, historical and political debates surrounding the U.S. Occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934, they may be aware of some of the cultural production that developed out of it. The Popular Arts Movement in painting and sculpture beginning in 1944 is one of the most important of these occurrences although I do not address it here. Instead the following chapters address developments in ethnography, literature, dance, music, film, and other performance derived of the Occupation, beginning with William Seabrook’s invitation to Haiti, *The Magic Island*, read by 500,000 Americans alone in 1929, spawning a new generation of interest in Haiti that has yet to cease.

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<sup>386</sup> Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*, 78.

<sup>387</sup> Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*, 77.



## CHAPTER IV

## AN OPEN INVITATION TO HAITI:

WILLIAM SEABROOK'S *THE MAGIC ISLAND* (1929)

But if we do not to fall into a culture of resentment or hatred, which would be the sign of the internationalization of the racism at the heart of the outsider's deformation of the image of Vodou, we must undertake a face to face criticism with what has been made of Vodou abroad, as well as in Haiti.

—Laënnec Hurbon, "American Fantasy and Haitian Vodou,"  
*Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, ed. Donald J. Cosentino, 1995, 198.

We wound upward toward the Hotel Montagne, passing beautiful villas, set behind walls amid palm trees, with glimpses through grilled gates of lovely lawns and tropical gardens. Immediately, beyond this hill with its palaces and estates rose the tangled slopes of Morne Hôpital, the jungle mountain creeping down to the edge of the city, primitive and eternal, as if patiently biding its time to reclaim its own.

—William Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, New York: Literary Guild of America, 1929, 130.

**Introduction.** In 1928 William Buehler Seabrook visited Haiti during the Marine Occupation. He rented a home in the vicinity of Port-au-Prince; engaged in discourse with U.S. and Haitian government officials; visited the colony at La Gonave to witness the kingdom of Faustin E. Wirkus; went adventuring with Dr. Eckman and other scientists to the peak of Morne La Selle; and made friends with a local *mambo* by traveling to the countryside to investigate superstition, folk belief, and "Voodoo." Many scholars consider Seabrook's *The Magic Island*, written after he returned to New York, and published in 1929, controversial at best; many turn away from ever reading it after glancing through the woodcut block prints peppered throughout the text. These twenty highly racialized images, by artist Alexander King, repel potential

contemporary readers. The “[b]latantly racist illustrations suggest the monstrous possibilities not quite witnessed in the text,” notes Laënnec Hurbon.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, Seabrook writes, “the Haitian people . . . are easily vulnerable to a certain sort of caricature,” printed directly opposite of a very difficult highly sexualized print by King titled “Dark Mother of Mysteries,” visual metaphor and metonym of an imaginary dark motherland traceable “to their ancestral Africa.”<sup>2</sup> Due to such complications of structure and form, *The Magic Island* finds itself isolated on library shelves and available in dusty molden forms for purchase by obscure collectors, disregarded by history. Here, I engage extensively with the details of *The Magic Island* while reviewing immediate and less immediate responses to the text to illustrate its lasting impact on the way U.S. Americans and others experience Haiti both up close and at a distance.

Some recent scholarship has sought to reinsert Seabrook into his proper historical space, although not uncritically, in the U.S. American literary and artistic imagination and beyond. Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert find Seabrook typical in his misrepresentations of African-derived religious practices “he claims to have witnessed” in the “denigrating accounts . . . that abound” in *The Magic Island*.<sup>3</sup> As Seabrook provides ample evidence of such exaggerations, Paravisini-Gebert and others recognize the lasting impressions of such accounts for the literary and visual imagination, not just in the U.S., but in the work of subsequent Haitian authors as well and on the global stage.<sup>4</sup> In many ways, for the general U.S. population, perceptions of Haiti have not changed much since the Occupation years though recent scholarship makes it clearly evident that U.S. American and other scholars have

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<sup>1</sup> Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 188.

<sup>2</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 277; facing plate; unfortunately this image strongly reminds one of Seabrook’s description of Maman Célie holding him while she weeps upon his departure, treated later in this chapter, 77.

<sup>3</sup> Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, eds., *Sacred Possession: Vodou, Santeria, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, “Women Possessed: Eroticism and Exoticism in the Representation of Woman and Zombie,” *Sacred Possession: Vodou, Santeria, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, eds. Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000, 47-56.

maintained a sincere and sustained interest in Haiti over time. Outright dismissal or over simplifications of Seabrook's text reflect a lack of historicity in understanding the complexity of U.S. interest in Haiti dating back to the Revolution and before. U.S. Americans responded in complicated ways to many competing narratives of journalism, ethnography, and travel writing making their way into the American imagination during and following the Occupation. Seabrook finds himself, in spite of himself, at the center of a discourse, political, social, and spiritual in nature, drawing interest of attractors and detractors to the Haitian cause. It is not that nothing of importance came out of the literary production of the Occupation, but that much did and these works continue to influence perceptions of this small island nation.

At the time of its publication *The Magic Island* held a broad appeal for an American audience with an initial estimation of 500,000 readers; its controversial nature does not take away from that. Haitian scholar and author Myriam J. A. Chancy contends that Seabrook appealed "to an emotional sentimental readership defined as female to assure his credibility as an ethnographer if not as an anthropologist."<sup>5</sup> In evaluating Seabrook's intentions and relative value for contemporary readers, I compare initial reactions with present reassessments of the text, focusing my attention on the actual contents of the original text, Seabrook's own struggle with the material, and how immediate and long term responses both deny and reinvigorate the stereotypes internal to the text, carefully reading for incidents of resolution within the work of each author or artist who approaches it. Although the text is hardly mentioned outside of academic circles today, it had an enormous impact on the future of writing about Haiti. Not only did significant American authors travel to Haiti during the Occupation to witness first-hand events occurring on the ground, others followed immediately. Occupation period political reports

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<sup>5</sup> Myriam J. A. Chancy, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997, 55.

and fantastical creations drew many to Haiti. In the previous chapter, I surveyed the production of James Weldon Johnson, Herbert J. Seligmann, Frank P. Walsh, and the Emily Balch Commission, who were extremely critical of the U.S. Occupation forces' activities on the ground. I also compared their reports to U.S. apologists Carl Kelsey and Phillip Marshall Brown. Within the highly politicized and racialized atmosphere revealed in the documentation of brutalities witnessed on the ground by each of these commentators, reputable ethnography or creative exploration would prove difficult at best during the Occupation, as illustrated by Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes's veiled critical discourse in their children's book *Popo and Fifina* (1932).

In spite of such criticisms the Occupation did succeed in some of its claims. One testament to this is that a period of political and economic stability followed the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 1935 that allowed tourists, artists, ethnographers, and other curiosity seekers to travel safely about the island as some claim to have done prior to the intervention. In this period of nearly twenty years of stability, significant numbers of American and other investigators flocked to the island to see for themselves this "primitive" world so vividly described and so hotly contested for the previous two decades. William Seabrook was on the ground in Haiti during the Occupation, and if his text is true, he saw quite a bit of the island and its culture traveling within the protection of the Occupation forces. Of all of the sensationalist and spectacularized works of the period, Seabrook's text finds itself at the center of interest. Widely read by a diverse audience, *The Magic Island* piques the curiosity of scholars and tourists alike. Like a carnival side show announcer, Seabrook works his material and his various audiences, seductively drawing in detractors and admirers, some excited and titillated by his tales, others extremely critical of the disservice his work does to Haiti. Seeking pleasure and entertainment or

to rigorously dispel much of his unscientific accountings, individuals of various backgrounds are drawn to Haiti by Seabrook's open invitation. In order to understand the text's broad appeal and deep reach we must look at the details of the work and then at the relative genealogy of those that followed.

In the following chapter I offer a sustained accounting of that varied interest focusing attention on the popular ethnographic works of Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Dunham, and Maya Deren. These three scholar/artists present a triad of women connected by obvious and less transparent threads to Seabrook himself. Their scholarship and artistic enterprises impact the literary and creative world of the imagination in regards to Haiti into the present as illustrated by the number of authors and artists, plastic and performative, who turn to their works for knowledge and inspiration within the African and Haitian diasporic world. All three women conducted ethnographic research on the ground in Haiti following the Occupation and in some relation were influenced by Seabrook. Zora Neale Hurston's textual account appears immediately in *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938), Katherine Dunham's much later in *Island Possessed* (1969), and Maya Deren's within five years of completion of her fieldwork in *Divine Horsemen* (1953). Hurston recounts, "William Seabrook in his *Magic Island* had fired my imagination with his account of The White King of La Gonave. I wanted to see the Kingdom of Faustin Wirkus," which she did to some extent "two weeks before Christmas of 1936."<sup>6</sup> (Though Hurston accounts for her visit to La Gonave, she does not describe meeting or seeing Wirkus.) None too impressed with Seabrook, Dunham refers to "the creator of the myth of the Magic Island, William Seabrook," as "Charles" later in *Island*

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<sup>6</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 134.

*Possessed*.<sup>7</sup> Dunham's usual careful documentation of sources slips here, revealing her incredulity toward the author. In Deren's public work she takes a neutral stance toward Seabrook but careful examination of her letters reveals a complicated relationship.

Beyond popular ethnography, each of these women takes the body of their research into the world of creative expression quite successfully. What cannot be communicated in a purely scientific accounting is revealed in fiction, dance, and film. Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1938) while in Haiti, Dunham choreographed Haitian and other Caribbean influenced dance for the American stage first presenting *L'Ag'ya* in 1938, and Deren produced experimental films exploring the spiritual life of Haiti influenced by her work with Dunham before she actually arrived on the ground in Haiti beginning with *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1945). Their collective body of work is intrinsically informed by an initial engagement with Seabrook and consultation with some of the same informants. Their works represent progress well beyond anything Seabrook was capable of imagining and it is doubtful he was familiar with the production of their material. He had more self-interested matters to keep his mind occupied, a publishing career to keep up that no longer involved Haiti after 1929, and further investigations into insanity, the occult, and their relation to the paranormal and supernatural that had little bearing on Haiti, but upon which he appears to try to recreate his experiences with Maman Célie in other settings and under other conditions.

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<sup>7</sup> Compare Dunham's earlier comments, "In those days Doc [Reser] was a real person, not just the *caractère* he became later. That would have been in the days of his first discovery of Haiti, in those early years before he began to doubt himself and the surrealistic world around him and before alcohol had dulled his histrionic and anecdotal aptitudes and a rather crafty poor white trash quality took over where a sensitive soul had started out. Perhaps this later personality took over after he had gone back from Haiti and spent time in Florida. Perhaps Haiti was all just too much for him, or the dipping in magic, as in the case of his predecessor, the one he really hoped to emulate, the creator of the myth of the Magic Island, William Seabrook," *Island Possessed*, 20, to her later comments, "I thought as I stood with my camera that whatever Charles Seabrook, incautious author of *Magic Island*, may have said to offend the Haitian government, he had certainly and rightly sung the praises of the Haitian mulatto woman. She is of a blend of beauty hard to find elsewhere," *Island Possessed*, 220. No one else has called Seabrook by the name Charles. One might find a study of "Doc Reser" quite interesting in the future.

Disdain for Seabrook's *The Magic Island* exudes in contemporary writing seeking to redress the negative impact of stereotypes, both gendered and racial, presented therein of Haiti on the world stage. In an attempt to minimize reifying stereotypes and to discredit Seabrook, minimal space is allotted for recounting the actual content, in effect glossing over the specifics of the text. The details reveal much about the position of the author, his intentions, and the continuing persistence of interest in ideas Seabrook presented to a popular American reading audience hungry for such accounts. In a careful reading, I present those details that reappear beyond the bounds of the hard yellow cover of the original first edition and point to literary and artistic examples of those who responded directly or indirectly to the text, whether with antagonism, sympathy, or a mix of both.

**Astral Projection or Spiritual Life Writing?** In *The Magic Island* Seabrook provides documentation of his account of encounters with various different personalities from around the world in Haiti. During the nineteen-year Occupation several other travel writers of note, in addition to Seabrook, wrote of their experiences in Haiti, though these other texts are more rarely mentioned in the context of a developing American imagination of just what Haiti is and was. In the previous chapter Emily Balch in *Occupied Haiti* (1927) borrows from Blair Niles to substantiate claims that racial prejudice of the American kind was unknown in Haiti prior to the Occupation. Niles was on the ground prior to Seabrook in 1925, subsequently publishing *Black Haiti: A Biography of Africa's Eldest Daughter* (1926), a travel log of her experiences. Michael Dash's argues, "White America in developing a self-concept based on Reason and Power found it necessary to impose mental boundaries which consigned other cultures to impotence and irrationality."<sup>8</sup> Haiti was certainly not the first "victim" of such discourse, but involved in a geo-

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<sup>8</sup> J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988, 45.

colonial project of cognitive mapping “shaped by imaginative and ultimately political constraints which marginalized other cultures.”<sup>9</sup> As a participant in this work the ordering of Seabrook’s text becomes significant. Identifying Haiti “as deviant and banished to the cultural periphery” allows American authors to project their fantasies of their own Otherness onto Haiti.<sup>10</sup> Dash equally commends and criticizes both Niles and Seabrook in their efforts as “defenders of negro primitivism” as part of a larger American project already at work in the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>11</sup> As a reaction against American Puritanism, Dash reads both works positively, “Anti-materialist and negrophile in outlook, both Niles and Seabrook unequivocally defended Haiti’s right to develop (or not develop) according to the dictates of its own folk soul,” harkening back to sentiments echoed in James Weldon Johnson’s series “Self-Determining Haiti” (1920).<sup>12</sup>

Although others have also compared Seabrook to Niles, Niles’s name drops out of the discourse on the Occupation ethnographies and literatures, possibly because of criticisms levied at her by Jean-Price Mars, or maybe simply because she was a woman.<sup>13</sup> Price-Mars criticized Niles’s for her implied feminization of Haiti. “In his view the Occupation becomes an inevitable form of ‘purdah’ inflicted on ‘Africa’s oldest daughter’ because of her misconduct.” For Price-Mars, as read by Dash, “The sinister effect of the ‘femisation of Haiti’ had become apparent.”<sup>14</sup> Balch’s name also rarely appears in the discourse, probably for similar reasons though their texts are widely different in scope and purpose. Balch concerns herself and others working in concert with her on politics; Niles concerns herself with discerning the soul of Haiti through its popular culture. Jeff Karem notes that with “optimistic language regarding Haiti’s ‘gifts’ and

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Dash, *Haiti and the United States*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> Dash, *Haiti and the United States*, 31.

<sup>13</sup> Jeff Karem, *The Purloined Islands: Caribbean-U.S. Crosscurrents in Literature and Culture, 1880-1959*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011, 55-58.

<sup>14</sup> Dash, *Haiti and the United States*, 32.



regeneration, Niles echoes the traditions of Romantic racism, but with a sense of exceptionalist projection onto Haiti that would come to characterize almost every U.S. writer's approach to the island, whether celebratory or critical," including Seabrook.<sup>15</sup>

Seabrook's text acts as a point of departure. Subsequent authors, writing mostly in English, but also occasionally in French, appear compelled to define their position on Vodou in relation to Seabrook's undeniably fantastical and overtly eroticized depictions. Vodou is the amalgamation of African social and spiritual practices that developed within the fragmented cultures of enslaved Africans at their frequent common point of entry into the New World. Following the establishment of the second settlement on Hispaniola at Cap Haitian, then Cap Francais, at least 774,000 African slaves from various points of departure, found themselves imported into or through Haiti between 1697 and 1804.<sup>16</sup> In these "conditioning grounds" where traders attempted to strip imported Africans of their humanity, slaves created community-based spiritual, social, and psychological methods of maintaining continuity with their African ancestral worlds and lost loved ones based in performative ritual while establishing social bonds to ensure survival in the hostile New World environment. These practices evolved in Haiti into what we know as Vodou.<sup>17</sup>

*The Magic Island* represents a type of travel writing Seabrook was personally familiar with. He previously published another successful work of travel writing based on a similar strategy of pseudo-ethnography, *Adventures in Arabia Among the Bedouins, Druses, Whirling Dervishes, and Yezidee Devil Worshipers* (1927), for which he admits he was sharply criticized;

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<sup>15</sup> Karem, *The Purloined Islands*, 57.

<sup>16</sup> Gates, *Black in Latin America*.

<sup>17</sup> See Joan Dayan on difference between old world Vodun and new world Vodou, "Erzulie: A Women's History of Haiti," in *The Woman, the Writer, and Caribbean Society*, ed. Helen Pyne-Timothy, Los Angeles: Center for African American Studies, 1998; also see Suzanne Preston Blier, *African Vodun: Art, Psychology, and Power*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

“certain otherwise friendly and more than generous reviewers found what they called my ‘continuous good luck’ in the Arabian desert a bit monotonous and too marvelous.”<sup>18</sup> This text, along with his bibliography of other published works, *Jungle Ways* (1931), *The White Monk of Timbuctoo* (1934), *Asylum* (1935), *These Foreigners* (1938), *Doctor Wood, Modern Wizard of the Laboratory; The Story of an American Small Boy who became the Most Daring and Original Experimental Physicist of Our Day—but Never Grew Up* (1941), *Witchcraft, its Power in the World Today* (1941), and *No Hiding Place: An Autobiography* (1942), establishes Seabrook’s initial and continued interest in sensationalism, spectacle, and the occult, as defined in Western, not Haitian, terms. An opportunist at heart, Seabrook garnered a contract for publication and set out to Haiti to position himself in the midst of a milieu of sensationalist writing and reclaim his own personal credibility.

Loosely based on developments in ethnographic and ethnological research in and concerning Haiti by Moreau de St. Méry (1796), Melville Herskovits (1923), J. C. Dorsainvil (1924), and Jean Price-Mars (1928), all of whom he credits in the endnotes, Seabrook’s Haitian travelogue presents an interesting work of popular ethnography infected by the sensationalist language of other Marine reports. James Weldon Johnson described Price-Mars as “a gentle scholar” in *Along this Way* (1938), buffeting Steven Gregory’s description of the Haitian physician’s strong reaction to Seabrook: “Price-Mars . . . express(ed) doubt that the American had indeed ‘witnessed much of what he wrote about’ and claim(ed) he had ‘embellished what he did witness with false piquant details’.”<sup>19</sup> Such fascinating and interesting authors as Alejo Carpentier (see *The Kingdom of This World* [1949] and *Explosion in a Cathedral* [1962]) play on

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<sup>18</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, *Along this Way*, 347; Steven Gregory, “Voodoo, Ethnography, and the American Occupation of Haiti: William B. Seabrook’s *The Magic Island*,” *The Politics of Creativity: A Critique of Civilization*, ed. Christine Ward Gailey, *Dialectical Anthropology: Essays in Honor of Stanley Diamond II*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992, 169.

Seabrook's somewhat nonfactual and sensationalist depictions of Vodou. Carpentier wrote in the journal *Carteles* (1931) that *The Magic Island* was "one of the most beautiful books written in recent years."<sup>20</sup> Alternately, in "Lo, the Poor Haitian," a book review by Melville Herskovits (1929), he condemned Seabrook's attempt. Herskovits wrote, "This book like others of its kind, is a work of injustice. The blurb does not do justice to the book, the publicity does not do justice to the author, the author does not do justice to the people of whom he writes, and the illustrator, with his exaggeratedly gruesome drawings, does injustice to all."<sup>21</sup>

Alexander King may have based the prints on his own interpretation of the text, if he read it at all. It is unknown if Seabrook had any influence on the choice or design of these images. Photographs taken by Seabrook and others selected from Dr. Arthur C. Holly's personal collection, included in *The Magic Island*, provide a much more scientific quality to the work when viewed separately from King's prints.<sup>22</sup> The photographs present other biases of the author, supporting claims of ethnographic, if not journalistic, efficacy and ethics. Not only does Seabrook play the role of amateur ethnographer, he also draws on another history of literary production in the Atlantic world that proved quite productive for my purposes concerning the uses of images of Louverture, that of life writing at the intersection of scientific and travel writings of early explorers of the colonial world. Imagining himself as both scientist and scholar in bringing previously "unknown" knowledges to an uninitiated audience, and citing some of this work in the endnotes, Seabrook attempts to establish the credibility of *The Magic Island* as both spiritual quest and wonder tale through his presentation thereof. In Seabrook's case one might

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<sup>20</sup> L. Paravisini-Gebert, "The Haitian Revolution in Interstices and Shadows: A Re-reading of Alejo Carpentier's the 'Kingdom of This World,'" *Research in African Literatures* 35.2 (Summer 2004): 114-127, 117.

<sup>21</sup> Melville J. Herkovits, "Lo, the Poor Haitian," *The Nation* 128.3319 (2/13/1929): 198-200.

<sup>22</sup> See appendix for twenty-eight photographs. The editors do not indicate which photos were taken by Seabrook or which by Holly. The following appears as the last line of the text, "I wish to thank Dr. Arthur C. Holly for several photographs never heretofore published. – W.B.S.," Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 336.

also inscribe this work in a category of historical fantasy. Let us consider his claim closely and without prejudice.

In the seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries life writings played a definitive role in the construction of the transatlantic literary and publishing world maintaining and cultivating persistent relations within the territories and between Britain, France, Spain, Holland, and Portugal and their colonial islands and outposts throughout the Americas.

David Winslow . . . provides this definition of the term ‘life-writing’: ‘In the narrower sense this term means biography, but in general it may include autobiography as well, so that it is actually a more inclusive term than *biography*, even though some people may consider the word *biography* to include autobiographical works, letters, diaries, and the like. *Life writing* has been used since the eighteenth century although it has never been as widely current as *biography* and *autobiography* since these words came into the language.’ When applied to transatlantic literary studies from 1680-1830, in particular the term also includes the personal narrative, such as the spiritual, captivity, slave, and travel narrative.<sup>23</sup>

Three significant categories of such life writings have been defined as providence tales, spiritual autobiographies, and tales of wonder.<sup>24</sup> Providence tales involve personal witnessing of God’s works on earth that justify or satisfy evidence of God’s virtual presence in the lives of human beings confirming their fate or destiny in God’s world. Spiritual autobiographies allow authors to express their personal quest for God’s assurances through witnessed events, personal experiences, and quests for spiritual knowledge. In wonder tales, specific natural (or unnatural phenomena) are presented as scientific. Although the first two categories of life writings tend towards the theological, wonder tales tend in another vein to support (supposedly) objective observation of such occurrences that cannot be explained through merely spiritual or religious

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<sup>23</sup> Susan C. Imbarrato, “Life Writings,” *Transatlantic Literary Studies, 1660-1830*, eds. Eve Tavor Bannet and Susan Manning, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 60.

<sup>24</sup> See Eve Tavor Bannet and Susan Manning, eds., *Transatlantic Literary Studies, 1660-1830*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

means.<sup>25</sup> Many of these life writings border on the utopic as well as the dystopic.<sup>26</sup> These types of popular writing circulated generously in the century preceding and leading into the Haitian Revolution and, as demonstrated, persist through the U.S. Occupation of Haiti, suggesting a narrative or discourse between Haiti and America that proves significant in the textual and visual development of creative art forms within and between the two nations in their formative years and into the current century, as essential political allegiances through literary and artistic means continue to be sought.

Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929) operates as a work of life writing; specifically, falling into the categories of spiritual autobiography and wonder tale. Prior to his time spent in Haiti, Seabrook established himself as a spiritual seeker, having traveled to the Middle East with the subsequent publication of *Adventures in Arabia among the Bedouins, Druses, Whirling Dervishes, and Yezidee Devil Worshipers* (1927). Intrigued by U.S. Marine and other reports emanating from Haiti during the U.S. Occupation, Seabrook sought to continue such spiritual seeking in Vodou. He reports on the many natural, social, and supernatural wonders he witnesses in his travel writing including: the nature of governmental interactions on the island between U.S. Marines, Haitian officials, and the local peasantry; documentation of Vodou practice and Haitian history via expeditions with local and non-local adventurers; recording of tales of mythological characters, places and practices; and collection of folktales. One such practice Seabrook documents is the introduction of the zombie into the popular American psyche as a folk practice both fascinating and to be feared. While trying to maintain just enough objectivity

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<sup>25</sup> Jim Egan, "Tales of Wonder, Spiritual Autobiographies and Providence Tales," *Transatlantic Literary Studies, 1660-1830*, 56.

<sup>26</sup> See Wil Verhoeven, "Transatlantic Utopianism and the Writing of America," *Transatlantic Literary Studies, 1660-1830*, 28-43.

to keep his work within the respectable traditions of the various literary forms he assumes, he actually plays a dangerous game.

In his writing, not unlike like some other early colonial writers, Seabrook further inscribes Haiti within notions of “primitivism” and a stagnant ethnographic present from which, especially in the case of zombies, the West refuses to let go. Seabrook’s efforts at authenticity continue to influence authors following into the present day and popular culture production horror films in demonizing ways. Gary Rhodes documents the history of the zombie in the travel writings of the previous century.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Seabrook is not the first author to bring the concept of the zombie to U.S. American audiences, but the breadth of his readership ensures its proliferation. Hurbon cites this as the most damaging element in *The Magic Island*. Possibly unaware of prior presentations of the zombie concept, Hurbon’s chief criticism of Seabrook lies here.

What Seabrook’s *Magic Isle* [*sic.*] presented to the American imagination for the first time was the theme of zombies—those apparently dead and buried, but then brought back to a semi-conscious life and put to work particularly in fields of sugar cane . . . The horror film was born in the United States, exploiting the theme of zombification, a practice that forever after spelled Haitian “Voodoo.”<sup>28</sup>

In 1932, the film *White Zombie*, directed by Victor Halpern and acted by Bela Lugosi, appeared based directly on Seabrook’s inventions and exaggerations.<sup>29</sup> These unfortunate visual depictions lead to the current recycling of *zombi* (Haitian spelling) films around which flows an enormous global cult following. These films essentially rehash false information in ahistorical ways that continue to demonize the folklore of Haiti. They do nothing to remedy the distortions of an

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<sup>27</sup> Gary D. Rhodes, *White Zombie: Anatomy of a Horror Film*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2006, 70-85.

<sup>28</sup> The spelling *Magic Isle* indicates the author read the French translation of the text, which I have not; Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 188.

<sup>29</sup> See Lois Wilcken, “The Sacred Music and Dance of Haitian Vodou from Temple to Stage and the Ethics of Representation,” *Latin American Perspectives* 32.1 (January 2005): 193-210.

inaccurate historical past and continue to imply that the Haitian people suffer from a strange form of disorientation, disassociation, dislocation, and disempowerment, reinforcing the idea suggested by Donna Weir-Soley that, “Haiti needs white Northern Americans to solve the problems caused by its own ignorance and superstitions.”<sup>30</sup> The visual impact of such images on the screen allows for the perpetuation of types of attitudes used to contribute to “what (for) some readers, would provide a justifiable defense for the spilling of Haitian blood.”<sup>31</sup>

Zora Neale Hurston’s *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938) and other essays written during her tenure in Haiti; Katherine Dunham’s research for *Island Possessed* (1969), *Dances of Haiti* (1947 in Mexico), and subsequent artistic output in the world of dance; and Maya Deren’s book and film *Divine Horseman: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953 text and 1985 posthumously produced film) and other related experimental films recorded in or during Deren’s engagement with Haiti can also be classified as life writings of the spiritual autobiography and wonder tale types.<sup>32</sup>

Early reactions and more recent interpretations of misleading accounts of Seabrook can be used in harmful ways. A large number and variety of authors, cultural critics, and creative artists have used Seabrook as an impetus for further investigations. Authors and researchers of

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<sup>30</sup> Donna Weir-Soley, “Voudoun Symbolism in ‘The Farming of Bones,’” *Obsidian III-Literature in the African Diaspora* 6-7.1-2 (Fall 2005-Fall 2006): 167-184.

<sup>31</sup> Weir-Soley, “Voudoun Symbolism,” 167-184; U.S. servicemen who will remain anonymous here have confirmed to me that this is the only impression they ever had of Haitians when intervening during the instability of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. One in particular relayed to me that he never saw the humanity of the people and used the word zombie in reference to the “helpless Haitians.” He then gave me a T-shirt as souvenir of his tour of duty emblazoned with a tank reading “Operation Uphold Democracy,” which occurred in 1994-1995.

<sup>32</sup> Alan Lomax’s ethnographic collections of Haitian music from 1936 and Lois Mailou Jones’s artistic interests may be considered as experience in life writing or artistic documentation and production along these same lines. James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Arna Bontemps had other interests in Haiti, more along the lines of their nineteenth-century predecessor, Frederick Douglass, i.e., to establish and clarify the historical, political, and financial realities of the U.S. sustained interest in Haiti through political commentary and varied literary forms. Even though their aims appear more overtly political each utilized creative literary form to deliver their messages regarding Haiti as well. Of these men, only Richard Wright did not produce a text referencing the Haitian Occupation or a result of his direct encounter with it. Arna Bontemps did but did not travel to Haiti as the others did; instead he relied on Langston Hughes’s communications as the source of his literary work; Dash, *Haiti and the United States*, 57-58.

some renown have been inspired by Seabrook (or those inspired by him) to find out more for themselves. A short list of others who have cited or referenced Seabrook directly or indirectly at some point in their careers include Karen McCarthy Brown, Donald J. Cosentino, Paul Farmer, Ishmael Reed, Arthur Flowers, Nalo Hopkinson, Edwidge Danticat, and more. These writers represent a broad range of disciplines from anthropology to literature to performance to public health. All have worked somewhat in conversation with each other textually over the past eighty-five years since *The Magic Island's* publication. All have found themselves working against stereotypes imposed by Seabrook. Within each of these can be found uncomfortable moments where each author faces his or her own particular crisis in representing Haiti's popular religious and art forms, without re-inscribing Seabrook-like notions of difference that justify continued abuse of the island. For example, although Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in Haiti, she often repeats in *Tell My Horse* material directly from Seabrook, while adding her own critical "sardonic" twist. For Leigh Anne Duck, this strategy limits Hurston's "respect for local cultural forms to consideration of the roles they play in residents' social and spiritual lives, while implying their destructive influence in the political realm."<sup>33</sup> Black writers were not immune from importing with them personal biases derived from lived experience in America and applying the experience of U.S. American material inequality on a Haitian backdrop. The Haitian peasantry and the Haitian elite do not divide so easily along racial and class lines as did black and white in U.S. America in the 1920s and 1930s.

On a theoretical level, Edwidge Danticat, Myriam Chancy, and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert engage in feminist reevaluation of Seabrook's writings. Barbara Sanon, in Danticat's collection *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States*, reflects

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<sup>33</sup> See Leigh Anne Duck, "Rebirth of a Nation': Hurston in Haiti," *Journal of American Folklore* 117.464 (Spring 2004): 127-146.



on the zombie myth as metaphor for the sexual abuse of women in “Black Crows, Zombie Girls” (2001). Danticat best represents this resistance and reconsideration in her fiction through very careful choices of how she employs coded Vodou symbolisms and, on a more subtle level, direct resistance to the Occupation and its political aftermath in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) and other texts. Danticat carefully avoids reinvigorating overused hyper-simulacra of the Occupation in addressing its abuses. Over the course of several essays, Paravisini-Gebert offers textual evaluation of *The Magic Island* considering the representation and stereotyping of women, not just in the text, but also in *White Zombie*.<sup>34</sup> Folktales documented in Seabrook’s *The Magic Island*, such as “Toussel’s Pale Bride,” clearly reappear in that film, as well as in later sensational representations of Haiti, including the adaptation of Wade Davis’s supposedly ethnobotanical investigation of the zombie phenomena in the Hollywood production of *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988).<sup>35</sup> Davis claims he regrets having sold the rights to the original book due to the distortions presented in the film.<sup>36</sup>

**Controversial Beginnings (or Endings?).** Having briefly considered the broad reach of Seabrook’s text we must address what actually appears in it. Seabrook dedicates *The Magic Island* to his initiator, Maman Célie. The text does not follow a chronological account of his time in Haiti as might a truly scientific ethnographic work but begins with the most significant event to himself and his audience, his initiation into the ways of “Voodoo,” and the circuitous and

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<sup>34</sup> See Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, “Women Possessed: Eroticism and Exoticism in the Representation of Woman and Zombie,” *Sacred Possession: Vodou, Santeria, Obeah, and the Caribbean*, eds. Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000, 47-56; and L. Paravisini-Gebert, “The Haitian Revolution in Interstices and Shadows: A Re-reading of Alejo Carpentier’s the ‘Kingdom of This World,’” *Research in African Literatures* 35.2 (Summer 2004): 114-127.

<sup>35</sup> Based on Wade Davis, *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

<sup>36</sup> Davis’s research attempted to shed light on the real process of zombification so as to diffuse stereotypes and fear cultivated in the West. In spite of his best intentions, the movie that resulted from his book, *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, may have given the myth an unanticipated new life, one with which the author has expressed his dissatisfaction, interview, WRAS radio, 8 January 2003.

curious route by which he discovers a true servitor, willing to consider his initiation.<sup>37</sup> Steven Gregory argues that “Seabrook’s very lack of anthropological discipline . . . allows us to view, through his text, the ethnographic process in its most subversive and critical aspects,” granting Seabrook a literary sagacity Herskovits and Price-Mars would unlikely acknowledge.<sup>38</sup> The “double tension between scientific and narrative discourses on the one hand, and cultural relativist and supremacist paradigms on the other, produces ruptures and fissures in the text that Seabrook struggles to mediate, if not elide.”<sup>39</sup> Seabrook provides extensive endnotes for the first half of the book in the Appendix documenting the investigative research he put into this project before and after landing on the ground in Haiti. Gregory believes this “editorial decision” serves “as an attempt to create a counter-dialogue against the narrative itself.”<sup>40</sup> Although these notes provide a cohesive counter-narrative to the main popular narrative sustaining Seabrook’s claims of both journalist and somewhat scientific ethics, I suspect they were not written by him, but transcribed and compiled by his wife, Katie, whom he left safely behind in Port-au-Prince under the protection of Louis, U.S. Marine officials, and her colorful array of friends.<sup>41</sup> Chancy also questions the “pure intentions” Gregory ascribes to Seabrook.<sup>42</sup> In Maya Deren’s early career as a freelance writer she ghost wrote much of Seabrook’s later text, *Witchcraft, its Power in the World Today* (1941), indicating Seabrook does employ other writers when necessary to complete

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<sup>37</sup> “Voodoo” is Seabrook’s choice of term. When quoting him or those that do, this spelling will appear here. As noted earlier, “Vodou” appears to be the most commonly used term by scholars of Haitian culture; “Vodun” is often used by Haitians; Katherine Dunham will use some variation of “Vandaux” over time. I will keep spellings in quotes exactly as the author wrote them at the time they wrote it as the spelling shifts across time, geography, and language.

<sup>38</sup> Gregory, “Voodoo, Ethnography,” 169.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Gregory, “Voodoo, Ethnography,” fn 4 205.

<sup>41</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 28.

<sup>42</sup> Chancy, *Framing Silence*, 59.

the more tedious aspects of his projects.<sup>43</sup> The endnotes do read as if written by another hand seeking to offer balance to many of his extraordinary descriptions of “Voodoo.”

Seabrook wants to be more than a sightseer, but faces the same challenges of skepticism from Haitians on the ground and audience alike as Kelsey did due to his white maleness. Chancy notes Seabrook “adopts the stance of an apologist to mystify readers who may mistrust his white male, American identity, which is what permits his presence in the first place.”<sup>44</sup> Hurston, Dunham, and (to some extent) Deren benefit from the advantage of color and gender in gathering research after the close of the Occupation period. As Dunham notes,

When the stigma of being an American had worn off, there was great and protective interest in the recognition of ‘Guinea’ blood ties and great concern for my ancestors, who had not received the proper ritual attention because that group of slaves taken farther north had been cut off from their brothers in the Caribbean and had forgotten those practices.<sup>45</sup>

That Seabrook carries out this investigation during the Occupation probably speaks to a certain naivety on his part. He is stymied by many of the same limitations of his predecessors and followers, especially his expressed conflicting concerns with inter- and intra-racial relations within Haitian communities and between Haitians, U.S. officials, and the Marines corps.<sup>46</sup> The Occupation also offers him protection he finds suffocating.

I quite realize that in writing about this social-racial tangle, which I seem to be doing on every other page, just as one encounters it at every other step in Port-au-Prince, I am piling up paradoxes, illogicalities, and non sequiturs. But I refuse to be blamed for the illogicality. The thing itself is essentially tangled, illogical, and insane. It would be the easiest thing in the world to choose selective facts on one side alone and present a consistent picture. But it wouldn’t be a true picture.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Clark, *Legend of Maya Deren*, 411.

<sup>44</sup> Chancy, *Framing Silence*, 55.

<sup>45</sup> Katherine Dunham, *The Dances of Haiti*, foreword Claude Levi-Strauss, translated Jeanelle Stovall, photographs Patricia Cummings, véné motifs courtesy Milo Rigaud, Center for Afro-American Studies, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983, xxiv.

<sup>46</sup> Dash, *Haiti and the United States*, 34.

<sup>47</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 157.

**A World in Reverse as Ethnographic Sleight of Hand.** Rather than tangle the audience up in the complications of the political landscape of the Occupation outlined in the previous chapter here, Seabrook begins with what the previous commentators carefully avoid, “The Voodoo Rites,” which comprise the first half of *The Magic Island* in an artificial chronological construct. *New York Times* critic R. L. Duffus, writing in 1929, noted the inverted temporal structure of the text.<sup>48</sup> Duffus identified Part 1 (the Voodoo account) as the “second phase” of Seabrook’s report and Parts 2, 3, and 4 as the first. These parts “consist of objective observations, excellently made and recorded, but not beyond the scope of any accomplished teller of traveler’s tales.” In actuality, Part 1, which Duffus credits as “a sympathetic contribution of vast importance to a little understood subject,” occurred last.<sup>49</sup> Through this temporal disruption, Gregory argues “Seabrook’s very lack of anthropological discipline . . . allows us to view, through his text, the ethnographic process in its most subversive and critical aspects.”<sup>50</sup> I argue this linear disruption undermines Seabrook’s effort at establishing credibility. He privileges his “Voodoo” experience above any other appearing quite lost in the haze of trying to relocate himself within the narrative framework of the “second phase” of the book. Alerted to this temporal illogicality I reverse Seabrook’s order of presentation and read the text as events may have occurred in linear time.

**Sorcery.** The second part of *The Magic Island* titled “Black Sorcery” deals with all the associated myths and folklore that spin out of Vodou practice as Seabrook understands it. Not necessarily formally connected in any way to the practice of Vodou as we understand it now, these elements in Seabrook provide further evidence of African-derived myths, folk practice,

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<sup>48</sup> R. L. Duffus, “A Book on Haiti that Dips Below the Surface Controversies,” *New York Times Book Review*, January 1:6, in Gregory, “Voodoo, Ethnography,” 171, fn 7 205.

<sup>49</sup> Duffus, 6, in Gregory, “Voodoo, Ethnography,” 172.

<sup>50</sup> Gregory, 169.

healing remedies, and witchcraft. Separate from any religious practice, these seemingly disparate elements of African heritage have a long historical trajectory of their own in Africa.<sup>51</sup> In Seabrook's sorting system, they fall outside of religious practice but within the realm of Vodou. He struggles with where to place these practices and cannot anticipate how others will. As a diligent contributor to a type of reclamation anthropology (or mythical archaeology) that captures potentially dying elements in a modernizing culture, he reproduces a bit of a garbage bin approach to presenting these materials. Hurston and Dunham also struggle with where to place these disparate elements of Haitian culture. As scientists aimed at presenting unbiased perspectives and total transparency in their ethnographic attempts these must be included but none of our informants here spends enough time on the ground in Haiti to sort this out. An insider might better place them.

*The Cult of the Dead.* In "The Altar of Skulls" Seabrook directs his attention to the less savory side of Vodou in downtown Port-au-Prince, presumably on his return from Maman Célie's. At least Seabrook presents this section as if he experienced it with the benefit of knowledge acquired from Maman Célie. He can only write this from that perspective retroactively as in real time he has not yet met Maman Célie. Here he visits the pharmacy of Dr. Arthur C. Holly, the same Dr. Holly that Hurston spends much time with a decade later upon her initial arrival in Haiti.<sup>52</sup> Dr. Holly is a medical doctor by day, and like Seabrook, "seriously interested in comparative religion, folk-lore, mysticism, and magic."<sup>53</sup> Seabrook inquires of Dr. Holly about the *culte des mortes* and Dr. Holly arranges for him to travel to the plantation of "Papa Nebo" of the cult-Classinia. There, in front of an altar of skulls within the "narrow oblong

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<sup>51</sup> On the power of binding and loosing as positive and negative action, and the symbolic relationship between chains in objects and slavery, see Suzanne Preston Blier, *African Vodun: Art, Psychology and Power*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

<sup>52</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, Ch. 10, 113-131.

<sup>53</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 81.

room” devoid of “Voodoo symbols or sacred objects of any sort” to which he was taken, Classinia appeared as “the male-female hermaphroditic oracle of the dead . . . a metamorphized creature, which . . . was now neither man nor woman, or was both, flanked on either side by two ‘wives’.”<sup>54</sup> Seabrook notes that in the performance he witnessed, Gouédé Mazacca and Gouédé Oussou were also present. His statement about the lack of “Voodoo” objects conflicts with his description.

In the Haitian metal art form that developed in earnest after the Occupation the inversion of folkloric and Vodou imagery in complex steel constructions appeared regularly in the work of Serge Jolimeau. *Les Trois Hermaphrodites (The Three Hermaphrodites)* (1981) exhibits Jolimeau’s mastery.<sup>55</sup> In this work and others within his oeuvre men become women, and winged demons, felines, and humans intersect in various transformations of human, animal, and divine spirits in surprising, playful, and sometimes frightening composite forms. Figures interact in tantalizing ways suggesting perversion.<sup>56</sup> The tableau is blatantly sexual. Jolimeau was not the first Haitian metal artist to introduce sexuality as a theme. Grigsby wrote of Georges Liautaud that his work drew “upon his enormously vital joy in living, and upon his wild, lusty sense of humor.”<sup>57</sup> Jolimeau’s inclusion of sexually charged images is much less subtle than Liautaud and much more deliberate. The visual work of Haitian artists validates Seabrook’s account of Classinia in the hermaphroditic assumption of form.

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<sup>54</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 84.

<sup>55</sup> Figure 25; Brown, *Tracing the Spirit*, 59.

<sup>56</sup> Selden Rodman describes the eroticism in Jolimeau’s work as “figures part male, part female, incorporating fish and birds . . . [that] sometimes seemed to be feeding on the sexual organs of their hosts.” The images are discomfiting; they disrupt the boundaries between human and animal, male and female. They are titillating, almost pornographic. Jolimeau illustrates the delicacy required in handling such subject matter that risks wrongful and deceptive interpretations by outsiders. In this image three Sirène (mermaids) with both male and female organs appear within the formal construction of a triptych. Each Sirène is six feet tall, full human height, forcing the viewer to interact with the images as equals and not as diminutive decorative objects or souvenirs. The work measures 71 x 34 x 14 inches. Due to the dimensions, the work must have been cut from a sheet of steel rather than an oil drum. Much of Jolimeau’s work is made to this scale. In 2001, he offered to sell me one of these works, fascinated by my fascination with them, at a good price. I could not imagine how to transport a work of such scale on a plane.

<sup>57</sup> Grigsby in Rodman, *Where Art is Joy*, 146.

For Seabrook to exclude first-hand and anecdotal evidence of practices that fall outside of the Vodou environment but within the local Haitian sensibility would have ignored vital elements of a culture of sustained healing practices and *rememory* necessary as building blocks and cornerstones for future artists and authors. In this personal tableau, Seabrook witnessed, “The oracle . . . talking with the dead, in the subhuman vernacular of death itself—or at least so it must have seemed to the ears of the waiting listeners.”<sup>58</sup> That ghosts speak through a human host here provides some very provocative material for an interpretation of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1988), a task I hope to take on at a future point.<sup>59</sup> Discovering the subtle roots of Africanisms that survived the middle passage in Morrison’s work presents quite a challenge to those not informed in African practices. This is just the challenge she proposes to white American literature in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993).<sup>60</sup> Seabrook notes “when it was over, Classinia and her two assistants were stupefied, tired, ‘washed-out,’ almost to the point of exhaustion, as if they had been under prolonged and violent nervous stress,” exhibiting symptoms of amnesia [or trauma] as if having been possessed.<sup>61</sup> Participating in such rights with the dead leaves visibly traumatic marks on the bodies of the participants. “These people gave me no personal confidence, nor were they particularly friendly. They had permitted me to see what I had just seen only because they had been assured that I was ‘safe’—not connected in any way with the gendarmerie or ‘government’.”<sup>62</sup> Seabrook travels shortly after the Balch mission (see previous chapter). Any member of *le culte des mortes* could have suffered persecution for allowing his presence or if Seabrook reported this immediately to a

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<sup>58</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 86.

<sup>59</sup> See Sethe’s story and her experience of *Beloved*, baby ghost returned, for comparison in Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, New York: Pantheon, 1988; Morrison is not the only one to do this, only the most well known to global audiences, also see Tina McElroy Ansa, *Baby of the Family*, New York: Mariner Books, 1991.

<sup>60</sup> See Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, New York: Vintage, 1993.

<sup>61</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 87.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

Haitian audience. He reluctantly, but regularly, finds himself in this liminal space of extra-legality in carrying out his intended mission of discovering the mystical culture of Haiti.

*Funerals and Zombies*. Seabrook includes a story he heard, probably third-hand from a willing informant, of occurrences at gravesites, describing rituals to Baron Samdi, where participants exhume a body for necromantic purposes.<sup>63</sup> Of particular interest for Gregory “is Seabrook’s abrupt introduction of the conventional devices of Africanist travel narrative—notably the use of hearsay as a means of constituting reality,” techniques assumed by Hurston and Dunham as well.<sup>64</sup> Seabrook’s description prepares the audience for a funeral he witnesses while “[r]iding through the mountains between Morne Rouis and Les Verettes.”<sup>65</sup> Seabrook presumes he hears a Congo dance but, when he stops to inquire, he finds a “dead man in a clean blue smock and blue cotton trousers with shoes on his feet and his Sunday straw hat on the back of his wooly gray head . . . propped . . . up in a position as lifelike as possible and . . . fastened . . . in the chair so he wouldn’t topple over.”<sup>66</sup> Hurston describes similar events in at a funeral she observes, as does Dunham when she adventures out on her own one night and stumbles across a funeral.<sup>67</sup> This funeral scene indicates the beginning of Seabrook’s material mined by others for *White Zombie* (1932). Seabrook did not anticipate the appeal this material would have for ongoing audiences but presented it as much for entertainment as to validate his efforts in the

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<sup>63</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 87-89.

<sup>64</sup> Gregory, “Voodoo, Ethnography,” 190.

<sup>65</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 90.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Both Hurston and Dunham report cases of the dead sitting straight up for a moment before the spirit entirely departs the body. At Archahaie Hurston attended “the Manger des morts (The food or feast of the dead) or Courir Zinc (To run the Zinc fish hook of the dead) for a houngan. “The body of the dead man sat up with its staring eyes, bowed its head and fell back again and then a stone fell at the feet of Dieu Donne, and it was so unexpected that I could not discover how it was done. There it was, and its presence excited the hounsi, the canzo and the visitors tremendously. But its presence meant that the loa or mystere which had lived in the dead man and controlled him was separated from him,” *Tell My Horse*, 139-141. Dunham similarly accounts for the death of a bocor, “Reluctantly, after much pleading, celebrating in his honor, dancing, reciting of magic formulae, and weeping, he had entered his former abode, weakly at first, but at that very moment with enough strength to rise to a sitting position and point a withered finger at his successor,” *Island Possessed*, 35.



project of capturing for American audiences the more fantastical details of Haitian culture. His attempts to explain the processes and possible roots of the mythological zombie narrative further inscribe the notion in the readers' minds of zombies as real rather than alleviating Haitians from the burden of this recurring myth. Jennifer Fay examines Mary Renda's reading of *The Magic Island*, explaining that in "Seabrook's candidly paternalistic and often sensationalized account, it was the author's intent to dispose American readers positively to Haitian culture because, bereft of ecstasy, Americans were on the path to becoming 'mechanical soulless robots'."<sup>68</sup>

In the opening of *White Zombie*, the soon-to-be-wed couple, riding in a carriage from Port-au-Prince, encounters a funeral in the road in the dark of night. The driver tells them this prevents the bodies from being recovered for necromantic purposes.

Steven: Looks like a burial.

Madeleine: In the road? Driver, what is it?

Driver: It's a funeral, Mademoiselle. They're afraid of the men who steal dead bodies, so they dig the graves in the middle of the road. There, people pass all the time.

Steven: Well, that's a cheerful introduction for you to our West Indies.<sup>69</sup>

Hurbon reminds readers, "While rumors of zombification were weak in the nineteenth century, they make quite a sudden comeback to the international scene through the accounts of American travelers during the occupation," including Seabrook and Hurston.<sup>70</sup> Seabrook's ". . . Dead Men Working in the Cane Fields" and "Toussel's Pale Bride," provide the narrative structure for Edward Halperin's film *White Zombie* (1932); Wes Craven's disturbing film interpretation of

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<sup>68</sup> Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation of Haiti and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001, 247, in Jennifer Fay, "Dead Subjectivity: *White Zombie*, Black Baghdad," *The Centennial Review* 8.1 (2008): 81-101, 90; Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, 42.

<sup>69</sup> Edward Halperin, *White Zombie*, Videodisc. Thomasville, Ga.: The Roan Group, [1932]1995, DVD, opening lines; I am highly indebted to Sherah Faulkner, a former student of mine at both Agnes Scott College and Georgia State University, who wrote a brilliantly theory-driven paper on the contemporary zombie cult film following and its meaning for modern American youth culture. Currently, an M.A. student in Womens' Studies at GSU, I have encouraged her to pursue publication of that paper. I will steer away from the topic as I find the ahistorical nature of the films damaging to contemporary conceptions of Haiti by viewing audiences globally, reinforcing and reifying stereotypes I spend my career undoing.

<sup>70</sup> Hurbon, "American Fantasy," 192.

Wade Davis's *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie: A Harvard Scientist's Astonishing Journey into the Secret Society of Haitian Voodoo, Zombis and Magic* (1988), titled *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988);<sup>71</sup> and, possibly, much material for *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003), produced recently by Disney.<sup>72</sup> For Hurbon, "*The Magic Isle* is the island where the living dead cease to be phantoms and fantasms, and appear in flesh and bone. Veritable godsend for cinematic production."<sup>73</sup>

Seabrook's narrative in *The Magic Island* and Halperin's *White Zombie* fueled a spate of zombie films and television shows that mirror and reflect off of each other for the past eighty years from *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) to *The Walking Dead* (2010), presently filmed in Atlanta, forming a veritable cult form far removed from any actual Haitian practice. In ". . . Dead Men Working in the Cane Fields," Seabrook explores "the tangled Haitian folk-lore" provided by an informant, Constant Polynice, on the island of La Gonave.<sup>74</sup>

The *zombie*, they say, is a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life—it is a dead body which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive. People who have the power to do this go to a fresh grave, dig up the body before it has had time to rot, galvanize it into movement, and then make of it a servant or slave, occasionally for the commission of some crime, more often simply as a drudge around the habitation or the farm, setting it dull heavy tasks, and beating it like a dumb beast if it slackens.<sup>75</sup>

Seabrook claims to see zombies first-hand the night before he leaves La Gonave, though as far as the reader knows he has not yet gone to La Gonave due to chronological reordering of events.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Davis, himself, noted later regretting having sold the rights for his book to Hollywood; see Davis's disclaimer, WRFG radio, 8 January 2003.

<sup>72</sup> See *White Zombie* (1932); Wade Davis, *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobiology of the Haitian Zombie*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988, and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988); Disney, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003).

<sup>73</sup> Hurbon, "American Fantasy," 192.

<sup>74</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 92.

<sup>75</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 93.

<sup>76</sup> "One morning an old black headman . . . appeared leading a band of ragged creatures who shuffled along behind him, staring dumbly, like people walking in a daze. As Joseph lined them up for registration, they still stared,

In *Tell My Horse* (1939), Hurston's text engages its most controversial moment in presenting a photograph and description of a zombie she encountered in the only asylum for the insane she visited on the island at the time. Dunham encounters another family of zombie women, but that account does not appear until 1969, long after we find the zombie tradition in full swing.<sup>77</sup> Hurston dedicates an entire chapter to exploring the zombie "myth."<sup>78</sup> In "Black Crows and Zombie Girls" (2001) Barbara Sanon writes, "In the mythical world, a zombie is someone who is buried alive while comatose and is then revived to serve others in whatever way they want, without questioning," only able to "regain her true self once she's been given a taste of salt."<sup>79</sup> In Hurston's account "numerous upper class Haitians" denounce "the whole thing" as a fiction made up to scare the peasants, but Hurston discovers through the direction and guidance of "Dr. Rulx Léon, Director-General of the Service d'Hygiene, . . . a Zombie that had been found on the road and was now at the hospital at Gonaives."<sup>80</sup>

After much persuasion on her part and that of two doctors at the hospital at Gonaives in November 1936, Hurston captured several photographs of Felicia Felix-Mentor, one of which

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vacant-eyed like cattle, and made no reply when asked to give their names." He reiterates the myth that salt will awaken them; Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 95, 98, 100. He provides the English translation of penal code Art. 249 prohibiting zombification on page 105. The original French appears in the Appendix.

<sup>77</sup> Upon Dunham's visit to the habitation of 'ti Couzin, she sought to verify whether "seven wives in the compound" were "all zombies." She wrote, "I hoped to find out whether or not the wives were zombies, take a photograph or two if I were clever [like Hurston did], and visit the hougfors. Following a lengthy "three-way conversation, each speaking the language easiest for him, helping each other with unfamiliar words," Dunham felt assured the Petro bocor was generally harmless. "He had stopped smoking, and to all appearances, breathing. . . I rose and went to the veranda. Now I could see all the women, seven of them, because they had stopped whatever they had been doing, whether carrying cooking pots, pounding millet, or just sitting, and had come within range of the open window. They were absolutely motionless, with faces turned in our direction, faces with absolutely no expression and which might as well have been the faces of the blind or deaf. There was one difference; they were listening with every pore and fiber and were seeing with sightless eyes and smelling with nostrils distended like animals who have caught the first scent of fresh blood." Melville Herskovitz "had warned me against trying to experience too fully the mysteries of the magic island," *Island Possessed*, 187-188, 199-200.

<sup>78</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 181.

<sup>79</sup> Barbara Sanon, "Black Crows and Zombie Girls," *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States*, ed. Edwidge Danticat, New York: Soho, 2001, 45.

<sup>80</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 181, 195.

appears in *Tell My Horse*.<sup>81</sup> Hurston describes Felix-Mentor in familiar terms as she approaches the patient: “She huddled the cloth about her head more closely and showed every sign of fear and expectation of abuse and violence.”<sup>82</sup> In taking the photograph, they had to cajole her out of “the position she assumed herself whenever left alone . . . cringing against the wall with the cloth hiding her face and head.”<sup>83</sup> Hurston describes Felix-Mentor’s exposed face as

dreadful. That blank face with the dead eyes. The eyelids were white all around the eyes as if they had been burned with acid. It was pronounced enough to come out in the picture. There was nothing that you could say to her or get from her except by looking at her, and the sight of this wreckage was too much to endure for long.<sup>84</sup>

Hurston considers further investigations into the “semblance of death induced by some drug known to a few,” but Dr. Legros warns her that in searching for “the drug and the antidote” she might find herself “involved in something terrible, something from which I could not extricate myself alive.”<sup>85</sup> All of this from a self-declared experienced researcher and initiate. The implication is of physical escape from the hands of a dangerous *bocor*, but is it the psychological ramifications that Dr. Legros warns Hurston about? Hurston has obviously seen a lot in her research but can she face the truths Dr. Legros and the tale about Felix-Mentor hide? Sanon theorizes that zombification works as a metaphor to explain the physical and psychological symptoms of sexual abuse and trauma experienced by young girls in a manner that reflects Pecola’s fragmentation in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1994) and that Morrison calls attention to in *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature* (1989).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 180.

<sup>82</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 195.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 196.

<sup>86</sup> See Pecola’s fragmentation in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, New York: Plume, 1994; and *Unspeakable Things Unspoken*.

When family and friends assembled for gatherings, there was always a little girl there that I would recognize, a girl who would have her head down, her eyes lowered a certain way. I could always experience with her the pain of her bruised genitals hidden under immaculate petticoats that pressed her into her and kept her there so she would shut up. She was always so quiet, that girl, so confused, so *egare*, that people would joke that she was a zombie. A zombie, who in the midst of the endless political discussions on right and wrong was not allowed to disclose the bad things she swallowed.<sup>87</sup>

Sanon's physical description of young girls silenced by sexual violence closely mirrors

Hurston's description of Felix-Mentor. The visual and textual image of Felix-Mentor and the palpable sense of Hurston's own fear in *Tell My Horse* hardly reflects the romance portrayed in *White Zombie*.

Seabrook had no access to the interior lives of Haitian peasant women, but he does hear tale of "Toussel's Pale Bride," the source for the white female lead character, Madeleine, in *White Zombie*. Paravisini-Gebert explains that Seabrook's account constructs a variously repeated narrative that follows fairly predictable lines.

Seabrook's tale . . . brings together a number of elements that are always present in the zombification of women: the coveting of a beautiful, light-skinned or white upper-class girl by an older, dark-skinned man who is of lower class and is adept at sorcery; the intimations of necromantic sexuality with a girl who has lost her volition; the wedding night (in this case its anniversary) as the preferred setting for the administration of the zombie poison; the girl's eventual escape from the bokor in her soiled wedding clothes (the garment of preference for white or light-skinned zombie women); her ultimate madness and confinement in a convent or mental asylum.<sup>88</sup>

In keeping with the site of the wedding night as the point of infection, in *White Zombie*, Mr. Beaufort deposits poison(s) obtained from white *bocor* Murder Legendre, played by Bela Lugosi, in Madeleine's wine on her planned wedding night. Madeleine is revived twice, when the correct antidotes are obtained and administered, once after her burial and again after Mr. Beaufort discovers he prefers the "real" Madeleine. The antidotes restore the white female character to her

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<sup>87</sup> Sanon, "Black Crows," 45.

<sup>88</sup> Paravisini-Gebert, "Representation of Woman as Zombie," 39-40.

original self whereas in the Haitian mythos of Seabrook's work the tragic mulatto can never be herself again. She sustains permanent injuries during the zombification process, a tragedy that parallels the effects of the Occupation interventions on Haiti as idealized woman, hence Price-Mars criticisms noted earlier.

In "Toussel's Pale Bride," which Seabrook only hears of second-hand, but which he believes to be taken from a true story, "Camille, a fair-skinned octoroon girl," married at age twenty to "Matthieu Toussel, a rich coffee-grower from Morne Hôpital . . . twice her age," joins the walking dead after drinking wine and dining with zombies on her wedding anniversary.<sup>89</sup> She is found stumbling the streets, unaware of her whereabouts and identity, obviously exhibiting symptoms of trauma along the mountain road leading to Seabrook's initial habitation in Haiti at Hotel Montagne.<sup>90</sup> That such magic and mystery may have occurred here, on the road to Petionville, works metaphorically to indicate distance in caste and class between the zombie bride and husband. Concurring with Hurbon's initial comments about the zombie phenomenon, Paravisini-Gebert adds the combination of elements derived from these two chapters, "zombies as workers in cane fields" and "the ensnaring of a young white woman," or in Toussel's case a lighter skinned woman, "intertwine in this macabre tale as they intertwine in the ideology of vilification of Haiti as the land of 'Voodoo'—an ideology that has sustained American indifference to the fate of the island and its people."<sup>91</sup> Fay explains, "Displacing politics with horror," *White Zombie* and its descendants perform "curious racial reversals that implicate Americans in a colonial economy and suggest that U.S. citizens may themselves be susceptible to America's degrading Haitian policy" of Occupation.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 109.

<sup>90</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 109-114, 130.

<sup>91</sup> Paravisini-Gebert, "Representation of Woman as Zombie," 43.

<sup>92</sup> Fay, "Dead Subjectivity," 83.

Certainly, the popularity of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films, which also follow the dictates of zombie narrative as outlined by Parasivini-Gebert as derived from Seabrook's testimony, speaks to these local American and larger global anxieties in a time of economic uncertainty. If, as Parasivini-Gebert claims, *The Magic Island*, brings together elements "always present in the zombification" theme, does the first film in *The Pirates of the Caribbean* series, *The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003), qualify, and on what grounds?<sup>93</sup> Parasivini-Gebert's concern is with the zombification of women and though only male zombies appear here, the film's narrative clearly reveals the Disney writers read and adapted elements of Seabrook's tale to suit their artistic vision. Here, the woman in question is Elizabeth Swan (acted by Kierra Knightly) and she is clearly not a zombie in the same sense as the male pirate zombies. The pirate zombies serve under a curse imposed by "the old Gods" for having stolen Aztec gold stolen by Hernando Cortez. Swan serves the political motivations of her father and the British Crown in a fictional recreation of Port Royal, Jamaica. Imbedded in a social caste network that disallows her the right to marry a blacksmith, like Sanon's "Zombie Girls," Swan's status as a white woman denies her agency in the colonial world. In accordance with Seabrook's terms, Swan is a light-skinned upper class woman who cannot marry below her class and who falls for a blacksmith. In order to achieve the connection she desires she must disprove her sanity by believing in a ghost story and fighting the pirate zombie skeletons. In all of these battles she wears her bedclothes or undergarments reminiscent of "Toussel's Pale Bride."

Like "Toussel's Pale Bride," Swan is invited to dinner with Captain Bartholomew Barbosa (acted by Geoffrey Rush). Served wine, Swan drinks unaware of her fate, only suspecting Barbosa of possibly poisoning her when he offers her an apple in a conflation of Adam and Eve and Snow White, who if one remembers slumbers in glass coffin waiting for her prince to awak-

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<sup>93</sup> *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, Disney, 2003, DVD.

en her from a poison-induced sleep. “Black hearted” Barbosa has no intention of poisoning Swan. He needs her alive and well for the grand sacrifice towards the end of the movie where he believes her blood will redeem him and his zombie crew of their cursed “immortality.” Blood serves as the salt required to revive zombies in the Haitian mythos. Swan leaves the dinner scene to discover to her horror she is surrounded by zombies where Barbosa announces, “Start believing in ghost stories Ms. Turner [aka. Swan]. You’re in one now!” Unlike Seabrook’s zombie women, Swan does not suffer insanity but takes on the charge of saving herself and the others from this bizarre nightmarish world.

In case this does not convince the viewer that Disney plays with *The Magic Island* here, both Swan and Captain Jack Sparrow (played by Johnny Depp) repeatedly invoke the “right of parley” under the “Pirate’s Code” to secure negotiations with Barbosa. The actual words appear in Seabrook’s narrative when he encounters a maroon community in the mountains, “Still they stood dumbly, refusing to parley.”<sup>94</sup> Zombie-like these Haitian peasants cannot speak for themselves and must wait for their master. “Parley” serves a critical role in the narrative discourse of *The Curse of the Black Pearl*. Sparrow cannot pronounce “parley” when he needs to save his own life. Inadvertently, he says “parsley,” a common food eaten in Haiti, historically used derogatorily and to distinguish Haitians from Dominicans during the “mass slaughter of thirty-five thousand Haitians at the River Massacre,” by Generalissimo Rafael Trujillo in 1937.<sup>95</sup> Dominicans claim not to eat parsley.<sup>96</sup> The fictional Sparrow denounces the French for creating the word “parley.” “That’s the one,” he says. The pirates reply, “Damn the man who thought of

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<sup>94</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 25.

<sup>95</sup> Morgan and Youssef, *Writing Rage*, 211.

<sup>96</sup> In Edwidge Danticat’s, *The Farming of Bones*, “Absences and pain remain fresh sources of indirect trauma as generation after generation of women take their progeny to the river to introduce their children, through narrative, to the presences of their foremothers who suffered and died at the river of blood,” Morgan and Youssef, *Writing Rage*, 212; see Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*, New York, Soho, 1988.



parley.” Sparrow informs the ignorant zombies, “That would be the French.” The title of the film implies another “parley,” or play on words. Prior to the revolutionary period in which the film is set, Haiti was commonly known as The Pearl of the Antilles. Activities that take place on Isle de Tortuga in the film, which is an actual island off the northern coast of Haiti associated with piracy and privateers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, serve to conflate the ship, The Black Pearl, and the Isle de Morte with Haiti and the rebellions that lead to revolution. For Disney, Sparrow, and future generations of Haitians and Americans, “What the Black Pearl really is is freedom.”

*Voodoo Politics and Internal Affairs.* Seabrook relays the frequently repeated myth of “Célestine with a Silver Dish.” Célestine, daughter of President Dartiguenave, rumored to be one of the most dangerous sorceresses of the pre-Occupation period, also appears in James Weldon Johnson’s “The Haitian People” and Hurston’s *Tell My Horse*. Seabrook includes this tale here rather than in the initial (or final) section on Vodou practice to discredit the idea, or at least bring into question the validity some hold that Célestine operates as a *mambo*. Instead, placed here, in transition to Seabrook’s account of his encounters with U.S. and Haitian officials, Célestine’s enduring legacy exhibits the potential for abuse by those in power of the symbolic cooption of Vodou. None of the reporters, commentators, or ethnographers I investigated here was in Haiti when President Dartiguenave held office and rumors of his daughter’s alleged incestuous powers over him, operating through a Vodou mythos, are just that, rumors, and serve here for Seabrook to signal to his reader that he has read Johnson and shares his concern, though in a very different way.<sup>97</sup> In fact, Johnson remarks in *Along this Way*, “William B. Seabrook talked with me about

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<sup>97</sup> I came to believe after reading repeated accounts that Celestine functions as a mythological or folk hero rather than as a figure of historical fact based on the sheer numbers of times the tale is repeated. The story serves as a warning against certain forms of abusive and coercive power and against mixing Vodou and politics. Vodou is

Haiti before he went down and wrote *The Magic Island*. Among my friends and acquaintances, my trip started a sort of pilgrimage to the black republic.”<sup>98</sup> Among Johnson’s friends who traveled to Haiti we can count Hurston and Hughes, but does Seabrook qualify as he would like to as a friend to the black cause of the 1920s and 1930s? Hughes makes no mention of Seabrook, but Hurston claims all three men as influences at some point in her career.

In the second half of the book, its actual beginnings, Seabrook provides no footnotes, no bibliographic resources, and no appendices. He hesitates to condemn racialized practices of U.S. Marines but finds himself difficultly positioned. In the appropriately titled, “The Tragic Comedy,” Seabrook chronologically returns to the beginning of his narrative. After settling into the home above Petionville, many things occur in Seabrook’s encounter with the Haitian elite and U.S. Commissioned Officers prior to his engagement with Maman Célié and the mysteries of the *loas* including his hearing about superstitious and folkloric practice. He also appropriately titles the first chapter here, “A Blind Man Walking on Eggs,” as he has no idea how to negotiate race relations on the ground in Haiti. As an outsider himself to mainstream American culture, a perceived and self-proclaimed seeker of mysticism, establishing credibility with the Haitian elite and commissioned officers and other marines proves difficult. Major Davis, whom Seabrook meets with at the Hotel Montagne for tennis, says to Seabrook, presumably including him too, “all writers and artists were more or less nuts,” to which Seabrook responded, “all congressmen were fat-heads and most of them crooks,” offending his host and noting, “The only thing we agreed on was the quality of his sixteen-year-old Haitian rum.”<sup>99</sup>

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inherently not political and those that use it for political gains often find themselves on the receiving end of very dire consequences.

<sup>98</sup> Johnson, *Along this Way*, 352.

<sup>99</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 132.

Awkwardly treading the evolving narratives of race consciousness arising in his New York home; i.e., in Harlem, and translated to the island via the various discourses presented in the previous chapter of this dissertation, Seabrook's image of delicately treading on eggshells correctly conveys the anxieties and social tensions he presents and encounters during the Occupation. "The most interesting and pervasive of the American innovations is the belated lesson in race-consciousness which we have been at pains to teach the Haitian upper [and lower] classes."<sup>100</sup> Hunton and Balch previously reported, "Haitians have always preferred to have the United States represented diplomatically by a man of color, and no foreign name is more honored and loved by Haitians than that of Frederick Douglass."<sup>101</sup> Prior to the arrival of the Marines, Haitian officials may have preferred to engage with black Americans such as Frederick Douglass but they in no way perceived themselves inferior to governmental officials of any other country, nor do they now. Seabrook further complicates his own position with the rather odd assertion that, "Americans have complicated the problem by treating the Haitians as if they were white" in a condition where he claims, "only a rhinoceros could be unconscious of his skin in Port-au-Prince today."<sup>102</sup> Haitians perceive themselves as equal to white and though they resented being placed at the same level as "the Negro" in America in 1928, Seabrook should not find it surprising that some Haitians "draw a reverse color line and dare to despise white people."<sup>103</sup>

Seabrook and his wife, Katie, frequent the American Club for social and sporting events. He notes that "aristocratic Haitian[s]" are "barred from this [American] club's sacred portals by a

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<sup>100</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 127.

<sup>101</sup> Hunton and Balch, "Racial Relations," 120.

<sup>102</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 128.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*

Jim Crow rule which probably no Haitian had dreamed could exist in his own free republic until we came down to befriend them.”<sup>104</sup> Again, following tennis with drinks and lively conversation,

Inevitably, we touched upon what Major Davis called ‘the nigger question.’ Mrs. Davis had been asking about life among the Arabs. The Major said, ‘Well, of course, you’ll never be able to get as close as that to the Haitians; you won’t want to; of course you’ll meet them and see them, as we all have to do sometimes, but you won’t want to be *intimate*.’ I said, ‘Why not? I understand that they are interesting, that many of them are well worth knowing.’ He replied, ‘Yes, but after all they *are* niggers. You can’t get away from that.’<sup>105</sup>

Major Davis carries on attitudes of those such as Carlyle, imploring Seabrook to see Haiti through oppressor’s eyes. Thus welcomed to Haiti, Seabrook forms his own critical opinion of whitemen in Haiti. “It seemed to me that very little of this transplanted Jim Crow attitude was vicious. It seemed just a form of group insanity for which perhaps individuals should not be blamed.”<sup>106</sup> In a seemingly strange and disturbing way Seabrook seeks to distance himself from such attitudes without alienating a racialized reading audience in America. He describes Major Davis as “typical of most Marine Corps officers in Haiti today,” defending abuses cited by James Weldon Johnson and confirmed by the Balch mission.<sup>107</sup> “Reports of that sort [of harassment by Marines of ordinary Haitians], in my sincere belief, after living in Haiti with my eyes open, are propagandist rot. We had to kill a few of them at first, for various reasons. But that is all fortunately ended. Our attitude now in Haiti is superior, but kindly.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 131.

<sup>105</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 132; italics mine.

<sup>106</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 156.

<sup>107</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 133.

<sup>108</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 133; In contradiction he concludes the text with, “The presence of the Americans has put an end to . . . revolution, mob violence, and many other deplorable conditions which the entire reasonable world agrees should be put an end to. It has also put an end, or if not an end, a period, to more than a century of a national freedom of a peculiar sort, which has existed nowhere else on earth save in Liberia—the freedom of a negro people to govern or misgovern themselves, to stand forth as human beings like any others without cringing or asking leave of any white man,” *Magic Island*, 282.

The Occupation offered Seabrook the protection he needed to travel extensively in search of his ultimate desire, to “discover” Maman Célié.<sup>109</sup> No Occupation equals no Seabrook. The twisted desire Seabrook ascribes to Maman Célié in his adoration of her, he finds earlier in his travels in “A Nymph in Bronze,” which we must remember occurred before his encounter with Célié and his own Voodoo initiation. In an attempt to distance himself and Katie from the likes of Major Davis, Seabrook emphasizes their personal interactions with Haitians of color. Although Seabrook’s ceaseless description of people defined by racial physiognomy and “pigmentation” is more than a little irritating, he serves his purpose of awkwardly neutralizing his own position on race. Seabrook observes, “Between these pure blacks and the dominant pale mulatto tone with its lighter shades of quadroon and octaroon, there was a considerable element of brown like my friend Mosieur Baussan.”<sup>110</sup> At the now destroyed National Palace, designed by architect Georges Baussan, Seabrook’s wife Katie dances with a black man with claims to “African princely families on the southern edge of the Sahara” with “the face of an Iroquois,” indicating their liberal position in regards to race.<sup>111</sup> She would never have done this in the American South in 1928 and other Americans in Haiti do not look kindly on her actions. At the American club they “ragged me before I left the island; they ragged Katie even more—she happens to come from Georgia,” specifically Atlanta, “and has a marked southern accent—for dancing with coal-back gentlemen.”<sup>112</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr., confirmed in his most recent project, *Black in Latin America*, the U.S. sent the most racist southerners in the entire Marine Corps to Haiti during the Occupation; he says “we are responsible” for “the economic and social

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<sup>109</sup> Seabrook describes Maman Célié as “old priestess of dark mysteries, . . . old mother whom I love” whom he yearns for; “I feel your arms around me and your wrinkled cheek wet with tears,” Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 77.

<sup>110</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 138.

<sup>111</sup> “It required no poring over the historical pages of Moreau de Saint Méry to understand that the seventeenth-century slavers had been, to say the least, careless in selecting their supposed ‘human cattle’ for West Indian export. Here flowed the blood of warriors and chiefs. Revolts, uprising, massacre, were bound to follow the enslavement of such types as these,” Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 134, 139-140.

<sup>112</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 156.

instability that plagued Haiti for the next several decades.”<sup>113</sup> Seabrook’s endorsement of Katie’s actions further substantiates his position, though his own take on Haitian women one finds more than a little disquieting.

Seabrook attempts to equate his admiration of Haitian women with that of James Weldon Johnson by borrowing heavily from Johnson’s description provided in his earlier *Nation* articles: “Magnificent as they file along the country roads by the scores and by hundreds on their way to the town markets, with white or colored turbaned heads, gold-looped ears, they stride along straight and lithe, almost haughtily, carrying themselves like so many Queens of Shebas.”<sup>114</sup> Seabrook discovered his own Queen of Sheba in Mlle. Thérèse who “was Africa, yet not quite Africa, Africa of the poets [i.e., Baudelaire] rather than of the ethnologists and explorers.”<sup>115</sup> Apparently, Katie’s liberty in dancing with an African king allows Seabrook to ruminate on his own possibilities. “I reflected on the strange biological-hereditary processes that had culminated in” Thérèse. “I wondered whether she represented some ultimate future type, superior perhaps to anything that either race alone could breed, and which, a thousand years or ten thousand years hence, might become the dominant superior world-type.”<sup>116</sup> Such “[s]lightly decadent but authentic aristocratic blood, cross-breeding with strong, rich primitive blood, makes an excellent biological mixture,” which the implication of his interest in would have disturbed, or possibly titillated, white reading audiences.<sup>117</sup> Seabrook’s further statement, “The French colonial masters chose mistresses and concubines from their slave girls. They chose the prettiest, healthiest, and most desirable,” suggests his own sexual confusion in equating his distorted desire with that of

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<sup>113</sup> Gates, *Black in Latin America*.

<sup>114</sup> Johnson, “The Haitian People,” 346.

<sup>115</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 140; Nalo Hopkinson picks this up in her fictional narrative description of the sexual relationship between Baudelaire and Jeane Duval in *The Salt Roads*, see conclusions.

<sup>116</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 148-9; consider metissage and colonial family romance in Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*.

<sup>117</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 141.

the colonial master.<sup>118</sup> In this act Chancy argues that Seabrook “sees Haiti from the clouded perspective of an occupier, a possessor, which permits him to sexualize all his encounters with Haitians and accounts for his wish to literally *penetrate* the culture he has the license to define.”<sup>119</sup>

All of this represents a type of racial discourse as presented in Seabrook that obfuscates his own position and concerns Chancy. That he chose to say, “It was deplorable morally if you like, but it was biologically sound . . . [and] probably also agreeable” would offend many early twentieth-century American readers.<sup>120</sup> He cannot restrain his fascination with Thérèse. “As a cross-strain in the white blood of Mlle. Thérèse, who now sat opposite me toying with her champagne glass, there may also have been blood of the buccaneers, the pirates and adventurers in the Spanish Main.”<sup>121</sup> Seabrook fantasizes away, writing in New York, allowing his memory of Thérèse and his white male image of the exoticized, eroticized mulatto woman; i.e., Haiti, to run wild.

As I sat speculating about Mlle. Thérèse in terms of her ancestors . . . it occurred to me how very interested, and perhaps astonished, the ghosts of her various ancestors would be if they could come back on this stroke of midnight and see the ultimate product of the fusing, this rather gorgeous, poised, modern creature with her crinkly hair, Egyptian-bobbed, and high-heeled gold slippers, dancing with the tall blonde Swedish admiral—belle of the ball at Bellevue.<sup>122</sup>

He devotes eight pages, an entire chapter, fantasizing about a light-skinned Haitian woman while his wife dances with a beautiful African. Is he not just an American male egoist? None of this is scientific and certainly works to discredit Seabrook’s prior (or is it future?) authority with Maman Célie. No wonder Raphael, possessed by Goédoé Badagris, tries to strangle him,

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<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *italics Chancy, Framing Silence, 56.*

<sup>120</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 141.

<sup>121</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 141; consider *Pirates*.

<sup>122</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 141.

indicating his eminent dismissal from Maman Célie's presence. His intentions are not pure. He is as duplicitous as any Haitian he describes. "The Haitian peasants are thus double-natured in reality—sometimes moved by savage, atavistic forces whose dark depths no white psychology can ever plumb—but often, even in their weirdest customs, naïve, simple, harmless children."<sup>123</sup> Though Seabrook's intentions are in no way entirely harmless, he attempts to illustrate that racial difference in Haiti means less than in America and probably should mean less in America as well, in spite of his ridiculously sexualized way of making his point.

*Censorship.* In *The Magic Island* Seabrook attempts to address each of the criticisms brought against the Occupation by the prior commentators by capturing discrete moments in his own research that belie those constructions. Not always fruitful, or tasteful, he sought in the previous chapter to place himself and Katie on equal ground with all Haitians of color and to dismiss the charges that all Americans are racist by revealing just a little too much information about himself and his appreciation of Haitian women. In "The Truth is a Beautiful Thing" he takes on the issue of censorship and the press. He dines with one Ernest Chauvet, "owner and editor of the *Nouvelliste*, violently Anti-American," educated in Paris and trained in newspapers in New York. Regularly jailed for his editorials, he wrote a scathing challenge, "L'Américain, Seabrook?" questioning Seabrook's motives. Is this the same Henri Chauvet, editor of *The Nouvelliste*, Carl Kelsey encountered in 1921, reportedly punished for announcing the "impending recall of the financial advisor, Mr. Ruan," in November 22, 1918, in spite of the fact that the story proved true?<sup>124</sup>

While the freedom of the press and of speech are practically unrestricted, articles or speeches that are of an incendiary nature or reflect adversely upon the United States forces in Haiti, or tend to stir up an agitation against the United States

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<sup>123</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 91.

<sup>124</sup> Kelsey does not state the quality or duration of the punishment, though "preventative imprisonment" was very common in 1926, "Haiti," 140-141; Watson and Balch, "The Press and the Prison," 145.



officials who are aiding and supporting the constitutional government of Haiti, or articles or speeches attacking the President of Haiti or the Haitian Government are prohibited and offenders against this order will be brought to trial before a military tribunal.<sup>125</sup>

Seabrook documents his face-to-face defense with this Chauvet over “a good number of rum cocktails,” with, “I’m not down here to attack the occupation, and I’m not down here to defend it. I’m not interested in politics. I’m interested in people.”<sup>126</sup> “The Americans have taught us a lot of things,” Chauvet said, “Among other things they have taught us that we are niggers. You see, we really didn’t know that before. We thought we were Negroes.”<sup>127</sup> This Chauvet exhibits satire worthy of Webb’s critique of Carlyle’s 1853 combined essay “On the Nigger Question.”<sup>128</sup> “For me such things are comedy. But for others, who are more easily hurt than I, these things are not always so comic.”<sup>129</sup> Chauvet declares with the flare of Shakespearean soliloquy that prior to the Occupation,

We were masters in our own land. . . . No! It remained for the Americans, first the Marine Corps military occupation and the treaty civilians, to inflict upon us that insult in our own free land. And it has been more than a matter of hurt pride. It has brought something shameful. It has made many of us ashamed in our hearts of our own race, ashamed of our birth and of our families and of the blood that flows in our own veins. For not all are strong enough to laugh and say ‘*Je m’en fiche*’ as I do . . .”<sup>130</sup>

Chauvet defends the wife of John Henry Russell, high commissioner, but agrees with previous commentary by Johnson and Kelsey that white women in Haiti are “worse than American men” in holding “themselves contemptuously superior.”<sup>131</sup> The following comments from Chauvet are worth repeating in their entirety in that they confirm the concerns and accusations of American commentators attempting to represent the Haitian experience of occupation:

<sup>125</sup> Actual order appears in Kelsey, “Haiti,” 140.

<sup>126</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 145.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> See Chapter 2 for a lengthy analysis of these exchanges.

<sup>129</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 145.

<sup>130</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 146.

<sup>131</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 147-8.

“Elles s’en fiche the color lines drawn by American women whose social experience has been previously limited to Marine Corps posts and their own small towns in Alabama and Nebraska.”

“But it is a grand joke, isn’t it? . . . the sergent’s wife, or the captain’s, who maybe did her own washing at home, is our social superior and would feel herself disgraced to shake hands with any nigger.”

“There are a few like that in the Marine Corps, mostly Yankees, who had it in their beans before they ever came to Haiti that all negroes were not cornfield coons.”

“I’m still against the Occupation for lofty patriotic reasons which have nothing to do with racial prejudice, but if they used more tact, more common sense, sent down here only people who were free of race prejudice, there wouldn’t be all this added unnecessary mess which has made more mutual dislike, distrust, and trouble than all the senatorial howlings and journalistic rows since the caco revolution.”

“By the way, Monsier the writer, you said something about being in Haiti for human-interest stuff. Maybe this is human interest. But, maybe it is too human. You couldn’t publish it. Too much under the skin. Lily-white skin, black skin. All the world’s kin, Shakespeare . . . Madame Russell . . . and the sergeant’s wife, and us niggers.”

“Chauvet,” said I, ‘we’re getting drunk, but the truth is a beautiful thing. The truth is beautiful thing even when it’s tangled and doubtful in taste.’<sup>132</sup>

Seabrook published the conversation replete with Chauvet’s overt criticisms of the Occupation.

Does Chauvet gives voice to what Seabrook cannot risk? Seabrook offers much more than entertainment here. Rife with social criticism, his inclusion of this conversation could inflame anti- and pro-Occupation sentiments all the way around exhibiting another moment of questionable responsibility on the part of Seabrook or evidence of a deeper social and political critique in which he dare not tread.

*Literacy and Civilization.* Seabrook reiterates another claim by previous commentators about literacy and the role of literary production in determining culture and cultivating civilization. His encounters with prominent authors including poet and President Louis Borno confirm Haiti’s civilized entry into modernity, dismissing claims to the contrary. Seabrook performs this work by presenting the narrative of his invitation to the National Palace, the same

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<sup>132</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 148-149.

site where his wife, Katie, dances with an “African,” in a subsequent chapter titled, “Ladies and Gentlemen, the President!”

It occurred to me as I was being presented to Madame Borno that the society of this small West Indian country, though certainly far behind us in civilization, if civilization is to be measured by material-mechanical-industrial standards, was perhaps a great deal more civilized in some ways than we are. At any rate, it often seemed to me that they lived more agreeably.<sup>133</sup>

Upon arrival at the palace, the gendarmerie that greets the Seabrooks “seemed to me something which had been masqueraded and projected on a screen,” prompting Seabrook to ask, “Was [Borno] too a shadow silhouette projected on a screen? Was he Russell’s magic-lantern toy?”<sup>134</sup> Here Seabrook freely presents his commentary and opinions regarding the Occupation. It is not the constitutionality of the events that concerns him but the basic inhumanity he regularly witnesses and hears out of the mouths of American servicemen and their wives that finally provides the material that motivates him to vent his spleen. If his wife had not been personally attacked at the American club he may have kept his mouth shut and silenced his pen. Fortunately, we finally get a sense of how Seabrook feels about all he encounters and why Maman Célie probably did take him into her confidence.

At the palace, Seabrook discovered, maybe much to his surprise, Borno speaking with four of his friends “of various colors” who Seabrook presumed “were ministers and bureau chiefs.”<sup>135</sup> Rather than discussing politics as he expected, Seabrook found them discussing the state of national literature and

the current tendencies and future of Haitian poetry. This dispute involved, as they expressed it, *la muse haïtienne d’expression française* versus *la muse haïtienne d’expression créole*, but it involved more than a matter of idiom. It was a question whether the genius of Haitian poetry might find its happiest medium in the rich *créole du peuple*, . . . But actually, as they developed various antithesis, it

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<sup>133</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 159.

<sup>134</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 151.

<sup>135</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 160.

involved the deeper question whether the Haitian poet seeks his inspiration in the classic French tradition or in African negro emotional tradition.<sup>136</sup>

President “Borno stressed the point that great poetry frequently had no locale, no geography other than the geography of the soul.”<sup>137</sup> Borno himself was a celebrated poet published in the *Anthologie de Poésie Haïtienne*.<sup>138</sup> The conversants apparently “admitted . . . that Oswald Durand, the one sheer genius Haiti had produced to date, had done his greatest work in creole and that his genius was essentially a negro genius,” reflecting debates raging within the Harlem Renaissance between Alain Locke, W. E. B. DuBois, and others and still carrying on today in global literary circles.<sup>139</sup> Rather than isolated from the larger world of cultural development, Seabrook’s evidence points to a Haiti engaged in world literary and artistic concerns, sure signs of civilization. Finally, enraged, Seabrook speaks his own mind:

It seemed to me that the whole group-social-American attitude in Haiti was a piece of sheer craziness—Alice in Wonderland idiocy, without the mad logic which integrates *Alice*. So far as I could gather, no wife of a Marine Corps captain or major had ever attended or wanted to attend a ‘nigger gathering’ socially, even at the presidential palace; and I think 99 per cent of the sergeants’ and corporals’ wives would have turned up their noses in honest disgust if they’d been invited. To Judy O’Grady a coon was a coon and that was that, no matter if he’d been a king instead of a president, no matter if he’d been through three universities at Paris and spoke eleven Languages instead of four and had sat as a member of a dozen Hague Tribunals.<sup>140</sup>

The Occupation allows not only Seabrook to travel freely in Haiti, but President Louis Borno as well. At the opening of a bridge over the Limbé River, Seabrook notes, “its real significance lay in the fact that for almost the first time in Haitian history, a president, without fear . . . could visit the most remote and formerly most dangerous districts of the interior of the republic without fear

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<sup>136</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 160-161.

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> “*Plus puissante, O Poète, est ton, œuvre ideale/Car le dur metal ou tu sculptes ta chimère . . .*” by President Borno, in M. Fortuant Strowski, *Anthologie de Poésie Haïtienne*, Paris: Bossard, n.d, cited and presented in Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 161.

<sup>139</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 161.

<sup>140</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 155-156.

of revolution, assassination, or uprising.”<sup>141</sup> In 1928, with “more daily newspapers than New York . . . [f]ree speech and freedom of the press flourish with tropical luxuriousness, despite occasional jailings.”<sup>142</sup>

What conclusion emerges from these tangled part-truths? How weight them? By some evaluations of life, perhaps, the scales tip in one direction, but by different evaluation of life they upset in a reverse direction. I am not sure of ultimate evaluations where problems of this sort are involved. With Louis and Maman Célie, it was different. Concerning them I have the strength of a profound conviction. But here I think that I, if I am anything, am the onlooker, the reporter—not the solver, surely not the judge. But perhaps others capable of judging (or who deem themselves so) may find in these *faithfully recorded observations* material for thought.<sup>143</sup>

*Magic Islands Within*. Seabrook includes tales of other adventurers beginning with “The White King of La Gonave” in a section titled “Winding Trails.” He discovers several others like himself traversing the island under the safety net of the Occupation revealing information he believes previously unknown to anyone outside the island.

To hold undisputed sway on some remote tropical island set like a green jewel amid the coral reefs of summer seas—how many have dreamed it, and how many grown men, civilization-tired.

It is a strangely potent dream; it has a druglike fascination. It is susceptible of infinite variation. Sometimes the island proves to be inhabited by natives—sometimes not. One man may dream of it in terms of refuge, tranquility, escape—another in terms of despotic power.

It is a dream, which for the most of us never comes true.<sup>144</sup>

Seabrook encounters several figures pursuing this dream in much their own way, possibly giving voice to Seabrook’s own “logic of desire.”<sup>145</sup> In concordance with Dash, Hurbon specifically charges Seabrook, Wirkus, and later Wade Davis with projecting their own fantasies “beyond the expansionist interest[’s]” to all “that is repressed in the United States by the dominant Puritan

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<sup>141</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 162.

<sup>142</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 163.

<sup>143</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 167.

<sup>144</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 171.

<sup>145</sup> Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 195.

culture . . . onto the Vodouist.”<sup>146</sup> In his recurring conflicting views of the Occupation and its servants, these further investigations, beyond the borders of Port-au-Prince lead him to describe the Occupation as a “benevolent protectorate” over the “the most primitive and untouched by civilization in the whole West Indies.”<sup>147</sup>

Here, Seabrook refers to La Gonave, where he finds Lieutenant Faustin. E. Wirkus, Gendarmerie d’Haiti (b. 1894, Pittston, Pennsylvania), assigned for a three-year period during the Occupation stationed at Anse-à-Galets. Up “until the time [Wirkus] was twenty, and even after he ran away to enlist in the Marine Corps, Haiti meant nothing to him except a vague name in the geographies which he had studied in public school.” The proliferation of the “Pittston (Pa.) *Gazette*” as the most common newspaper on the isolated island clearly indicates the true object of Wirkus’s interests.<sup>148</sup> “He had not the slightest intention or desire to go to Haiti.”<sup>149</sup> According to the previously referred to Major Davis, Wirkus “can outcurse and outfight any tough baby I know in the whole service. But he doesn’t drink . . . [or smoke] . . . and he eats quite a lot of sweet stuff. They tell me alcohol turns to sugar, and I suppose when a fellow doesn’t drink he needs more sweets.”<sup>150</sup> Captain Presley warns Seabrook not to

get off on the wrong foot with Wirkus . . . this stuff about his not drinking and smoking. He’s no Sunday school product by a damned sight. He just happens not to care anything about liquor, and where he is it’s a good thing he’s that way. . . out there on an island full of rum and nigger wenches and lazy cocoa-nut groves, he’s stayed hard as nails. . . . A rum-hound or a lazy guy would go crazy out there, but it suits him, and it seems to suit the natives. . . . You’ve heard, I guess, that they’ve crowned him king or something. That’s a hot one.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 171.

<sup>148</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 195.

<sup>149</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 174.

<sup>150</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 175.

<sup>151</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 176.

Although by no means a “missionary,” Wirkus “sends a woman for cataract surgery to the mainland” and provides the first accurate maps of the island, an American engine for a mill, and a stone wharf at Anse.<sup>152</sup> Seabrook presents Wirkus as concerned with development of the island for which he has become known as king.<sup>153</sup> In Seabrook’s eyes, Wirkus exhibits generosity by persuading “the American agricultural station at Jacmel to give him a blooded boar and brood-sow,” from which Wirkus distributes the progeny thereof around the island to certain “*gros nègre*” (men) insuring food sovereignty for the island.<sup>154</sup> These “creole pigs” remain a staple of the Haitian economy until the Duvalier years when the U.S. demands that they be killed due to an epidemic of swine fever. Providing financial security for families, mostly headed by women, the creole pig serves the function of savings. Without them, under the guise of U.S. neoliberalism, the “feminization of poverty” increases in Haiti overall as well as at La Gonave, where Seabrook finds the “Plaine Mapou . . . covered with ‘gardens’ (small farms) and habitations.”<sup>155</sup> Belying the myth of Wirkus’s isolation at La Gonave, Seabrook notes that Wirkus uses a motorboat provided by the Marines to investigate six stations on the island and flies to Port-au-Prince once a month.<sup>156</sup>

At La Gonave, Seabrook introduces the audience to “The Black Queen’s Court” at the top of Bois Noir. Ti Meminne functions as Wirkus’s counterpart to Seabrook’s Maman Celie. He finds Ti Meminne much less appealing than Maman Célie and, probably, misrepresents the relationship between Wirkus and Ti Meminne, drawing parallels that just do not exist. Wirkus insisted Seabrook “set down in so many plain words so that nobody could misunderstand.

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<sup>152</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 181, 182, and 184.

<sup>153</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 200.

<sup>154</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 183.

<sup>155</sup> Yvette Etienne, The Campaign Against Violence, in *Poto Mitan: Haitian Women, Pillars of the Global Economy*, prod. Mary Becker, narr. Edwidge Danticat, Tet Ansamm Productions, 2009, DVD; Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 182-183.

<sup>156</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 186.

Wirkus, though king of the island, is not married to the queen; he is not married to anybody.”<sup>157</sup>

Although Seabrook expresses a strong dislike for Ti Meminne, he describes Ti Meminne and her many bracelets and earrings in terms of the Queen of Hearts in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, within a brief description of Wirkus’s crowning, about which Wirkus appears ambivalent.<sup>158</sup> “Wirkus would never let me photograph him with his crown on his head. He felt that if it were published, it might make him seem ridiculous back home.”<sup>159</sup>

Ti Meminne expresses concerns about photography as well. “When Wirkus asked her to let me photograph her while there was still plenty of sunlight, I became slightly annoyed with her. She insisted on dressing first, and I wanted her the way she was.”<sup>160</sup> Ti Meminne’s accessories actually indicate her devotion to Erzulie. Seabrook exhibits arrogance and disrespect for a woman of obvious social stature in the community. Ti Meminne exhibits pride in her appearance, accustomed as she has become to photography since Wirkus’s arrival, knowing these images will circulate outside Haiti and influence a larger dialectic community.

[F]inally I got the picture [pun not intentional]. . . . I mentally apologized to her for not liking her. I didn’t say anything to Wirkus about it at all. I was wrong anyway. If she had proven to be something like a black tribal queen in an African tom-tom movie, I suppose I should have been enchanted with the theatricality. When, instead of that, she had turned out to be a real and somewhat surly strong-headed person, it had annoyed me.<sup>161</sup>

In an attempt at honesty, Seabrook again reveals his transparency regarding women.

In spite of reservations and promises made, Seabrook does publish these photographs in *The Magic Island*. Seabrook’s visual and textual description, as well as other U.S. American

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<sup>157</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 193.

<sup>158</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 188-9; “Four big negroes mounted the throne, and lifting up the chair in which King Wirkus was seated, marched with him three times around the peristyle . . . and then around in circles through the crowd outside it, the people falling in behind, shouting, waving flags, blowing conch-shells. And this ended the formal ceremony. A *danse Congo* followed, which lasted through the night,” Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 193.

<sup>159</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 191.

<sup>160</sup> Seabrook describes Ti Meminne as “solid bulk rather than fat, with a big, heavy head, and heavy but not gross features,” *Magic Island*, 189.

<sup>161</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 190.



sensational interest in all things Haitian, prompted Wirkus to publish his version of his experiences as *The White King of Gonave: The Cult of Vodou in Haiti 1915-29* in 1931. Hurbon suggests, “The account of Wirkus, which one might suppose ethnographic, is transformed little by little, in the recital of carnage that he personally directs: he claims to have emptied ‘his revolver on the chief Caco,’” and to have imprisoned many others.<sup>162</sup> Where Seabrook cannot determine if he apologizes for or supports the Occupation, Wirkus clearly justifies “the American occupation of the country, to those who are hesitant or skeptical,” by evidencing his participation in the extermination of rebels and bandits; i.e., the *cacos*.<sup>163</sup> Wirkus further claims to have performed this work by exacting “criminal punitive action on all *papalois, hougans, bocors* and *mamalois* or as the orders read: ‘on all voodoo artists’.”<sup>164</sup> A photograph titled “Two great authorities on the magic rites of black races” of Seabrook and Wirkus seated together, and presented by Wirkus in *The White King of Gonave*, further inscribes Seabrook as complicit in the Occupation agenda.<sup>165</sup>

Sidestepping material Seabrook finds clearly discomfiting he refocuses attention on meetings with the local “*minister l’intérieur, . . . minstre l’agriculture, [and] minister la guerre,*” concluding that what the inhabitants of La Gonave “really had, he discovered, was a sort of agricultural guild, primitive yet highly organized,” who “went about in little armies, fifty or a hundred to a group,” working “communistically,” for planting, harvesting, and clearing new ground, a system defined as *combite* by other ethnographers.<sup>166</sup> Dunham notes that the *combite*, “organized along the lines of the African *dokpwe*, travels under the guidance of professional

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<sup>162</sup> Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 187.

<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> “Officially we were informed that the cult of Vodou was the medium of black magic, blasphemy, treason to Haiti,” Faustin Wirkus and Tane Dudley, 1931, 136-137, in Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 187.

<sup>165</sup> Photograph, “W. B. Seabrook, *Magic Island*, and Faustin Wirkus,” reprinted in Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 187.

<sup>166</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 186.

*combite* drummers,” indicating her awareness of its African origins.<sup>167</sup> “It lingers at the houses or fields of farm neighbors to assist in planting, reaping, house building, or any other activities that concern peasant economy.”<sup>168</sup> According to Dunham, though not technically “a dance, certain of the work activities actually adhere to a rhythmic choreographic pattern” exhibiting movements worthy of presentation on the global stage.<sup>169</sup> Seabrook reports,

They had been organized that way ‘forever’ back in the mountains, one of the old men told him. And the queen with her council and court preserved order among them, settled disputes, dispensed justice. It seemed to me as he told it that he was describing a sort of primitive monarchical communism. The present queen, Ti Meminne, had ruled for a generation. Before her there had been a queen called La Reine Tirhazard, who had reigned from time immemorial.<sup>170</sup>

Had Seabrook looked a little deeper he would have found this matriarchical type of community structure not unusual for particular African communities, probably the ones from which the slaves at La Gonave had been acquired though the practice of *combite* occurs across Haiti. The voluntary practice of *combite* mirrors the institutional *corvee*. Neglect of attention to such details of history prompted much of the criticism Seabrook received from trained anthropologists and native Haitian observers, such as Hurbon, who found his “rigorous and explicit description,” infused with an un-self reflexive racism.<sup>171</sup>

Seabrook concludes his account of Wirkus in “A Torn Scrap of Paper,” where he admits, “La Gonave is a subject of fantastic speculation.”<sup>172</sup> Here one finds the tale of Anacoana, the subject of Edwidge Danticat’s 2005 young adult novel, *Anacoana Golden Flower, Haiti 1490*.<sup>173</sup> According to Seabrook “the Indian Queen Anacoana who was hanged by the Spaniards” hid “a

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<sup>167</sup> Dunham, *Dances*, 11, 18, 39, and 43.

<sup>168</sup> Dunham, *Dances*, 18.

<sup>169</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 186.

<sup>171</sup> Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 288.

<sup>172</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 194.

<sup>173</sup> See Danticat, *Anacoana*.

great chest of gold, rubies, and diamonds,” buried at Piemy.<sup>174</sup> “There is a tale of a great cave beneath the mountains; the tale also of a bottomless pool in which dwells a scared crocodile that no one dares to kill.”<sup>175</sup> Seabrook provides the following footnote, “It is historical fact that Anacoana with her court and dancing girls used to come over from Leogane in long canoes to bathe in the pool beneath the waterfall.”<sup>176</sup> Where Seabrook gets his “historical fact” remains unclear but Danticat poetically recounts Haitian memory of Anacoana,

the struggle is not new, with each braid you remember Anacoana who stood up against colonization, you remember women like Defilee who forged freedom from tyranny and Captain Flawn who sewed the country’s first flag using strands of her own hair to bind us in unity and strength, with each braid you hope that this unity continues.<sup>177</sup>

The unity is submarine, occurring below the surface.<sup>178</sup> Seabrook notes, “People often talk of making a syndicate to go over and dig for treasure. Treasure-hunting is a favorite occupation of Haitians, high and low. Sometimes it is successful. Treasures were buried by the buccaneers and by fleeing colonial slave-owners.”<sup>179</sup> Which people does he refer to here? Haitians or U.S. Americans? And what kind of treasure do they really seek? Why does Seabrook provide much more insightful material in the footnotes and appendix containing his field notes than the rest of the book? What lies below the surface here? What mirages and phantasms appear here that persist into the present? In what ways is the world colored by myths of the initial periods of contact between the Old and New Worlds, old and new words? Seabrook sits at the crossroads of deeper metaphors of human contact, relation and the human condition, in addition to setting the tone for U.S. American relations with Haiti into the present. Bridging spirit, myth, politics, and

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<sup>174</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 195.

<sup>175</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> Edwidge Danticat, narrator, *Poto Mitan: Haitian Women, Pillars of the Global Economy*, prod. Mary Becker, Tet Ansamm Productions, 2009, DVD.

<sup>178</sup> See Glissant, *Poetics*.

<sup>179</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 195; see *Pirates*.

science, the mysticism he seeks he finds but has a very difficult time transmitting in text. Maybe this frustration, sensed through the whole text, drives his disconnection with American society upon his return to New York and ultimate suicide. How could anything else be as fulfilling and sustaining as the grand fantasy of Haiti he creates here imagining himself the great translator of foreign cultures? If Haiti is Seabrook's philosophical jewel, Hurbon asks, "haven't American writers invented a Vodou for their convenience?"<sup>180</sup>

In "Portrait of a 'Gros Nègre,'" Seabrook reveals the discomfort he feels around Constant Polynice, nicknamed "Ti Malice, The Sly One," with the "look of a killer" in his eyes, who took care of things around Wirkus's place when he was away.<sup>181</sup> In "Polynice and his White," Seabrook describes a typically brutal Haitian cockfight.<sup>182</sup> In this closing chapter about La Gonave, Seabrook witnesses a "Danse Congo," which is relevant to studies conducted by Hurston, Dunham, and Deren. Here, Polynice specifically organizes a dance in honor of Seabrook's impending departure. Maybe Polynice reads correctly that providing such a performance will rid them of the nuisance of Seabrook. Seabrook certainly implies that Polynice practices sorcery of a different kind than Mamam Célie and hopes to witness it. Instead he gets an everyday dance, specific and local and no way really deviating from later ethnographic accounts except in his amazement that men also participate in the secularized sexual aspects of the *gouillé*, or pelvic, dance motion. "It had seemed to me queer, almost unnatural at first, . . . to see a male body exhibiting itself proudly in this peacock sex-strutting and these sexual muscular contortions, but that, I think, was only a limitation of my own, used to fixed-idea

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<sup>180</sup> Hurbon, "American Fantasy," 195.

<sup>181</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 206; Hurston refers to Ti Malice as "the sharp trickster of Haitian folk-lore," *Tell My Horse*, 82, see also 135.

<sup>182</sup> Hurston describes abuse of animals, especially donkeys, horses, and chickens, in excruciating detail: "The Haitian people are gentle and lovable except for their enormous and unconscious cruelty." Upon inquiry about these practices with Jules Faine, "the first Haitian whom I had noticed who seemed to care about such things," he replied, "Why should these peasants care? . . . No one has ever been tender with them," *Tell My Horse*, 82-83.

associations.”<sup>183</sup> Katherine Dunham clarifies that, in such a secular dance, the *gouillé* serves the function of dissipating grief and other difficult emotions as well as sexual energy, allowing for psychological catharsis within public dances, recordings of which date back to at least the seventeenth century, probably due to the lack of physical privacy afforded most slaves.<sup>184</sup>

Indicating his lack of access to dance performance in the black America of the Harlem Renaissance, Seabrook describes the “Congo dances” as “African in origin, but without a parallel among the negroes in the United States.”<sup>185</sup>

[D]anced to the accompaniment of tom-tom work-drums, rattles, and shrill singing[, t]hey are the universal Saturday night diversion of the peasants both in the mountains and the plain. They are lawful, in no way connected with Voodoo, quite easy to see, and nearly all writers visiting Haiti have seen and written about them.

They are, of course, sexual dances . . . travelers have sometimes imagined they were witnessing Voodoo dances. But the Congo is simply a wild frolic. It is the night club of the jungle.<sup>186</sup>

Thus concludes Seabrook’s fantastical description of time spent at La Gonave under the close supervision of King Wirkus and circumspection of Polynice.

*Eckman Meets Tir nan Og in Marassa and Midnight* (1966). The final three full chapters of the book as ordered by Seabrook, “No White Man Could be as Dumb as That,” “Portrait of a Scientist,” and “Morne la Selle Adventure,” introduce the reader to “Dr. Eckman of the Royal Swedish Scientific Society . . . world’s leading authority on West Indian flora” who may or may not have invited Seabrook to join him in his adventures.<sup>187</sup> In introducing the erratic and nonconformist nature of Eckman, Seabrook provides contrast to others he travels with. He finds

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<sup>183</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 220; he continues, “I should like above all things to have the power of rational detachment in the face of unfamiliar phenomena, and I had seen this sort of dancing before; but as I watched this man it again affected me unpleasantly for a moment. I felt ashamed for him, and ashamed of myself for feeling ashamed . . . civilized men mustn’t do it. Only females may strut their sex publicly and adorn themselves for sex in the civilized human world. It doesn’t make sense, but thus it is,” 221.

<sup>184</sup> On the form and function of various dances and the movements involved see Dunham, *Dances*, Chapters 3 and 6.

<sup>185</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 209.

<sup>186</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 219.

<sup>187</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 239.

himself camping at “forty-five hundred feet above sea-level, on a mountain-circled plateau behind the Morne Rouis ring” with a “prejudiced” ass, Dr. W.W. Cumberland, American Financial Advisor, exercising “absolute control over government financial matters.”<sup>188</sup> Ideas do not change when centuries turn and Seabrook finds himself once again in the uncomfortable seat of white observer of intense racial prejudice. Revisiting the words of Carlyle, “Cumberland, of course, didn’t defend slavery, but he thought negroes were never much good except when directed by whites . . . They can’t look ahead. *I tell you, no white man could be as dumb as that.*”<sup>189</sup> Retrospectively, Seabrook expresses some guilt for his own attitude towards Ti Meminne back at La Gonave.<sup>190</sup> To borrow a term from Chancy, Seabrook’s continual equivocations about race constitute an “impotent dialogue,” that serves to provide “a deceptive appearance of racial and cultural openness.”<sup>191</sup>

Seabrook visits another American, Ash Pay Davis, “authority on Haitian archaeology and history,” following his travels with Cumberland. They photograph archaeological remains, a persistent interest of mine. Seabrook takes the photographs to Davis. Seabrook and Cumberland romantically imagined them the remains of a fancy French Châteaux, possibly occupied by members of the LeClerc-Bonaparte expedition prior to the end of the Revolution. Davis reports,

they are big colonial coffee plantations; I think your immense walls are slave barracks, your sunken gardens drying-floors, your circular fountains decorticators, around which horses revolved, crushing off the hulls, Moreau de Saint Méry . . . mentions that the mountains behind Saint Mar were a great coffee district.<sup>192</sup>

Seabrook contrasts Davis’s educated generous attitude with both Cumberland and a Dr. Robert Parsons, who Seabrook traveled with to see about some sick children in Cornillon in Grand Bois,

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<sup>188</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 226-227.

<sup>189</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 227.

<sup>190</sup> From Seabrook’s perspective, Wirkus’s little kingdom may have offered a respite from the virile nature of some U.S. servicemen, though Wirkus claims to have shot down bandits himself.

<sup>191</sup> Chancy, *Framing Silence*, 55, 59.

<sup>192</sup> Seabrook’s description matches the mill in *White Zombie* with men instead of horses, *Magic Island*, 228.

in the high mountains near the Dominican with “only one hard, narrow trail” leading to it.<sup>193</sup>

Parsons reports, with resentment towards the U.S. and locals, that he was tricked into getting a “dispensary.”<sup>194</sup> Where Cumberland is insensitive to the needs of the Haitian populace, Davis and Parson supply narrative balance.

Continuing to travel with Dr. Parsons to Jacmel, the southernmost seaport in Haiti, they find Dr. Eckman asleep in the corner of a courtyard. He appears decrepit in worn out sandals and turns out quite a character. Eckman as travel guide turns the reader’s attention to the landscape of the island, the focal point and beginning marker for Morna Stuart’s revolutionary interpretative novel, *Marassa and Midnight* (1966).<sup>195</sup> Of native (Asian) Indian extraction and resident of Britain, Stuart brings another voice to the literatures derived of Occupation.<sup>196</sup> With sensitively executed illustrations by Alvin Smith, Stuart clearly sets a different tone though she draws heavily from Seabrook’s descriptions of his geological adventures with Eckman. A sharp-witted reclamation of the Revolution through the eyes of the Occupation, Stuart’s text provides a corrective to many of Seabrook’s admitted injustices in her dramatization of the life of twin slave boys, separated and reconnected by “fate,” named for the relation and time of their birth, respectively. She expertly extracts significant material from the final sections of *The Magic Island* as the backdrop for the novel while avoiding commonly repeated stereotypes, sensationalism, and misguided tropes about Vodou. Stuart never once mentions the word Vodou. Instead she focuses on the character of the *loa* variously named Og, Ogoun, and Ogoun Feraille in her text. Unlike Seabrook, Stuart clearly understands the *loa*’s African origins. “Ogoun was the name of the African God of fire and war upon whom they called to help or avenge their pain.

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<sup>193</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 228.

<sup>194</sup> Because the U.S. was slow in responding to official requests the locals employed their own tactics.

<sup>195</sup> Morna Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, illustrations Alvin Smith, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996 (text), 1967, (illustrations).

<sup>196</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, back flap.

They were sure the God had not abandoned them when they were taken from Africa as slaves.”<sup>197</sup> Where Seabrook clearly equivocates on the origins of the “Voodoo” he so rigorously seeks, Stuart knows “her history book.”<sup>198</sup> Chancy reminds readers, “*This is why you must do the best you can and know where you came from.*”<sup>199</sup> Ogoun presents as a force, manifest initially in a Scotsman modeled on Eckman named Tir nan Og for his home estate, from which he lives in exile due to war between England and Scotland, England and France, and the initiation of the French Revolution.

Tir nan Og first appears to rescue Marassa from attack by a mob of French boys not unlike the Irish mob that attacked Mr. Ellis and the Garies family in Frank J. Webb’s *The Garies and their Friends* (1857), also written in England, but by a free black American. Tir nan Og “running furiously” appears out of nowhere “with a shiver of steel as his sword . . . whorled out of his sheath” to rescue Marassa.<sup>200</sup> Any bit of iron or steel serves as symbol of Ogoun. Like Eckman, Tir nan Og is a skilled, roughish, unkempt adventurer lacking in respect for social caste, class, or prejudice. Unlike Eckman and Seabrook, Tir nan Og is not sexist or racist. Tir nan Og has a soft spot for a woman he once intended to marry who left France for colonial San Domingo. Initially drawn to the island to seek her out, he finds himself enmeshed in the Revolutionary world of the slave boy he found dying and starving on the streets of Paris as his master fled “to escape the guillotine.”<sup>201</sup> Validating that Stuart draws from *The Magic Island*, Marassa recognizes, from his sick bed, the name “of that magic island which the French masters

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<sup>197</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, 12.

<sup>198</sup> Chancy, *Framing Silence*, 48.

<sup>199</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, 20.

<sup>201</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, front flap.



called San Domingo. They did not know the Creole name for it, used by every slave. Marassa spoke its true name silently now in his own mind. Haiti! It means ‘the land of high places’.”<sup>202</sup>

In *The Magic Island*, Seabrook reports that Eckman declines to engage in discourse with a woman regarding the flora and fauna of Haiti. Seabrook relays the following conversation between Eckman and an interested and informed young woman:

Then an individual charmer who fancied herself intellectual tried to draw him out. “You know, I studied botany at Bryn Mawr, and I am so awfully interested in flowers. I wonder, Dr. Eckman, if you would be so kind as to give me the names of some books concerning plant-life here.”

“But, my dear voman [*sic.*],” said Eckman, “botany is a science. How with your silly mind could you hope to understand vat [*sic.*] is in those books? It is impossible.”<sup>203</sup>

Eckman’s purposeful dig at Bryn Mawr College for women must refer to an encounter he and/or Seabrook had with the Balch mission.<sup>204</sup> Stuart remedies the sexism inherent in Seabrook’s text by recuperating what she finds most useful to her literary construction, including rewriting Eckman as Tir nan Og.<sup>205</sup>

Eckman challenges and entices Seabrook to accompany him “to climb Morne La Selle, the highest mountain and most inaccessible mountain in Haiti”— according to modern records only the U.S. Geological Survey had yet reached the summit at 10,000 feet in 1919.<sup>206</sup> For Midnight and Marassa, this mountain is named The King’s Mountain, as they believe their

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<sup>202</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, 17.

<sup>203</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 242.

<sup>204</sup> Helen, in the anonymous author’s marginal notes, must have some affiliation with Bryn Mawr College. I doubt anyone will discover the identity of the anonymous commentator in my copy of the text.

<sup>205</sup> A prior owner of my copy of this text underlined the following: “It is impossible,” and commented in the margins, “Thus far I’ve read with great interest—It makes one think of big things—doesn’t it Helen? Now, though, am laughing, that is, my laughter has ceased temporarily, however, as soon as I recommence reading about Eckman I’ll stop and laugh again—He’s capital! A specimen I should like to meet. N.B. The underlining signifying where I stopped reading in order to wipe my tears,” marginal notes by anonymous reader, original 1929 edition, Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 242.

<sup>206</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 248.

father, a Dahomey king, or at least his ancestral ghost resides there.<sup>207</sup> The King's Mountain "is cut off by a gulf so wide and so deep it cannot be bridged."<sup>208</sup> The better part of Stuart's novel is set in the shadow of this mountain and two others named Dove and Diamond, one each for Marassa and Midnight. Through her subtle narrative of passages, revolution, exile, and return, Stuart works to credit and discredit Seabrook who claims Eckman

promised to show me a manchineel tree, deadliest of all tropical poisons. It looked, he told me, like a stunted apple tree and had little red fruits like small crab-apples. Their juice was a violent caustic poison so deadly that a piece of the fruit no bigger than a small pea produced certain and painful death. When the colonial French first came to Haiti they had made every effort to stamp out this tree and partially succeeded. It was a dangerous weapon in the hands of the slaves.<sup>209</sup>

According to Seabrook, the "sap . . . made little white burns . . . like sulphuric acid, and left tiny sores which were days in healing."<sup>210</sup> Eckman relates the plant not only to slave insurrections but to art. This is

the famous *manzinillo* of Meyerbeer's opera, *L'Africaine*. The two lovers fleeing through the jungle go to sleep in each other's arms beneath a *manzinillo* tree. The dew falls through the branches, and in the morning they are found dead. "And that," sniffed Eckman, "like every poetry, is a lie."<sup>211</sup>

Stuart reveals the lie in Eckman's claim that women are incapable botanists in identifying this red fruit at a fictional maroon encampment. Exiled from the coffee plantation at the foot of The King's Mountain, Midnight finds his existence "a strange, dreamlike life" where he observes a gardener "gathering the strange red fruits which Midnight had tasted by now and found good—they were little, sweet tomatoes."<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, 35.

<sup>208</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, 41.

<sup>209</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 242.

<sup>210</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 243.

<sup>211</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 243; Is Eckman the predecessor for Wade Davis?

<sup>212</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, 143.

At 5,500 feet Eckman's party discovers the "colonial ruins" of Camp Franc, the plantation on which the fictional Midnight and Marassa were born: "They were gigantic European chestnut trees, an avenue of them planted two centuries ago by some rich colonial whose name is forever lost, leading to the ruins of what must have been a superb estate, which we examined later by daylight."<sup>213</sup> The trees running parallel on the avenue mirror the parallel paths Midnight and Marassa pursue in trying to locate each other throughout Stuart's novel. On their return descent Seabrook and friends stopped again at Camp Franc to admire the "relics of the old French colonial habitation."<sup>214</sup> "Here once, in a spot as isolated as it is now, had dwelt salve-owning luxury—that was clear as daylight—but no oral tradition lingered."<sup>215</sup> With "no oral tradition" to rely on Stuart reconstructs the events of the revolution centered around the loss and recovery of Midnight and Marassa to each other in a work of literary *rememory*.

On the way up and down the mountain the Seabrook party stayed at Mamam Lucie's compound.

All Maman Lucie knew was that they called the ruins Magasin, for no reason she could assign. We guessed it was because the only walls still standing, were a circular strong-hold on a slope behind the gardens, which might have been the powder magazine of a fort, but in all probability it had been a storehouse. There were foundations, still traceable, of an extensive villa, overlooking what had been a terraced rose garden, with scattered bushes still blooming there, a plum orchard, and the avenue of huge chestnut trees which led to it along the ridge. There were ruins also of a big circular cistern.<sup>216</sup>

Resting at Maman Lucie's *caille*, Seabrook cannot help but provide an instructive comment on the nudity of the young girl sent to serve him: "The girl [Amelisse], who had a necklace of bones and beads and inevitable *ouanga* strung round her neck on a cord, totally unconscious of her

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<sup>213</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 249.

<sup>214</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 266.

<sup>215</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 266.

<sup>216</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 269.

nudity, was more timidly curious than fearful.”<sup>217</sup> Seabrook believes he has discovered the fabled maroon colonies of colonial days. The women of the maroon community Midnight visits each night in the shadow of The King’s Mountain to acquire food also wear beaded and bone jewelry, “the men carve stones and thread them on twisted cotton to make necklaces for their women.”<sup>218</sup>

Seabrook describes the following encampments of contemporary “maroons,”

Scattered around Camp Franc there were half dozen habitations like Maman Lucie’s. None of the dwellers on this ridge had ever crossed the gorge, but they assured us that people of some sort lived above, because at night they sometimes heard the sound of drums.<sup>219</sup>

In *Marassa and Midnight*, “the Great One” and “Master of the Drums,” a fabled maroon leader with eyes “Red as fire,” lives and keeps his stores of food, weaponry, and drums in these same mountains in preparation for “the Night of the Drums,” where “there will be a drinking of blood and rum and gunpowder, and after that the Great One, the Flame-bearer, will send down the Maroons to us.”<sup>220</sup> Taking advantage of the intense echoes between the high mountain peaks, messages travel quickly when dispensed from the Big Drum at the mountain’s highest point. Situating her text historically within the timeframe of the Haitian Revolution, Stuart draws a parallel with the mythological Boukman of Haitian folklore credited with starting the initial deadly revolts of 1791. Edwidge Danticat provides a fictional rendering of Boukman’s alleged speech as follows in “A Wall of Fire Rising” (1991),

*“A wall of fire is rising and in the ashes, I see the bones of my people. Not only those people whose dark hollow faces I see daily in the fields, but all those souls who have gone ahead to haunt my dreams. At night I relive once more the last caresses from the hand of a loving father, a valiant love, a beloved friend.”*<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 250-25; This site provides the setting for British author, Morna Stuart’s *Marassa and Midnight*, illustrated Alvin Smith, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966/67.

<sup>218</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, 135.

<sup>219</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 252.

<sup>220</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, 63.

<sup>221</sup> Edwidge Danticat, “A Wall of Fire Rising,” *Krik? Krak!* New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1995, 53-80, 56.

Commenting on the ability of white observers such as Seabrook to distort history to serve their own ends, Danticat adds, “It was obvious this was a speech written by a European man, who gave to the slave revolutionary Boukman the kind of European phrasing that might have sent the real Boukman turning in his grave.”<sup>222</sup>

Seabrook claims to find body art reminiscent of African scarification in these remotest parts never before visited by whitemen as he preferred to believe. “Here, for the first time in Haiti I saw tattooed faces of men and women,” which in the footnote Fred Baker reveals “are really ‘burns,’ seen only in the most remote and isolated communities, . . . made with a caustic from the shell of the cashew nut (*Anacardium occidentale*).”<sup>223</sup> Both Midnight and Marassa bear brands from a flat iron. Seabrook provides drawings of brands he sees, describing their meaning. “The first two symbols, I believe, had both a sexual and a serpent significance,” but Seabrook “cannot guess” the meaning of the “heart-shaped one . . . unless it was intended to represent a heart; the fourth and fifth symbols represented perhaps the triple paths and triple circles through which the voodoo *mystères* move;” i.e., the Marassa.<sup>224</sup> Baker clarifies in a footnote that “the heart-shaped mark is the natural outline of the split shell pasted against the cheek,” discrediting some of Seabrook’s other assumptions about their symbolic meaning.<sup>225</sup> For Midnight and Marassa, their brands identify their status as runaway slaves, mirror the bonding of one to the other, and symbolize freedom, as these caustic brands may have for the maroons.

On Seabrook, Eckman, and Parsons’s return to Maman Lucie’s compound Dr. Parsons ably treats:

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<sup>222</sup> Danticat, “Wall of Fire Rising,” 56.

<sup>223</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 253; cashews figure significantly in Nalo Hopkinson’s novel of spiritual seeking in *The New Moon’s Arms*, New York: Warner, 2007.

<sup>224</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 253; While observing a service at Archahaie, Hurston notes, “The next god honored was Aisan who walks with the Marassa, Yumeaux ad Trumeaux and the child who follows the twins which is called the Dossou. They are the gods of the little joined plates that one finds displayed all over Haiti. The full name is Marassas Cinigal (black twins) Dahomey,” *Tell My Horse*, 157.

<sup>225</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 253, 254.

[a] cousin of Old Authority [who] lay on a pallet with a dislocated shoulder, badly swollen Fastened to his arm was a wooden cross, and around his neck a *ouanga* bag of greasy black cloth, the size of a goose-egg filled with *merde-diable* (their name for assafoetida), dried pig-tree leaves, and snake bones. It was an excellent, high-smelling *ouanga*, but is hadn't worked.<sup>226</sup>

Old Authority mirrors Stuart's fictional rendering of Toussaint Louverture in the form of "Papa Doctor," who she describes as a coachman to a kind Beke, short and stocky in stature, a blacksmith and healer, and about middle-aged.<sup>227</sup> Forcing Old Authority's shoulder back into joint with "a light shot of morphine" from Dr. Parson's seemed to do the trick.<sup>228</sup> Papa Doctor as presented by Stuart is an able healer coming to the aid of both Midnight and Marassa, applying salve to their brands and supplying hope and psychological comfort to the separated twins. "There was no poison in [Midnight's] wound, the poison was in himself. Hatred is poison!"<sup>229</sup> Papa Doctor seeks healing for all of the Haitian people regardless of color or class. Stuart relays in her fictional rendering,

Papa Doctor said very seriously, "Master, there must be no great or small among us Negroes, here in Haiti. We are all just men—who have come by Whydah roads. That means people sold as slaves through the port of Whydah in Africa. Whatever they were before that, it is nothing now. We should never forget this. And we should never forget the full name of our god Ogoun, as it was known in the golden time of peace . . . Ogoun Feraille! Ogoun Feraille!"<sup>230</sup>

Rather than divide the country along racial lines like the Great One, Papa Doctor invokes the Ogoun Feraille's healing nature to unite all those worthy of rehabilitating Haiti from the stronghold of colonialism, here symbolized by Stuart's inclusion of Tir nan Og as revolutionary hero.

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<sup>226</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 255.

<sup>227</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, 32.

<sup>228</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 255; Parsons seems to fill the roll of contemporary physician Paul Farmer. See Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti*, and Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights and the New War on the Poor*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005; Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Could Cure the World*, New York: Random House, 2004.

<sup>229</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, 104.

<sup>230</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, 100. Could the Whydah roads be *The Salt Roads* of Nalo Hopkinson's 2005 novel of the birth of the New World Erzulie? See Chapter 6.

In embarking to access the summit of the mountain, “we looked a bit like Stanley starting into the darkest Africa” or so Seabrook fantasized.<sup>231</sup> In spite of his belief that none had traversed the top of the Morne, “an unmistakable footpath, not leading in the direction we were trying to climb, but clinging and winding along the side of the salient, lead . . . up towards the cliffs at the head of the gorge.”<sup>232</sup> Both Midnight and Marassa also find this footpath, Midnight “ought to have guessed from the state of the trail that other people had used it recently.”<sup>233</sup> Unable to traverse the gorge dividing the mountains, Midnight discovers hidden stairs carved within the mountain by earlier inhabitants that lead him to the mountain’s peak. “It must have been these little men,” Midnight describes as “red-brown” with “black hair” that “was long and straight” depicted in “colored pictures and carvings” inside the mountain, “who had made the tunnels and stairs so cleverly under the gully and up inside the King’s Mountain.”<sup>234</sup> In a mystical act of heroic faith, Marassa safely leaps across the gorge to finally reunite with Midnight at the novel’s end. At 7,000 feet, Seabrook and friends found other “old, faint, footpath[s]” leading to the summit at 9,780 feet. Seabrook claims in a footnote:

We inscribed the date, our names, the altitude as registered by the aneroids, enclosed the writing in a metal tube and buried under a pile of stones beside the Geoditic plaque [of 1919], leaving also a heavy staff protruding from the top of the stone mound. On my return to Haiti in February, 1928, Captain Presley and I flew over Morne La Selle, and circling close within fifty feet of the summit, observed the staff and stone mound undisturbed, as we had left them. The figures I give from memory; probably wrong.<sup>235</sup>

Sighting evidence on another peak, “about a hundred yards over,” Seabrook offers that the “table-rock overhanging a cliff” was recently used, a few months before. Haitians and others were there before, within four months according to Dr. Baker upon examination of leftover

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<sup>231</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 259.

<sup>232</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 260.

<sup>233</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, 73.

<sup>234</sup> Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, 142.

<sup>235</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 263-264.

firewood.<sup>236</sup> Seabrook and Eckman, like Midnight and Marassa, had never been as alone in their travels as they perceived.

**The Momentous Return, Vodou Fires Burn in Haiti.** Seabrook's chronological reordering of *The Magic Island* at once deceives the reader and establishes Seabrook and his audience as authorities on a subject he actually knows little about. Approximating about ten percent of the linear time accounted for in the text this reversal assures the reader they will learn all they need to know about "The Voodoo Rights" in the seventy pages dedicated to the subject in the opening of *The Magic Island* and the thirty-nine pages of related endnotes with twenty-eight photos. In the reordering of time Seabrook dismantles, or to use Gregory's term, "undermines" his entire project. Returning from the mountain and not yet achieving his goal of initiation he follows his houseboy, Louis, on a cat-and-mouse chase to the fires and welcoming arms of Maman Célié. As if in a slow motion film, Seabrook moves the reader step-by-step towards the second climatic moment of the text, the first having been the humbling recognition that he was not the first to reach the heights of Morne La Salle, nor would he be the first or the last to find redemption in Vodou, if he actually even found it at all.

*Louis.* In the initial chapter of the text as laid out by Seabrook, "Secret Fires," he introduces simple local practice of Vodou through his houseboy, Louis of Orblanche. "Louis belonged to the chimeric company of saints, monsters, poets and divine idiots. He used to get besotted drunk in a corner, and then would hold long converse with seraphins and demons, also from time to time with his dead grandmother who had been a sorceress."<sup>237</sup> *Chimera* generally implies ghost in Haiti. Seabrook seems to mean that Louis communes with the dead, or imagines he does when drunk, or has already become a half-dead creature reconstructed from

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<sup>236</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 265.

<sup>237</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 7.



dismembered parts, his own pet zombie.<sup>238</sup> Seabrook clearly mistranslates the term in forcing it into the adjectival form. Today, *chimera* refer to political dissidents in the urban slums of Port-au-Prince in the employ of various political interests to maintain control much in the same way *tonton macoutes* functioned during the Duvalier years.<sup>239</sup> In spite of his apparent mental limitations, Louis leads Seabrook from his “bare, humble quarters where a tiny light was burning” to the trail which “ended one night when I knelt at last before the great *Rada* drums, my own forehead marked with blood,” apparently Seabrook’s crowning achievement in Haiti.<sup>240</sup> In spite of the grandeur of Seabrook’s description of his final spiritual destination, in Louis’s introduction of Vodou to Seabrook, he speaks of simpler practices more characteristic of everyday belief. Louis

explained that a *mystère*, a *loi*, which is a god or spirit, had entered the body of a girl who lived in a hut up the ravine behind our house, and that everywhere throughout our neighborhood, in the many straw-thatched huts of the ravine, likewise in the detached servant quarters of the plaster palaces of American majors, and colonels, hundreds of similar little sacred flames were burning.<sup>241</sup>

Seabrook (actually Louis) speaks to the simple and ubiquitous ways Vodou is experienced and acknowledged amongst local peasantry even within the city. One need not travel, but for the sake of secrecy during the Occupation; Seabrook initially finds any other such way for deeper investigation, or “deep penetration” blocked.<sup>242</sup>

Seabrook provides the following definition of “Voodoo in Haiti,” before leading us along his trail of discovery, as

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<sup>238</sup> See chimera, chimeric, and chimerical, dictionary.com. “The truth is a beautiful thing,” Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 91. Ironically, Ishmael Reed uses the phrase “pet zombie” as in, “*No I could be found to become his Talking Android, his pet zombie he could use any way he wanted to undermine Jes Grew.*” *Mumbo Jumbo*, 139.

<sup>239</sup> About *chimera*, see Asger, *Ghosts*; about *tonton macoutes*, see Jac Avila and Vanyoska Gee, ed. and dir., *Krik? Krak? Tales of a Nightmare*, choreography Michael Anderson, John Douglas, and Sandi Sissal, music Juan Marquez and Jean-Calude Martineau, in French and English with English subtitles, Mountain Top Films and ICAC with National Film Board of Canada, 1987, DVD, and Edwidge Danticat, *The Dew Breaker*, New York: Knopf, 2004.

<sup>240</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 11.

<sup>241</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 11-12.

<sup>242</sup> Gregory, “Voodoo, Ethnography,” 171; See Article 49 of the Code Pénal, Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 105.

a profound and vitally alive *religion*—alive as Christianity was in its beginnings and in the early Middle Ages when miracles and mystical illuminations were common everyday occurrences—that Voodoo is primarily and basically a form of worship, and that its magic, its sorcery, its witchcraft (I am speaking technically now), is only a secondary, collateral, sometimes sinisterly twisted by-product of Voodoo as a faith, precisely as the same thing was true in Catholic mediaeval Europe.<sup>243</sup>

With this conflation of history, “The Way is Opened and Closed,” for Seabrook to travel to Louis’s family compound at Orblanche in the Croix-des-Bouquets district of the Cul-de-Sac plain for his initial encounter with Vodou, the same place I went in 2001 to interview artists working in the Haitian metal cut-out sculptural form and the place from which the *cacos* claim to have carried out some of their most brutal massacres against the Marines.<sup>244</sup> Seabrook first encounters a *papaloi* in the form of Louis’s Uncle Dort Dessiles. Local officials, fearing repercussions, put a stop to plans for allowing a banned Voodoo ritual including the white journalist. Article 49 of the Code Pénal imposed by the Occupation government banned such performances at the time.<sup>245</sup>

*Maman Célie*. Undeterred by the suspect legality of his intentions Seabrook pursues his mystical quest witnessing “The Petro Sacrifice” where he finds his introduction to Maman Célie. Seabrook temporarily moves someplace he does not name but regularly repeats is “lost in the high mountains.” In a reconstructed chronology one must ask, did he possibly discover this place while adventuring with Eckman?

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<sup>243</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 12.

<sup>244</sup> See marines at fictional Croix-des-Rosets in Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*.

<sup>245</sup> Article 409 of the criminal code, Code Pénal, reads in English translation: “All makers of ouangas, caprelatas, vaudaux dompedres, macandals [bags, packets, talismans, Voodoo objects of various sorts for who names there is no English equivalent], shall be punished by from three to six months’ imprisonment by the police court, and for repetition of the offense by an imprisonment of six months to two years imposed by the criminal court. Such convictions shall not prevent the infliction of additional severer penalties for more serious crimes committed in this connection. (All dances and other practices of whatsoever sort which are of a nature to foster the spirit of fetichism and superstition among the people shall be considered as sorcery and punished by the same penalties.)” Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 294-5.

So far as the world of urban Port-au-Prince and Americanized Haiti was concerned, I might have been on another planet. Yet I do not wish to exaggerate this isolation. Maman Célie and Papa Théodore had been down there. They still went perhaps once a year. . . . In general, this mountain-enclosed life went on as if no Port-au-Prince existed.<sup>246</sup>

Hidden away from local officials this interstitial space allows Seabrook the obscurity necessary for a white man to engage in “real Voodoo” first-hand and untainted. Here he becomes not a journalist or another simple curiosity seeker eager to return with a simple story but an ethnographer engaging in research that no outsider could find, replicate, or verify. He could clearly have made up this part of his account of Haiti. Since this is what he came for, this account appears at the beginning of his narrative because it is the most important for him to communicate to others. Seabrook brags, “I did it. I found it. Without the help of others, my very own community willing to share its daily Voodoo practices with me,” the pride of his career. He notes the skepticism with which some received his prior text, *Adventures in Arabia Among the Bedouins, Druses, Whirling Dervishes, and Yezidee Devil Worshipers* (1927). In his defense he notes, “But I suffered a hundred untold disappointments and obstacles that had to be deviously circumvented in Arabia. And I feel it best, therefore, to confess that I suffered many similar disappointments in Haiti before I finally reached my goal.”<sup>247</sup> In attempting to authentic his work in Haiti, Seabrook provides us the example of his first failed attempt with Uncle Dort Desilles at Orblanche.

In terms of his agreement with Maman Célie, Seabrook writes,

. . . between Maman Célie and me there was something deeper, which grew. I knew, of course, that she was a *mamaloï*. I knew also that largest building of the habitation, the only one with a locked door, was a *houmfort*. She knew likewise that I was profoundly interested in the religion in which she was an active high priestess. And she also understood quite definitely that I wished to write about it. There was complete candor and confidence between us. She herself could neither

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<sup>246</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 30.

<sup>247</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 27.

read nor write, but she was keenly intelligent and understood clearly what I was and what books were. She understood, furthermore, instinctively, that there was no latent intention of betrayal, that whatever I might write would not be with intent to do them harm. Instinctively she knew whatever might grow tree-like from my interest, its roots were buried in soil common to us both.<sup>248</sup>

Maman Célie could not have known the reach of her influence on future generations of ethnographers, filmmakers, authors, artists, dancers and musicians, but Seabrook seems well aware he has found a gem and that supreme secrecy is required to protect her by not revealing the location of the *caille* as he did in his previous encounter with Dessilles. Here, he attempts to establish himself as an intelligent, trustworthy informant and eye-witness accountant of Vodou practice. Much like the relationship between King Wirkus and Ti Miminne, no outward romantic relationship occurs here between Seabrook and Maman Célie. Maman Célie is married, further authenticating Seabrook's claim of lack of bias in his work. As a proper ethnographer a romantic attachment to Maman Célie would entirely invalidate his narrative. Seabrook provides a photograph of her with a large *rada* drum to validate that she is indeed real and not a fantasy of his imagination. Although Gregory draws parallels between Seabrook and Marlow in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Seabrook is no Kirche.<sup>249</sup> Though Conrad's work is based on his experience as a merchant marine in the Congo, Conrad's work is strictly fictional. Seabrook claims his is not.

His engagement with Maman Célie changes Seabrook's definition of Voodoo. Although aware that, "Words are merely labels, and we do not always explain the inner essence of things by rejecting the old labels and inventing new ones," Seabrook provides further refinement to his

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<sup>248</sup> Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, 31.

<sup>249</sup> See Gregory, "Voodoo, Ethnography," 170.

definition of Voodoo, derived from his experience with Maman Célie, in a footnote dispelling myths about the religion he himself had maintained prior to investigation.<sup>250</sup>

Voodoo is not a secret cult or society in the sense that Freemasonry or the Rosicrucian cult is secret; it is a religion, and secret only as Christianity was secret in the catacombs, through fear of persecution. Like every living religion it has its inner mysteries, but that is secretness in a different sense. It is a religion toward which whites generally have been either scoffers, spiers, or active enemies, and whose adherents, therefore have been forced to practice secrecy, above all where whites were concerned. But there is no fixed rule of their religion pledging them to secrecy, and Maman Célie was abrogating nothing more than a protective custom when she gave me her confidence.<sup>251</sup>

In the following fantastical description of the ceremony for sacrificing a bull, replete with incantations to Legba, Danballah, and Ezilie, initiates performed possession outside as a nature ritual.<sup>252</sup> Seabrook echoes the words of Kelsey, “Voodoo dances of today, therefore, often degenerate into sexual orgies.”<sup>253</sup> In spite of Seabrook’s revisions of the definition of Voodoo he observed what

the literary-traditional white stranger who spied from hiding in the forest would have seen . . . all the wildest tales of Voodoo fiction justified; in the red light of torches which made the moon turn pale, leaping, screaming, writhing black bodied, blood-maddened, sex-maddened, god-maddened, drunken, whirled and danced their dark saturnalia, heads thrown weirdly back as if their necks were broken, white teeth and eyeballs gleaming, while couples seizing one another from time to time fled from the circle, as if pursued by furies, into the forest to share and slake their ecstasy.<sup>254</sup>

Seen from the spiritual and religious angle presented in his revised definition, Seabrook calls on his audience to see these events differently. He provides a photograph of the crowd dressed all in white defying the popular assumptions and descriptions of nudity. He can only guess at what

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<sup>250</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 47.

<sup>251</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 31.

<sup>252</sup> Spellings of the names of the Vodou loas fluctuate throughout the rest of the text. I try to best match them to the most current discourse while staying to true to each authors’ spellings; thus you will see Ogu, Ogoun, Ezili, Erzulie, Danballah, Damballah, Ghede, Guede, Baron Samedi, Bawon Samdi, etc.

<sup>253</sup> Kelsey, “Haiti,” 120, 122.

<sup>254</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 42.

occurs outside of his vision and freely admits his own inebriation at this point in the ritual.<sup>255</sup> The description of the tension of the dance mirrors Hurston's description of Vodou as performed unity of male and female.<sup>256</sup> It also provides a strikingly familiar portrait of possession similar to that in Deren's footage in the film version of *Divine Horsemen* (1977). Sidney Littlefield Kasfir asks if the image of exposed "white teeth and eyeballs gleaming" in Deren's film does not closely resemble carved wooden masks utilized by male dancers in Gelede masquerade performance honoring mothers among the Yoruba of Nigeria and held in African Art collections around the world.<sup>257</sup> Seabrook defends the Haitian performance of saturnalia as not different "from things which occur in our own fashionable and expensive nightclubs, except that they were doing it with the sanction of their gods and doing it more successfully?"<sup>258</sup>

Maman Célié indicates her concern for or about Seabrook in the manufacture and presentation of "The 'Ouanga' Charm." Maman Célié gathers materials to make a charm, packet, or *ouanga* in her dual role as a "sorceress" for his final encounter with her form of Vodou in her *houmfort* and in preparation to send him back to Port-au-Prince with the following contract, "May Papa Legba, Maitresse Ezilée and the Serpent protect me from misrepresenting these people, and give me power to write honestly of their mysterious religion, for all living faiths are sacred."<sup>259</sup> Seabrook admits skepticism about the *ouanga's* ability but cannot deny its import as "the imponderable will-to-protect of a community, so that whatever it was or was not magically, it not only deserved respect but had an actual potency-value as the sacred symbol and earnest of

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<sup>255</sup> Seabrook admits his level of participant observation and his sincere intentions, "Very well: the truth. I drank like the rest, when the bottles were passed my way. I did willingly all else that Maman Célié told me, and now with good appetite stuffed myself with goat flesh and washed down meats with more white rum, and dozed, replete and vastly contented, in the bright sunshine. It was for this I had come to Haiti. It concerned me personally. It justified something in my soul. I cared not if I ever wrote a book," Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 43-44.

<sup>256</sup> See Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 113.

<sup>257</sup> Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, personal communication, Fall 2001.

<sup>258</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 42-43.

<sup>259</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 53.

their protection.”<sup>260</sup> In connection with death-*oaungas* Seabrook notes that “Frazer [in *The Golden Bough*] contends that for magic of this sort to operate fatally without supplementary human agency the victim must *know* and *believe*.”<sup>261</sup> The same must follow for Seabrook’s own meticulously constructed protective *ouanga* though he equivocates about admitting whether he believes in its efficacy.

So there was an additional element beyond anything that could be connected with credulity, superstition, or a belief in supernatural agencies that caused in me this knowledge that Voodoo magic was pragmatically effective, whether for good or evil; that caused me to believe in a definite sense that this bright, protective charm which they were engaged in preparing for me now constituted a real and actual protection.<sup>262</sup>

Was it a protective *ouanga* and who did it serve to protect? Seabrook’s assertion that it placed in him a protective charge over the community of which he would later write about seems clear. But Seabrook committed suicide due to complications of alcoholism on September 10, 1945, following a blighted career.<sup>263</sup>

In relation to the sacrifice of a goat in “Goat-Cry Girl-Cry,” Seabrook provides a photograph, likely associated with the blood-ritual inside Maman Célie’s *houmfort*, Seabrook’s intended goal. “I merely wondered, without worrying—since it is impossible ever to be utterly content—how soon Maman Célie would take me inside her *houmfort*.”<sup>264</sup> Chancy reminds us here that “readers are encoded within the text as female” through Seabrook’s “claims to be controlled by Madame Célie-his pseudo-mother.”<sup>265</sup> Of this ceremony within the *houmfort* Seabrook provides three diagrams of the arrangement of the altar, attendants, and plan of the

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<sup>260</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 49.

<sup>261</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 52.

<sup>263</sup> Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 408.

<sup>264</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 43-44.

<sup>265</sup> Chancy, *Framing Silence*, 55-56.

room including a side room for the sacrificial goat and the sealing of the entrance.<sup>266</sup> He describes art on the interior walls of the *houmfort*.

Its clay walls were elaborately painted with crude serpent symbols and anthropomorphic figures. Papa Legba, guardian of the gates, god of the crossroads, was represented as a venerable old black farmer with a pipe between his teeth; Ogoun Badagris, the bloody warrior, appeared as an old-time Haitian revolutionary general in uniform with a sword; Wangol, master of the land, drove a yoke of oxen; Agoué, master of the seas, puffed out his cheeks to blow a wind and held in his hand a tiny boat; the serpent symbols stood for the great Damballah Oueddo, almighty Jove in the Voodoo pantheon, and his consort Ayida Oueddo.<sup>267</sup>

The fourth and fifth plates of the Appendix provide four photographs of the exterior and interior walls of Maman Célie's *houmfort* verifying his descriptions of the painted *loas*.

Thunderstones appear on the altar.<sup>268</sup> Kameelah L. Martin notes the importance of thunderstones, historically, in the work kits of conjure men and women, like Maman Célie, in *Conjuring Moments in African American Literature: Women, Spirit Work, and Other Such Hoodoo* (2103). In her analysis of Ann Petry's semi-fictional account of the trial of purported witch and conjure woman in Salem, Massachusetts, *Tituba of Salem Village* (1964), Martin finds thunderstones an important multi-functional and practical symbol of embodied spiritual and physical power indicating the deeply syncretic nature of African-derived spiritual practice of which Voodoo, in Seabrook's account, is one.

Tituba's possession of a thunderstone, one of the sacred stones of the orisha Shangó, is the most convincing evidence that Petry privileges an African-based epistemology in her text. Robert Farris Thompson submits that the power of the West African thunder deity "streaks down in meteorites and thunderstones, stones both real and imagined." Thompson goes further to explain that "the ashé of Shàngó is found within a stone, the flaming stone that only he and his brave followers know how to balance unsupported on their heads." In the New World, these stones represent a significant part of the initiation process and "become part

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<sup>266</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 55, 57, and 58.

<sup>267</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 54-55.

<sup>268</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 55.



of the permanent altar of the *iyawo* [or the newly initiated], the primary symbolic medium for presence of orishas in his home and life.”<sup>269</sup>

Thunderstones symbolically also connect African derived practices to Native Arawak and Taino beliefs in Haiti. Maman Célie’s possession of thunderstones on her *houmfort* altar validates Seabrook’s claim of her authenticity as a practitioner and initiator of Vodou in Haiti in 1928 according to definitions provided in Martins’ most-current research and my own. Seabrook declares, “I believe in such ceremonies. I hope that they will never die out or be abolished. I believe that in some form or another they answer a deep need of the universal human soul. I, who in a sense believe in no religion, believe yet in them all, asking only that they be alive—as religions.”<sup>270</sup> Seabrook’s hopes do not go unanswered, as exhibited in this work and that of Martin and many others.

Apparently Seabrook cannot see when he has worn out his welcome. In “The God Incarnate,” he describes the possession of one of Maman Célie’s compound, Raphael, by Ogoun Badagris, who attempts to strangle Seabrook. Apparently, this is his signal to leave the compound and return to other work. Seabrook bids, “farewell, Maman Célie . . . farewell, old priestess of dark mysteries . . . farewell, old mother whom I love . . . I feel your arms around me and your wrinkled cheek wet with tears.”<sup>271</sup> With this he closes his ethnographic account of Vodou practice and, thankfully, bids farewell to Haiti.

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<sup>269</sup> Martin, *Conjuring Moments*, 34; see also Robert Ferris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, New York: Random House, 1983; Ann Petry, *Tituba of Salem Village*, 1964, New York: Harper Trophy, 1991; Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora*, Boston: Beacon P, 1994; and my personal photos of thunderstones in Haiti taken in 2001.

<sup>270</sup> A cynic at heart, Seabrook decries, “Better a back *papaloi* in Haiti with blood-stained hands, who believes in his *living gods* than a frock-coated minister on Fifth Avenue reducing Christ to a solar myth and rationalizing the Immaculate Conception” (Italics mine as they reference the title of Deren’s book and posthumously produced film, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1977); Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 61-62.

<sup>271</sup> Seabrook, *Magic Island*, 77.

## CHAPTER V

KATHERINE DUNHAM (1936 AND BEYOND),

ZORA NEALE HURSTON (1936-37),

AND MAYA DEREN IN (AND OUT OF) HAITI (1947-55)

Wherefore, from Magic I seek assistance,  
 That many a secret perchance I reach  
 Through spirit-power and spirit-speech,  
 And thus the bitter task forego  
 Of saying the things I do not know,—  
 That I might detect the inmost force  
 Which binds the world and guides its course;  
 Its germs, productive powers explore,  
 And rummage in empty words no more!

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Bayard Taylor, Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing, Project Gutenberg, [1890-1] 2005, 154.

The most important part of your equipment is yourself; your mobile body, your imagination, and your freedom to use both. Make sure you do use them.

— Maya Deren, “Amateur Versus Professional,” in *Essential Deren, Collected Writings on Film by Maya Deren*, ed. Bruce R. McPherson, Kingston, New York: Documentext, 2005, 18.

When I went to Haiti in 2001, my ethnographic intentions were much different from others but not my techniques. I interviewed and gathered information from multiple generations of sculptors at workshops in Croix-des-Bouquets. I did not intentionally look for Vodou as so many inspired to follow in the wake of Seabrook did. I had seen enough and heard enough about Vodou and wanted to meet the artists responsible for my favorite form of Haitian art. The culmination of my subsequent analysis of every published example of the Haitian metal cut-out form revealed what I found true in the explanations the artists conveyed to me personally.

Winzor Gouin tells prospective buyers what the subject of a work is based on his assessment of the buyer's expectations. If the buyer wants a Vodou subject he tells them it is; if they want Bible scenes he tells them that the same work is just that. In both cases, he tells the truth. He describes broad subjects, but is unlikely to provide more detail.<sup>1</sup> Haitian artists work with many idioms from the secular life of lived experience, to folklore, to religion—be it Vodou or Christianity. Their works are gently inflected with political allegory and commentary presenting a range of subject matter imbued with subtle but humorous puns about the dependent and independent state of Haiti as a nation and individuals as participants in local and national affairs. Other literature and creative art forms also deserve a multi-layered reading not limited to quaint idyllic scenes of nature or strictly to a Vodou interpretation. The research I conducted then informs my current project in that I remain hesitant to reify fantastical descriptions of Vodou. I witnessed none of what Seabrook did—no blood rites, no saturnalias, no naked writhing bodies.<sup>2</sup> I did witness hard working people, like myself, negotiating shifting terrains of cultural identity in a search for economic solvency.

Putting politics aside, I did not realize the state of the nation before I arrived in Haiti nor did I while there. Only in reading Michael Deibert's *Notes from the Last Testament: The Struggle for Haiti* in 2005 did I realize the true nature of the physical danger I put myself in as a student ethnographer at the time.<sup>3</sup> I expect this is best. I did not rough it in Haiti. I stayed at the

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<sup>1</sup> Stevens, *Zonbis, Zobop, and Zanj*, 74.

<sup>2</sup> The only place I have witnessed that is at neo-pagan festivals in the U.S. where participants perform rituals they believe drawn from occult practice, pre-Christian harvest rites, and presumably New Orleans-style Voodoo; Margot Adler explains that at these events “nudity has more to do with freedom than sexuality. People’s bodies just were. The fat, the thin, the old, the young—sagging bellies, wrinkles, protruding veins—all were accepted and none of this was the measure of one’s worth. No one had a perfect body. Everyone had blemishes and imperfections, and sitting among all these variations, it was possible to exult in the amazing discovery that no one cared. There was something extraordinary about discussing life, spirituality, and politics, with ten or twelve people while completely in the nude. Many of the prejudices I had held for years against my own form melted away,” *Heretic’s Heart: A Journey through Spirit and Revolution*, New York: Beacon, 1997, 162.

<sup>3</sup> See Michael Deibert, *Notes from the Last Testament: The Struggle for Haiti*. New York: Seven Stories, 2005.

now-leveled Hotel Montana and hired a driver, Jean-Claude, to take me out to a new destination each morning including tourist shops, the cemetery at Port-au-Prince, workshops at Croix-des-Bouquets, the revolutionary monuments on the Champs de Mars, the studio of Vodou sequin-flag maker Joseph Silva in Belair, and Le Marche de Fer to negotiate and translate for me. He maneuvered around gun checkpoints telling me to hide my camera and soliciting the funds necessary for successful passage unharmed as necessary. Katherine Dunham, Zora Neale Hurston, and Maya Deren traveled in the relative safety of the shadow of the Occupation. Their experience of Haiti did not include AK-47s patrolling the hotel pool at night. Mine did. Every traveler, student, ethnographer, or researcher who visits Haiti at any given point in time finds a different place. Haiti changes as the world changes. Each of the previous chapters illustrates to some degree those shifting temporal perspectives and notions of place and culture.

**Introduction.** Katherine Dunham and Zora Neale Hurston found themselves on the ground in Haiti in 1936 immediately following withdrawal of Occupation troops, introduction letters in hand from Melville Herskovits and Franz Boas, respectively, funded by Rosenwald and Guggenheim Fellowships, respectively, with contributions from various private personages with vested interests in their research, including the generous support of friends discovered upon arrival, friendships forged and earned amongst Haitian peasants and elite alike.<sup>4</sup> Although both visited various islands before settling their ethnographic eye specifically on Haiti and were on the ground in Haiti during overlapping periods in 1936 and 1937, neither directly interacted with the other nor mentions any such interaction in their accounts of their research. Often times they consulted the same resources in the U.S. and in Haiti but as far as can be told they did not

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<sup>4</sup> See Gwendolyn Mikell, "Feminism and Black Culture in the Ethnography of Zora Neale Hurston," and Joyce Aschenbrenner, "Katherine Dunham: Anthropologist, Artist, Humanist," both in *African American Pioneers in Anthropology*, eds. Ira E. and Faye V. Harrison, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999, 37-50, 137-153.

encounter each other or directly avoided such interactions as might color one or the other's research.

Very little direct communication between the two ethnographers appears in any other published sources either, though their works establish a textual and performative conversation worthy of extended consideration. As late as 1947 Hurston reviewed *Katherine Dunham's Journey to Accompong*, which did not appear in print itself until 1946.<sup>5</sup> Both spent time in Jamaica in 1936. Both traveled and collected data in similar circles there. Hurston found Dunham's text, "very readable," but she did not like the illustrations. The human figures in Ted Cook's illustrations appeared to Hurston as caricature. As she described them, they exhibited "the eternally overdeveloped buttocks, the over-long and skinny arms, [and] the lack of human expression in the face," characteristic of other representations of the time.<sup>6</sup> A certain tension appears to arise when comparing this review to private letters written by Hurston to her benefactors and friends. In a letter addressed to Herskovits in 1936, from Jamaica, Hurston writes, "Dunham had been here last year carrying out the program that I had mapped out for the Rosenwald gang. I can afford to laugh at them, but their littleness is astounding."<sup>7</sup> Hurston adds similar remarks regarding Dunham in another letter to Herskovits in 1937 after she traveled to Haiti, "I have nothing against her and could in no way be jealous of her work."<sup>8</sup>

Conflict appears to arise over competition for funding and academic supervisory support from overlapping sources. Hurston reiterates in this second letter, "I had more experience in the field than she," which was true. Hurston published her account of folklore in the south, *Mules*

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<sup>5</sup>Katherine Dunham, *Katherine Dunham's Journey to Accompong*, introduction Ralph Linton, illustrated Proctor Fyffe Cook, New York: Henry Holt, 1946, Reprint, Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press, 1971; see Zora Neale Hurston, "Thirty Days among the Maroons," review of *Journey to Accompong* by Katherine Dunham, *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Report*, 12 January 1947, reprinted in Clark and Johnson, eds., *Kaiso!*, 272-273.

<sup>6</sup> Clark and Johnson, eds., *Kaiso!*, 273.

<sup>7</sup> Kaplan, *Zora: A Life in Letters*, 384.

<sup>8</sup> Kaplan, *Zora: A Life in Letters*, 399.

*and Men*, in 1935.<sup>9</sup> According to Sandi Russell, the “seventy-two folktales within the text . . . display the complex communication systems set up by an oppressed, inventive people,” establishing Hurston not only as able collector but as complicit subject in her own narrative creations.<sup>10</sup> Hurston’s prior ethnographic, performative, and literary production would prove a hard act to follow.<sup>11</sup> Dunham’s Caribbean tour did serve as her first truly ethnographic experience. Carla Kaplan describes a certain productive rivalry between the two; Hurston had other friends who were “anthropologists who specialized in dance, such as . . . Jane Belo and Katherine Mershon,” who with “her rival, Katherine Dunham” mutually founded “influential dance schools.”<sup>12</sup> Hurston shared Dunham’s interest in performance. Not a dancer herself, Hurston “wrote of the angularity of the black dancer” as she continued to push oratory of folktales and song onto the American stage in spite of inadequate funding.<sup>13</sup>

Both Dunham and Hurston were drawn to Haiti by William Seabrook’s account of life in Haiti under the Occupation, *The Magic Island* (1929). The Occupation ended with the withdrawal of U.S. Marines in 1934, five years after the release of Seabrook’s text to U.S. American audiences and after sustained and aggressive documentation of the abuses of the Occupation as reported in sources as credible as James Weldon Johnson in his four-part series, “Self-Determining Haiti,” published in *The Nation* in 1920, and the Emily G. Balch team, who published their report, *Occupied Haiti*, in 1926. Universal Newsreels announced the return of U.S. Marines from Haiti to American audiences on theater screens on August 22, 1934,

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<sup>9</sup> Kaplan, *Zora: A Life in Letters*, 400.

<sup>10</sup> Sandi Russell, *Render Me My Song: African-American Women Writers from Slavery to the Present*, New York: St. Martins Press, 39.

<sup>11</sup> As well as *Mules and Men* (1935), staging of oratory and “real” African-American singing, Hurston had already written her first novel *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* (1934) steeped in the her Southern experience prior to her Haitian studies; see Russell, *Render Me My Song*; Zora Neale Hurston, *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, New York: Harper Perennial, 1934; Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1935.

<sup>12</sup> Kaplan, *Zora: A Life in Letters*, 169.

<sup>13</sup> Russell, *Render Me My Song*, 39; Kaplan, *Zora: A Life in Letters*, 405, 412.

following coverage of sustained *caco* resistance, December 11, 1929.<sup>14</sup> Recognizing that the U.S. might have overstayed its welcome in Haiti, the U.S. brought the Marines home, leaving the gendarmerie and a semi-functional democracy under the leadership of President Stenio Vincent (1934-1941) in place. Under the Occupation guard two black American female ethnographers traveling on their own may not have been welcomed within the racially and socially antagonistic milieu created by mounting tensions between U.S. and local officials. With the Occupation forces out of the way, these two ambitious women set their sights on scholarly study in the Caribbean. Hurston already had an established career as collector of folklore and Dunham was already performing dance on the American stage.<sup>15</sup> Both were ready when the opportunity availed to set sail for the Caribbean. This opportunity came with the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

Following the academic paths of Dunham and Hurston requires careful attention to the details of their careers. Dunham was on the ground first in Haiti. Hurston followed shortly. Both competed for the attention of anthropologist Melville Herskovits and for funding from some of the same sources. Herskovits had traveled to Haiti during the Occupation and published his findings in *Life in a Haitian Valley* in 1932.<sup>16</sup> Hurston regarded Herskovits above all other prior ethnographers in higher esteem because he alone had written about the “Secte Rouge, Cochon Gris, and Vinbrindingue” (secret societies) whose tales and exploits haunt many of her peasant informers and at least one of her employees at the time of her studies, “the people who have written about it, with one exception, that of Dr. Melville Herskovits, have not known the first

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<sup>14</sup> “Hoover Rushes Marines to Quell Haiti Riots,” *The Talk of the World*, Universal Newspaper Newsreels 99 (11 Dec. 1929), Maryland: National Archives, Alexander Street Video, 2013; “Marines Back from Haiti,” Universal Newspaper Newsreels 241 (16 April 1934), Universal Pictures Company, 1934, Alexander Street Video, 2013; “Marines Back from Haiti,” Universal Newspaper Newsreels 278 (24 August 1934), Universal Pictures Company, 1934, Alexander Street Video, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> See Mikell, “Feminism and Black Culture,” and Aschenbrenner, “Katherine Dunham: Anthropologist.”

<sup>16</sup> The Guggenheim committee further offered a Fellowship to Melville Herskovits to conduct more research in Haiti from 1937 to 1938 following on the heels of Dunham and Hurston, Kaplan, *Zora: A Life in Letters*, 399 fn1.

things about it.”<sup>17</sup> Dunham found her academic home under the supervision of Herskovits where she pursued a degree in Anthropology at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois (a suburb of Chicago). Hurston found her academic home at Barnard College of Columbia University under the tutelage of Franz Boas. With references from Herskovits Dunham secured a Rosenwald Fellowship and with Franz Boas’s support Hurston secured a Guggenheim Fellowship. Both directors were of a similar mind in sending the two women to the Caribbean to collect data supporting the connections of spiritual and cultural practice in Haiti to African origins. Both Dunham and Hurston were influenced by a rising interest in the African heritage of American Negroes popularized by Alain Locke’s seminal text of the Harlem Renaissance, *The New Negro* (1925).<sup>18</sup> Both spent time in Jamaica before arriving in Haiti. Both were able ethnographers welcomed in Haiti but faced difficulties in pursuing academic careers back home. Something in Haiti changed them, or brought out strengths in each that defied the patriarchal and rigid strictures of anthropological practice in the U.S. American academy at the time. Neither completed a Ph.D. but each contributed substantially to the body of ethnographic textual work through popular media.<sup>19</sup> For each a significant contribution to that body of work is their artistic output.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 204, 216.

<sup>18</sup> Locke included Hurston’s short story “Spunk” as the only woman represented in the fiction section; Alain Locke, *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, Introduced by Arnold Rampersad, New York: Atheneum, [1925] 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Previous summary compiled from Joyce Aschenbrenner, “Katherine Dunham: Anthropologist, Artist, Humanist,” and Gwendolyn Mikell, “Feminism and Black Culture in the Ethnography of Zora Neale Hurston,” both in *African American Pioneers in Anthropology*, eds. Ira E. and Faye V. Harrison, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999, 137-153, 37-50. Harrison and Harrison place Hurston first chronologically. I place Dunham first here because she was in Haiti first, consistent with this subject. Although the *Journal of Black Studies* states Dunham “received her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago,” Clark and Johnson found, “University of Chicago records show that Katherine Dunham was awarded a Ph.B. (bachelor of philosophy degree) in 1936. Her major field of study is shown as social anthropology,” eds., *Kaiso!*, 309 fn4. They add that the material drawn from her thesis, presented in various formats from 1947 to 1985, appearing as “an analysis of forms and functions of native dances of Haiti . . . [was] submitted to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago in 1937 or 1938. She never completed the requirements for her master’s degree, choosing instead to give her time and energies to a performing career,” Clark and Johnson, eds., *Kaiso!*, 309 fn5. Dunham notes the internal conflict she felt between “science and



In addition to Dunham and Hurston, a third female ethnographer appears here due to her substantial contributions to performative ethnography and her personal interest in Haiti. Maya Deren traveled to Haiti a decade after Dunham and Hurston. Beginning in 1947 and continuing off and on through 1955, Deren spent twenty-one months there.<sup>21</sup> In 1940 and 1941, Deren served as Dunham's technical assistant.<sup>22</sup> In this capacity she had access to Dunham's research material. Although Deren had no personal relation with Hurston, she too traveled to Haiti with the support of a Guggenheim Fellowship, but under the guidance of Joseph Campbell, professor of comparative religion at Sarah Lawrence College. By this time Deren was no longer a student but a filmmaker; though she never intended to pursue a Ph.D., her work resulted in comprehensive textual, aural, and video documentation of Vodou informed by the productively competitive relationship between Dunham and Hurston.

Connected to each other by a personal interest in Haiti and in varying responses to Seabrook, collectively the ethnographic textual and artistic production of these three women following the U.S. Occupation of Haiti comprises the most viable and comprehensive catalog of Haitian Vodou available prior to the efflorescence of the Haitian Popular Arts Movement, which began in 1944.<sup>23</sup> Here, I provide an investigation into a creative dialog between these three influential women, whose investigative techniques were born of similar grounds, who surrendered to the creative impulse in representing their material, and who continue to influence

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art," between "anthropology and the dance," in *Island Possessed*, "I had not been able to make up my mind to separate the two callings and haven't yet," 10.

<sup>20</sup> "Caught up in 'Barnardese,' Zora's first attempts at collection in Florida were difficult. Zora the artist and Zora the scientist proved to be at odds. Boas wanted scientific fact, yet how could this be done when the basis of oral tradition was fiction?" Russell, *Render Me My Song*, 37.

<sup>21</sup> Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, foreword Joseph Campbell, Kingston, New York: Documentext, 1953, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Bruce R. McPherson, ed., *Essential Deren: Collected Writings on Film by Maya Deren*, Kingston, New York: Documentext, 2005, 8.

<sup>23</sup> See Jontyle Theresa Robinson, *A History of the Haitian Popular Art Movement, 1944 to 1972*, unpub. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1983.

contemporary perspectives on Vodou. Their compiled work comprises the most comprehensive and sustained dialog on Vodou to this date and would not have occurred had each not encountered the stereotypes imposed by Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929). In a real act of ethnographic subversion Dunham, Hurston, and Deren's body of work taken as a whole performs work that has yet to be surpassed in the field of Haitian and Vodou studies outside of Haiti itself. My argument disrupts prevailing myths of white privilege within the academy, undermining assumptions that only pure ethnographic work as outlined by strict academic prescriptions can accomplish the task of reclaiming culture.

**Connecting Threads of an Ethnographic Triumvirate.** I am not an initiate in Vodou. Dunham was.<sup>24</sup> Hurston began her initiation process during her fieldwork for *Mules and Men* (1935) in the New Orleans, Louisiana, tradition and made preparations for and continued that in Haiti.<sup>25</sup> Deren never formally sought initiation into Vodou but was regularly possessed by the *loa* associated with love, *Erzulie*, while observing, participating in, recording, and filming Vodou rites in Haiti.<sup>26</sup> Each is qualified to speak to her own experience and does so in ethnographic form. In a reordering of time, consistent with the intent of each reporter, Hurston published her account first in *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938).<sup>27</sup> Dunham published her thesis material originally in Mexico as "Las Danzas des Haiti" in 1947.<sup>28</sup> Deren published *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* in 1953.<sup>29</sup> Dunham responded to Hurston and Deren providing a full accounting of her initiation and time in Haiti in *Island Possessed* in 1969.<sup>30</sup> Dunham's thesis material in its full form made it to American audiences in 1983 as

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<sup>24</sup> See Dunham, *Island Possessed* for detailed description of her initiation to Damballa, 58-140.

<sup>25</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 231.

<sup>26</sup> Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, 323.

<sup>27</sup> See Hurston, *Tell My Horse*.

<sup>28</sup> In Spanish, see Katherine Dunham, "Las Danzas de Haiti," *Acta Anthropologica* II:4 (1947).

<sup>29</sup> See Deren, *Divine Horsemen*.

<sup>30</sup> See Dunham, *Island Possessed*.

*Dances of Haiti*, following translation from Spanish into French as *Les Danses d'Haiti* in 1953.<sup>31</sup> Excerpts from that text reappeared in 1985 in *The Journal of Black Studies*.<sup>32</sup>

Because of the tangled history of the ethnographic reports of Dunham, Hurston, and Deren, it did indeed appear to American audiences that Hurston was in Haiti first. In fact, Dunham was. Dunham was also in Jamaica prior to Hurston. Hurston included her account of time spent in Jamaica in 1936 as the first third of *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* in 1938, while Dunham published her ethnographic account of her time in Jamaica in 1936 as *Katherine Dunham's Journey to Accompong* ten years later in 1946. Dunham published her work about Jamaica separately; Hurston considered her Jamaican account integral to her understanding of Haiti working the two accounts together into one text.<sup>33</sup> Because Dunham and Hurston were in Jamaica in the same year, the *New York World Herald Tribune* invited Hurston to review *Journey to Accompong*; Hurston's review appeared in 1947.<sup>34</sup> Deren had access to both Hurston's published work and much of Dunham's unpublished work in 1940 and 1941 while she worked as Dunham's assistant helping her to compile her research materials, directly observing dances Dunham choreographed based on that material, and negotiating and facilitating the arrangement for those performances on stages across America and eventually helping to bring that material to Hollywood film.

While both Dunham and Hurston were indirectly and directly lead to Haiti by Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929), Deren had direct access to Seabrook himself working as a freelance

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<sup>31</sup> Katherine Dunham, *Dances of Haiti*, Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California-Los Angeles, 1983; in French, see Katherine Dunham, *Les Danses d'Haiti*, Paris: Fasquel Press, 1957.

<sup>32</sup> Katherine Dunham, "Excerpts from the *Dances of Haiti*: Function," *Journal of Black Studies* 15.4 (June 1985): 357-379. Reprinted by permission of the author and publisher from Katherine Dunham, *Dances of Haiti*, Los Angeles, UCLA Center for Afro-American Studies, 1983, 41-57.

<sup>33</sup> Russell, *Render Me My Song*, 42.

<sup>34</sup> Hurston, "Thirty Days among the Maroons," 272-273.

writer, ghostwriting much of his *Witchcraft, its Power in the World Today* (1941).<sup>35</sup> That relationship ended dramatically in 1940 with what Deren's biographers call the Rhinebeck Episode driving her to seek out Dunham.<sup>36</sup> Posthumously, Cherel and Teiji Ito compiled and presented to the public a small portion of Deren's ethnographic footage of Haiti, also titled *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* in 1985, coinciding with the final presentation of Dunham's textual work in the American academic press.<sup>37</sup>

The problem presented by the chronological production of the research materials of each of these women's work becomes who to address first and how to address the productive tensions between Dunham and Hurston and Dunham and Deren in a coherent narrative. The problem is further complicated by the appearance of the artistic production of each woman. Initially Dunham chooses not to publish her printed work. Instead she finds the most expedient way to present her material to her audience is to perform it. She translates her research into kinesthetic form via choreography. Her dances influenced by her Caribbean experience first appear on the stage "in New York City as part of *A Negro Dance Evening*" in 1937, the same year Hurston releases her creative literary effort, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.<sup>38</sup> Hurston wrote the novel during a seven-week period in Haiti in November and December of 1936.<sup>39</sup> Following her work as Dunham's assistant, Deren began releasing experimental art house films based on Dunham's dance performances and research materials beginning in 1943 with *Meshes of the Afternoon*, four years before she actually recorded her own Haitian ethnographic work.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> William B. Seabrook, *Witchcraft, its Power in the World Today*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. London: Harrap, 1941.

<sup>36</sup> Clark, Hodson and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 414.

<sup>37</sup> Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, compilers Cherel and Teiji Ito, Mystic Fire Video, 1985, VHS; see Dunham, "Excerpts from the *Dances of Haiti*," 1985.

<sup>38</sup> Clark and Johnson, eds., *Kaiso!*, xvii; Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, New York: Harper & Row, [1937] 1990.

<sup>39</sup> Kaplan, *Zora: A Life in Letters*, 398 fn1.

<sup>40</sup> McPherson, ed., *Essential Deren*, 259.

All three women were conspicuously aware of the delicacy of their materials and the expediency with which they needed to reach their American audiences, ripe for such literary, performative, and artistic production in the post-Freudian emerging moments of modernism and negritude. All three pushed their creative endeavors born of their realization of the benefits of their exposure to the Haitian material ahead of their textual ethnographic productions. If Dunham's initial choreographies appeared thirty-two years prior to *Island Possessed*, Hurston's *Their Eyes* appeared a year before *Tell My Horse*, and Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* appeared ten years before the textual version of *Divine Horsemen*, where indeed does a scholarly analysis of this web of ethnographic and artistic production begin? Which came first and does it matter? And to whom? If one considers the impact these works had on American audiences, especially in terms of how they fired the artistic, literary, and scholarly ambitions of others (including Haitians), then the logical order in which to present the works is the order in which the imagined audience may have received them.

In this case we must begin with Dunham's solo presentation at the Rex Theater in Port-au-Prince in 1936 towards the end of her initial studies in Haiti. She performed interpretations of dances written by others, inflected with movements acquired through her studies, and appeared in costumes designed by herself and fabricated by Haitian artisans. Her choreographies of De Falla's *Fire Dance*, Carmen Brouard's "Gypsy Dance from the operetta *Countess Maritza*," "a Chopin etude," Villa-Lobos' *Saudades do Brasil*, and Ernesto Lecuona's *Malaguena* were well received by a Haitian elite audience that included Jean Price-Mars and his wife.<sup>41</sup> Following much anxiety about her "assault on bourgeois Port-au-Prince," whom she did not feel would welcome her Vodou re-presentations of classic works, Dunham wrote, "after the article by René

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<sup>41</sup> Dunham, *Island Possessed*, 145-154.

Piquion in the morning paper [*La Nouvelliste*] I knew that my position was no longer ambiguous, that my nonconformist behavior would be attributed to my artistic temperament.”<sup>42</sup>

Back in America, Dunham faced similar anxieties as she performed *A Negro Dance Evening* in New York in 1937, at the same time that Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* appeared. Dunham presented her first full-length ballet based on her Caribbean experience, *L’Ag’ya*, and *Tropics* in Chicago in 1938. Similar audiences read Hurston’s *Tell My Horse* (1938) as viewed the Dunham Dance Company’s initial efforts. In addition to Dunham’s first film appearance in *Carnival of Rhythm* (1939), the Company toured America beginning with *Tropics* and *Le Jazz Hot* in New York in the same year. In 1940 the Company picked up *Cabin in the Sky* on Broadway and carried it through to its Hollywood production in 1941. They immediately, nationally toured *Tropical Revue* until 1945. In the midst of this flurry of choreographic production, the Company made their second Hollywood appearance as a group, and Dunham made her third as an individual, in *Stormy Weather* (1943).<sup>43</sup>

In such a chronological analysis of the visual and literary material culture produced by these three women, Deren’s *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) and subsequent experimental films produced prior to and following her research in Haiti would be considered next. Deren’s textual account *Divine Horsemen* (1953) would precede evaluation of Dunham’s textual accounts, *Island Possessed* (1969) and *The Dances of Haiti* (1983), followed by Deren’s posthumously produced film *Divine Horsemen* (1985) alongside the excerpts of Dunham’s “Dances of Haiti” that appeared in the same year in *The Journal of Black Studies*. Hurston died in 1960, twenty-three years after the appearance of *Their Eyes*; Deren in 1961, eight years after the text *Divine*

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<sup>42</sup> Dunham, *Island Possessed*, 154, 155.

<sup>43</sup> Dunham chronology developed from Clark and Johnson, eds., *Kaiso!*, xvii-xviii.

*Horsemen* appeared; and Dunham in 2006, seventy years after her first encounter with Haiti. Dunham maintained a sustained interest in Haiti until her death.

Following a strict analysis of the works as chronologically presented to American audiences makes logical sense but in the interest of performing scholarly work along those lines I seriously risk losing my audience. Rather than get lost in this highly productive web of creative and scientific production, I offer to guide the reader through the significant elements of each woman artist/ethnographer's production in discrete categories, noting that each of Dunham, Hurston, and Deren presented their creative work resulting from their engagement with Haiti prior to their ethnographic work. This is not insignificant in supporting my argument that each perceived that their artistic work would undeniably have a deeper reach into the present and future imaginations of popular consuming audiences than would their ethnographic productions alone. Working in tandem, the ethnographic works support the validity of each artistic endeavor, and vice versa. Each privileged the artistic over the ethnographic though none could have accomplished the heroic tasks of their artistic work without the buffeting substantiation of their scholarly endeavors.

**Katherine Dunham (1935-1936, and ongoing).** Dunham presents the results of her research in textual form initially in Mexico in "Las Danzas de Haiti" in Spanish and English in 1947. The text was reproduced in France as *Les Danses d'Haiti* in 1957, with a foreword added by Claude Levi-Strauss.<sup>44</sup> Not only do Herskovits and Price-Mars endorse her work, Dunham adds Levi-Strauss to her list of admirers. Finally, a revised edition of the previous versions appears in America in 1983 as *Dances of Haiti*.<sup>45</sup> The first full-length textual presentation of

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<sup>44</sup> See Dunham, "Las Danzas de Haiti," and, *Les Danses d'Haiti*.

<sup>45</sup> See Dunham, *Dances*. I work from this text and have not compared the American release to the French or Spanish.

Dunham's research in Haiti did not appear until 1969, with the debut of *Island Possessed*.<sup>46</sup> Later in life, later in her career, Dunham found the time and the desire to add her comments to the emerging field of Haitian studies for American audiences. She published her research on Jamaica separately in *Katherine Dunham's Journey to Accompong* in 1946, and an autobiography, *Touched by Innocence*, in 1959.<sup>47</sup> Like Hurston, she spent time in Jamaica, specifically amongst maroon communities established during and continuously maintained since slavery there.<sup>48</sup>

In Levi-Strauss's forward to the French edition of Dunham's thesis about her original fieldwork in Haiti, *Les Danses d'Haiti*, published in 1957, he writes, "Haiti and Haitian subjects are the order of the day."<sup>49</sup> This has held true since the U.S. American intervention in 1915 and proceeded through the Haitian Arts Renaissance or Popular Arts Movement beginning in 1944. By the time Levi-Strauss got on board in support of Dunham's achievements she had already toured much of the world illustrating the physicality of that work on the dance stage. She had yet to tour Australia, New Zealand, or Japan, but had reached Europe and the Americas, establishing the Dunham Dance Company and influencing generations of performers, dance educators, and choreographers throughout most of the Western world. Dunham achieved her fame and presented the intellectual fruits of her Haitian pursuits through performative movement of the body. By the time Levi-Strauss wrote this introduction, Deren had completed the textual version of *Divine Horsemen*. Both Hurston (1960) and Deren (1961) passed away more than forty years

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<sup>46</sup> See Dunham, *Island Possessed*.

<sup>47</sup> See Katherine Dunham, *Katherine Dunham's Journey to Accompong*, introduction Ralph Linton, illustrated Proctor Fyffe Cook, New York: Henry Holt, 1946, Reprint, Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press, 1971; Katherine Dunham, *Touch of Innocence, Memoirs of Childhood*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959.

<sup>48</sup> "In 1936, there were upwards of a thousand people in the Maroons' mountain settlement living in a sort of tribal fashion under their head, who wears the title of colonel. The settlement has been there for around three hundred years. Its origin is a product of phases of African slavery in the West Indies. First under the Spanish, then the British. The Maroons were ex-slaves who either ran away to the all-but-inaccessible retreat of the mountain or fought their way free and joined the others," Hurston, "Thirty Days among the Maroons," reprinted in Clark and Johnson, eds., *Kaiso!*, 272-273, 273.

<sup>49</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, preface, trans. Jeanelle Stovall, in Dunham, *Dances*, xv.



prior to Dunham. Dunham carried the tradition into the twenty-first century continuing in her role as activist educator of atavistic dance through the end of her life in 2006.<sup>50</sup>

Instead of using Deren's photographs, Dunham illustrated her U.S. publication of *Dances of Haiti* (1983) with ten contemporary photographs by Patricia Cummings and four *vévé* drawings from Milo Rigaud's *Ve-ve Diagrammes Rituels du Voudou*.<sup>51</sup> Dunham originally published her thesis material, "Las Danzas de Haiti," in *Acta Anthropologica* II:4 in Mexico in Spanish and English in 1947 and a decade later in French as *Les Danses d'Haiti*.<sup>52</sup> The foreword by Levi-Straus, translated by Jeanelle Stovall in the U.S. edition, first appeared in the French edition. Dunham revised the 1983 U.S. publication, reflected most extensively in the preface, noting changes in the dances she observed over time in Haiti. She provides a useful glossary as appendix and minimal notes with no bibliography or index. The publisher systematized creole terms throughout.

Levi-Straus reflected on Dunham's already established career of performative ethnography, an entirely new and emergent field founded by Dunham herself, which she later taught as a course in "dance anthropology" at Southern Illinois University in East St. Louis.<sup>53</sup> For Levi-Straus, Dunham's work shows

how a culture, doubly transplanted (a culture transported from Africa onto American soil, imbued in its new dwelling place with a religion and philosophy originating in Europe, especially in France) has proven capable of retaining its

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<sup>50</sup> Katherine Dunham, Memorial Auditorium, Louisville, Kentucky, on 19 October 1944, in Vévé A. Clark and Sara E. Johnson, *Kaiso! Writings by and about Katherine Dunham*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, 255; Aschenbrenner, "Katherine Dunham," 147.

<sup>51</sup> Milo Rigaud, *Ve-ve Diagrammes Rituels du Voudou*, trilingual ed., New York: French and European Publications, 1974; see Milo Rigaud, *Secrets of Voodoo*, New York: Arco Publishing, 1969; reprint, San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1985; and Karen McCarthy Brown, "The Vèvé of Haitian Vodou: A Structural Analysis of Visual Imagery," Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, Xerox University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, MI, 1976. Rigaud's English edition and Brown's dissertation provide details of meaning for each *vévé*.

<sup>52</sup> In French, see Katherine Dunham, *Les Danses d'Haiti*, Paris: Fasquel Press, 1957; in Spanish, see Katherine Dunham, "Las Danzas de Haiti," *Acta Anthropologica* II:4 (1947).

<sup>53</sup> Eugene Redmond, "Cultural Fusion and Spiritual Unity," Vévé A. Clark and Sara E. Johnson, *Kaiso! Writings by and about Katherine Dunham*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, 557-563, 557; see Dunham, *Dances*.

cohesive force while gaining freedom through the existence and vitality of its beliefs and rites.<sup>54</sup>

What he did not recognize was that Dunham physically embodied this tradition in mind and body. Born in Chicago in 1909, to Albert M. Dunham and his French-Canadian wife, Fanny June Taylor, twenty years his senior, Dunham came naturally to her combined European, African, and Native American sensibilities that drew her to the Caribbean to study the dances of her ancestors.<sup>55</sup> She spent months in Jamaica, Martinique, Trinidad, and “other islands of the Lesser and Greater Antilles” setting the stage for “my nine months of intensive investigating, armed with cameras, recording equipment, and notebooks,” in Haiti, supported by a Rosenwald Fellowship in 1935 and 1936.<sup>56</sup>

Dunham revealed the circumstance of her birth and the difficulties posed thereby due to rising racial conflict in her autobiography, *Touch of Innocence* (1959), released deep in the era of Civil Rights. Dunham’s two-fold mission sent her to investigate and propagate knowledge of African-derived dance forms while exploring important aspects of her own heritage. She also acquired the skills necessary to rise above difficult economic restrictions due to antiquated conceptions of race for herself, her performers, her audiences, and, later in life, for the underprivileged children of East St. Louis through work carried out at the Edwardsville campus of Southern Illinois University.<sup>57</sup> Uniquely positioned, she bridged several worlds and continued to fight for Haiti throughout her life. As one of many scholars whose interest had now been piqued by Haiti and its productions in art, literature, dance, ethnography, and film inspired by Dunham, Levi-Straus wrote:

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<sup>54</sup> Levi-Strauss, foreword, Dunham, *Dances*, xv.

<sup>55</sup> Katherine Dunham, “The Closed Room,” Véné A. Clark and Sara E. Johnson, *Kaiso! Writings by and about Katherine Dunham*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, 28; also in Dunham, *A Touch of Innocence: Memoirs of Childhood*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959, written from Habitation Le Clerc—Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 11 December 1958.

<sup>56</sup> Dunham, *Dances*, xxvii-xviii.

<sup>57</sup> Redmond, “Cultural Fusion,” 557.

In the large periodic table of human societies, Haiti could therefore not miss appearing as a social molecule whose small dimensions retained remarkable properties, a molecule formed, it would seem, of atoms capable of releasing exceptional quantities of energy. This fact should justify the impassioned attention devoted increasingly by sociologists and ethnographers to the Haitian society.<sup>58</sup>

In Haiti, Levi-Strauss saw a merging of material resources, intellectual pursuit, and spiritual wealth capable of improving humanity for all in “a new ‘deal’ that would allow us to reshuffle and alter the positions of the card game.”<sup>59</sup> In the “mass confusion of the twentieth century, expressed partially by this growing vogue of ethnographic research,” lies possibility. Unique features appearing in the emerging field of Haitian studies as exhibited in Dunham’s work challenged traditional research methodologies leaving Levi-Strauss hopeful for the future of the field of anthropology, Haiti itself, and the world at large.

[P]recisely because the Haitian culture is a syncretism, it provides a privileged field of study for observing those phenomena of collaboration among different traditions; herein lie the hope for a better and freer life for these peoples long humiliated and the one possibility for the others to discover a vaster and more complete humanity. In short, such a collaboration could give rise for a new humanism.<sup>60</sup>

Much of that artistic possibility had already been revealed, though Dunham’s documentation of that process appears rather late.

***Bringing Haiti to the World Stage through Dunham Technique.*** Dunham’s documentation most immediately appears, not in print, but in performance. She takes her study, focused on dance forms of Haiti, to the world stage. Instead of telling, Dunham showed audiences around the world movements particular to Haitian and other Caribbean performance practices. These performances are recorded in film and in the memory of performers and viewers. Although contemporary reproduction and presentation “of Dunham choreography and

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<sup>58</sup> Levi-Strauss, foreword, Dunham, *Dances*, xv-xvi.

<sup>59</sup> Levi-Strauss, foreword, Dunham, *Dances*, xvii.

<sup>60</sup> Levi-Strauss, foreword, Dunham, *Dances*, xvii.

recreat[tions of] Dunham costumes,” are limited to the Katherine Dunham Children’s Workshop, much “plagiarism” of her work appears on stages across the world today.<sup>61</sup> The results of Dunham’s Caribbean studies begin to appear on American stages in 1937, and continue into the present through her own efforts and multiple generations of the efforts of her students.<sup>62</sup> I speak to that genealogy here, as we walk through some of the more significant dances and dancers influenced by Dunham. Beginning with *A Negro Dance Evening* in 1937, upon return from Haiti, Dunham associated herself with the remnants of the Harlem Renaissance engaging in the emerging discourse on negritude that would bring her to live simultaneously in America, Haiti, and Dakar, Senegal, where she wrote *Island Possessed* (1969). Dunham’s thoughts about negritude warrant attention in terms of her philosophy on performance as activism:

Though the meaning of the word negritude has never been completely clear to me, here in the country of the conceiver of the concept, reflecting on my early years, I know I must have practiced, preached and lived it. Leopold Sédar Senghor, President of Senegal, has interpreted and reinterpreted the word over the years, but unlike Aimée Césaire, who coined the word, he never rejected it himself. . . .

For myself, I insist upon the meaning of negritude as the effort to create a community of men, who happen to be black but must belong to the world around, no matter what kind or color. It is a word I feel to be redundant in most uses. Especially for English-speaking people it is hard not to feel undertones of nationalism and narcissism, and I do not admit to a spiritual or cultural poverty in black people which would make it necessary to coin a system of thinking of oneself outside the human division.<sup>63</sup>

In her ongoing commitment to Haiti and such ideals, Dunham purchased Habitation LeClerc in Haiti, maintaining a peristyle and *hounfort* for performance of Vodou rites in accordance with

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<sup>61</sup> Aschenbrenner, “Katherine Dunham: Anthropologist, Artist, Humanist,” 150; Long, “Harlem Renaissance Personages & Haiti,” youtube.

<sup>62</sup> In 2007, I was permitted to study Dunham Technique with one such generational descendent at the Arts Exchange in Atlanta thanks to the Carol Lloyd Dance company. Like Dunham I studied dance at a young age, and like Dunham I developed arthritis early in life. In my case, arthritis prevented me from performing on the stage, but not from studying form, both visually and physically. Throughout my educational career and into the present I continue to dance, as Dunham did throughout her life. My Dunham Technique instructor, Smythe, had performed on various stages and was taking leave from Disney’s *The Lion King* while recuperating from an injury. Trying to understand the movements bodily helped me to distinguish Dunham from other modern forms I learned in the past. As a bonus, my daughter took the class with me before pursuing her own studies in tap. Dunham’s reach holds depth.

<sup>63</sup> Dunham, *Island Possessed*, 4-5.

her initiation to Damballa.<sup>64</sup> She describes the ordeal of her own initiation in detail in *Island Possessed*, organized initially by the same Doc Reser Hurston encountered in her later investigation.<sup>65</sup> Despite years of performing that knowledge, Dunham writes in *Dances of Haiti*:

Although I have recalled my Haitian years from 1935 onward in *Island Possessed* and in numerous lectures and articles, the full content of the *vodun* (*vaudon*, *vodu*, *voodoo*, *voudú*) escapes me. In spite of three baptisms of lesser importance and one of major importance (my introduction to *mambo-asegue*, the highest degree of the *Rada-Dahomey* cult), I have never been able to claim truthfully a knowledge of the *vodun*.<sup>66</sup>

Dunham maintains a persistent presence in Haiti throughout her life adding “that a great deal of reflection on the island has helped.”<sup>67</sup> Her performances and the productive work of her students paint a picture of that ongoing legacy.

Dunham’s “first full-length ballet,” *L’Ag’ya*, based on a Martiniquan martial arts form, appeared at the Federal Theater in Chicago in 1938, performed by the Negro Dance Group, “devoted to African-American and Afro-Caribbean Dance,” founded in 1937.<sup>68</sup> Like the Juba, a dance performed throughout the Caribbean, *L’Ag’ya*, as choreographed by Dunham, presented “primarily a competitive dance of skill,” reflecting a tradition in New World African dance forms that required “great activity and strength of body, and keeping time.”<sup>69</sup> In the same year, *Tropics* premiered at the Goodman Theater, also in Chicago, prior to its presentation along with

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<sup>64</sup> “Several years ago she bought a historic plantation, Habitation Leclerc, once presided over by Napoleon’s sister Pauline,” editor’s note, Dunham, *Island Possessed*, viii.

<sup>65</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, ch. 17, 245-257.

<sup>66</sup> Dunham provides the scrupulous details of her initiatory process in Chapters 4 through 8, *Island Possessed*, 58-160; In spite of several initiations including two previous baptisms “of *lavé-tête* (head-washing to remove my former, unclean uninitiated self from my head, leaving it free to retain properties inducted during the ceremony or to receive the *loa*, or gods, without physical danger to myself). And the following initiation was that of *kanzo*, trial by fire, giving me the right to carry the *asson* but not to know its secrets. These—in addition to visiting and being responsible for numerous ceremonies and *baptemes*, reading books by responsible authors, broadening my base of religious and cult concepts, selecting, eliminating, and adding informants—represent most of my furtherance of knowledge in the *vodun*. I might add I cannot yet feel that I know the *vodun*,” Dunham, *Dances*, ix-x.

<sup>67</sup> Dunham, *Dances*, x.

<sup>68</sup> Clark and Johnson, eds., *Kaiso!*, xvii.; Bruce Elder, “Katherine Dunham,” *All Music Guide*, Alexander Street Press, 2013.

<sup>69</sup> Dunham, 1941, and Sir Hans Sloane, 1707, in Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance in the United States from 1619 to 1970*, foreword Katherine Dunham, Palo Alto, California: National Press Books, 1972, 20, 27.

*Le Jazz Hot* at the Windsor Theater in New York in 1939, where its one-week run extended into thirteen.<sup>70</sup> In 1939, Dunham appeared in her first film, *Carnival of Rhythm*, where African Americans performed as Brazilians due to restrictions on racial representation at the time.<sup>71</sup> Lavinia Williams, who performed with Dunham in the film *Carnival of Rhythm* (1939), the Broadway and U.S. tour of *Cabin in the Sky* (1940-1941), and the Hollywood film *Stormy Weather* (1943) said, “Dunham had enough talent in her—as a singer, dancer, director, writer, and producer—for three people, and she also managed to work in a significant contribution as a rights activist in a career that started in music and dance and lasted for 60 years.”<sup>72</sup>

Dunham shared the spotlight with another energetic young star, vocalist Lena Horne, in *Stormy Weather*. In the narrative scope of this musical theater production for film, fictional character, Bill Williamson, returns from France after serving in World War II, to a celebration of African American servicemen. A bit of an amateur dancer himself, he seeks to establish a relationship with Selena (Lena Horne) by establishing himself as a dancer and producer on an equal level with her. Striking intraracial differences seem to bar his entry into professional production and access to Selena. Following a proposal from Bill and a strong performance by Horne of “There’s No Two Ways about Love,” Selena responds, “I have always been ambitious, haven’t you Bill? We’re show people. Bill, I don’t want to quit. I wouldn’t be happy if I didn’t go on working, just like you. Singing’s in my blood. Bill, I’m afraid I’ll never see it differently.” Selena reflects the sentiments of Dunham, Hurston, and Deren, that a woman artist must work. In that spirit, following production of *Stormy Weather*, Williams went on to Haiti where she spent twenty-seven years beginning in 1951 with the Haitian Dance Festival. She set up her own

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<sup>70</sup> Clark and Johnson, *Kaiso!*, xviii; Elder, “Katherine Dunham.”

<sup>71</sup> Clark and Johnson, *Kaiso!*, xviii; Lavinia Williams, interview in William Hohausser, dir. *Dance On: Lavinia Williams*, perf. Billie Mahoney and Lavinia Williams Yarborough, prod. Billie Mahoney, Insight Media, 1983, 28:17, Music Online: Dance in Video, Alexander Street Press, 2013.

<sup>72</sup> Hohausser, dir. *Dance On: Lavinia Williams*.

school there teaching classical, tap and Dunham technique. She also studied the movements of the Vodou dances and taught Afro-Haitian dance in Haiti until 1978, when she returned to New York to start a school there. She established the New Negro Space for Dance in the Brooklyn Academy of Music in the early 1980s. Her daughter, Sarah Yarborough, who now lives in Atlanta and whom Williams trained in Haiti, became a leading dancer with Alvin Ailey, the Robert Joffrey Ballet, and the Metropolitan Opera.<sup>73</sup> Williams's experience speaks to the depth of Dunham's legacy.

Charles Moore, who performed in Dunham's choreography *Shango*, said, "When I danced with Katherine Dunham, she was the best. You couldn't go any higher. And when I danced her dance *Shango*, I wasn't Charles Moore anymore. I was possessed."<sup>74</sup> Based directly on observed Vodou ritual, including the mock sacrifice of a living chicken, the dancers appear in all white; one shakes the ason, another rings Ogun's bell, another rattles a gourd, another pounds out rhythms on a metal plate, all accompanied by the three sacred Vodou drums of Dunham's initiation to Damballa, or imitations thereof.<sup>75</sup> Vodou rhythms and chants permeate the air. Moore dances Damballa, slithering across the floor of the stage. Dunham includes dancers of all body types, not just limiting her casts to those with perfectly trained bodies. Dunham wears the

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<sup>73</sup> Hohausser, dir. *Dance On: Lavinia Williams*.

<sup>74</sup> Katherine Dunham and Charles Moore, performers *Shango*, choreographer Katherine Dunham, Charles Moore Dance Theatre, New York: Brooklyn, Pennebaker Hegedus Films, 1984, 87.12 min., Alexander Street Video, 2013.

<sup>75</sup> "My baptismal drums leaned against cane chairs beside the poteau mitan and were freshly dressed in white embroidered petticoats and pale blue cotton handkerchiefs. I was pleased to see La place make the libation from left to right in front of them with his kola, and at one point Doc poured a drop of clairin in front of each. One or three drops of any liquid about to be drunk should always be poured in front of an altar, baptized drums, important or highly accomplished drummers, at times at the doorstep of a house when visiting," Dunham, *Island Possessed*, 125. Dunham choreographed these motions into *Shango* as well. "These drums of Ville Bonheur, village of the Black Virgin of Haiti, had been hidden behind a waterfall during one of the Occupation 'purges' of vandun temples and, traditionally unpainted and unstained glowed with the usage of time like museum pieces," *Island Possessed*, 123-124. Dunham speculates this may have happened because she had not kept up her ritual marital obligations to Damballa, a jealous *loas*. "Somewhat dubious at the time, I have since every reason to feel that the burden of being 'married' to a *loa* is best avoided. . . . In none of my affections have I been so punished for infidelity as by my Haitian serpent god, the rainbow holding his tail in his mouth and supporting the sky to keep it from falling to earth," *Island Possessed*, 110-111.

costume she appears in on the cover of *Island Possessed*. In order for Dunham's dancers to perform she had to teach them what she had learned in Haiti.<sup>76</sup> Reciprocally, when she returned to Haiti, Dunham reflects, "To hold ceremonies at our residence at Leclerc, I am periodically obliged to give refresher dance lessons at our peristyle. Only the older hounsi appreciate the subtle changes that have taken place in the dances over the years."<sup>77</sup>

What exactly constitutes Dunham Technique? She gives a hint when articulating: "I was very curious. I loved danceology. It didn't take me long to know there was something missing in the concert and theatrical presentations of American black people. I felt there was a whole culture being overlooked."<sup>78</sup> In order for her translations of Haitian Vodou and popular dance performance to work, they must be visible on the body in motion. A former anonymous dancer with the Dunham Company says the foundations "of Dunham technique are based on the principal of isolation."<sup>79</sup> Performers must learn difficult steps based on supreme strength that originates from the core of the body, but involves the isolated articulation of each part. "There is no tenseness or rigidity of muscles; instead, a constant circular flow acts as a mental narcotic and neural catharsis."<sup>80</sup> Based on her training in ballet and modern dance as advanced by Martha Graham, Dunham made slight adjustments to traditional positions, movements, and jumps, added heightened sexuality and pushed the body to its ultimate limits in speed, force, and gravity. Repetitive movements known to induce trance or possession in such cults from Asia to Africa to

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<sup>76</sup> Lacy, *Steps of the Gods*. Dunham trained dancers by showing them film she recorded in her Caribbean studies. Some of these "technique" films are stored at The Library of Congress; Stephanie L. Batiste analyzes these in "Dunham Possessed: Ethnographic Bodies, Movement, and Transnational Constructions of Blackness," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 13.2 (2007): 8-22, see specifically 22 fn 20, 25, 27, 28, and 29.

<sup>77</sup> "I am not aware of new dances, but I am very conscious of the urbanization of older ones," Dunham, *Dances*, xi-xii.

<sup>78</sup> Dunham, choreographer, and Moore, performer, *Shango*.

<sup>79</sup> Unidentified dancer, interview, Lacy, *Steps of the Gods*.

<sup>80</sup> Dunham, *Dances*, 61; compare to Deren's ideas about paralysis (possession) as catharsis in the dance that allows for a return to a state of balance, Deren, "New Directions in Film Art," *Essential Deren*, 216.



the Caribbean combine handclapping and foot stamping or shuffling with ring shouting and mysterious chants to the various *loas*.

Another aspect of Dunham technique is the insistence of dancing without shoes so as to work the articulation of each muscle and joint of the foot individually. Talley Beatty commented on his first impression of Dunham when he joined her company; “Dunham was in bare feet[;] . . . We’d never seen anybody dance without shoes,” subtly echoing the concerns of Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes in *Popo and Fifina* (1932).<sup>81</sup> Another Dunham company member says, “we found ourselves doing things that did not even seem like dance anymore . . . we learned the spiritual part of the dance,” including the *gouille* pelvic movements that so horrified William Seabrook in *The Magic Island* (1929) and “embarrassed our parents and friends.”<sup>82</sup> Dunham explains that through the social and secular dances “the artist as such develops.” Skills and strength developed in the secular dances allow a devotee to perform the strenuous movements demanded of the *loas* in possession. Possession generally does not occur in social dances and is discouraged when it appears. Dunham concurs with Hurston, “The highly sexual form of most of the movements undoubtedly has to do with stimulus to procreate new life to replace death.”<sup>83</sup> Some find the inclusion of such movements in *combite* (or work dances) and funeral dances such as the *Banda* confusing. “That the funeral dances are sexual is an aid to a quicker, more complex internalization and redirection of energy. A reaffirmation of community solidarity is one of the sociological functions of the funeral dance.”<sup>84</sup> Although Dunham rarely observed sexual activity in the context of social dances, she notes the public “release process might be called sexual

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<sup>81</sup> Talley Beatty, interview, Douglas Rosenberg, dir., *Talley Beatty: Speaking of Dance, Conversations with Contemporary Masters of American Modern Dance*, choreographer Talley Beatty, performers Talley Beatty and Charles Reinhart, producer Charles Reinhart. American Dance Festival, 1993, 61:07 min., Durham: Duke, 1993, Alexander Street Video, 2013.

<sup>82</sup> Unidentified dancer, interview, Lacy, *Steps of the Gods*.

<sup>83</sup> Dunham, *Dances*, 10.

<sup>84</sup> Dunham, *Dances*, 55.

catharsis.”<sup>85</sup> In spite of the sexualized nature of such movements, even in secular dances, Dunham “found no strict divisions among the dances on the basis of sex, though the work dance groups or *combite* were, by their nature, composed almost entirely of men,” though often followed by groups of “young girls.”<sup>86</sup>

***The Dunham Legacy.*** On stage performers appeared entirely clothed as they would in a Vodou ritual so that the emphasis was not on sex but sexuality. No Vodou performance occurs that involves nudity as described in Seabrook but sexuality persists in Dunham’s work as a marked theme. Beatty notes that Dunham utilized costume to “make a setting of Dunham and her times.”<sup>87</sup> Beatty began his career with Dunham as an extra in *Pins and Needles*.<sup>88</sup> He continued to train with Dunham and toured with *Cabin in the Sky* before breaking away to form his own company, with his partner, Janet Collins, whom he met in California. After performing in *Stormy Weather*, Beatty says, “Well, Dunham fired me, and Janet went with me, we went together.”<sup>89</sup>

Beatty’s comments about his time with Dunham are instructive and offer a bit of perspective on both their personalities and working relationships. When two great artists meet on the same stage, tensions are bound to arise, as they do later again between Beatty and Deren in *A Choreography for Camera* (1945). Rather than adversarial in nature such conflicts lead to divisions and fissures that frequently push the work of both in stronger directions. In *Cabin* Beatty found, “I was getting rather tired of picking up under Katherine’s dresses and saying, Ay Bo Bo!”<sup>90</sup> In forming his own school he mixed traditions. Greatly influenced by and grounded in

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<sup>85</sup> Dunham, *Dances*, 44.

<sup>86</sup> Dunham, *Dances*, 11.

<sup>87</sup> Beatty, interview, Rosenberg, *Speaking of Dance*.

<sup>88</sup> Clark and Johnson, *Kaiso!*, xviii; Rosenberg, *Speaking of Dance*.

<sup>89</sup> Sympathetically speaking, Beatty relays, “When we were in *Cabin in the Sky*, George Balanchine invited me to study at the school,” where he was told they did not take coloreds. Although Dunham was of mixed race origins herself, Beatty says, “I told Dunham about this and she said, ‘Serves me right!’ Maybe she was trying to save me that experience,” Beatty, interview, Rosenberg, *Speaking of Dance*.

<sup>90</sup> Beatty, interview, Rosenberg, *Speaking of Dance*.

the physical techniques and artistry of Martha Graham, Beatty added the Dunham experience to his repertoire palette, and returning to his own specific roots in a not unusual turn for African American dancers of the day, “I put a little of Louisiana hot sauce on it.”<sup>91</sup> In reflection, he concludes, “I love Dunham’s technique,” but for Beatty, “It’s always Louisiana hot sauce with a little Graham.”<sup>92</sup>

Like Dunham, Pearl Primus also won a Rosenwald Fellowship to study the African origins of dance.<sup>93</sup> Primus presented *Strange Fruit* in 1943 based on a woman’s grief over witnessing a lynching, possibly of her partner. She performed the dance to a poem of the same name by Lewis Allen exhibiting the use of literature as potential accompaniment for dance. Primus traveled through West Africa searching in similar ways as Dunham and is equally credited with influencing modern African-derived dance forms, in addition to Lavinia Williams and Pearl Reynolds who “taught Dunham Technique in the Alvin Ailey company.”<sup>94</sup> Eartha Mae Kitt also got her start working with “Dunham’s dance school at age sixteen. . . . When the company stopped in Paris, Kitt got the chance to fill in for a singer who was too ill to perform,” granting her the opportunity to develop her nightclub act as “the sex-kitten chanteuse.”<sup>95</sup> Kitt also performed with Alvin Ailey. Richard Long “referred to Dunham, along with Pearl Primus,

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<sup>91</sup> Beatty, interview, Rosenberg, *Speaking of Dance*.

<sup>92</sup> “I just think it’s too bad that we don’t see her technique as complete. I think it’s very great. I think she’s made a monumental contribution to well, I guess, everybody else. She gets all these awards, right? But you never see it in the students. You have to stop and start talking about contractions and how to arrive at it and when you put a piece together, and not since that original company when all the kids . . . Dudley, Tanya, that wild one, that magnificent thing, . . . what a dancer, well, they all were from Graham and they had done that stuff and they all went to Ailey, and they were doing my stuff anyway, the material went there, but I haven’t had a dancer that understood the Graham, I think that was what made it so special,” Beatty, interview, Rosenberg, *Speaking of Dance*.

<sup>93</sup> Like Dunham, Pearl Primus was awarded the Rosenwald for her choreography. In *Dancing in the Light: Six Compositions by African American Choreographers*, American Dance Festival: Free to Dance, pbs.org, 2007, DVD, 57 minutes.

<sup>94</sup> Madison Davis Lacy, prod. and ed., *Steps of the Gods*, American Dance Festival, New York: National Black Programming Consortium, 2005, DVD; Clark and Johnson, eds., *Kaiso!* 486.

<sup>95</sup> Steve Huey, “Kitt, Eartha Mae,” *All Music Guide*, Alexander Street Press, 2013, 8 January 2013.

as ‘canonical’ in producing dance teachers and mentioned a considerable number of dancers associated with Dunham who have international reputations as teachers.”<sup>96</sup>

Beatty, who went on to dance with Deren, trained with both Dunham and Primus. Beatty’s most famous choreography appeared in 1947 as *Mourner’s Bench*. Following in the mode of feeling captured by Primus’s *Strange Fruit*, here a single male body performs the spiritual work of grief associated with the pain of loss and oppression. His body never loses contact with the bench and the performer’s strength and movements exhibit the influence of Dunham and Primus.<sup>97</sup> Always anxious about her position in the black world, Dunham’s Haitian inquiry lead to developments in dance she simply could not have anticipated. In 2008, Big Boi (Antwan André Patton), originally of Savannah, Georgia, choreographed a similar work to that of Beatty and Primus with The Atlanta Ballet’s Lauri Stallings. In one of ten pieces within the larger work titled simply *big* set to Outkast songs, a single white ballet dancer performs as the one being lynched. In a work *New York Times* critic Claudia La Rocco feared seemed “like a recipe for disastrous cultural misunderstanding,” the white female dancer dangles precariously in space on a line hanging from a tree in one of the most moving works of choreography I have witnessed this century.<sup>98</sup> According to Rocco, Georgetown University Professor Michael Eric Dyson saw “in ‘big’ an opportunity for hip-hop to re-examine some of its more self-destructive tendencies, including violence and ‘the blitzkrieg of misogyny that passes for commentary on

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<sup>96</sup> “Among others he cited Carmencita Romero, who has taught in Cuba, Italy, Japan, Spain, and Germany; Lavinia Williams, who taught in Haiti, the Bahamas, Guyana, Jamaica, Germany, and New York; Vanoye Aikens, a faculty member for many years at the Royal Swedish School of Dance; Walter Nicks, who taught in New York, Scandinavia and France and in the 1970s had his own company in the United States; and Syvilla Fort, Claude Marchant, Tommy Gomez, Archie Savage, Ruth Beckford, Glory Van Scott, and Pearl Reynolds, all of whom have taught primarily in the United States. Lucille Ellis, Clifford Fears, Lenwood Morris, Ural Wilson, and many of those who have attended the seminar also taught in universities and community centers,” Clark and Johnson, eds., *Kaiso!*, 486.

<sup>97</sup> Talley Beatty in *Dancing in the Light*.

<sup>98</sup> Jayson Rodriguez, with reporting by Sway J. Calloway, “Outkast rapper says collaboration with the Atlanta Ballet ‘was a natural thing’ for him, if not for the dancers,” *mtv.com*, 10 April 2008, 5:48 pm.

gender’.”<sup>99</sup> In the 1930s and into the present, “Africa had [and has] something to teach us about negotiating identity, . . . [we had to] dance outside the reach of the oppressor, . . . [creating a] black aesthetic and cultural continuum transformed in a new world;” a lived tradition passed on through the movements of the body in dance.<sup>100</sup>

**Zora Neale Hurston in Haiti (1936-1937).** Hurston’s main aim was to debunk the spectacularized mythopoeias of Seabrook’s *The Magic Island* (1929). In doing so she both validates and invalidates many of his claims. She aimed to see for herself and collect her own data from her own sources. Hurston claims, “I never tried to get my information second-hand . . . because I consider myself amply equipped to go out in the field and get it myself.”<sup>101</sup> Gwendolyn Mikell proposes that “Hurston’s lack of recognition within anthropology . . . results from her insistence upon conducting ethnography her own way.”<sup>102</sup> Hurston’s Caribbean inquiry followed along similar lines of her previously published research in *Mules and Men* (1935), based on her first-hand investigations of the social discourse in the world she knew best, the deep South. Based on the then in vogue, emerging anthropological concept, that those of a particular culture may be best suited to conduct research in those areas, Hurston’s first scholarly attempts at the work she would continue to conduct in Haiti, began in Eatonville, Florida, the home she grew up in and around.<sup>103</sup> Within *Mules and Men* she reported on folklore as relayed to her by local informants; she eavesdropped on front porch conversations, much as Janie does in Hurston’s

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<sup>99</sup> Claudia La Rocco, “Pirouettes and Street Cred: Atlanta’s Hip-Hop Ballet,” *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, 6 April 2008.

<sup>100</sup> Lacy, *Steps of the Gods*; Dunham recognized the need for change in the dance in revisiting her thesis for American publication. “Undoubtedly, with the rapid industrialization of Haiti in the interim, there has been a diminishing of regional concentration and some shifting of emphasis from sacred to secular, as well as a degree of change in form and function in the natural process of acculturation,” Dunham, *Dances*, 11; I saw this regionalism in public art in the form of painted shop signs in different areas of Jamaica in 2006; regionalism persists in spite of urbanization and industrialization

<sup>101</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 252.

<sup>102</sup> Mikell, “Feminism and Black Culture,” 53.

<sup>103</sup> “With good reason, Hurston approached her work with the assumption that the best researcher has a commonality with the people being studied. . . . Boas’s experiences with the Kwakwiltl led him to understand Hurston’s position,” Mikell, “Feminism and Black Culture,” 59.

celebrated fictional text, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Hurston also reports on travels in other parts of the South familiarizing herself with the spiritual practices of Hoodoo and conjure during the Harlem Renaissance. She leads us through her own initiation where: “For sixty-nine hours I lay there. I had five psychic experiences and awoke at last with no feeling of hunger, only one of exultation.”<sup>104</sup> According to Kameelah Martin, although Hurston “understands there to have been only one Marie Laveau,” she believes “her own apprenticeship and training under a myriad of mentors in *Mules and Men* (1935)” authentic because it culminated in “her studies with Luke Turner,” nephew of Marie Laveau.<sup>105</sup> Ancestrally, in spite of public misconceptions, Hurston believed in her initiation through a direct line that connected her to the famous New Orleans servitor of Voodoo, Marie Laveau. Hurston’s study of folklore, her initiation, and her experience presenting to the American stage “real” African American singing inform her work in Haiti.<sup>106</sup>

*Mules and Men* (1935) contains sixteen “Negro Songs with Music,” some arranged by C. Spencer Tocus, Porter Grainger, Portia D. Duhart, collaboratively providing material to further support her promotion of performances of such songs.<sup>107</sup> She also provides eight “Formulae of Hoodoo Doctors,” a list of thirty-eight necessary items of “Paraphernalia of Conjure,” and fifteen “Prescriptions of Root Doctors,” we might well learn from should we study the medicinal and botanical properties behind them.<sup>108</sup> She also provides a glossary.<sup>109</sup> These catalogs substantiate her claims to authenticity within the work. Laënnec Hurbon criticized Hurston’s approach in

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<sup>104</sup> Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 190, in Cheryl A. Wall, ed., *Zora Neale Hurston: Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings*, New York: Library of America, 1995.

<sup>105</sup> Martin lays out the concrete historical genealogy of the legacy of the Laveau women in *Conjuring Moments*, 18, 42.

<sup>106</sup> Hurston wrote, “Negro songs to be heard truly must be sung by a group, and a group bent on expression of feelings and not on sound effects . . .,” in Russell, *Render Me My Song*, 38.

<sup>107</sup> Hurston in Wall, *Zora*, Appendix 1, 233-255.

<sup>108</sup> Hurston in Wall, *Zora*, Appendices II-IV, 256-267.

<sup>109</sup> Hurston in Wall, *Zora*, 229-231.

Haiti, though comparison of the structure of the text reveals that Hurston modeled her Haitian study on an already previously successful body of work. In his accusation Hurbon notes, “Yet it is clear for Black Americans such as Zora Neale Hurston the Black nation of Haiti took on such great importance that they managed to mythologize it and to recapitulate, unwittingly, the very stereotypes spread by White American essayists on the particularities of Haiti, a land where all the Africanisms are conserved.”<sup>110</sup> The implication that her Haitian work does little more than Seabrook fails as an assumption though *Tell My Horse* (1938) structurally follows a similar format to *The Magic Island* (1929) at some points. A superficial analysis might lead one to the same conclusions, as she addresses each of his individual claims. In *Tell My Horse*, Hurston revisits legends others have documented before and investigates Vodou for herself in her own way, again recording in print form thirty-two chants and songs, here assisted by Arthur Lyncie Duroseau and A. Hernandez.<sup>111</sup> Other parallels appear in the specific following discussion. Also perceived as controversial is Hurston’s report on the political state of the nation as she finds it, taking a position in support of the Occupation some find unfortunate.<sup>112</sup>

Hurston’s research appears in *Tell My Horse* (1938) within a year of her return. Interestingly, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), and other essays written during her time in Haiti, appear immediately as well.<sup>113</sup> Taken together, these three types of production, popular ethnography, fiction, and literary prose, comprise a combined output that represents the full body of her Haitian work. Numerous scholars have written about Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and many have looked at it closely for structuring motifs derived from Hurston’s field research in Haiti. Long noted that Hurston did not write this book “about” Haiti but “in”

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<sup>110</sup> Hurbon, “American Fantasy,” 190.

<sup>111</sup> Hurston in Wall, *Tell My Horse*, 265-287.

<sup>112</sup> “Her political understanding of these islands was limited,” Russell, *Render Me My Song*, 42.

<sup>113</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, “My People! My People!,” written July 2, 1937, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in Wall, *Zora*, 773-781.

Haiti and cautioned against reading too much into it.<sup>114</sup> Derek Collins disagrees. In his discussion of *Their Eyes*, Erzulie Freda, specifically, plays a prominent structuring role we cannot afford to ignore.<sup>115</sup> Hurston claims in *Tell My Horse*, “Nobody in Haiti ever really told me who Erzulie Freda was, but they told me what she was like and what she did. From all of that it is plain that she is the pagan goddess of love.”<sup>116</sup> As a critic and long-time board member of the Zora Neale Hurston Festival, Long’s cautionary words do not take into account the fact that *Their Eyes* demonstrates Hurston’s total immersion and full absorption of the culture she lived in when she wrote her most famous novel. As a work of “fictional ethnography,” underlying metaphors of Vodou belief and/or practice surface as structuring narrative devices in *Their Eyes*. Herskovits’s *Life in a Haitian Valley* (1932) provides the basis for developing an argument that Hurston and others could theorize Vodou from within the structure of the text.<sup>117</sup> *Their Eyes* provides the working model for analysis conducted by others in tracing the structure of Vodou metaphor in American literatures of spirit, hoodoo, and conjure.<sup>118</sup>

Of the immediate literary responses to Occupation period ethnographies under consideration and scrutiny, Hurston serves as the most renowned and frequently written about of these. Her ethnographic revelations reveal much in *Tell My Horse*, *Their Eyes*, and other essays and letters composed during and after her time in Haiti. Traces of that physical engagement appear in *Their Eyes*, as she wrote it on the island over a seven-week period there. Reception of

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<sup>114</sup> Long, personal communication, 2012.

<sup>115</sup> Long agreed, “There might be something useful there but don’t spend too much time on it,” personal communication, 2012; see Derek Collins, “Myth and Ritual of Ezili Freda in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” *Western Folklore* 55.2 (1996): 137-154.

<sup>116</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 121.

<sup>117</sup> See Robert Baron, “Amalgams and Mosaics, Syncretisms and Reinterpretations: Reading Herskovits and Contemporary Creolists for Metaphors of Creolization,” *Journal of Folklore* 116.416 (Winter 2003): 88-115. In the conclusion, I demonstrate how Erzulie functions in later texts as well, including Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), Arthur Flowers’s *Another Good Loving Blues* (1993), Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), and Nalo Hopkinson’s *The Salt Roads* (2003). Hopkinson’s most recent text, *The New Moon’s Arms*, New York: Warner, 2007, offers another such opportunity I would like to explore in the future.

<sup>118</sup> See Martin, *Conjuring Moments*, for a much deeper discussion of the role of conjure in the development of the African American literary canon.



the Guggenheim Fellowship inspired Hurston to walk away from a tumultuous affair.<sup>119</sup> Hurston's "fieldwork was both cathartic and threatening" making her "reflect upon the contradictions within her own life—the loneliness of the female intellectual."<sup>120</sup> Observations and experiences gathered in Haiti seep into Hurston and others' writings, figuratively and literally. The *loas* appear with certain consistent identifying themes and features. The rhythm of a text assumes certain patterns depending on the appearance of particular *loas*. Folktales and mythological accounts of the struggles for independence appear in repeating structural forms reflecting techniques of aural and oral rhetorical memory. Recurring structural patterns of local forms of vocalization through song and kinesthetic movement through dance influence details of description employed by the author characterizing a scene or situation. Texts focused around a particular *loa* embody particular patterns of behavior attributed to those spirits.

*Erzulie's Eyes*. Collins considers *Their Eyes* an *Erzulie* tale because Hurston includes and combines traits associated with the *loa* equated with love in Janie's aspirations for the kind of love she desires early in the text and in the evolution of the love she acquires later in the text.<sup>121</sup> On its surface *Their Eyes* functions as a love story but there is much more at work here. Hurston subjects the fictional Janie to three kinds of love in the form of three "marriages:" to Logan Killicks at age seventeen, arranged by her Grandmother, Nanny; to Joe Starks, chosen by herself as an escape from the brutal labor and physical and sexual demands Killicks subjects her to; and to Tea Cake, whom she chooses in an unconventional relationship following the death of her second husband.<sup>122</sup> Possession begins with Janie hearing, feeling, and smelling what belongs to the world of spirit. "This singing she heard had nothing to do with her ears. The rose of the

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<sup>119</sup> Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, in Wall, 749.

<sup>120</sup> Mikell, "Feminism and Black Culture," 62.

<sup>121</sup> *Their Eyes* may also function as a *Marassa* story when analyzed in Vodou terms. *Marassa* refers to twins and the third child that follows, each gifted in spiritual ways. See Collins, "Myth and Ritual of Ezili Freda," 137-154.

<sup>122</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 13, 18.

world was breathing out smell.”<sup>123</sup> Janie is married to this presence as many Vodou devotees or adherents go through a ritual and spiritual “marriage” to their chosen intercessory deity.<sup>124</sup>

Hurston describes the wedding of Janie to Erzulie Freda as follows:

She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of the bloom: the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid.<sup>125</sup>

This scene occurs before any literal marriage in Janie’s life. She is symbolically charged with the order to realize this spiritual love in the physical world through this “mystic” marriage. The text follows the course of Janie’s quest, realizing that love in *Tea Cake*. Erzulie loves everything decadent in this world. Deren provides further elucidation on the nature of Erzulie derived from her studies with Dunham and experiences with possession by Erzulie herself in Haiti.

Their goddess of love is a very fascinating and complex idea. She is in fact goddess of all the luxuries which are not essential to survival. She is the goddess of love in which sex is not essential to propagation. She is the muse of the arts. Now man can live without it but he doesn’t live very much as man. It is strange one would have to go to an apparently primitive culture which is Haiti to find an understanding in such exalted terms of what the essential feminine female role might conceivably be, that of being everything which is human, everything which is more than that which is necessary.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 10.

<sup>124</sup> Dunham describes her spiritual marriage to Damballa, the serpent deity, and his subsequent jealousies when she does not provide appropriate offerings in a timely manner. “It was all right to take in the girl from ‘Nan Guinée, but she must remember that Damballa stood for no nonsense and expected to be rewarded for his gifts and to be offered at regular intervals the foods and drinks of his taste no matter where in the world she might be. The message to me was delivered in such an emphatic way that I felt the skin on my back tingle and wished that the marriage part had been left unexplored in my research,” *Island Possessed*, 138.

<sup>125</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 10-11.

<sup>126</sup> Deren, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*; in spite of the fact that Erzulie “was understood as my *maît/tête*, since, not infrequently, she threatened to mount my head and actually installed herself seven or eight times,” Deren did not have “the *laver tête* ceremony . . . nor did I ever go through any of the stages of initiation,” as both Hurston and Dunham did, Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, 323.

Tea Cake's name reflects Erzulie's lust for sweets and it is not coincidence that Janie wears a blue dress (as devotees to Erzulie do in Vodou performance) in her wedding to Tea Cake.<sup>127</sup> In wedding Tea Cake she renews a vow made to Erzulie under buzzing pear trees when she was only sixteen.<sup>128</sup> Hurston accomplishes this without ever mentioning the name of Erzulie. She is known only in allusion. In *Tell My Horse*, Hurston writes, Erzulie "is the ideal of the love bed."<sup>129</sup> As evidenced by its current popularity, *Their Eyes* succeeds whether the reader is familiar with Vodou or not. That the structural arrangement succeeds testifies to the universality of the path of love as evidenced by the lives of the *loas*.

Janie's significant relationships are not about the men involved but reflect her internal temporal development of self-realized desire.<sup>130</sup> Each male character functions to allow that realization. Janie saw "through the deceptiveness of female manipulation and had chosen for herself the kind of relationship she wanted and the type of man she wanted it with"—an

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<sup>127</sup> "Wear the new blue dress because he meant to marry her right from the train," Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 111.

<sup>128</sup> In *Tell My Horse*, Hurston describes a Vodou ceremony as a "dance analogous to the nuptial flight of the queen bee. The Mambo discards six veils in this dance and falls at last naked, and spiritually intoxicated, to the ground," 113-114. That I believe is relevant, but Hurston continues, "It is considered the highest honor for all males participating to kiss her organ of creation, for Damballa, the god of gods, has permitted them to come face to face with the truth," 114. The nudity concerns me here in that a woman only throws "back her veil . . . revealing her sex organs" in an African performance context if she is out of her mind, literally, insane, an outcast, and marking this. I am not convinced Dr. Holly has brought Hurston to a legitimate ceremony, but nonetheless, certain truths are revealed here. Tourist presentations of Vodou include true elements as well or they would not work, and we can still learn much from them.

<sup>129</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 121. Erzulie "has been identified as the Blessed Virgin, but that is far from true. Here again the use of the pictures of the Catholic saints have confused observers who do not listen long enough. Erzulie is not the passive queen of heaven and mother of anybody. She is the ideal of the love bed. She is so perfect that all other women are a distortion as compared to her. . . . To be chosen by a goddess is an exhilaration for men to live for." But Hurston does not "listen long enough" here herself, or pretends not to. She says, "Women do not give her food unless they tend toward the hermaphrodite or are elderly women who are widows or have already abandoned the hope of mating," *Tell My Horse*, 122. Hurston relays that men enter into sacred marriages with Erzulie here but does not admit that women do. She saves that best course for *Their Eyes* rendering in fictional form Erzulie manifest in Janie's desire.

<sup>130</sup> Claudia Tate somewhat disagrees, "The flowery but imprecise prose suggests that like Janie, Hurston is more successful at describing desire than its gratification. No doubt Hurston later realized that many of the charming expressions characterizing love in *Their Eyes* are somewhat obscure." Tate believes Hurston's later work *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948) "explicitly analyzes the bondage of romantic passion, a form of sexual love that her epoch particularly idealized in stories of female submission," *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and Protocols of Race*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 149.

“uneducated, hard-working, and genuine” one who “may have reflected Hurston’s view of male dignity among the black working” classes of the multiple diasporas of her various researches.<sup>131</sup>

In comparison, Haitian devotee Georges René describes his non-fictional “double marriage to Ezili Freda and Ezili Dantò” in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* (1995) in an interview with Marilyn Houlberg. For his first “marriage . . . with Dantò,” René prepared a cake for his mystical union with the divine, describing the offering as follows:

The cake is very brown, it’s about the color [GR points to his arm]. It’s a special cake. It’s a peasant cake, very rough. But with good savour [*sic.*], good flavor, special cake. I remember what she said was black beans, and rice, and fried bananas, and very hot sauce. Because she’s hot, very *picklés*, very hot sauce.<sup>132</sup>

René’s description mirrors Hurston’s of the fictional Tea Cake, as “sweet as all dat,” simultaneously equating him with “both the devil” and “malice,” the trickster, “Ti Malice,” of *Tell My Horse*, in a brilliant move of textual interplay.<sup>133</sup> The three aspects of Janie as realized through the detailed portrayal of each of her three marriages mirrors the most generally accepted definition of Erzulie as manifesting in three forms. Under consideration here in Hurston and, later, Danticat, are *Erzulie Freda* and *Danto* of the Rada cult and *Erzulie Red Eyes* of the Petro. Collins associates Janie with Freda because, “she is a flirtatious Creole woman who adores fine clothes, jewels, perfumes, and lace. The love she seeks is forever unrequited and causes her to weep.”<sup>134</sup> Janie’s marriages are not determined significant because of the literal physical human being she chooses, but function as mirrors, metaphors, and metonyms of that symbolic marriage to the nature of idealized love, defined as Erzulie in Vodou, and realized internally within the fully realized subject.

<sup>131</sup> Mikell, “Feminism and Black Culture,” 62.

<sup>132</sup> René remarks, “I hope the interview will go for the integrality of the sexes,” because, “Well, yes, it’s love I’m talking about. Love,” Georges René and Marilyn Houlberg, “My Double Mystic Marriages to Two Goddesses of Love: An Interview,” in *Sacred Arts*, 287, 295.

<sup>133</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 93, 106; Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 135.

<sup>134</sup> Cosentino, *Sacred Arts*, 240.

Hurston does not gloss the realities of the difficulties of this realization. She does not romanticize love.<sup>135</sup> Neither does Erzulie. At the time of the writing of *Their Eyes* (1937) fully self-realized desire on the part of a woman challenged centuries-old notions of women's limited desire within the domestic sphere.<sup>136</sup> Victorian values persist across continents, into the twentieth century, appearing more reified in the present but in ever more opaque form than ever before in spite of the concentrated efforts of many waves of feminism and generous shifts in the economic burden to women.<sup>137</sup> In this way, consideration of *Their Eyes* is warranted. It positions Hurston as radical in her time. Wherever she trained her critical eye we see such theoretical, ethnographic, and literary movements. Luckily for us, her eyes were watching Haiti at a critical juncture in Haiti's relation to the U.S. providing spiritual, historical, and ethnographic meat for further consumption and digestion by later authors. That her work was not as well received in her own time "as it is" now is a subject of others' work.<sup>138</sup> In fact, Mikell posits that in *Their Eyes* Hurston may have "'opened up too soon' and perhaps too thoroughly, because the reaction to this book did much to destroy any future chances of positive responses from the anthropological community."<sup>139</sup> The point is to place this significant literary culture creator at the center of a theoretical debate inspired by the conflict in Haiti in the early twentieth century.<sup>140</sup>

***Tell My Horse.*** "Parley cheval ou?" or rather who tells who what in Hurston's ethnographic account of her research in Haiti? Is Hurston telling us, an American audience, of

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<sup>135</sup> "I have a strong suspicion, but I can't be sure, that much that passes for constant love is a golded-up moment walking in its sleep. Some people know it is the walk of the dead, but in desperation and desolation, they have staked everything on life after death and the resurrection, so they haunt the graveyard," Hurston, *Dust Tracks*, 272-273.

<sup>136</sup> See Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

<sup>137</sup> See Jennifer De Vere Brody, *Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1998

<sup>138</sup> Ishmael Reed, intro., Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 92.

<sup>139</sup> Mikell, "Feminism and Black Culture," 62; In fact, Hurston wrote, "I have lost all my zest for the doctorate." in Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977, 210.

<sup>140</sup> In spite of the fact that others disagreed with her approach, she drew attention to the critical space of Occupation for many U.S. Americans, who eagerly, or sometimes reluctantly, felt compelled to engage in a reevaluation of the liberation of Haiti through the lens of Occupation and beyond.

her observations as a practicing ethnologist, or do the *loas* tell her? Is she the horse, the Guede, that speaks to mock and disrupt notions of class, conformity, and continuing invisible colonial relations between the U.S. and Haiti following the Occupation? Hurston's account opens by introducing audiences to Haiti via a quick review of history including the Revolution and Haiti's subsequent dissolution into chaos; she carefully avoids blaming Haitians for their condition, placing blame instead on international forces at work during the colonial period that left an island of dislocated Africans who had known no sense of democratic government to discover such a viable system for themselves. She writes,

No country has ever had more difficult tasks. In the first place Haiti had never been a country. It had always been a colony so the victors were not taking over an established government. They were trying to make a government of the wreck of a colony so that there had never been any real government there. And not out of people who had at least been in the habit of thinking of government as something real and tangible.<sup>141</sup>

The same thing could be said of the post-Occupation period. Hurston justifies the U.S. Occupation of Haiti. She does not disagree with the initial motivation of bringing peace to the island following the multiple corrupt and collapsing governments of the early twentieth century as other critics of her time do. James Weldon Johnson wrote in 1922,

Most Americans have the opinion—if they have any opinion at all on the subject—that the United States was forced, on purely humane grounds, to intervene in the black republic because of the tragic coup d'état which resulted in the overthrow and death of President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam and the execution of the political prisoners confined at Port-au-Prince, July 27-28, 1915; and that this government has been compelled to keep military force in Haiti since that time to pacify the country and maintain order.<sup>142</sup>

Hurston rightly credits “the N.A.A.C.P., *The Nation* and certain organizations” with having “a great deal more to do with the withdrawal of the Marines than [Haitian President Stenio] Vincent

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<sup>141</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 81.

<sup>142</sup> Johnson, “The American Occupation,” 236.

did and much more than they are given credit for.”<sup>143</sup> As Hurston notes, the U.S. is “never mentioned when Vincent orates about the Second Independence and honors himself as the Second Liberator. The story of how he drove out the marines all by himself is a great one, the way he tells it.”<sup>144</sup> Instead Hurston seems to agree with some Haitians, “A great many expressed resentment toward the whole thing. Why celebrate the leaving of the Marine Corps when nobody wanted the Marines to go anyway? Their era of prosperity had left with the Marines.”<sup>145</sup> Such statements ignore the documented well-known brutality exhibited against Haitians, especially the majority peasantry, by U.S. Marines including the “some three thousand Haitian men, women and children shot down by American rifles and machine guns” in the first “five years [the U.S.] maintained military forces in Haiti.”<sup>146</sup> Careful reading of *Tell My Horse* reveals Hurston’s engagement in a double-minded discourse aimed at pleasing multiple audiences that for some critics takes away from the credibility of her work.<sup>147</sup> One could also argue that as an ethnologist Hurston avoids judging such political concerns that might color or influence the intent of her investigations. In this deliberate avoidance of the obvious political problems asserted by prior critics she steers clear of polluting her own work, or discrediting herself to either her subject or audience. Hurston attempts to maintain a semblance of unbiased strict participant observation according to the rules of training required within the field of anthropology she so desperately tried to enter and where she strove to achieve scholarly success.

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<sup>143</sup> Italics added, Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 86.

<sup>144</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 86.

<sup>145</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 87.

<sup>146</sup> Johnson, “The American Occupation,” 236.

<sup>147</sup> By the time Hurston wrote *Dust Tracks* (1942) her editor at Lippincott had suggested she eliminate “international opinions as irrelevant to autobiography;” they “deleted two complete chapters from the 1942 edition and one other was edited out of recognition,” Russell, *Render My Song*, 43. Interestingly, William Seabrook was under contract to write his autobiography in the same year with the same publisher, *No Hiding Place: An Autobiography*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1942.

Hurston expresses her concerns with a true accounting of what she can gather through testimony, collected stories, and narrative accounts of those she encounters and direct witness of current events about the state of “Haiti as it is” and the intrinsic relationship of that definition with Vodou.<sup>148</sup>

As someone in America said of whiskey, Vodoo has more enemies in public and more friends in private than anything else in Haiti. None of the sons of Vodoo who sit in high places have yet had the courage to defend it publicly, though they know quite well and acknowledge privately that Vodoo is a harmless pagan cult that sacrifices domestic animals at its worst. . . . So since Vodoo is openly acknowledged by the humble only, it is safe to blame all the ill of Haiti on Vodoo.<sup>149</sup>

*Tell My Horse* proves Hurston’s thesis and her intended sincerity. As testament to her own commitments she provides late in the text details of her encounter with Dr. Reser in Pont Beudet, a white houngan whom she visits many times during the twelve months she lives in Haiti. She writes “the most important reason why I never tried to get my information second-hand out of Dr. Reser was because I consider myself amply equipped to go out in the field and get it myself.”<sup>150</sup> Hurston insisted on “conducting ethnography her own way,” sometimes at the expense of credibility among other anthropologists including her “Barnard and Columbia colleagues [who] had at first valued her folklore research and sought to use her contacts . . . as they pursued their own research.”<sup>151</sup> Additionally, according to Mikell, they became “ambivalent about her work, hostile to her methodology and research techniques, or scandalized by the depth of her cultural practices,” accusing her of “rebellious against rigorous comparative training to her own detriment.”<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 92.

<sup>149</sup> “The very same animals that are eaten every day in most of the civilized countries of the world,” [left out of quote], Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 92.

<sup>150</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 252.

<sup>151</sup> Mikell, “Feminism and Black Culture,” 64.

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*



Both Arthur Flowers in *Another Good Loving Blues* (1993) and Ishmael Reed in *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) defend Hurston against her critics in their fictional recreations of her.<sup>153</sup> Flowers describes a fictional Hurston in his expert retelling of *Their Eyes* as “an impressive woman in bold browskin features, a pillbox hat sitting confidently over high bangs and a feathered boa, draped carelessly around her neck,” the boa working as a playful pun at the expense of her mentor, Franz Boas.<sup>154</sup> The fictional Hurston attempts observational objectivity by sitting “somewhat apart from the others, listening intently, occasionally taking notes in a spiral notebook.”<sup>155</sup> Based on Hurston as she presents herself in *Mules and Men* (1935), Flowers notes that it is not until his fictional Hurston “put[s] away both pad and pen,” do the spiritual informants in *Another Good Loving Blues* open up to her questions.<sup>156</sup> When the fictional Hurston participates as herself, abandoning the reserve required of such academic interview techniques (and maybe her own shyness) with “unrestrained grins and a laugh that made everybody smile and chuckle along with her,” is she able to draw information out of Melvira and Hootowl.<sup>157</sup> Her personality sets the crowd gathered for lunch at Jackson’s Drug Store on Beale Street at ease allowing her to establish the rapport necessary to gather the tales she came for. Metaphorically, Flowers presents the struggle between academic integrity and the artistic creative impulse that drove the real Hurston’s best work through his fictional recreation of her.

Reed also tips his hat to Hurston’s somewhat unconventional techniques in his creation of the fictional character Earline, again modeled on the real Hurston. Both Flowers and Reed use the medium of fiction to defend Hurston as they reflect on and mine her work for material to support their own historically based novels. As a contemporary of Hurston, Langston Hughes

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<sup>153</sup> Mikell, “Feminism and Black Culture,” 64.

<sup>154</sup> Flowers, *Another*, 114.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> Flowers, *Another*, 118.

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*

described her similarly as a scholar that accomplished her best work when she put aside academic pretensions and allowed her artistic side to flourish through her enigmatic personality, “Miss Hurston was clever, too—a student who didn’t let college give her a broad *a* and who had great scorn for all pretensions, academic and otherwise. That is why she was such a fine folk-lore collector, able to go among the people and never act as if she had been at school at all.”<sup>158</sup>

Ultimately, the fictional Hurston in *Another Good Loving Blues* declares, “Literature and hoodoo . . . both are tools for shaping the soul,” while Hootowl concurs, “Spiritwork,” equals, “Sacred literature,” endorsing and legitimating Hurston’s body of work as a whole.<sup>159</sup>

Through Hurston’s prior work collecting folklore in the South for *Mules and Men* and by the time she arrived in Haiti, Hurston had developed a theory of “ethnographic subjectivity” at odds with her mentors, Franz Boas and Melville Herskovits.<sup>160</sup> “Hurston approached her work with the assumption that the best researcher has a commonality with the people being studied.”<sup>161</sup> The chapter about Dr. Reser falls late in her narrative as an afterthought. Apparently, she has sworn an oath not to describe this part of her work, but feels compelled as a scientist to depict the world of Haiti as she saw it with full transparency. Mikell explains, “Particularly with *Tell My Horse*, Hurston was alternately accused of journalistic approaches or of entering too fully into the cultural experience of her informants.”<sup>162</sup> Part I of *Tell My Horse* documents her time spent in Jamaica and Part II her time in Haiti. She provides accounts of creation myths, folklore and Vodou beliefs, including performance as well as other practices largely spectacularized in Occupation accounts. She investigates zombies, poisoning techniques, funerary practices, and possession as psychological processes. She provides musical

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<sup>158</sup> Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography by Langston Hughes*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1940, 239.

<sup>159</sup> Flowers, *Another*, 119.

<sup>160</sup> Mikell, “Feminism and Black Culture,” 61.

<sup>161</sup> Mikell, “Feminism and Black Culture,” 59.

<sup>162</sup> Mikell, “Feminism and Black Culture,” 64.

transcriptions of twenty-five Voodoo chants and six other associated songs and dance tunes (with the assistance of Arthur Lyncie Duroseau and A. Hernandez)—quite enough material given a thorough reading of her account to recreate a Vodou ceremony.<sup>163</sup> She sprinkles chants and twenty-eight photos throughout the text closing certain chapters with “Ah Bo Bo!” signaling the end of the calling of the *loas*, as if these chapters indeed operate as literary rituals, literary possessions, moments in which we see through her eyes.<sup>164</sup> Hurston is nothing but scientifically persistent in her commitment to truth about the healing and associated potentially disturbing practices of this Haitian-born belief system as ethnological accountant, first-hand witness, and participant observer.

In her description of “the ceremony Tete l’eau (Head of the Water) . . . a thing to induce the belief in gods and spirits,” or “head washing,” Hurston admits to her own initiation (for the second time) as she reports that the “ceremony is so beautiful in setting and spirit that it is necessary to participate in it to fully appreciate it” as she heads off to the Falls “at Saut d’Eau, a triple waterfall just above Ville Bonheur” to join the yearly pilgrimage.<sup>165</sup> These are the same falls Dunham previously found and at which she discovered the scared drums she used in performance.<sup>166</sup> Once there,

Louis Romain, the houngan of the Bolosse who was preparing me for initiation at the time begged me not to enter the water. He said, and others agreed with him that Agoue’ ta-Royo, the Maitre L’Eau (Master of Waters) might enter my head and since I was not baptized he might just stay in my head for years and worry me.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 265-287.

<sup>164</sup> See Beatty about his work with Dunham in previous section.

<sup>165</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 226, 228.

<sup>166</sup> Dunham, *Island Possessed*, 123-124.

<sup>167</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 231; see Tobias Wendl, *Mami Wata: der Geisst der Wissen Frau*, Göttingen: Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film, 1988; Henry John Drewal, “Mami Wata Shrines,” *African Material Culture*, eds. Mary Jo Arnoldi, Christraud M. Geary and Kris L. Hardin, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, 308-333; Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, New York: Random House, 1983, and *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas*, Munich: Prestel for the

Hurston names her informants where appropriate, obscures their identities when necessary, and reports what she hears as distinguished from what she sees. Of her methodology when recording the words of others she notes,

I kept on talking to people and asking questions . . . they kept on telling me things. So I came to hear from many people a story that was the same in all the essential points. Minor details differed of course. But the happenings that follow were repeated to me by numerous persons.<sup>168</sup>

Hurston recounts significant moments in Haitian history in her first chapter about Haiti provocatively titled “Rebirth of a Nation” mirroring the title of the controversial American film “Birth of a Nation” released in 1915, the first year of the Occupation.<sup>169</sup> Her sardonic sense of humor often communicates more than Hurston willingly commits to paper in terms of her opinions about politics.<sup>170</sup> In “Politics and Personalities of Haiti” she recounts the capture, imprisonment, and subsequent execution of political dissidents, and the grotesque details of their mutilated bodies in the prison, providing justification enough for her position of support of the U.S. intervention.<sup>171</sup> She describes these events through a narrative description worthy of or reflective of her fictional writings.

All that day of the massacre the families washed the bodies and wept and hung over human fragments asking of the bloody lumps, ‘Is it you, my love, that I touch and hold?’ And in that desperate affection every lump was carried away from the prison to somebody’s heart and a loving burial.<sup>172</sup>

She chooses not to engage in extenuating debates of the value of the Occupation, but does note some of the positive effects she witnesses herself and recounts that her informants told her they

Museum for African Art, New York, 1993. This is the second time Hurston uncharacteristically walks away from a challenge out of fear for her personal safety in Haiti.

<sup>168</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 105.

<sup>169</sup> Hurston plays on the title of D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*, Chicago, Illinois: Facets Multimedia, 1992, VHS. The film was originally released in 1915, the year the U.S. Occupation of Haiti began.

<sup>170</sup> See Russell, *Render My Song*, 41, about Lippincott’s admonishment to avoid politics in her later works.

<sup>171</sup> Part I of *Tell My Horse* is dedicated to Hurston’s ethnographic account of spirit work in Jamaica; see “Part I: Jamaica,” 3-62.

<sup>172</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 71.

wanted outside help. “One black peasant woman fell upon her knees with her arms outstretched like a crucifix and cried, ‘They say that the white man is coming to rule Haiti again. The black man is so cruel to his own, *let the white man come!*’”<sup>173</sup> Hurston cannot have witnessed firsthand what precipitated the events leading to the U.S. Marines dropping “anchor in the harbor of Port-au-Prince” on July 28, 1915, but relies sympathetically on informants who apparently agree, in spite of certain cruelties referred to in the popular press, that the Occupation benefited Haiti.<sup>174</sup>

L’Ouverture had beaten back the outside enemies of Haiti, but the bloody stump of [President] Sam’s body [‘hoisted on a pole on the Champ de Mars and his torso being dragged about and worried by the mob’] was to quell Haiti’s internal foes, who had become more dangerous to Haiti than anyone else. The smoke from the funnels of the U.S.S. *Washington* was a plume of white hope.<sup>175</sup>

Certainly, the U.S. intervention allowed Hurston to travel safely alone in Haiti from September 1936 to March 1937 and May 1937 to September 1937 to conduct her ethnographic research. Hurston is not the first African American ethnographer to conduct such scientifically inclined research on the spiritual (and intellectual) lives of Haitians. To do this work successfully, and with as much objectivity as any anthropologist can claim, she must carefully sidestep any political misgivings voiced by other critics of the Occupation at the time.

Speaking from afar (or perplexingly, as if at a distance), Hurston recounts the history of the Revolution noting, “Haiti has always been two places. First it was the Haiti of the masters and slaves. Now it is Haiti of the wealthy and educated mulattoes and the Haiti of the blacks.”<sup>176</sup> She compares this situation to that of the United States where “race” men, whom she does not mention by name, have made much of the competencies, abilities, and duties of W.E.B.

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<sup>173</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 71.

<sup>174</sup> Johnson, “The American Occupation,” 236.

<sup>175</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 72; see Bontemps and Hughes, *Popo and Fifina*.

<sup>176</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 73.

DuBois's celebrated "talented ten percent."<sup>177</sup> Under auspices of introducing her audience to the personalities that "rule" Haiti, Hurston offers scathing critique of her own intellectual counterparts in the U.S. She tells "a very intelligent young Haitian woman" with whom she "had come to be very close to" so that they "had gotten to the place where neither of us lied to each other about our respective countries" about "gangsters, corrupt political machines, race prejudice and lynchings" in the U.S.<sup>178</sup> Hurston draws a parallel distinction between divisions of power and success between America and Haiti along class and color lines within an entirely colored society. She criticizes ineffectual Haitian leaders, who are predominantly of an elite lighter class, via the lens of American race consciousness discourse, in a literary turnabout worthy of "the sharp trickster of Haitian folk-lore," Ti Malice, or Little Devil.<sup>179</sup> Her critique of the government and its representatives she initially engages with as an outside, disengaged observer with a literary gift allows her to state, "Of course, Haiti is not now and never was a democracy according to the American concept. It is an elected monarchy. The President of Haiti is really a king in a palace, with a reign limited to a term of years. The term republic is used very loosely in this case."<sup>180</sup>

She decries "the most striking phenom[en] in Haiti" are the "enormous and unconscious cruelty" of the "gentle and lovable" Haitian people and the "habit of lying!" after quietly detailing the ongoing successes of some of Haiti's most humble and faithful public servants.<sup>181</sup> Ironically, she noted in *Mules and Men* that "black women" actively participated "in the 'lies'

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<sup>177</sup> See DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks*.

<sup>178</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 203-4; in making comparisons between the Haitian elite and the U.S., Hurston opens the door for the following critique: "America has produced a generation of Negroes who are impatient of the orators. They want to hear about more jobs and houses and meat on the table. They are resentful of opportunities lost while their parents sat satisfied and happy listening to crummy orators. Our heroes are no longer talkers but doers. This leaves some of our 'race' men and women of yesterday puzzling and hurt. 'Race leaders' are simply obsolete," Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 77.

<sup>179</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 82.

<sup>180</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 75.

<sup>181</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 81-2.

that southerners told on their porches to wile away the time” as evidence that “they were equally as strong as men but that their strength came in different ways.”<sup>182</sup> The cruelty Hurston speaks of echoes the cruelty towards animals remarked upon previously by the Balch mission and Carl Kelsey during the Occupation. Without such context provided by Hurston’s prior writings, and those of prior visitors to Haiti, some claims Hurston makes in *Tell My Horse* regarding Jamaican and Haitian internal relations could be dangerously misinterpreted as unsympathetic. She concludes the initial chapter with, “Whither Haiti?” Incidentally, Jacques Derrida, echoes this phrase in the opening of his *Specters of Marxism* fifty-six years later with, “Whither Marx?” (1993). She begs the question, where do we find the spirit of Haiti if not in the presented obvious political, social, and economic contradictions? An adept ethnographer, literary agent and initiate, thus, Hurston answers her own question in the chapters on mythology, Vodou, and folklore.

**Maya Deren (21 months in Haiti, from 1947-1955).** The third woman under consideration here reminds us, “The audience for art is limited not by ignorance nor by an inability to analyze, but by a lack of innocent receptivity.”<sup>183</sup> Maya Deren served as Dunham’s personal assistant in touring *Cabin in the Sky* along with Ethel Waters and the Dunham Dance Company across America from 1940 to 1941 after Dunham returned from her initial study in Haiti. A student of poetics first and of dance and film secondarily Deren carefully studied the movements of the Dunham Technique as she witnessed first-hand its evolution on the American stage. Based on careful study of Vodou (in the form of Dunham’s research notes, technique films, and stage presentations) and her own experiments in translating those movements into

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<sup>182</sup> Mikell, “Feminism and Black Culture,” 59-60; Hurston reiterates this concept of lying as form of community protection in *Tell My Horse* although she does not develop the concept as consciously here as in *Mules and Men*, “Certainly at the present time the art of saying what one would like to be believed instead of the glaring fact is highly developed in Haiti,” 82.

<sup>183</sup> Maya Deren, “Cinema as Art Form,” in *Essential Deren: Collected Writings on Film by Maya Deren*, ed. Bruce R. McPherson, Kingston, New York: Documentext, 2005, 23.

choreography for film, Deren published a chapbook titled *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film* in 1946. There she wrote,

The entire alphabet is insufficient to describe the infinite complex of variables which the theoretical formula of life or great art would involve. For the interaction of the parts so transforms them into function that there are no longer parts, but a simple, homogenous whole which defies dissectional analysis, and in so sublimating the complex history of its development, seems an instantaneous miracle.<sup>184</sup>

Deren's astute assertions about the ability of the camera to capture movement in ways beyond the limits of imagination, psychoanalysis, and linguistics predate feminist film theorists such as Laura Mulvey by two decades.<sup>185</sup> The anagram draws psychologically and conceptually from the Haitian *vévé*.<sup>186</sup> Impelled by an inner drive and encouraged by mentor and friend, Joseph Campbell, Deren went to Haiti to document, validate, and verify with the most modern cameras and audio recording systems available at the time the movements upon which Dunham developed her techniques. Inspired to seek a certain universality in the performance of spirit and motivated to explore the camera as a tool for expanding choreographic space beyond the limits of the stage, Deren recorded hundreds of hours of video and audio, combining the strengths of the prior ethnographic production of Hurston and Dunham in concrete forms. Film and audio reels reveal much for careful and repetitive study of the worlds witnessed by both Hurston and Dunham, but for which neither had the funding for such extensive plastic documentation.

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<sup>184</sup> Maya Deren, *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*, republished in *Essential Deren: Collected Writings on Film by Maya Deren*, ed. Bruce R. McPherson, Kingston, New York: Documentext, 2005, 47. This description echoes DeLeuze and Guattari's "body without organs;" see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, New York: Viking, 1972.

<sup>185</sup> See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *The Sexual Subject*, Routledge, 1992, 22-34.

<sup>186</sup> See Karen McCarthy Brown's definition of a "Haitian aesthetic" in *Tracing the Spirit*, 22. "Nine factors define this aesthetic [primarily including] the division of the picture plane into a grid based on the form of *veve* patterns[. . .] a focus on earth and that which pushes up from beneath the surface; [and] the filling up of the visual space with object upon object. . . . The other six elements in her definition refer not to form but to meaning: 1) indirect communication, 2) condensation of multiple referents into a single image through visual puns and conflicting visual images, 3) humor, 4) preoccupation with binding and loosing, 5) transformation, and 6) bricolage. It is bricolage that interests me here, because it is through both structural and 'iconographic bricolage' that the other elements are communicated to the viewer . . .," Stevens, *Zonbis, Zobop, and Zanj*, 116.



Hurston went armed with a still camera and Dunham a moving camera, but neither with the technological machinery nor savvy of Deren, who already had worked with the Haitian material in her avant-garde and experimental films prior to her arrival on Haitian ground.

Deren made very few films obviously evidencing her experience in Haiti upon her return. Instead, she published a complex text, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953).

Dunham-trained dancer and choreographer, Jean Léon-Destiné, said about the book:

*Divine Horsemen* is really one of the best that I have seen. For some reason, I myself being Haitian, when I read the book, I wonder, how did she accumulate so much knowledge? I mean how did the people who she was connected with, how could they open up so easily to a foreigner, somebody that they didn't know, and somebody who is supposed to be, who comes . . . as a white person, coming to learn about the culture of the black people? So it was very strange when you read this book to see how much they revealed.<sup>187</sup>

The companion video to the text, with actual ethnographic footage of Vodou possession and other practices, compiled by Cherel and Teiji Ito and narrated by John Genke and Joan Pape, appeared in 1985.<sup>188</sup> This film may be the most widely shown film documenting Vodou performance in classrooms globally. Although Deren traveled without the endorsement of Dunham and employed some of the same sources that Dunham did, Dunham later commented on the work of Deren. "I tell you my first reaction was annoyance because she had the advantage of all my correspondence, also she didn't relate to me as she should have. I got over that because I saw that she was a serious person and was received by Haitians."<sup>189</sup> Dunham responds to both Hurston and Deren in *Island Possessed* (1969), though she does not directly mention either there.

Deren was born Eleanor Derenskovskaya in Kiev, capital of the Ukraine, in 1917. The Derenskovskayas emigrated to the United States, settling in Syracuse, New York, when Eleanor

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<sup>187</sup> Jean Léon-Destiné, interview, Martina Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror of Maya Deren*, Zeitgesit Films, 2004, DVD.

<sup>188</sup> See Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, compilers Cherel and Teiji Ito, Mystic Fire Video, 1985, VHS.

<sup>189</sup> Dunham, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

was five years old. She completed two degrees in English by age twenty-two as an aspiring poet: the first at New York University (after transferring from Syracuse, where her father taught psychiatry), and, the second, from Smith College, where she completed a master's "thesis about French Symbolists' influence upon Anglo-American modernist poets (e.g., Pound, Elliot, and the Imagists)" in 1939.<sup>190</sup> In the same year, she encountered William B. Seabrook. Sharing an interest in spirit possession, she researched portions of his *Witchcraft, its Power in the World Today* (1941). Following graduation, Deren realized she was not a great poet and pursued freelance work. Seabrook was one of many she wrote for. This working relationship did not last.

Upon visiting his home at Rhinebeck on the Hudson River, Seabrook invited Deren to stay for three weeks with pay at a rate of twenty-five dollars per week to participate in experiments in "extra-sensory perception."<sup>191</sup> He provided her with a contract three pages in length that "proceeded upon the logic that when, for example, someone is very very exhausted and thus physically unable to exercise their [*sic.*] regular senses normally, they get a type of lucidity and hallucination which has a profound subconscious basis."<sup>192</sup> Upon this premise Deren agrees, "Working and living as hard as I do I had often reached the hallucinatory or imagistic stage of fatigue."<sup>193</sup> Seabrook does not present unfamiliar ideas; Deren idolized her father and his work and familiarized herself with Freud and Jung as evidenced in her thesis; her burgeoning interest in how artistic creativity and inspiration manifests in the mind drove her search for a viable form for communicating such experience. Seabrook's plan sounded intriguing until she read the proposal in detail. Over the course of three weeks a woman would volunteer for: "1. Standing on toes for six to eight hours[;] 2. Kneeling erect for 8 to 10 hours[;] 3. Remaining in

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<sup>190</sup> McPherson, intro., *Essential Deren*, 8.

<sup>191</sup> Deren letter, 1940, in Clark, Hodson, and Neiman. eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 411, 412.

<sup>192</sup> Deren letter, Clark, Hodson and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 412.

<sup>193</sup> *ibid.*

the witch's cradle for six hours . . . [; and] 4. To hang by the wrists for six hours with toes barely touching floor."<sup>194</sup> She could also choose to: "1. To Remain in the cage for from three to five days[; and] 2. To remain in the mask, with hands tied, for from three to five days."<sup>195</sup> Seabrook asked women to perform all of these acts naked, without objection or use of intelligible language on pain of punishment by whipping.

Deren's full account of Seabrook's proposal appears in a letter dated February 16, 1940, addressed to and held in the collection of her colleague and friend Professor Herbert Passin. All of this occurred in a box-type barn reconfigured for such activities decorated with the artifacts of Seabrook's previous travels. He claimed the evidence he gathered would contribute to his next book on paranormal experiences, which he never wrote. Although deeply interested from an early age in states of trance and possession, Deren strongly disagreed with such methods. Her letter recounts Seabrook's admission that he had made a mistake in choosing her as a possible candidate, "you didn't seem to me a girl whose primary function was thinking."<sup>196</sup> For Seabrook, intelligence and intellect prevented the necessary break down of the person into the passive state required for extra-sensory perception to occur. Seabrook admits this bluntly to Deren, "It is obvious I wouldn't go to all this trouble for materials of dubious value on extra-sensory perception unless I got some erotic pleasure of seeing attractive young girls acting like animals."<sup>197</sup> Such confessions must call into question the validity of his work in Haiti.

Deren describes what we would call a panic attack associated with traumatic experience the following day:

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<sup>194</sup> Seabrook, quoted in Deren letter, Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 412-413, Deren provide's this parenthetical definition: "The witch's cradle is a medieval narrow sort of seat which apprentice witches were supposed to straddle for hours to eventually be able to ride a broomstick," 413.

<sup>195</sup> Seabrook, quoted in Deren letter, Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren* 413

<sup>196</sup> Deren letter, Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 414.

<sup>197</sup> Seabrook in Deren letter, Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 414; Seabrook later defends his position in *No Hiding Place: An Autobiography*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1942, 370-373.

I had a terrible nervous reaction, like after an emergency dealt with. The images kept coming to me and all day long yesterday every muscle in my body would contract in spasms of horror, and revulsion. Even today they float about in the room. As I think back now I am amazed how calm and alert my mind was. Only this morning I remembered that I had slept alone, in the midst of a howling blizzard, surrounded by his instruments of pain and hideousness.<sup>198</sup>

Sasha Hammid, Deren's future husband, notes Deren did not advertise this, it "wasn't something she'd talk about with strangers a lot."<sup>199</sup> Referred to by her biographers as the Rhinebeck Episode, the letter occupies six pages of five volumes of collected documentary evidence contained in *The Legend of Maya Deren: A Documentary Biography and Collected Works* (1984) by Vèvè A. Clark, Millicent Hodson, and Catrina Neiman.<sup>200</sup> It represents a major turning point in Deren's career.

Immediately, Deren aggressively pursued work with Dunham. "She presented herself for a managerial job with the African-American choreographer Katherine Dunham, traveling with the troupe for a year, and developing an already nascent appreciation for dance, as well as a strong interest in Haitian culture," probably derived from reading *The Magic Island* and motivated by her personal experience with the book's author.<sup>201</sup> Deren's interest in Haiti and Dunham was literary as well as choreographic and ethnographic, as presented in her later text documenting that work, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, in 1953. Describing herself as a failed poet, with an interest in dance inherited from her mother and psychology from her psychiatrist father, Deren sought to redefine herself. After a nine-month tour with Dunham, Deren married her first husband, exiled Czechoslovakian filmmaker, Alexander Hackenschmied

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<sup>198</sup> Deren letter, Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 414.

<sup>199</sup> Interview with Alexander Hammid, New York City, August 15, 1976. In Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 410.

<sup>200</sup> In no other text I read or film I viewed did anyone mention the Rhinebeck Episode. I was shocked and remain shocked. Deren added, "But what is there to tell you how real, how horribly real it was, except all these inadequate words strung so ineptly across the past few pages?" Deren letter, Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 414.

<sup>201</sup> McPherson says this occurred in 1941, all other sources indicate Deren began working with Dunham in 1940, intro., *Essential Deren*, 8.

(aka. Sasha Hammid) in 1942. Hammid chose the name Maya for her to reflect her image as “a white dance enthusiast turned manager of a black dance troupe during the Jim Crow era.”<sup>202</sup> He says he looked in myth books for names associated with water and found the Mother of Buddha; in Hinduism he found Maya associated with “a goddess who wore a veil in front of her eyes, a veil of illusion;” which “allowed her to see the spiritual reality behind it.”<sup>203</sup> Langston Hughes wrote “Danse Africaine” in 1922.

A night-veiled girl  
whirls softly into a  
circle of light.  
whirls softly . . . slowly,  
Like a wisp of smoke around the fire –  
and the tom-toms beat,  
and the tom-toms beat,  
And the low beating of the tom-toms  
stirs your blood.<sup>204</sup>

Although Hughes wrote this poem prior to his travels to Cap Haitien in 1931, his description aptly fits Deren.<sup>205</sup> Hammid’s choice of name for Deren reflects his intentions to tie her work to that of black America.

Deren wore many masks, allowing her to fluidly negotiate shifting racial and spiritual terrains as she sought to study the dance forms of Haiti through her close association with and observation of Dunham and her company. Ultimately, she employed three dancers trained in the Dunham technique from that company in her own work: Talley Beatty, Rita Christiani, and Janet Collins. Although illegal to mix dancers of certain types with certain dance forms on certain

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<sup>202</sup> McPherson, intro., *Essential Deren*, 9.

<sup>203</sup> Hammid, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>204</sup> Langston Hughes, “Danse Africaine,” in *African-American Classics: Great Stories and Poems from America’s Earliest Black Writers*, Graphic Classics Volume 22, Mount Horeb, Wisconsin: Eureka Productions, 2011, 37.

<sup>205</sup> In “A Letter from Haiti,” Hughes wrote from Cap Haitien, “Haiti is a hot, tropical little country, all mountains and sea; a lot of marines, mulatto politicians, and a world of black people without shoes—who catch hell,” Edward J. Mullen, *Langston Hughes in the Hispanic World and Haiti*, New York: Archon Books, 1973, 33; Hughes traveled to Africa in 1923, *The Big Sea*, 102. Like Deren, Hughes worked from imagination prior to actual physical investigation.

stages in the 1930s and 1940s, Deren freely mixed dancers from various backgrounds in her choreographies of dance for film. Hammid introduced Deren to filmmaking techniques where she allowed black and white dancers to visually interact on the screen, metaphorically arranging a palette for social metissage in the silent black and white film format. In a radical move, Deren addressed racial issues without speaking about race.

After her experiences with Dunham and marriage to Hammid, publishing came much more frequently for Deren. Before she went to Haiti for the first time herself she published seven essays and the chapbook on film theory, *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film* (1946), that reflect her persistent interest in capturing spiritual movement within the lens of the camera.<sup>206</sup> These essays and the book paralleled her experience as an emerging filmmaker.

According to Bruce R. McPherson, Deren's

formalism can be read more specifically as a stratagem to defend her films from their audiences. Deren quickly learned that acquired habits of perception and interpretation prevented viewers almost literally from seeing her films. Her admonitions against interpretation champion form over content because by her definition form is inseparable from content, and the only avenue for its apprehension.<sup>207</sup>

For Deren film functions as the only form in which she feels visual images of the other can be translated into meaningful fresh perception. The raw, undoctored, verbally undirected image can speak for itself across space and time without directions from its creator. This makes Deren's films influenced by Haiti through contact with Dunham and later by the island itself more revealing than any prior newsreels about Haiti that precede her by a decade or more and with

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<sup>206</sup> See "Cinema as an Independent Art Form," promotional flyer, August 1945; "Choreography for the Camera," *Dance Magazine*, 1945; "An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film," *The Alicat Book Shop Press*, chapbook, 1946; "Ritual in Transfigured Time," *Dance Magazine*, 1946; "Magic is New," *Mademoiselle*, January 1946; "Three Abandoned Films," Film Program, Provincetown Playhouse, 133 McDougal Street, New York City, 18 February 1946; "Cinema as an Art Form," *New Directions* 9, 1946; "Films in the Classicist Tradition," Promotional flyer, late 1946; previously published in shorter form, Provincetown Playhouse, 133 McDougal Street, New York City, late October 1946; "Creating Movies with a New Dimension: Time," *Popular Photography*, December 1946; and "Creative Cutting," *Movie Makers*, May and June, 1947, *Essential Deren*.

<sup>207</sup> McPherson, intro., *Essential Deren*, 11.

which she must have been familiar. She argues that her films offer a visceral and sensual experience of that which cannot necessarily be translated into verbal or textual form. Film offers an alternate media to imaginatively capture the work of ethnography and cultural studies. She thus hints at the limitations Seabrook, Dunham, and Hurston encountered in translating their Haitian experience into objective journalistic and popular ethnography. Dunham, Hurston, and Deren find their most successful recountings of supposedly scientific studies in their creative presentations. Hurston captures the feeling of Haiti in the one work of fiction she wrote while there, Dunham's choreographies exhibit moving dioramas witnessed by a broad body of live audiences, and Deren breaks the rules of physics and gravity in her films suspending the body outside of a fixed spatial and temporal reality as a metaphor of spirit. In the opacity and obscurity of their creative work, all three of these ethnographers lose the ability to direct the audience in how to read them. None of these three women directs our vision of Vodou, allowing audiences through time, across different positionalities to engage as participants in the creation of the non-static evolving worlds of the *loas*. Removing the work from fixed rules of ethnographic representation and into the experiential realm of art does justice to the work in new ways beyond the limited visions of the early twentieth-century academy or popular audiences.

***The Experimental Films.*** Deren created four significant experimental films prior to going to Haiti that clearly exhibit the influence of her study of Dunham's dance theories and practice derived from Haitian Vodou performance of possession and secular dance. Deren described her films as poetry suspended as dance within the frame of the camera with no need for the verbal. She choreographed these "dance poems" within the lens of the camera, unconfined by the front-facing three-walled space of the stage, something no one else had yet done. The early films are mostly silent. Drums echo through the later films from the hundreds of

hours of audio and visual tape she recorded of Vodou song, dance, and possession, drawn from her personal archives. The 16 mm films recorded between 1943 and 1948 are all presented in black and white. Films presented before Deren's trips to Haiti were influenced by her relationship with Dunham as her personal secretary: "The drums really took her over. She was possessed by rhythm. And you can see it without drums, without sound, or anything else in the way she handled her body."<sup>208</sup> Although not a dancer in the troupe, Deren's mind was activated by what she witnessed on tour with Dunham leading to a mutually beneficial relationship between them.

*Meshes of the Afternoon*. Deren first presented *Meshes of the Afternoon* to American audiences in 1943.<sup>209</sup> The silent film, made in collaboration with Hammid, lasts for fourteen minutes. Teiji Ito added a score of Vodou drums to the film in 1959.<sup>210</sup> One can view *Meshes* silently and then with the sound on to see how the addition of sound changes the audience's experience. Filmed at Deren and Hammid's apartment on Kings Road in Los Angeles, Hammid ably handles the camera in creating a dream sequence focused on five symbolic elements: a white hibiscus flower, a knife, a key, a mirror, a telephone, and stairs. In a play on interior and exterior space, Deren appears in shadow and presence, as the audience traverses the world of a dream within a dream. She fumbles in attempting to enter the interior space, signaling her apprehension, and the dual nature of the visual poetic image. Viewers see this world from Hammid's perspective as he captures Deren's psychological landscape through the mechanical enclosure of the tubular camera lens. Images repeat in impossible reversals. Deren, dressed in black, chases a black-robed figure with a fractured mirror for a face. The robed figure walks

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<sup>208</sup> Dunham, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>209</sup> *Maya Deren: Collected Experimental Films*, Chicago: Facets Multimedia, 1990, VHS.

<sup>210</sup> *Meshes of the Afternoon*, 1943, 14 minutes, silent, collaboration with Alexander Hammid, Teiji Ito added the score in 1959.



slowly, comfortably, at ease and with purpose, but Deren runs behind, never catching up. Temporal and spatial disconnection signal entry into a non-verbal world of shattered images, shifting awareness of self from viewed to viewer.<sup>211</sup> The illusion of three parties, when actually only two can occupy these two perspectives, implies a play on the Vodou concept of Marassa.

Expressing frustration at her inability to escape, the dreamer pushes through sheets of sheer black mesh to face the camera directly. Engaging the audience in complicity with her, Deren dances backwards out of a window and winds upside down the exterior stairs as they turn interior to confront her sleeping self. Obviously, that makes no sense nor should it. Spatial relationships contradict reality.<sup>212</sup> Appearances deceive. Within the dream, Deren looks from behind a glass window, in which her own image is refracted. This is the most commonly reproduced image of Deren as an artist.<sup>213</sup>

Deren as the dreamer follows an invisible force, writhing snake-like (Damballa), up stairs. She cannot access the robed figure who places the white flower on a white pillow on an all white bed; white signaling initiation or marriage (in Vodou, specifically here to Erzulie).<sup>214</sup> Deren's reflection is captured in the mirror-face of the robed figure as it turns directly toward her. The camera cuts to two similar women sitting at a kitchen table appearing as twin Derens while another Deren stands in the doorway (Marassa), places the knife (symbol of Ogun) on the table, and retrieves it as the key. The dreamer exits to walk on sand and in grass. The sleeping

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<sup>211</sup> "The time is out of joint," from *Hamlet*, "A question of repetition: a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back," and, ". . . the thing works, whether it transforms or transforms itself, poses or decomposes itself: the spirit, the 'spirit of the spirit' is *work*. But what is work? What is its concept if it supposes the spirit of the spirit? Valéry understands it: 'By "Spirit" here I mean a certain power of *transformation . . . the spirit . . . works*,'" Derrida could be applied here, see *Specters of Marx*, New York: Routledge, 2006, frontispiece, 9, 11. I want to pursue this in a future analysis of Deren's films and theories thereof.

<sup>212</sup> Echoing "not where I left you," Disney, *Pirates*. Displacement of objects indicates entry into another world, be it the dream or that of spirit.

<sup>213</sup> Stan Brakhage, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>214</sup> Dreams can determine who one chooses as master of the head in Vodou, or who chooses you. This also mirrors Dunham's description of her faltering initiation to Damballa.

Deren holds the knife in her hand. Hammid's face appears for the first time, seemingly admonishing her to wake up. Her eyes flutter open in recognition of the man she loves. Holding the white flower he climbs the stairs and places it again on the white pillow, inviting her to join him. Deren follows, naturally climbing the stairs, and enters the bedroom where Hammid's face appears in reflection in an unbroken round mirror. Deren collapses gently on the bed, next to the flower, and stares somewhere away from the camera. Hammid caresses Deren's backside, she grabs the knife from under the pillow and slashes through the projected image of Hammid, tearing the photographic paper screen, as it shatters into so many fragments of a broken mirror she then tosses out to sea. Waves roll over the fragments and Hammid walks away, picks up the flower, opens the lock to the apartment with the key, enters and finds Deren with the shredded photo image of him scattered across the room, fragments of the broken mirror in her lap, white blood trickling from her mouth as if she had succeeded in swallowing the knife. The film ends there. No resolution, no happy ending, no spoken words.

Deren's biographers note that "the sequence of events in the film is often inaccurately recounted," because "the 'story' is tenuous and easily eludes memory or waking logic," thus my own accounting may not be "true."<sup>215</sup> Memory by its very nature lies. Deren says the

film is concerned with the interior experiences of an individual. It does not record an event that could be witnessed by other persons. Rather, it reproduces the way in which the subconscious of an individual will develop, interpret and elaborate an apparently simple and casual incident into a critical emotional experience.<sup>216</sup>

Film critic and editor of *Cinema 16*, Amos Vogel, living in exile from Austria during World War II, saw Deren's film as dream theory in a new kind of present, "I felt I was in the presence of a new kind of talent, somebody who had absorbed the twentieth-century revelations and

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<sup>215</sup> Catrina Neiman, ed., *Legend of Maya Deren*, Vol. 1, Pt. 2, "Chambers (1942-47)," 78.

<sup>216</sup> Deren in Neiman, ed., *Legend of Maya Deren*, "Chambers," 77.

achievements in terms of dreams theory.”<sup>217</sup> Freud developed his theories on dreams at the very beginning of the twentieth century and Amos felt Deren had fully absorbed this. “Dreams are essentially silent. This was a very important element in the films to me, this silence, and here was somebody who was able to represent this dream reality, this inner reality, on film.”<sup>218</sup> Vogel says this with a gentle amiable smile, obviously moved by Deren’s work in a deeply troubled world.

*Witch’s Cradle*. In repetitions, reversals, and impossible breaks and multiplicities, and seemingly seamless movement between interiority and exteriority of mind and space, and by slowing and advancing the movements of bodies by adjusting the speed of the film, Deren depicts intellectual philosophical struggles, spiritual realities, and “industrial expressions in the mind of man that wanted to break some kind of confines.”<sup>219</sup> She illustrates this intellectual conflict within another film made in 1943, but not presented to the public, *Witch’s Cradle*. This thirteen-minute silent film has been presented in exhibitions since Deren’s death. Marcel Duchamp and Anna Matta Clark perform within “the Art of This Century gallery, where the architecture, designed by Fredrick J. Keisler, and the paintings and objects by the foremost modern artists seemed to [Deren] to constitute a strange, magic world.”<sup>220</sup> Within the confines of the room, the props constitute an intellectual framework from which the young white female character cannot escape. Such a thought experiment may have been suggested by the Rhinebeck Episode. Deren drew the title from one of the torture devices she witnessed in Seabrook’s barn studio and wrote about in 1940. Instead of the “erotic” nature of Seabrook’s occult experiments, Deren elevates the “Witch’s Cradle” to a mental trap. The woman cannot engage linguistically in

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<sup>217</sup> Amos Vogel, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>218</sup> Vogel, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>219</sup> Deren, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>220</sup> Maya Deren, “Magic is New,” *Essential Deren*, 104; originally published in *Mademoiselle*, January 1946.

this fabricated world to remove or dissolve the sculpturally abstracted structures that physically ensnare her.<sup>221</sup>

*At Land*. In a more hopeful and playful take on the idea of linguistic exclusion from society, or the linguistic impossibility of visual expression, Deren's next film, *At Land* (1944), begins to show most directly the Haitian influence derived from her work with the Dunham Dance company. Although, Deren had not filmed in Haiti yet, she had keenly observed the performative practice of Vodou as presented on the Dunham stage and absorbed much from the free access she had to all of Dunham's research notes. Few people at this time had seen Dunham's ethnographic production because she did not formally publish it until a decade after she returned from Haiti. Deren assisted in compiling the notes for that text, *Dances of Haiti*, published originally in Spanish in Mexico in 1947, and not in America until 1983. Deren had access to inside information about the *loas*, including La Siren, after whom Deren modeled herself for this fifteen-minute silent film. She appears as a mermaid washed up on the shore in a short black sundress, somewhat inappropriate for any of the situations in which she engages. Hellas Heyman and Hammid perform the work of editing and cinematography as Deren appears in every scene. Heyman also plays a role in the film. Anonymous extras appear at a dinner table.

Graeme Ferguson, filmmaker, and co-founder of IMAX Corp, says that in Deren's mind she was from the sea.<sup>222</sup> Although *At Land* is silent, I hear the roar of the ocean as I view the waves crashing on the coastline due to a trick of vision and memory. A mermaid (La Siren) washed up from the sea, Deren grabs a driftwood tree to pull herself into this world as if she is a

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<sup>221</sup> Deren denies any autobiographical relationships within her film work, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>222</sup> Graeme Ferguson, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*. Ferguson elaborates that Deren's "bedroom was like an underwater grotto under the sea; it was full of very beautiful objects; shells, coral, and, on the ceiling, there was a very unusual large painting of an underwater creature and in the normal light you would see that; but, when the lights were turned off, it was painted with phosphorescent paint, and, so suddenly, it came to life with different colors, and you really felt as if you were under the sea at night surrounded by the other creatures of the sea. It was an apartment of love, beauty, it was predominantly blue, her favorite color."

*loa* descending to the earth via the *poto mitan* of the peristyle. The dying tree awaiting rebirth symbolizes Legba, the gatekeeper, and Papa Loco, the spirit of chaos, whom Deren must negotiate with to secure safe passage into society. Deren makes her way through foliage (the leaves serving as symbols of knowledge, language, and reading) and slithers onto a dinner table surrounded by laughing and talking people. Her performance mirrors possession as acted by Charles Moore in his role as Damballa in Dunham's choreography of *Shango*. The people at the table talk but we hear nothing, or we hear what the mermaid Deren hears. At the end of the table she encounters a chessboard from which she steals two white pawns. In a symbolic gesture of power, she gains the ability to walk. Having crawled across the table of society as a newborn mermaid, without legs, without means of communication or interaction, and without language, she returns to the beach collecting stones and shells where she discovers two women also playing chess as the tide comes in. Deren watches and observes; the sun magnifies her freckles; the black structured sundress has torn on the left shoulder. She strokes the heads of the two women in an impossible position as they sit across from each other at the chessboard; the camera shifts and they have changed—all three are now on the same side of the board. Deren stands above and behind the two seated women; the camera view from above shows three happy, smiling, women—Marassa. Deren steals the same two chess pieces she stole from the dinner table in a second subversion of the social game, playfully running down the beach, triumphantly.<sup>223</sup> And the film closes.

Deren does not remark on the Haitian elements in the film but says, reflecting the influence of Joseph Campbell, "I intended it as a mythological statement in the sense that folktales are mythological archetypal statements. The girl in the film is not a personal person,

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<sup>223</sup> In some descriptions of Deren's films I choose semi-colons to separate each scene, each camera cut, instead of slashes as one would in poetry, to convey the feeling of the movement of the film itself—abrupt shifts in time, place, and perspective—fragmentation.

she's a personage."<sup>224</sup> Although Deren "carved out a niche for the 'personal film' as a viable art form, and she established the means for its survival," she does not intend them to be read as autobiographical.<sup>225</sup> To impose such a narrative structure would distract from the artifice at work within the process. The films are not about her, they are her. As archetypal projections anyone of us could be a player here.

*A Study in Choreography for Camera.* In order to more fully illustrate this, Deren removes herself as performer from the following film. Instead she occupies the space of the camera, as the partner of Talley Beatty in *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945). In this short, silent three-minute film many of Deren's ideas come together. In collaborating with Beatty, a former Dunham dancer, on choreography, and Heyman and Hammid on cinematography, she loses the tight control she is known for. Deren later changes the name of the film to *Pas de Deux*,

because what actually happens there is that you see only one dancer with the camera as partner to that dancer; and that carries him or accelerates him as a partner would do to the ballerina, making possible progressions and movements that are impossible to the individual figure.<sup>226</sup>

The lens itself serves just as an important a function and purpose as the performer. Although Beatty expressed objections to Deren's continual focus of black and white as artificial differences representing good and evil in pre-Civil Rights America, he generously supported the film, offering his services for free.<sup>227</sup> The movements of his body as it twists and turns in and of

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<sup>224</sup> Deren, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>225</sup> Neiman, ed., *Legend of Maya Deren*, "Chambers," 4.

<sup>226</sup> Like two partners addressing each other in Haitian dances; if the camera is a woman, the gaze functions like a woman as a precursor to Mulvey, Deren, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>227</sup> The "dance film was photographed whenever Talley Beatty, who dances in it, had some spare time left over from teaching classes, taking classes and rehearsing for Broadway production," Maya Deren, "Magic is New," *Mademoiselle* (January 1946): 181, 260-265, reproduced in Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 307; Deren assures Beatty that if the film makes any money he will receive "a proportionate share," though she denies a request to use "stills from the movie as publicity for" Katherine Dunham's group allowing that, "If you ever need any stills for your individual publicity, of course you will have them," Letter to Talley Beatty, 20

interior and exterior space are simply brilliant. Outside of the confines of a stage, film allows for movement, transversals, reversals, repetitions, and changes in speed not possible for an individual to physically perform. Through substantial cutting and manipulation of the film the viewer sees the piece as whole, the dance as one continuous sensuous set of movements seamlessly performed in exterior and architectural landscapes, physically impossible to traverse in three minutes. One assumes the architectural shifts natural.

Beatty's body evidences his training with Dunham. Postures and movements he maintains here clearly exhibit the isolated articulations and sheer strength required to perform techniques Dunham derived from her Haitian study. The body performs with the camera, but also with Buddhist statues and the body's own shadow, comprising four performers in this filmic arabesque.<sup>228</sup> Deren wanted "film to free the dancer from gravity."<sup>229</sup> Here Beatty twirls, his own face framed by a sandstone statue of a Buddha with multiple heads and faces; the camera freezes only momentarily as Beatty's profile aligns perfectly, mirroring the figure behind him. He pauses again momentarily to parallel the head-on vision of the Buddha directly engaging the gaze of the viewer. Beatty's gaze draws into question who controls what here. In an unanticipated artistic shift, Beatty takes control of the movements of the lens and the photographer rather than the other way around.<sup>230</sup> Beatty's head spins at an impossible pace even for Beatty. Deren shows

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June 1945, reproduced in Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 281-282. Elizabeth Raphael remembers "that Talley Beatty was angry with her one time, when she associated black with darkness, the occult, evil. They had quite a to-do over it. He resented it very much, and she could not ever make him see that it didn't have anything to do with one's personal associations," interviewed in reproduced in Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 425-426.

<sup>228</sup> The shadow self equals *duppy*, ancestral spirit, in Jamaican *obeah*, which Dunham and Hurston also studied about and published on quite early; see Dunham, *Journey to Accompong*, and Hurston, *Tell My Horse*.

<sup>229</sup> Hammid, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>230</sup> Deren begins to acknowledge that "*A Study in Choreography for Camera* was made by Talley Beatty as dancer, and by me as director and photographer. . . . the dancer shares, with the camera and cutting, a collaborative responsibility for the movements themselves. This results in a film dance which could not be performed except on film," "Magic is New," reproduced in Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 310. An interview with Beatty, also in Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 280-281,

Beatty's feet moving equally as fast to convince the audience of the film's integrity. The screen fades to black, as if sunset comes from within the camera lens rather than real space.

It isn't a problem of choreographing a dancer. It's a problem with choreographing whatever it is that you have in that frame including the space, the trees, the animate or inanimate objects, and at that moment this is where the film choreographer departs a little bit from a dance choreographer.<sup>231</sup>

*Ritual in Transfigured Time*. In *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1945-46), Deren returns to themes explored in *At Land* (1944), completing the set of four short films she presented as a group to the Guggenheim committee. *Witch's Cradle* was not included in her application as Deren perceived it "abandoned" and unfinished. Like Dunham, she presented her artwork as evidence of her intellectual abilities to secure the funding to complete her ethnographic study. In a space of fifteen minutes this silent collaboration with choreographer Frank Westbrook reveals the complexity of Deren's genius prior to going to Haiti. Performed by Rita Christiani, Anaïs Nin, Westbrook, and Deren in various settings in New York, Heyman, Hammid, and Deren take turns at the camera to create extended group scenes in which Deren returns as a performer. I focus on the film's intersections with *At Land* as it completes work she started there. The title refers "to ritual in primitive society or any society where ritual takes place . . . as 'rite de passage,' that state which means the crossing of an individual from one state into another;" i.e., transformation and here, "transfiguration."<sup>232</sup>

Accordingly, the film opens with Christiani and Deren playing a game of cat's cradle, with Christiani collecting the excess string by rolling it into a ball as the string becomes disentangled from Deren's hands. The choreography of the movement of their hands and the

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serves my argument as well. In this case Beatty clearly usurps the role of the camera, achieving an artistic agency on film Deren was not quite aware had occurred herself.

<sup>231</sup> Deren, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>232</sup> Deren adds that the theme is not unusual but, "Form is the distinguishing factor," "New Directions in Film Art," *Essential Deren*, 212.



string obscures the ideological complexity at play between them. Christiani came from Trinidad on a boat at the age of five, like Deren did from Russia. Christiani believes in this “commonality that might not have been expressed but was felt by some psychic mean between the two of us.”<sup>233</sup> A third woman (performed by Nin) appears in a doorway dressed in a black habit-like costume behind Christiani and Deren implying a maternal/sisterly relationship between the three—Marassa. Deren loosens the cords stretched between her hands and her mouth moves conveying a sense of singing while lovingly smiling at Christiani, who periodically looks over her shoulder at the figure in the doorway behind her. All three women wear black, the opposite of the white required for initiation into Vodou; both Deren and Christiani wear scarves; Deren wears her hair loose and wild while Christiani wears hers restrained.<sup>234</sup> Edwidge Danticat echoes the feeling Deren captures here in her poetry,

*you remember thinking when braiding your daughter's hair that she looks a lot like you at her age,  
and like you and your mother and your grandmother before her . . .  
your sisters are as close as a needle in your hand,  
on the bus of the crowded city streets,  
sisters who must compete for limited housing and jobs,  
but sisters who protect one another with all their might from the violence of  
everyday life.*<sup>235</sup>

Apparently Deren took Beatty's criticism about the limitations of black and white to heart.<sup>236</sup> Neither Christiani nor Deren are white or black. Due to their shared heritage of exile,

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<sup>233</sup> Christiani, interview, *In the Mirror*.

<sup>234</sup> Several other commentators have mentioned that Deren wore her hair wild and free, alluding to some intangible social cue she has violated.

<sup>235</sup> Edwidge Danticat, excerpts from “Epilogue: Women Like Us,” *Krik? Krak!* New York: Vintage, [1991] 1996, 219-224, and Mary Becker, prod., *Poto Mitan: Haitian Women, Pillars of the Global Economy*, Tet Ansamm Productions, 2009, DVD.

<sup>236</sup> “A friendship between a white and a black woman was more unusual then, and [theirs {between Deren and Christiani}] was on a very straightforward level. . . . They were the most natural kind of friends. But there must have been a whole aura of ‘forbidden’ something. I can hardly believe it when I think back to that time myself—the racism. I remember there was one friend of Maya’s who had married a black man, and even in New York City they really truly could not find a place to live,” Elizabeth Raphael. When asked, “Do you think Maya was working consciously with that in the film in any way?” Raphael responded, “Well, she had to be careful about that. From time to

they fall into an ambiguous category contemporary South African artist Berni Searle names “Not Quite White” in an artwork displayed above the Capetown highway in the 2000 exhibition *Returning the Gaze*.<sup>237</sup> Deren employs dancers, choreographers, and cinematographers of various ethnic backgrounds just a year after Dunham criticized segregated Louisville audiences for preventing non-whites from viewing her show.<sup>238</sup> The three women in *Ritual in Transfigured Time* comprise a Marassa of women who could be of the same biological family.<sup>239</sup> Such depiction of interracial metissage and clear expression of familiar, familial love, created within the silent internal discourse of the film offers a wealth of opportunities for analysis.<sup>240</sup>

In the next scene Christiani walks veiled as a widow, subsequently revealing her face, into a social scene she is unequipped to communicate or function in. These disjunctures and displacements within the footage, cutting and editing of the film, speak to Christiani’s following statements.<sup>241</sup> Christiani offers that when coming to America, “Everything is new to you. And

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time she would really offend someone with the symbolism of black and white. I remember Talley Beatty was angry with her one time,” interview in Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, eds. and comps., *Legend of Maya Deren*, 425.

<sup>237</sup> Berni Searle, “Not Quite White,” in Candice Smith, ed., *Returning the Gaze: Public Arts Project at the Cape Town One City Festival 2000*, introduction Zayd Minty, Cape Town: BLAC, 2001.

<sup>238</sup> “It makes me very happy that you have liked us, that you have felt some of the beauty and happiness that we feel when we perform. But tonight our hearts are very sad because this is a farewell to Louisville. There comes a time when every human being must protest in order to retain human dignity. I must protest because I have discovered that your management will not allow people like you to sit next to people like us. I hope that time and the unhappiness of this war for tolerance and democracy, which I am sure we will win, will change some of these things. Perhaps then we can return. Until then, God bless you—for you may need it,” Katherine Dunham, Memorial Auditorium, Louisville, Kentucky, on 19 October 1944, Vève A. Clark and Sara E. Johnson, *Kaiso! Writings by and about Katherine Dunham*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, 255.

<sup>239</sup> “The term *dosou* (*dosa*), meaning the child born after twins, derives from the Fongbe *docu*, meaning the child of either sex born after twins. To complicate things further, in Haiti the child that follows *dosou/dosa* is called *idogwe*. This term appears to be a creolization of the Yoruba term *idogbe*, meaning the third child born after twins,” Houlberg, “Magique Marasa,” *Sacred Arts*, 269.

<sup>240</sup> See Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999; Deren cautions against applying psychoanalysis to film, especially hers. She also really does not like the word interpretation. “[B]y evoking emotional responses from unconscious or preconscious rather than conscious faculties of viewers, she believes that meanings of ideas realized in film can circumvent interpretation per se and be comprehended, in a sense, as memory,” McPherson, intro., *Essential Deren*, 11.

<sup>241</sup> Danticat also speaks to this surreal feeling of being and not being at home in America through the fictional arrival of Sophie in New York from Haiti at the age of twelve, “New eyes seemed to be looking back at me. A new face all together. Someone who had aged in one day, as though she had been through a time machine, rather than an

everything is so frightening to you. People, the place, the way people talk, the way they act, and then you have to speak English, to become an American.”<sup>242</sup> The film cuts again and again to a courtyard lined with Romanesque sculpture and a portico architecturally designed in the Greco-Roman style.<sup>243</sup> Experienced choreographer Westbrook instructs the dancers in silent words how to perform; as the scene progresses each dancer moves more and more freely and playfully each to their own ability and reflecting their own personal dance heritages in a communal filmic work. In the final scene Deren runs into the sea, returns to her death, or in Haitian terms, to *Nan Guinen*, the mythological Africa to which all spirits return.<sup>244</sup> According to Haitian choreographer Léon-Destiné, Geude appears in Vodou performance to poke “fun at death; you should celebrate instead of cry.” He remarks on his surprise at Deren’s comfort with death because she “called her cat *Guede*. Nobody would dare do that in Haiti because it would be an insult to the spirits.”<sup>245</sup> Christiani felt very differently about the performance.<sup>246</sup> As Deren happily runs into the ocean submerging herself in a return to her source as a mermaid, *La Siren*, (see *At Land*) the film cuts to the veiled image of Christiani in reverse projection so that she appears white (like a bride/widow) against a black background under the sea.

*Meditation on Violence*. The final film I discuss here is the first Deren made after the initiation of her early studies in Haiti. She began going to Haiti to film and record audio in 1947,

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airplane. Welcome to New York, this face seemed to be saying. Accept your new life. I greeted the challenge, like one greets a new day. As my mother’s daughter and Tante Atie’s child,” *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 49.

<sup>242</sup> “Maybe she saw in this mirror of oneself, that she saw this particular person when she came here to this country because coming here at that young age, unless you’ve experienced it, it you don’t know what it is,” Christiani, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>243</sup> *Maya Deren: Collected Experimental Films*.

<sup>244</sup> Dunham writes that ‘Nan Guinée had developed a double meaning by the time of her initiation in 1936.

Reporting on that event in 1969, she notes ‘Nan Guinée has “come to mean all Africa” as the origin of the vaudun (*loas*) and “the bottom of the sea” where particular spirits including “la Sirène” reside, *Island Possessed*, 62, 72.

<sup>245</sup> Léon-Destiné, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>246</sup> Christiani (from Trinidad) did not share this Haitian concept of death, “Many people feel death is a release and you go into something else. I had no feelings about that. There was never any question in my mind. All I could think about was the absolute absence of death. After death, to me, there is just nothing. If I could just outrun death, if I could just get away from it, the whole thought of it,” Christiani, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

and in 1948, employed Chinese Chao-li Chi to perform a dance on violence much like that performed in Haiti to invite Papa Legba to open the gates in a Vodou ritual and/or as a representation of possession of a Haitian devotee by Ogun. Violence functions in some African and African-derived belief systems to facilitate healing. By choosing Chao-li to perform the role of the spirit in the choreography for *Meditation on Violence* (1948), Deren speaks to the universality of violence. This thirteen-minute film includes a score with Chinese flute and Haitian drums recorded by Deren. Chao-li performs the dance and Deren composes and edits the cinematography.<sup>247</sup> Filmmaker Stan Brakhage describes this as the “most personal film Maya ever made.”

She doesn't appear in the film but she is the camera, she is moving, she is breathing, in relationship to this dancer. She is composing so that the one shadow, or the three shadows, or at times the no shadow, of this dancer against the background are an integral part of the dance. Every kind of quality of texture is a really felt part of the frame.<sup>248</sup>

This film most closely resembles in *A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945) with Talley Beatty. Like Beatty, Chao-li appears naked from the waist up. Unlike Beatty, Chao-li has no formal training in dance. The movements derive from a lifetime of practice of Buddhist martial arts, a form of spiritual boxing Deren associated with the *Tao Ti Cheng* (Book of Changes). Imposing this training upon Deren's desire to represent violence as she had witnessed it in Ogun possession in Haiti allowed for productive creative tension between choreographer and performer.

As “a young man fresh out of college entering the dance field as an untrained dancer,” actor and Tai Chi instructor, Chao-li describes fondly and in detail his time spent working with Deren on this film.

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<sup>247</sup> *Maya Deren: Collected Experimental Films.*

<sup>248</sup> Stan Brakhage, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror.*

She was a woman with a lot of internal tension. And we started with many arguments because she had just come back from Haiti, and she was all involved with Haitian Vodou and the trance and the shaman culture and I was saying that in the Chinese context it was quite the opposite, the wise man is the one who controls nature rather than allowing nature to possess.<sup>249</sup>

Deren describes her first problem in creating the film as constructing “a form as a whole that would suggest infinity.”<sup>250</sup> Deren found she had to “translate” those principles “into physical terms in the breathing [as a form of] interior boxing . . . because the movements are governed by an interior position, I determined to treat the movements as a meditation that one circles around an idea in time terms.”<sup>251</sup> Chao-li concurred that,

when we want to break out into aggressiveness, and into outbursts of power, contained space is no longer appropriate, so with one jump, we are high up and we have the open sky, and then the power can break out and directly confront the camera. She conceived this entire project as an emergence from softness into harshness. I would simply do exactly the sequence that I had learned and Maya would film it, cut, it, she re-edited it, doubled it, reversed it, so that it became a continuous interplay between her and the raw movement.<sup>252</sup>

Here Deren, as cinematographer “of cubism in time,” becomes the dance partner to Ogun’s raw violence, emerging through the lens of the Chinese Wu Tang, “which is never an aggressive force, but rather a swallowing of the force coming at you, spitting it out and using it against where it came from.”<sup>253</sup> This application of Eastern ideals allows for a more instructive definition of Ogun’s force, role, insistence, and persistent presence in Haitian healing practice. “At the extreme of development is the point of paralysis after which the entire film is photographed in reverse, as the extreme curve of a parabola. The movement is so much in

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<sup>249</sup> Chao-li Chi, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>250</sup> In listening to Chi and study of the *Tao Ti Cheng*, Deren discovered in addition to her Haitian training, that in “theory . . . life is an ongoing process, constantly, and that it’s based on negative-positive, negative-positive, possibly coming into a resolution in another negative and positive and so on,” Deren, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>251</sup> Deren, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>252</sup> Chao-li Chi, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>253</sup> Deren, “New Directions in Film Art,” *Essential Deren*, 216.

balance that it is equally in balance going backwards as going forwards.”<sup>254</sup> Deren achieved her ideal. She died in 1961 after producing three more films that never quite reach this pinnacle of her creative thought.

**The Marassa and the Dousa.** In addition to an impassioned interest in all things Haitian, these three women share several other notable traits. All were artists in their own right prior to time spent in Haiti. The artistic vision influences their observations as much as their ethnographic training. Hurston performed at her most eloquent as an author of fiction. One might consider *Their Eyes* as equally or more important as a record of her experience in Haiti as *Tell My Horse*. Dunham had trained as a dancer while a teenager in Chicago. “Dunham presented her proposal to study dance and society in the West Indies to the startled committee by performing the dance styles of different cultures.”<sup>255</sup> As a result she won the Rosenwald Fellowship to support her research. Her dance legacy inflects modern performances globally today. Dunham says of Deren that she inherently felt the dance when she worked with her, “She could have been a dancer but that would have taken full-time work with us so she stayed being a kind of a personal secretary, or you know, that sort of thing.”<sup>256</sup> Prior to investigation in Haiti, Deren established herself as an avant-garde filmmaker in the Bohemian world of Greenwich Village, New York City, and Los Angeles, California. Notoriety produced by popular reception of her films helped Deren secure the Guggenheim Fellowship that permitted her study. Each saw the world through the eyes of an artist, experienced bodily and manifest intellectually in three different forms accessible to the broadest audiences possible—fiction, dance, and film. Each experienced America as an outsider, living on the margins of national culture. According to Dash,

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<sup>254</sup> Deren, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>255</sup> Aschenbrenner, “Katherine Dunham,” 141.

<sup>256</sup> Dunham, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

Deren saw herself as an artist, marginalized and displaced within “modern industrial culture.” She had been made an ethnic curiosity, subjected to the full “native treatment,” in American society. Consequently she approached Haiti as an “artist-native” whose experience in the United States created a special bond with Haitians to whom she was “not a foreigner at all, but a prodigal native daughter finally returned.”<sup>257</sup>

Each felt strongly about a woman’s right to work and the importance of her self-sufficiency based on her artistic production, predating a feminism that would support these principals by decades. Hurston chooses work over love, Dunham refuses to perform to segregated audiences and fights for pay and boarding for her dancers, and Deren bemoans that there simply are not enough female filmmakers.<sup>258</sup> None completed a Ph.D. as a result of their studies. And, finally, each died in a situation of economic instability. Although Dunham probably suffered the least economic deprivation in her later years due to her association with Southern Illinois University-East St. Louis and Edwardsville, her foundation struggles to maintain its programs for young adults in the East St. Louis area, including the Dunham Museum and Archives.<sup>259</sup> Dunham benefited from the length of her career and life. Neither Hurston nor Deren witnessed the changes of feminist and womanist movements, nor even Civil Rights in America. Dunham did and continued to willingly put herself, bodily and financially, on the line to benefit the people of Haiti until her death in 2006.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988, 83.

<sup>258</sup>“But no mater how soaked we were in ecstasy, the telephone or the door bell would ring, and there would be my career again. A charge had been laid upon me and I must follow the call,” Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, in Wall, *Zora*, 749; “There is no reason in the world why women shouldn’t be artists and very fine ones. I am a little distressed that so few women have entered the area of film,” Maya Deren, interview, Kudláček, dir., *In the Mirror*.

<sup>259</sup> Aschenbrenner, “Katherine Dunham,” 151.

<sup>260</sup> “She has tirelessly worked for the economic benefit of the Haitian poor, including a forty-seven day fast in protest of the treatment of Haitian immigrants by the United States in 1991-1992,” Aschenbrenner, “Katherine Dunham,” 147; Edwidge Danticat documents just the kind of treatment that concerned Dunham in *Brother, I’m Dying*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007.

## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSIONS:

## LOVE'S DISCOVERY, ERZULIE

## IN THE NARRATIVES OF ISHMAEL REED,

## EDWIDGE DANTICAT, AND NALO HOPKISON

If I don't visit Haiti perhaps Haiti will come to me.

—Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, New York: Scribner, 1972, 53.

It all lives in my memory, as clear as the contour of that dream country where it took place.

—Blair Niles, *Black Haiti: A Biography of Africa's Eldest Daughter*, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926, 28.

**Emerging Discourses on Love.** Toni Morrison writes that the first line of every novel is the most important in “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature” (1989).<sup>1</sup> At least, for her, she finds this true and illustrates that for her reading audience. If one simply reads the titles of Edwidge Danticat's works in the field of fiction (for adults and children) and collections of short stories and prose, as they appear chronologically, they begin to read like a poem, a poem that tells the story of a life, not just of one woman but of an island, a nation, struggling in conversation with others. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), *Krik? Krak!* (1995), *The Farming of Bones* (1998), *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States* (ed., 2001), *Behind the Mountain* (2002), *After the Dance* (2002), *The Dew Breaker* (2004), *Anacoana Golden Flower, Haiti 1490* (2005),

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<sup>1</sup> See Toni Morrison, “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature,” *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1994.



*Brother, I'm Dying* (2007), *Haiti Noir* (ed., 2010), *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* (2010).<sup>2</sup> The title of Danticat's first novel proposes the necessary ingredients to understand Haiti and its place in the world.

First, we need to breath. Luce Irigaray, in one of her more recent works, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community* (2002), suggests reconciliation of racial, ethnic, and social difference through the shared act of breathing.<sup>3</sup> She writes, "To breathe by myself allows me also to move away from a socio-cultural placenta. . . . To be born to my life. To be born also to a certain cultural naiveté: to not need to break in order to discover or rediscover what is, what is beautiful, what is true. To perceive it through a personal renaissance."<sup>4</sup> Breath alludes not only to the quality of the air one breathes but the quality of the words we share. Both Danticat and Irigaray draw attention to this essential human function. From this place of common ground, both see the potential for establishing community between people who are alike and not like each other.

Second, we need eyes. We need vision to see beyond (mountain) borders, boundaries, and artificial divisions created by slavery, colonialism, and occupation; specifically, we need the eyes of spirit implied in the metaphorical Erzulie of the Red Eyes, the dominant structuring force at work behind Danticat's brilliant yet difficult first novel. Danticat follows in a long genealogy of women claiming Vodou as a philosophy for channeling anger, healing intergenerational

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<sup>2</sup> See Edwidge Danticat, *Krik? Krak!*, New York: Soho Press, 1995; *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 2nd ed., New York: Vintage Contemporary Books, [1994] 1998; *The Farming of Bones*, New York: Soho Press, 1998; *The Dew Breaker*, New York: Knopf, 2004; *After the Dance*, New York: Crown Journeys, 2002; *Brother, I'm Dying*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007; *Behind the Mountain*. New York: Orchard, 2002; *Anacoana Golden Flower, Haiti 1490*. New York: Scholastic, 2005; *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010; also see Edwidge Danticat, ed., *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States*. New York: Soho, 2001; *Haiti Noir*. New York: Akashic, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Irigaray's emphasis on breath derives from her yoga practice and travels within communities investigating yogic techniques in India in addition to a long association and engagement with French psychoanalysis; see Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Irigaray, *Between East and West*, 5.

wounds, and developing narratives of hope grounded in the contexts of lived historical reality through the personal landscape of the body.

Thirdly, but not lastly, we need memory. Whether it is the transfigurations of rememory (to borrow the words of Katherine Dunham, Maya Deren, and Toni Morrison) or detailed accountings of history, we must remember exactly what happened, when it happened, and where it happened. Colonialism in the Americas was born in Hispaniola (later, and, previously, Haiti, or as one hears there, Ayiti!). Antonio Benítez -Rojo describes this historical moment,

Let's be realistic: the Atlantic is the Atlantic (with all its port cities) because it was once engendered by the copulation of Europe—that insatiable solar bull—with the Caribbean archipelago; the Atlantic is today the Atlantic (the navel of capitalism) because Europe, in its mercantilist laboratory, conceived the project of inseminating the Caribbean womb with the blood of Africa: the Atlantic is today the Atlantic (NATO, World Bank, New York Stock Exchange, European Economic Community, etc.) because it was the painfully delivered child of the Caribbean, whose vagina was stretched between continental clamps, between the encomienda of Indians and the slaveholding plantation, between the servitude of the coolie and the discrimination toward criollo, between commercial monopoly and piracy, between the runaway slave settlement and governor's palace; all Europe pulling on the forceps to help at the birth of the Atlantic: Columbus, Cabral, Cortes, de Soto, Hawkins, Drake, Hein, Rodney, Surcouf . . . After the blood and salt water spurts, quickly sew up torn flesh and apply the antiseptic tinctures, the gauze and surgical plaster; then the febrile wait through the forming of a scar: suppurating, always suppurating.<sup>5</sup>

Édouard Glissant further writes that the slaves of Africa transported across the Atlantic via the Middle Passage experienced three abysses: 1) the wrenching from “their everyday, familiar land, away from protecting god and tutelary community,” symbolized by falling into the belly of the slave ship; 2) the depths of the sea and “the deterioration of the person” as hundreds of “human beings crammed into a space barely capable of containing a third of them. Imagine vomit, naked flesh, swarming lice, the dead slumped, the dying crouched;” and followed by 3) “the panic of the new land, the haunting of the former land, finally alliance with the imposed land, suffered

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<sup>5</sup> Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 5.

and redeemed.”<sup>6</sup> This third abyss “projects a reverse image of all that had been left behind, not to be regained for generations except—more and more threadbare—in the blue savannas of memory or imagination.”<sup>7</sup> From “fugitive memories” are born new knowledges, derived of a shared experience of trauma. For Sybille Fischer, “Glissant links individual and collective experience, psychic life and historical experience.”<sup>8</sup>

To move beyond the perpetually repeating moment of the original clash of cultures in the New World, to heal the suppurating wound of the Caribbean described by Benítez-Rojo, through recollections and reconfigurations of memory, through ritual and transformation, we need two more items: a livable life articulated through love. This life advocated for by Judith Butler follows along similar lines as those proposed by Irigaray. Although Butler’s discourse focuses on gender, I extend it here to include other subjugated categories. Butler proposes in *Undoing Gender* (2004), “I would hope that we would all remain committed to an ideal that no one should be compelled to occupy a gender [or any other] norm that is undergone, experientially, as an unlivable violation.”<sup>9</sup> All of the voices thus far encountered involve a commitment to a sustainable livable life, though working from different grounds. bell hooks calls for a radical reworking and recombination of the efforts of such activists through the action of love in her recent trilogy, including *All About Love: New Visions* (2001). For hooks, “Love heals. . . . Contrary to what we may have been taught to think, unnecessary and unchosen suffering wounds us but need not scar us for life. It does mark us. What we allow the mark of our suffering to become is in our own hands.”<sup>10</sup> Her call is echoed from across the globe in Gayatri Spivak’s translation, interpretation, and interviews of Bengali journalist and novelist Mahasweta Devi in

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<sup>6</sup> Glissant, *Poetics*, 5-7.

<sup>7</sup> Glissant, *Poetics*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 137.

<sup>9</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, New York: Routledge, 2004, 213.

<sup>10</sup> bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, New York: William Morrow, 2001, 209.

*Imaginary Maps* (1994), “We must learn ‘love’ (a simple word for ethical responsibility-in-singularity), . . . in view of the impossibility of communication.”<sup>11</sup> In combining perspectives, temporal and spatial, I hope that one hears not only differences but also similarities in their answer to Glissant’s call for a new poetics of relation where Western and non-Western discourses merge in the necessary work of radical healing.<sup>12</sup>

In carrying out this labor, in serving the spirit of a new age, Danticat demands fearless creativity, a force that in many ways embodies the spirit of Haiti as outlined and described in each of the previous chapters. I offer only a beginning, but I did begin with this charge provided by Danticat in her most recent reflections on living a creative life, “I am even more certain that to create dangerously is also to create fearlessly, boldly embracing the public and private terrors that would silence us, then bravely moving forward even when it feels as though we are chasing or being chased by ghosts.”<sup>13</sup> I am deeply indebted to that work for pointing me to the conversations through time that have occurred between Haiti and U.S. America and the importance of that conversation to a larger global discourse.

**The *Loas* Exhibit Narratives of Love’s Recovery.** In Maya Deren’s reflections on art and film before traveling to Haiti, she wrote, “For we act and suffer and love according to what we imagine to be true, whether it is really true or not.”<sup>14</sup> Deren loved Haiti before she arrived or was certainly prepared to by her studies with Katherine Dunham and meditations on the *loas* through movement in her early experimental films. With this in mind and on these grounds I offer in conclusion further brief applications of the work of the *loas* in modern and contemporary

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<sup>11</sup> Gayatri Spivak in Mahasweta Devi, *Imaginary Maps*, translated Gayatri Spivak, New York: Routledge, 1994, 200.

<sup>12</sup> See Glissant, *Poetics*.

<sup>13</sup> Edwidge Danticat, *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*, The Toni Morrison Lecture Series, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010, 148.

<sup>14</sup> Deren, “Magic is New,” 202-203.

fiction, specifically here Ogun and Erzulie. As mythological symbol of war and harbinger of violence, Ogun, mirrors the violence described by Benítez-Rojo and Glissant. Ogun is an *orisha* of the Old World who survived the Middle Passage. Erzulie has no direct African counterpart. Created and born of a need derived from the horrific collision of the Old and New Worlds in the creation of one global world, she serves a need as the Haitian *loa* of love in resolving the traumatic wounds of that passage. Erzulie pursues those most in need of love and reveals lessons of recovery so that we all can breath, see, and remember. We have encountered much pain, suffering, and damage. Erzulie multiplies herself through our loves and losses to broaden the scope of her reach. Human beings do not seek to destroy each other, but to become closer. With the limited tool kit we have we often cause more destruction and distrust. Erzulie's task is monumental, requiring heroic efforts of those she engages in her quest. The following stories speak to set this spirit free to her labors.

Erzulie provides ample resources for authors of the twentieth century to explore African-derived religious syncretisms in literature. Zora Neale Hurston, Ishmael Reed, Edwidge Danticat, and Nalo Hopkinson, in order of appearance, are among a few of the most obvious choices but Erzulie's nets cast far and wide. Erzulie provides authors an invisible yet traceable structure. Erzulie has no fixed form, but appears quite popularly in the image of the Virgin Mary in chromolithographs dating from the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Erzulie assumes three commonly recognized guises: 1) Danto - mother (of everything) and wife (of everybody), 2) Freda - a virtuous and playful whore, and 3) Metres - an old decrepit wise woman with a cane. Danto

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<sup>15</sup> Chromolithographs of Catholic saints and, sometimes, Hindu deities in the case of Lasèrin, one manifestation of Erzulie, imported since the eighteenth century to Haiti represent each of the *loas*. The following applies to all: "It is impossible to analyze the transformations wrought upon the figure of Ogou in the last century without appreciating the profound influence of chromolithographs upon the religious imagination of Vodou. . . . Chromolithographs constitute the single most important contemporary source for the elaboration of Ogou theology," Cosentino, *Sacred Arts*, 253.

works hard, Freda plays hard, and Metres makes all she affects share in her pain.<sup>16</sup> A specific chromolithograph of the Virgin Mary corresponds to each of these guises. To a Haitian Vodou viewer there is no conflict between the image of Mary and the particular version of Erzulie she represents. All are valued as spiritual forces, by believers who often ascribe equally to Catholicism and Vodou. Joan Dayan writes,

Most ethnographers, Haitian or foreign, present Erzulie in three emanations: as Erzulie-Freda, the lady of luxury and love; as Erzulie-Dantor, the black woman of passion identified in Catholic chromolithographs with Mater Salvatoris, her heart pierced with a dagger; and as Erzulie-gé-rouge, the red-eyed militant of fury and vengeance. But Erzulie bears witness to a far more complicated lineage. Indeed, in ritual practice, there are slippages and uneasy alliances between these apparently antagonistic gods.<sup>17</sup>

Erzulie appears in the Rada and Petro traditions of Haitian Vodou as a manifestation of spiritual and carnal love, the Rada somewhat more gentle in nature than the more unpredictable, lustful, and vengeful Petro, Erzulie of the Red Eyes. Dunham distinguishes between the orders of the Rada-Dahomey, Petro, Nago, Ibo, Mahis, Congo Fran (Frang, Fons) cults by the form of the dance they take when serving the *loas*. These designations indicate loose geographical origins in Africa. In contrast to the “stronger” and more common Rada,

The cult Petro and some of the Congo cults are either so directly opposed to these other cults, or are so independently active that they remain distinct both in the general danse Vaudun [*sic.*] and in the specialized dances that make up the main part of the ritual procedure of a ceremony . . . [as] it is generally known that many of [the Petro gods] are violent.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Voodoo Priestess in Brooklyn*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, 229; Marilyn Houlberg, “Magique Marasa: The Ritual Cosmos of Twins and Other Sacred Children,” *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, ed., Donald J. Cosentino, Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995, 267-283; Leslie G. Desmangles, *Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992, 133-134.

<sup>17</sup> Joan Dayan, “Erzulie: A Women’s History of Haiti,” in *The Woman, the Writer, and Caribbean Society*, ed. Helen Pyne-Timothy, Los Angeles: Center for African American Studies, 1998, 42.

<sup>18</sup> Katherine Dunham, “Excerpts from the *Dances of Haiti: Function*,” *Journal of Black Studies* 15.4 (June 1985): 357-379, 366.

As a triplet of sorts Erzulie is a Marassa. In the Vodou pantheon the Marassa represent sacred twins and the third child born after a set of twins. Hurston described “the Marassa, Yumeaux and Trumeaux and the child who follows the twins which is called the Dossou” as “the gods of the little joined plates that one finds displayed all over Haiti.”<sup>19</sup> Twins are sacred and the dousa (or third) is a notoriously spoiled spirit reeking havoc much like the baby ghost (manifest as the ethereal Beloved) in Toni Morrison’s Pulitzer Prize winning text of 1988.<sup>20</sup> Operating as literary archetype, Erzulie provides structure for ever deepening explorations in narrative fictions of the unworldly, the unspeakable (to borrow from Morrison again), the spiritual, cruelty and its healing redemption in an abstract space defined only by the limits of experience and imagination. Creative artists and authors alike utilize Erzulie as a prototype, a salve to ease the traumatic wounds of the American slave system and its aftermath.

The idea of Erzulie originates in Haiti. It is not known when she first appears in oral tradition but we can securely document her in ethnographies by Melville Herskovits (1937), Zora Neale Hurston (1938), Maya Deren (1953), and Alfred Mettraux (1959), all motivated to rectify the fantastical journalistic, and ethnographic representations written during and after the U.S. Marine Occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934.<sup>21</sup> Dayan finds that Erzulie “articulate[s] and embod[ies] a memory of slavery, intimacy, and revenge. She survives as the record of and habitation for women’s experiences in the New World.”<sup>22</sup> Documented by scholars and pedestrians observing possession and divinatory practices of Vodou, Erzulie appears outside of Haiti as she follows the path of her creators across the Americas in different guises. Prior to

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<sup>19</sup> “The full name is Marassas Cinigal (black twins) Dahomey,” associating them with the Rada cult, Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 157.

<sup>20</sup> See Houlberg, “Magique Marassa,” and Morrison, *Beloved*.

<sup>21</sup> See Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (1929); Wirkus, *The White King of Gonave* (1931); and Craige, *Black Baghdad* (1933).

<sup>22</sup> Dayan, “Erzulie: A Women’s History of Haiti,” 47.

identifying the mysterious force on the loose in his novel *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), Ishmael Reed, as narrator, purposefully mistakes Erzulie for the “one known in Brazil as Yemanjá.”<sup>23</sup>

Hurston observed rites conducted in honor of the *loas*, including Erzulie, during her field studies. She reported these in *Tell My Horse* (1938). She explains,

Nobody in Haiti ever really told me who Erzulie Freida was, but they told me what she was like and what she did. From all of that it was plain that she is the pagan goddess of love. . . . Erzulie has no children and her husband is all the men of Haiti. That is, anyone of them that she chooses for herself. But so far, no one in Haiti has formulated her.<sup>24</sup>

Hurston does just that, formulates Erzulie Freida, through the creative work of her fiction in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). She does not specifically name Erzulie; as a philosophical concept of love she represents universal forces. To name her would apply definitive limits on those capacities, thus Hurston provides the story of Janie and Tea Cake, whose love ends in an untimely trauma, accounted for here previously in Chapter V.

The Haitian *loas* mirror the lives of real humans, experiencing and sharing in the travails of life with them in all of its messy aspects. Life has never been simple for Haitians or for the *loas*. The Haitian *loas* derive their power from the ancestral world of spirits, of those who have gone before and transmuted. This ancestral world is rich in narrative. The layers of verbal, oral, aural, and textual knowledge run deep and no one scholar fully documents the ever-changing landscape of the *loas*. The *loas* differ from African ancestral spirits. These are not the same entities, yet the *loas* do derive from similar belief systems shared by the disenfranchised and uprooted slaves. For example, Erzulie’s most similar counterpart in West Africa (specifically the

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<sup>23</sup> Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 126; Reed acknowledges the presence of Seabrook in another linguistic twist, “Of course there had been rumors during the campaign, the book brought to Washington by guarded express car, written by I William Eastbrook and based upon interviews with Harding’s neighbors of Marion Ohio who said that they had never treated his father as a White man. The books had been secretly destroyed in a bonfire,” *Mumbo Jumbo*, 146. Not incidentally, Marion, Ohio, is the birth place of Toni Morrison. The quote refers to the questionable racial background of President Warren Harding in Reed’s novel of the Occupation period.

<sup>24</sup> Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 121.



Cross River region and the coastal areas south of that in Nigeria) is Mami Wata, a maternal spirit associated with water.<sup>25</sup> Mami Wata is known in the Kongo regions as La Sirene.<sup>26</sup> The concept has a broad reach and it is beyond the scope of this project to assess the relationship between African and American-derived spirit forms. In fact, adequate research analyzing the relations between the New World deities and the African ancestral spirits is not yet complete.<sup>27</sup>

We see illustrated in ethnography, art, and literature that Erzulie forms from the fragmentation of African deities as a direct result of the slave trade. This fragmentation of language, culture, and religion as it occurred in the process of the Middle Passage provided fertile ground for the reinvention of and birth of new composite spiritual forms. Erzulie is one such composite. Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1989), and Nalo Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads* (2005), (re)configure such redeemed knowledge in a poetics of creolization as advocated for in the post-colonial Caribbean by Glissant. No definitive story derives from such experience but many different narratives of love persist in a multi-generational unfolding of submerged knowledge.

These authors employ the tools of textual psychoanalytics rooted in trauma theory acknowledged by critics such as Franz Fanon, Édouard Glissant, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Francois Vergès, Claudia Tate, Toni Morrison, and others. Trauma theory first appeared in Western discourse in the work of Sigmund Freud, initially published in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1917, following his observation of increased symptoms of neurosis in those who witnessed or participated in World War I. The above theorists acknowledge their debt to Freud's early work on trauma and the complex relations of family romance in illustrating the nature of the

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<sup>25</sup> See Drewel, "Mami Wata Shrines," *African Material Culture*.

<sup>26</sup> See the brilliant art works of Cheri Samba for whom La Sirene is an ongoing theme; in Owkui Enwezer and Chika-Agulu Okeke, *Contemporary African Art since 1980*, Bologna: Damiani, 2009.

<sup>27</sup> See Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*.

dysfunctional social constructions of the slave and post-slave periods in the Americas; e.g., Freud's (colonial) family romance and amanuenses evolve into notions of a rupturing metissage. Freud brought to Western psychology notions already examined earlier by the likes of free-black American Frank J. Webb in *The Garies and their Friends* (1857) and Harriett E. Wilson in *Our Nig* (1859). Although Freud presents as a complicated figure, his influence in bringing awareness of trauma into the public consciousness during his own post-War crisis cannot be denied. That these ideas circulate at the same time that James Weldon Johnson draws attention to the abuses of the U.S. Marines in Haiti in the 1920 *Nation* articles warrants further exploration. Reed describes Freud's encounter with America: "Freud saved many lives which would have ordinarily been dealt with by the Church in an inhumane manner. But when Freud came to America and saw what was going down over here it was too much for even this man. Freud fainted."<sup>28</sup> If Freud could not handle the Americas, fortunately others in his path could.

Who is Erzulie in constructions of trauma and how does she work in actual texts to perform the complicated task of healing? Glissant would argue that Erzulie operates as a system of competing relations that "both obscures and clarifies."<sup>29</sup> As a mythological figure Erzulie, she performs this work on multiple levels simultaneously. Erzulie utilizes the power of other *loas* in a complicated surgical operation in which she

disguises while conferring meaning, obscures and brings to light, mystifies as well as clarifies and intensifies that which emerges, fixed in time and space, between men and their world. [Myth] explores the known-unknown. Myth is the first state of a still-naïve historical consciousness, and the raw material for the project of a literature. We should note, that given the formative process of a historical consciousness, myth anticipates history as much as it inevitably repeats the accidents that it has glorified; that means it is in turn a producer of history.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 172.

<sup>29</sup> Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 71.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

In Fischer's reading of Glissant, "History on the periphery is experienced as repetition—as a dimension of the unexplorable, or perhaps dimensions explorable only through a vocabulary that grasps the deep structures of psychic life."<sup>31</sup>

How does Erzulie serve writers and artists in such a construction? As previously discussed in much more detail in Chapter V, Hurston presents the first fictional work in American literature infused with Erzulie. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was published in 1937, forty-five years before Glissant and fifteen years before Franz Fanon began to theorize a Caribbean experience. For Fanon,

The dialectic that brings necessity into the foundation of my freedom drives me out of myself. It shatters my unreflected position. Still in terms of consciousness, black consciousness is immanent in its own eyes. I am not the potentiality of something, I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. No probability has any place inside me. My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It is. It is its own signifier.<sup>32</sup>

Although Hurston is not from the Caribbean, we could say she is of the Caribbean. She never consciously states that Janie's story is an Erzulie one, rather Hurston structures *Their Eyes* around the appropriation of Janie's heart, psyche, and body towards the work of Erzulie, the manifestation of love in a world where duty, practicality, and material success are privileged above love. Erzulie finds a suitable human vehicle, a host, or "horse" in Janie. Janie (possibly, involuntarily) serves Erzulie, or one might say Erzulie embodies Janie. The text records Erzulie's (sometimes temporary) possession of Janie's body. In *Tell My Horse*, Hurston only witnesses the spiritual marriage of male devotees in Haiti to Erzulie. Dunham witnesses another side of Erzulie, "She walks in beauty and by her very nature is coquettish, so that she attracts all men, and when she enters into a woman this woman in turn attracts all men and is at the same time

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<sup>31</sup> Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 137.

<sup>32</sup> Franz Fanon in Richard J. Powell, *Black Art: A Cultural History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, London: Thames and Hudson, 2002, 7.

wife, mistress and mother.”<sup>33</sup> In *Their Eyes*, Hurston breaks invisible social norms allowing Erzulie to operate through the body of Janie. What she cannot document in the ethnographic record the creative mind can work into text in fictional form, capturing the essence of Erzulie’s healing intent for generations to follow.<sup>34</sup>

Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) allows Erzulie to function as a structuring element in other ways. Reed mentions her directly, initially in a fictional newspaper article, “Erzulie with her fast self is sheltered in a ‘vocalising’ trumpet which sings from mute to growl,” alluding to his later conclusion that Erzulie manifests in U.S. America through the blues, and appropriately so.<sup>35</sup> Fittingly, Dunham writes, “Erzulie likes perfumes and orgeat, a syrupy almond drink, and elegant clothes of filmy pale blue and silver and white.”<sup>36</sup> Altars to the *loas* exist in Papa LaBas’s (Papa Legba’s?) fictional Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral.

On a long maple table covered with white linen cloth rest 21 trays filled with such delectable items as liqueurs, sweets, rum, baked chicken, and beef. The table is the dining hall of the *loas*, and LaBas demands that the trays be refreshed after the Ka-food has been eaten. His assistants make sure this is done. The room is illuminated with candles of many colors, attendants have been guided through the exercises. Once in a while 1 is possessed by a loa.<sup>37</sup>

Erzulie possesses Reed’s fictional Earline, one appointed servitor of the altar.

Although Earline is skeptical early on, events unfold in such a way as to convince her by novel’s end of the importance of feeding the *loas*. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, “1 of the few trolley car operators of his race” finds a passenger wearing a “fresh white bandanna [and] . . . tropical blouses” emanating a “funny sweet odor” at the end of his daily run. “She gives him a look the nature of which would force a man to divorce his wife, sell his home,” echoing the description of

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<sup>33</sup> Dunham, *Island Possessed*, 61.

<sup>34</sup> The structural arrangement succeeds as testimony to the universality of the path of love evidenced by the lives of the *loas*.

<sup>35</sup> Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 77.

<sup>36</sup> Dunham, *Island Possessed*, 61.

<sup>37</sup> Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 50.

Erzulie Freida's invitation provided by Hurston in *Tell My Horse*, "There are tales of men who have fought against it valiantly as long as they could. They fought it until ill luck and ill health finally broke their wills before they bowed to the inexorable goddess."<sup>38</sup> The trolley car operator hears Earline's seductive answer, "All Black men are my husbands."<sup>39</sup> He cannot resist Earline when possessed by Erzulie. When LaBas claims the sleeping body of Earline, exhausted from the possession from which she carries no memory, he assures the trolley driver, "You couldn't help yourself. If you hadn't given in to her requests, she would have destroyed you."<sup>40</sup> Earline has allowed herself to serve as food. She has been carried away. Reed pays tribute to Hurston here:

Earline: I must have really been silly with my carrying-on, my nervous breakdown.

LaBas: I don't think it was a nervous breakdown, I have my theory. Nervous breakdowns sound so Protestant, we think that you were possessed. Our cures worked, didn't they? All you have to know is how to do The Work.

Earline: Yes, I want to learn more, pop. I'm thinking about going to New Orleans and Haiti, Brazil and all over the South studying our ancient cultures, our Hoodoo cultures. Maybe by and by some future artists 30 to 40 years from now will benefit from my research. Who knows, Pop, I believe in *Jes Grew* now<sup>41</sup>

Following the path of Erzulie, as Earline comes to believe, provides a framework, the internal steel girders, for Reed's text around which other events unfold.

Benítez-Rojo writes that "the culture of the Caribbean, at least in its most distinctive aspect, is not terrestrial but aquatic, a sinuous culture where time unfolds irregularly and resists being captured by the cycles of the clock and calendar."<sup>42</sup> Rojo further insists on a relational theory of chaos, bricolage, and repetition when representing the workings of the Caribbean machine. *Mumbo Jumbo* works as a perfect case study for Rojo's theories of development in the Caribbean, an area defined less by geography than by "the type of society that results from" the

<sup>38</sup> Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 119, 120; Hurston, *Tell My Horse*, 123.

<sup>39</sup> Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 121.

<sup>40</sup> Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 126.

<sup>41</sup> Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 206.

<sup>42</sup> Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 11.

uses and abuses of the plantation system.<sup>43</sup> Reed's text is structurally chaotic, defies linear construction of time, and utilizes multiple types of literary and historical media to create a sense of the fragmentary but repetitive nature of a world where the spiritual and material evidences of life merge, inseparably, weaving a permeable fabric. The fictional Abdul in *Mumbo Jumbo* asserts the craft of the author, "I had no systematic way of learning but proceeded like a quilt maker, a patch of knowledge here a patch of knowledge there but lovingly knitted."<sup>44</sup>

Erzulie works through a feminine guise but her mission extends to everyone. Although Toni Morrison never specifically mentions Haiti in her work, at least *Song of Solomon* (1977) can be included here. In *Song* Morrison describes Pilate's living room as a veritable botanica, a storehouse for the material culture necessary to carry out the work of Erzulie:

"Well. Step right in." She [Pilate] opened the door and they followed her into a large sunny room that looked both barren and cluttered. A moss-green sack hung from the ceiling. Candles were stuck in bottles everywhere; newspaper articles and magazine pictures were nailed to the walls. But other than a rocking chair, two straight-backed chairs, a large table, a sink, and a stove, there was no furniture. Pervading everything was the odor of pine and fermenting fruit.<sup>45</sup>

Every type of media necessary to feed the *loas*, especially Erzulie, at LaBas's altar maintained by Earline in Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* can be found in Pilate's home; i.e., *houmfort*.

Hopkinson's tale of Erzulie follows a similarly chaotic structure. Hopkinson recounts the nature of Erzulie's birth in *The Salt Roads* (2005). Hopkinson again points to Erzulie's history. Erzulie has no direct counterpoint in African belief systems. As an amalgamation of Mami Wata spirits and possibly Yoruba *orisha*, such as Osanyin and Oya, Erzulie mirrors the work of Oshun and Yemaya in Vodou's Latinate parallel, Santeria. Slaves sold into the American markets came from various different parts of West and Central Africa. In the Americas, slaves foreign to each

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<sup>43</sup> Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 37.

<sup>45</sup> Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 39.

other at home compared and shared religions, belief systems, social structures, cultural practices, history, languages, artistic traditions, and performative strategies. From this mixture resulted a spiritual *metissage* unknown in Africa. Erzulie was born and created in this admixture of belief. Hopkinson traces that birth following three non-coterminus historical trajectories. Baby Erzulie gathers strength from the souls of the stillborn and the articulated grief of their mothers and others, floating from head to head, from Mer in pre-revolutionary Haiti, to Jeanne Duval (Baudelaire's mulatto mistress) in France, and to Meritet in Egypt—three locations or sites of disruption, displacement, and marginalization of women by the legal and extra-legal trade in bodies effect a global dialect of love's recovery.

In *The Salt Roads*, Jeanne and Lise call Erzulie into life beginning with an attempt at scrying “into the chamber pot, at the orange liquid that swirled there, stirred by the unfolding puss; her piss and mine, my blood.”<sup>46</sup> Everywhere in this new world the waters are dirty. In Haiti, Lasirèn tells Mer, “The sea roads . . . They're drying up. . . The sea in the minds of my Ginen. The sea roads; the salt roads. And the sweet ones, too; the rivers. Can't follow them to their sources any more. I land up in the same foul, stagnant swamp every time.”<sup>47</sup> For Glissant, the sea is littered with cargo from slave ships thrown overboard. Weighed

down with balls and chains. These underwater signposts mark the course between the Gold Coast and the Leeward Islands. Navigating the green splendor of the sea . . . still brings to mind, coming to light like seaweed; these lowest depths, these deeps, with their punctuation of scarcely corroded balls and chains.<sup>48</sup>

The path back to Africa is choked with the bodies of the dead. Lasirèn, Mami Wata, Osanyin, and Oya cannot reach those they serve and who serve them; Erzulie must be born in the New World.

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<sup>46</sup> Hopkinson, *Salt Roads*, 18.

<sup>47</sup> Hopkinson, *Salt Roads*, 65.

<sup>48</sup> Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 6.

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Danticat follows the path of Erzulie from Haiti to New York in a second wave of diaspora [her spelling]. Danticat reveals generational sexual abuses passed down from mother to daughter. This is a different kind of plantation story—one of contemporary Haiti still infected with a colonial legacy of sexual abuse. In a country where “there are many good reasons for mothers to abandon their children,” Erzulie manifests her dual nature in the healing narrative of Sophie and the destruction of her mother.<sup>49</sup> Sophie is the child of rape. Martine was assaulted in a cane field by a *tounton macoute*, Francois Duvalier’s version of the Occupation gendarmerie. Martine deteriorated into insanity following Sophie’s birth and left Sophie to her sister, Tante Atie, to care for while Martine set up home in New York. Grandmother, aunt, mother, and daughter suffer virginity testing by their mothers. All but the grandmother experience this as sexually traumatic leaving complex psychological scars; i.e., they have become Barbara Sanon’s (2001) “zombie girls” through self-imposed sexual violence.<sup>50</sup> The fictional Sophie describes her attempt to reclaim her body from this history of violence.

My flesh ripped apart as I pressed the pestle into it. I could see the blood slowly dripping onto the bed sheet. I took the pestle and the bloody sheet and stuffed them into a bag. It was gone, the veil that always held my mother’s finger back every time she *tested* me.<sup>51</sup>

Danticat equates this testing to the “untouchable wound” of circumcision inscribing *Breath, Eyes, Memory* in conversation with Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992).<sup>52</sup>

Erzulie heals and destroys. Sophie develops bulimia after taking her own virginity and has difficulty later sexually in her marriage to Joseph, a blues and jazz musician. Like Reed, Joseph recognizes music’s healing potential, “I think music should speak not only to the ear, but

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<sup>49</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 227.

<sup>50</sup> See Sanon, “Black Crows and Zombie Girls.”

<sup>51</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 88.

<sup>52</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 202.



mostly to the soul,” equating the “Negro spiritual” to “prayers” and “*vaudou* song.”<sup>53</sup>

Additionally, Sophie seeks healing through therapy “with a gorgeous black woman who was an initiated Santeria priestess” and participation in a women’s support group, a loose collection of diasporic women from Africa and the Americas, “I showed them the statue of Erzulie that my grandmother [Ifé] had given me,” in Haiti.<sup>54</sup> Sophie’s mother, Martine, seeks the opposite, the blind power of an enraged Erzulie of the Red Eyes. Martine suffers severe nightmares and periodic attacks of psychosis leading her to stab herself seventeen times to remove an unwanted child.<sup>55</sup> Sophie says of her mother’s funeral, Red “was too loud a color for a burial. I knew it. She would look like a Jezebel, hot-blooded Erzulie who feared no men, but rather made them her slaves, raped them, and killed them. She was the only woman with that power.”<sup>56</sup>

Danticat’s narrative fictionalizes Rojo’s theoretical description. The actions of Erzulie in her destructive element are nowhere described better than here. Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) and *The Dew Breaker* (2004) bring to life real bogeymen, *tounton macoutes*, illustrating the damage instituted historically against women’s bodies. *Macoutes* appear as both mythological and historical characters, material embodiments of the unpredictable nature of violence as evidenced by the *loa* Ogun. To combat this violent energy in a healing practice Danticat must utilize the Petro *loa* Erzulie of the Red Eyes, whose nature is equivalent in rage to Ogun at his worst. Both Danticat and Hopkinson share in this desire to locate a feminine force strong enough to disable such violence.

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<sup>53</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 73, 213, 215.

<sup>54</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 201.

<sup>55</sup> “She stabbed her stomach with an old rusty knife. I counted, and they counted again in the hospital. Seventeen times,” Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 224.

<sup>56</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 227.

Fictional references to real and mythical heroes of Haiti abound. Aboard the fictional freighter, *The Black Plume*, resting at the Hudson River pier, Reed describes images of the Haitian revolutionary leaders in *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972).<sup>57</sup>

On the walls are oil portraits of Toussaint L'Ouverture, and Jean Jacques Dessalines, heroes who had expelled Napoleon's troops from Haiti and brought about the Independence of 1803. Next to these are portraits of Henri Christophe and Boukman, the Papa Loi, who rallied the Haitian countryside to the banner of Voodoo, and the mulatto general André Rigaud.<sup>58</sup>

Reed's casual acknowledgement of Papa Loi as a conflation of the Maroon Iconnu and Boukman, both credited with signaling the start of the Haitian Revolution in 1791, in the artworks aboard the ship and the following discussion of the *caco* "bandits" during the Occupation speak to the persistence of these sustaining myths of resistance. Hopkinson's representation of the mythical pre-revolutionary Makandal and his relationship to Ogun, Lasirèn, and Erzulie does this work as well. The *loas* take on mythical form inseparable from or difficult to extricate from historical events. *The Salt Roads* begins in the years preceding the death of Francois Makandal. Benítez-Rojo notes that "the most spectacular cases [of rebellion] happened in Haiti, or rather Saint Domingue, before independence."

[T]he legendary Makandal, from Guinea . . ., [i]n addition to his being a fearsome authority on the toxic properties of plants, he claimed to have the power to predict the future, to transform himself into any animal, to converse with invisible beings, and to be immortal. He wandered for six years through the plantations, organizing slaves for a general rebellion, and along the way poisoned some white colonists and a few hundred head of cattle. His prestige among the Negroes was enormous, and great numbers of them awaited anxiously the date set for the great uprising. He had a simple but chilling strategy. The slaves were to poison the whites' drinking water, then the plantations would be set on fire as they died. In 1758, on exactly the eve of the date set for the revolt to begin, in the midst of a ceremony of propitiation that was saturated with ritual sacrifices, libations, drums, dances, and exalted songs, Makandal was captured, jailed, and finally brought to the stake. Nevertheless, his being for a moment, able to get loose from his bindings

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<sup>57</sup> Reed clearly plays with Hurston's descriptions at Port-au-Prince in *Tell My Horse*, "The smoke from the funnels of the U.S.S. *Washington* was a black plume with a white hope," 72.

<sup>58</sup> Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, 131-132.

and leap over the flames was enough to convince the thousands of slaves who had been rounded up to witness the execution that his magical powers had triumphed in the end.<sup>59</sup>

The Makandal of *The Salt Roads* is a Muslim “half djinn” amputee roving the plantations, instructing in and providing for poisonings.<sup>60</sup> Many believe he escaped this death by transforming into a small flying thing. “Look! There he goes!” [Fleur] pointed into the air, her face alive with joy. ‘See? A manmzè!’<sup>61</sup> Makandal in Haitian folk belief appears as a butterfly. Makandal, in spirit form, appears to remind us of the instinct of resistance and rebellion, a history held close by Haitians as personal metaphor of survival.

Hopkinson illustrates the internal battle of the *loas* for power over practitioners and texts by situating the fictional Mer in opposition to Makandal’s jealousy, humanizing the mythical hero. Mer is ruled by Lasirèn; Makandal by Ogun.

In Yoruba mythology Ogun figures most prominently as an insatiable warrior, originally sent from the creator god, Oduduwa, to bring knowledge of iron to earth, and conquer Ire, where he gave his son, the title Onire or king. Following an unfortunate mix-up where Ogun is not offered proper respect when he returns to Ire after a twenty year hiatus, Ogun kills the people of Ire in a blind rage. Remorseful and ashamed, Ogun chooses exile in the earth, leaving behind a chain which his people can pull when in need of protection from violent assault. When the chain is pulled by a doubtful young man, Ogun springs to earth in a blind fury once again killing off many of his own people; this second time Ogun chooses permanent exile.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 160-161.

<sup>60</sup> Hopkinson, *Salt Roads*, 345.

<sup>61</sup> Hopkinson, *Salt Roads*, 349.

<sup>62</sup> Jacob K. Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals in a Nigerian Community: A Phenomenological Study on Ondo Yoruba Festivals*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1991, 110-111; Ulli Beier, *Yoruba Myths*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980, 34-35, 37. Yoruba myths can serve any one or a combination of the following functions: 1) some are of a religious nature and convey understanding of the Yoruba world view; 2) others are classified as folk-tales where the protagonists bear the names of the *orisa*; 3) others serve a historical function, recording key events; and 4) others develop as oracular devices that can be utilized in divination, Beier, *Yoruba Myths*, xiv. Divination is usually associated with the *orisa* Ifa, but other *orisa* perform oracular functions as well. One can see in the basic myth outlined here that it could perform in any or all of these categories simultaneously. Also, see Melville J. Herskovits, *Dahomean Narrative: A Cross Cultural Analysis*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1958, 134-135, for the Dahomean version of this myth where, Lisa, the son of the creator god, Mawu, brings Gu to earth. Here “Gu is not a god. Gu is metal.” After a successful mission, Lisa retreats to the Sun, rather than the earth, to live and watch over the Universe. Extracted from Shelley Stevens, “The Maturation of an Old God: Iron, Ogun, and Transformation,” unpublished manuscript, 2002, 26.

Ogun's anger is self-perpetuating and his exile self-imposed. "Ogun symbolizes the reality and ambiguity of violence in human experience, a violence that creates through acts of destruction, but can also destroy what it has created."<sup>63</sup> Out of the spiritual battle/symbolic marriage between Makandal possessed by Ogun and Mer by Lasirén, a third spirit emerges, a new world spirit, Erzulie. In Hopkinson's fictional account,

They are me.

‘*Freda*,’ the coquette names herself, toying with misty pink lace that looks strong enough to strangle.

‘*Lasirèn*,’ bubbles the sea woman in Pidgin, cradling whole continents on her bosom.

‘*Danto*,’ weeps the sad one, mourning for her losses. Her hard fists flex in anger. In her name I perceive echoes: Danto, D’hanto, D’hantor, D’hathor. Some few of the Haytian slaves were North African, and a small memory of Hathor’s love still clings to them.

They are me, these women. They are the ones who taught me to see; *I* taught me to see. They, we, are the ones healing the Ginen story, fighting to destroy that cancerous trade in shiploads of African bodies that ever demands to be fed more sugar, more rum, more Nubian gold.

The slave Thais would have borne a girl, to be raised in a whorehouse as another slave girl. Another African body borne away on the waves.

‘*Je-Wouj*,’ I name myself to my sisters, myself. I hear my echoes, all our echoes, say it with me. I am Ezili Red-eye, the termagant enraged, with the power of the millennia of Ginen hopes, lives, loves. ‘*We can lance that chancre*,’ we say. I can direct my own pulse now. I see how to do it. I, we, rise, flow out of ebb, tread the wet roads of tears, of blood, of salt, break like waves into our infinite selves, and dash into battle.<sup>64</sup>

Danticat reminds readers Erzulie can be as destructive as these other repeating mythical counterparts. Sophie’s mother dies a violent death at her own hand, in a scene that reminds us of Ogun’s inability to contain his anger. Danticat recounts the “story,” or folktale, of “a woman who walked around with blood constantly spurting out of her unbroken skin.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> John Pemberton, *Africa's Ogun: Old World and New*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, 107; Stevens, “Maturation of an Old God,” 26.

<sup>64</sup> Hopkinson, *The Salt Roads*, 304-305.

<sup>65</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 87.

‘Make me a butterfly,’ she told Erzulie. ‘Make me a butterfly.’  
 ‘A butterfly you shall be,’ said Erzulie.  
 The woman was transformed and never bled again.<sup>66</sup>

From the other side of the world and concerned with other colonized women’s survival in India, Devi echoes Danitcat and Hopkinson’s sentiments, “Only love, a tremendous, excruciating, explosive love can still dedicate us to this work when the century’s sun is in the western sky, otherwise this aggressive civilization will have to pay a terrible price, look at history, the aggressive civilization has destroyed itself in the name of progress, each time.”<sup>67</sup> These New World texts of diaspora remind us that the wound is “always suppurating,” new *loas* are born, and adaptable historical images and cultural practices of diaspora persevere and procreate to serve new ends. Erzulie’s dual narrative of healing capacity and destructive power has only begun to be explored. These texts take on a Haitian-derived *loas* as philosophical metaphor of suffering and recovery.<sup>68</sup> This evolving process of creolization only becomes more interesting as new voices in the conversation emerge.

**Final Thoughts.** Perhaps, I bring some pieces of Haiti to you. Each of the chapters presented here could have developed into a dissertation itself or stand alone as individual essays. Each is tied one to the other by the connective thread of artistic creation and a sense of social and political activism. Each encounter serves to illustrate a critical moment in U.S. American preconceptions, perceptions, receptions, repetitions, and re-conceptions of Haiti. Each identifies markers we recognize as Haitian from the Revolution to the Occupation well into the current century. Lytton Strachey wrote in *Eminent Victorians* (1918) that one requires fifty years distance to adequately begin to reflect on an epoch—including history and politics, and literary,

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<sup>66</sup> Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 88. Thus, I wear the butterfly.

<sup>67</sup> Devi, *Imaginary Maps*, 196.

<sup>68</sup> Kameelah Martin, in *Conjuring Moments in African American Literature: Women, Spirit Work, and Other Such Hoodoo* (2013), explores additional structuring motifs, including that of the blues, that allow for spiritual healing work.

artistic, and performative practice, what we so loosely call culture.<sup>69</sup> Within this matrix, the ontological and intangible perform the ideological production of humanity's concept of itself and its abilities, fabricating imagined realities for self and others within its interiority with which it must engage through exteriorization. Let these perspectives stand as imagined reconstructions of fragmented moments in Haitian and U.S. American dialectical relations. These offerings sprung from germinations of over a decade of persistent and deliberate investigation into a narrative discourse often quite brutal in its presentation. Recuperation. Reclamation. So many artists, scholars, public health workers, and authors in and out of Haiti diligently work everyday to create a new reality, one in which Haiti can thrive. By looking at certain focal points, or case studies, through a variety of disciplinary lenses, I hope to refer the reader to the connections and the disconnections between these disparate narratives in order that they feel compelled, whether they agree with me or not, to investigate further—to not just take literature, art, history, philosophy, linguistics, semiotics, politics, or performance as isolated individual media of expression but to feel the cross currents at work, the subtle pulls of personal interest, the aims of activism in the words, observations, novels, poetry, drama, prose, dance, and film through the movement between the disciplines. No one discipline thrives in isolation. Such combinations of windows, like the sliding doors of the *Katsura Detached Palace* in Kyoto (early seventeenth century, Edo period), allow us to adjust our world view and the views others hold of us as the political seasons change while holding firm to a foundational form of values engendered in broad and deep study of liberal disciplines.<sup>70</sup>

“After the mountains, still more mountains.”—Haitian proverb<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> See Lytton Strachey's opening remarks, *Eminent Victorians*, 1918, Project Gutenberg, December, 2000.

<sup>70</sup> In Micahel Kampen-O'Reilly, *Art Beyond the West*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York: Pearson, 2006.

<sup>71</sup> See title, Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*; “Only a mountain can crush a Haitian woman,” Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 198.

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