THE UNITED STATES AND HAITI, 1791-1863:
A RACIALIZED FOREIGN POLICY AND ITS DOMESTIC CORRELATES

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
August 2008

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ABSTRACT

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The Haitian Revolution represents a truly unique moment in world history. Between 1789 and 1804 a colony composed primarily of black plantation slaves overthrew their white masters and with them a well-established political and economic system. Founding a new state composed of and led by free blacks, the Haitian Revolution succeeded in this respect against all odds and the best efforts of the leading imperial powers. The largely reactionary policies of the United States which resulted from this event suggest a need for further investigation. The Haitian Revolution clearly touched a raw nerve in American domestic politics and society, bringing into view apparent divisions in these spheres on a range of topics, with race relations foremost among them.

In the face of the Haitian Revolution, American foreign policy took a number of seemingly contradictory turns, ultimately resulting in the non-recognition of Haiti for years to come. Scholarship in this area has clearly revealed the influence of Southern slaveholders who succeeded in applying a racist ideology in order to effectively isolate Haiti from the United States. Despite various and compelling counter-interests, their proponents never mobilized extensively enough to pose a significant threat to the agenda of Southern conservatives until the outbreak of the Civil War.

A study of the development of Haiti as an object of ideological and symbolic importance in American politics reveals the important role it played in fueling both sides of the increasingly sectional divide over race and the future of slavery in the United States. By tracing the evolution of U.S. policy and thought on Haiti, a new perspective on
America’s long and painful journey out of slavery is proposed; one that exists at the intersection of racial politics and the construction of foreign policy.
PREFACE

This topic of this thesis, originally conceived nearly two and a half years ago, is the result of the collision of three subjects, all critical to any understanding of American history, that have always fascinated me. First, the role of race in U.S. society is one that, though universally considered to be of central importance, is constantly undergoing reinterpretation. The second, the formulation of foreign policy, was no less important in the eighteenth and nineteenth century than it is today. Finally, the study of revolutionary change, throughout history, has always elicited my interest, and the transformation brought about by the Haitian Revolution was revolutionary indeed – not just for the inhabitants of that nation, but for the world as well. This thesis exists at the intersection of these three subjects as they applied to the early history of the United States.

At the time of this writing, the United States electorate considers its first black president. In light of this development, itself the product of immense transformations in American society, the political discourse of the U.S. in the years leading up to the Civil War can seem so distant. In this thesis I have attempted to both close that gap for the reader by making the events discussed herein seem close at hand through the use of primary sources, while at the same time keeping my boundless interest in current events a non-factor in the interpretation I advance. While it is for the reader to determine the extent to which I have succeeded in this endeavor, I also know that even the best historians often come up short in this regard.

In conceptualizing this study, in gathering the materials, and in honing my argument, I have indebted myself to so many. First and foremost, I must thank my advisor Dr. Douglas Forsyth, during whose policy history course I first conceived this
thesis. Without his boundless patience, incisive questions, and astute mentorship this study would not have been possible. I must also express my thanks and appreciation for the assistance of Dr. Scott Martin whose constructive criticism and deep knowledge of early U.S. history have improved this study immensely. Any flaws in the present work are mine alone and largely reflect my inability to enact all of their advice.

Thanks also to Ms. Mary Huth, whose expertise and assistance in locating materials at the Department of Rare Books and Special Collection at the University of Rochester were invaluable to my research. Everyone in the History Department as well as the BGSU community – friends, colleagues, and professors – who have listened to me discuss this study or even provided a sympathetic ear when I found it necessary to vent about the drudgery of historical research are also deserving of credit. Finally, I must thank my good friend Gwen Foster who corrected my translations of all of the French language documents employed in this thesis. Every French quote included herein, though initially translated by me, has been checked for accuracy by Gwen.

My graduate studies at BGSU were partly financed by a generous assistantship at the Institute for Child and Family Policy under the capable leadership of Dr. Laura Landry-Meyer.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the intersection of race and foreign policy in the early history of the United States through an examination of the event that brought these two issues toward an unavoidable collision: the Haitian Revolution and the sociopolitical fallout that attended it until the American Civil War. Two developments – one in the study of international relations, the other in the scholarship devoted to American history – provide much of the conceptual basis for the present investigation of the pre-Civil War foreign policy of the United States.

First, like the inquiries of most contemporary historians, as well as political scientists, this study proceeds from the premise that American interactions with the world at large “have seldom been divorced from their sociocultural milieu.”¹ As with all nation-states, domestic conflicts, anxieties, and pressures have in large part contributed to the formation of U.S. foreign policy since the country’s inception. To be sure, developments abroad, as in the success of Haiti’s slave revolt, have dramatically impacted American policy-making but were always viewed in the context of – and acted upon in conjunction with – the internal social and political issues of the time.

Second, beginning in the 1960s, historians of American slavery moved away from both the traditionalist and revisionist schools of thought to embrace an interpretation stressing the centrality of institutions such as slavery to much of American history. Race and the black experience are thus regarded “as a key to the meaning of the American experience.”²

¹ Alexander DeConde, Ethnicity and American Foreign Policy: A History (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), x.
If the nature of race relations is a central theme in American history and an essential part of the “sociocultural milieu” integral to the construction of American foreign policy, the Haitian slave insurrection of 1791 and the events which followed from it provide an excellent opportunity to examine the way the problem of race was conceived of and dealt with prior to the abolition of slavery. Although organized abolitionist groups would not gain substantial momentum in the United States until the 1830s, the legitimacy of slavery had long been contested. The principles manifested in the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence, which would later provide much of the intellectual framework for abolitionism, added to the tension between American ideals and the reality of its society. This state of apprehension as to the future of slavery in America would persist until the cataclysm of civil war thoroughly destroyed it. While racism would persist for generations, the peculiar institution was shattered.

Just as the ideals espoused by many American revolutionaries seemed ostensibly to challenge the validity of slavery, a far more jarring affront to the principles on which slavery rested – white hegemony and superiority – came with the Haitian Revolution. In 1791, hundreds of thousands of black slaves rose against their white and mulatto masters, inaugurating thirteen years of racial warfare that left the colony devastated and most of its whites dead or in exile. What immediately followed in the United States were attempts to insulate the slave-holding regions of the country from a similar fate as well as efforts to

assist the former French colony’s disaffected planters with whom many whites identified. Additionally, Haiti, with its enormous economic importance, was seen by U.S. policy-makers as an arena in which the United States could and must play the game of great-power politics as it competed with Britain, France and Spain.

Most relevant to this study, however, was the way the construction of a foreign policy in regard to Haiti became a stage on which to play out the drama of American anxieties over its own slave society as it approached the terminal crisis of American slavery. While many U.S. political actors sought to establish “a proslavery foreign policy” immediately following the Haitian slave revolt, the course of the policy leading up to the Civil War is much more complex than a simple reflection of Southern racism.3 In fact, U.S. foreign policy vis-à-vis Haiti became a battleground upon which opponents and proponents of American slavery would trade barbs. As such, this study seeks to employ American foreign policy as a lens through which to view the development of the domestic debate over slavery. While the policies enacted under the Washington and Jefferson administrations largely reflected racism and an effort to preserve slavery, Haitian-American relations would later come to be quite sensitive to public opinion as well as the divisions in Congress, as these factors related to American slavery. The connection is evidenced by the increase in calls for formal recognition of Haiti leading up to the Civil War as abolitionists gained political power and more forcefully expressed themselves. Ultimately, Haiti was recognized when, after the war broke out, there were no Southern members left in Congress to veto such efforts.

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While the course of American foreign policy toward Haiti has been studied for almost a century – and American slavery even longer – no study has yet achieved an understanding of the complex intersection of both these issues; one that goes beyond the simplicity of Southern racism and reaction; beyond Northern economic interests and budding abolitionism. By viewing America’s struggle with slavery through its response to the Haitian Revolution parts of the traditional narrative of the antebellum period must be reevaluated. For example, most historians agree that American abolitionism lacked the cohesiveness that existed among such movements in European countries until at least forty years after the outbreak of rebellion in Haiti. Moreover, the violence of the revolt and rampant racism prevented the formation of anything resembling a pro-Haitian lobby. Nevertheless, some in power acted upon their abolitionist sympathies almost immediately by opposing the interests of Southern planters whose tremendous anxieties as to the future of American slavery were actuated by the slave insurrection in Haiti. At times, these political actors were willing to behave more forcefully in the arena of foreign policy than they were willing to push on domestic matters, in an effort to reign in Southern political influence upon the latter. While proslavery forces would initially dominate U.S. foreign policy toward Haiti, the years leading to the Civil War paid witness to a concurrent increase in tension over relations with the black republic.

Haiti forces us not only to reevaluate the rise of American abolitionism but the role the Western Hemisphere’s second independent nation played in the formation of black nationalism among free blacks in the United States. African-Americans often looked upon Haiti and its leaders with pride, celebrating the revolution for both its concrete results and its symbolic importance. A few even resettled on the island, taking
part in colonization schemes similar to those involving Liberia. Haiti and the United States became inextricably connected as a result of migration; both free blacks looking for an escape from discrimination in newly independent Haiti, as well as refugees fleeing the violence of the revolution.

Further, while Haiti is traditionally understood largely for its strategic importance in the game of nineteenth-century great-power politics, this status takes on a different meaning for the U.S. when the racial implications of its policies toward Haiti are kept at the center of the picture. America’s interaction with Haiti, like its unwillingness to do away with slavery, came to be a factor in unfavorable relations with much of Europe.

The period between 1791 when Haitian slaves rose up against their colonial overlords and 1863 when the U.S. government finally offered formal diplomatic recognition to the island nation paid witness to dramatic developments in the American debate on slavery. The U.S. went from being a country increasingly dependent on slavery for its economic growth to one free of the malignant institution due to force of arms. By eschewing the traditional tendency to separate U.S. foreign and domestic policy, a new interpretation of certain aspects of the American journey out of slavery suggests itself. Namely, the nature of the conflict between the ideals of the American Revolution and its slave society in the last decade of the eighteenth century, the evolution of sectionalism in the U.S., and the symbolic function of Haiti in the minds of Americans, both within and outside the policy-making sphere, are all factors that demand reevaluation when

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4 For the traditional diplomatic history of U.S.-Haitian relations see: Mary Treudley, The Diplomatic Relations of Santo Domingo with the United States, 1789-1866 (Worcester, Mass., 1916); Charles C. Tansill, The United States and Santo Domingo, 1798-1866: A chapter in Caribbean diplomacy (Gloucester, Mass., 1938); Ludwell L. Montague, Haiti and the United States, 1714-1938 (Durham, N.C., 1940); and Rayford W. Logan, The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti, 1776-1891 (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1941). The latter is, in the opinion of this author, the most complete, and as such is employed for general diplomatic information more often than the others.
employing the Haitian Revolution as a frame of reference for the study of U.S. racial politics.

It should be emphasized that the methodology employed in this paper more closely resembles that of policy history or international history, as opposed to that which largely frames the work of historians of the early Republic. Further, the author’s intent was primarily to interpret – and in many cases, reinterpret – primary sources culled from the National Archives, the Papers of William Henry Seward, the South Carolina Archives, the Pennsylvania Register, and a number of contemporary periodicals, among others. As such, a survey of some of the most recent literature on U.S. politics in the early Republic and race in American society is a necessary component to this introduction and will hopefully remedy any deficiencies as seen by historians of the early Republic. Without these works this study would not have been possible and their approaches – if not their specific conclusions – were crucial in framing the arguments presented herein.

The last few years have been a productive period for the scholarship devoted to race and slavery in early U.S. society. Matthew Mason’s *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* is required reading for any historian attempting to remain up-to-date on the issues central to the present study. In addition, Adam Rothman’s *Slave Country: American Expansionism and the Origins of the Deep South* provides a thoughtful interpretation of the social and economic factors at work during most of the period covered within *The United States and Haiti, 1791-1863*. Two edited works, David Quigley and David N. Newman’s *Jim Crow New York: A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877* and Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Stauffer’s *Prophets...*
of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism provide important reinterpretations of Northern thought on slavery and abolitionism respectively.⁵

The study of the first party system and the concomitant political developments in the early United States has similarly benefited from a number of uniquely interpretive studies in recent years. Sean Wilentz’s sprawling book The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln serves as an effective representation of the progressive angle to which most histories of the United States currently subscribe. Similarly, Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson and David Waldstreicher’s Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic has collected some of the more forward-thinking work on early American politics. Two books on the role of print media – Trish Loughran’s The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870 and Jerry W. Knudson’s Jefferson and the Press: Crucible of Liberty are particularly important in framing this study as it employs such sources extensively.⁶

This thesis follows the labyrinth of U.S. political and social developments through the advent of the Civil War and, as such, benefited from some modern works on the era preceding the conflict which resulted in the demise of American slavery. The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War by Frank Towers effectively elucidates the

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increasingly sectional rift in U.S. society. John Y. Simon, Harold Holzer, and Dawa Vogel have recently collected some of the most modern interpretations of Abraham Lincoln, a pivotal figure in American history as well as this thesis, in *Lincoln Revisited: New Insights from the Lincoln Forum*. David P. Currie’s *The Constitution in Congress*’’ *Descent into Maelstrom, 1829-1861* is crucial to understanding the political and judicial aspects of the debate over slavery.7

A few new books examining the era of American slave society from an international perspective were similarly essential in constructing this paper. Particularly, Gerald Horne’s *The Deepest South: The United States, Brazil and the African Slave Trade*, as well as Ruben Gowricharn’s *Caribbean Transnationalism: Migration, Pluralization, and Social Cohesion* have enriched the study of the Atlantic slave trade and its relationship to U.S. political developments. *Europe’s American Revolution* by Simon P. Newman provides a collection of essays that seek to understand the role of the American Revolution in European society and its subsequent interactions with the United States.8

Finally, a clarification regarding terminology is in order due to the various monikers applied to the western third of what the Spanish called the island of Hispaniola. During the period of French control, it is most often referred to as Saint Domingue, though some still referred to it by its Spanish name, Santo Domingo, for many years.

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After declaring independence in 1804, the revolutionaries renamed it Haiti, reflecting the name given it by its native inhabitants. The author attempts herein to use the name most appropriate depending on the time period in question, though “Haiti” is applied more universally than any other.
CHAPTER 1

In the early days of the colony known by the French as Saint Domingue there was little indication that, by the late eighteenth century, it would become the wealthiest of the Caribbean slave colonies. The western third of the island was ceded to Louis XIV in 1697 in the Treaty of Ryswick, ending two centuries of Spanish rule. The first settlers were mostly former filibustiers, or pirates and freebooters who operated in the surrounding waters, along with the boucaniers occupied in trapping. What little subsistence farming the first colonists engaged in gave way to the vastly more lucrative production of tobacco and indigo in the late seventeenth century, initiating the transition to a plantation economy supported by forced labor.9

The first laborers imported to Saint Domingue were actually white indentured servants or engagés. Soon after the turn of the eighteenth century, however, the colony’s economy transformed again to focus on the more labor-intensive production of sugar. This, along with the importation of black slaves resulted in “a tiered system of interlocking castes and classes all determined by the necessities, structure, and rhythm of the plantations.”10 Four primary social castes constituted the population of Saint Domingue. At the top were the grands blancs, the planters and French-born bureaucrats with whom rested nearly all of the authority and wealth of the colony. Alongside them were the lower- and middle-class whites who worked as plantation managers, merchants, lawyers and tradesmen. Known as petits blancs, many were descendants of the engagés, though their ranks included a number of petty criminals, debtors, and mercenaries who

descended upon Saint Domingue where the privilege of race often provided opportunities their backgrounds would not have allowed in France.\footnote{Fick, 17.}

Despite the authorities’ attempts to establish a clear distinction between white and black, race was not configured in the same way as in the United States. The *affranchis*, or free persons of color occupied a middle ground in Saint Domingue’s social system. Most were of mixed race, and though equal in number to the whites, the *affranchis* suffered under a repressive judicial code that enforced their inferior status in relation to the island’s white population. Nevertheless, through tenacity and thrift, the *affranchis* were economically ascendant at the time of the revolution owning fully one-third of the plantation property, one-quarter of the slaves, and one-quarter of the real estate property in Saint Domingue.\footnote{Fick, 19.} As alarming to the whites as their economic achievements was the way “these coloreds…imitate the style of the whites and try to wipe out all memory of their original state.”\footnote{Cited in de Vaissière, *La société*, 223.} Most among the *affranchis* viewed themselves as part of the same culture as the whites of Saint Domingue and, despite increasingly strict laws meant to reinforce white hegemony, they continued to model their behavior on that of the *grands* and *petits blancs* often educating themselves and their children in France.

While the official figures cite the 1790 population of Saint Domingue at 30,826 whites, and 24,262 free blacks and mulattoes, the vast bulk of the colony’s inhabitants were black slaves, said to number over 450,000.\footnote{M. L. E. Moreau de St. Mery, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l’île Saint Domingue* (Paris, 1958). See also Jean Price-Mars, “La Position d’Haïti et de la culture Française en Amérique,” *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 8 (January 1966): 44-53. Price-Mars argues that the official figures were deficient and estimated the slave population to have been about 620,000.} It was upon their backs that the great wealth of the colony and the fortunes of its elite were built. The seemingly endless
economic growth and prosperity Saint Domingue underwent in the eighteenth century depended upon their ceaseless labor. By 1789, roughly two-thirds of these slaves were African-born: men and women forced to leave their homelands, crammed onto slave ships, and sold in the Americas in order to fill a constantly expanding demand for labor. Averaging some 14,500 captives per year between 1700 and 1792, the actual number of slaves imported increased dramatically in the last years of the colonial regime reaching 37,000 slaves per year between 1783 and 1792.15 Ironically, the wealth produced by Saint Dominguan slave labor fueled, in no small part, the rise of the French bourgeoisie and consequently, the French Revolution, without which the Haitian slave insurrection may not have occurred.

Despite concerted efforts to maintain white solidarity, including the 1763 legislation forbidding any of the *affranchis* from holding public office, practicing law or medicine, and engaging in other privileged trades, the whites of Saint Domingue were almost always in conflict. The *petits blancs*, perhaps the group with the most to lose and, as such, often the most politically volatile, resented the arrogance and privilege of the *grands blancs* as well as the economic achievements of the *affranchis* who not only competed with the lower- and middle-class whites but often surpassed them in wealth. It was not uncommon for even the *grands blancs* to divide between the ruling bureaucrats and the planters. At such times, the planter class would often elicit support from among both the *petits blancs* and the *affranchis*. Beneath the powder keg of these factional conflicts lay the mass of black slaves who were anything but blind to the potential vulnerability of Saint Domingue’s precarious slave society.

15 Fick, 22.
The calling of the Estates General to Versailles in the fateful year of 1789 precipitated not only the French Revolution but also the events which would trigger the Haitian slave revolt. Inspired by events in Paris, the petits blancs-controlled Colonial Assembly of St. Marc in west Saint Domingue issued a constitution for the entire colony. Angered by this affront to their presumed superiority, the grands blancs of the north attempted a coup. Both sectors of the white population began preparations for war, arming their slaves for the fight to come. When, however, the National Assembly passed the May Decree enfranchising propertied affranchis, they temporarily shelved their class differences and forged an alliance in order to stave off the threat of racial equality. The free blacks, determined to stand up for their hard fought political rights, in turn, armed their slaves for the impending racial war.\(^{16}\)

Employed for two years fighting for one of the other three factions in the colony, the slaves of Saint Domingue knew that if the whites and free blacks could employ violence in the name of liberty, so too could they go to war on their own behalf. In fact, the maroon bands of escaped slaves that had roved the mountainous interior of the island had, for years, engaged in guerilla tactics against the plantations of Saint Domingue, establishing a tradition of resistance to slavery. Finally, on the night of August 22, 1791, the slaves of the Plain du Nord, taking advantage of the instability resulting from the conflagration between the other classes, began a full-scale insurrection. Hundreds of thousands of slaves set fire to plantations, torched cities, and began slaughtering their former masters. So began the most successful slave revolt in history which, in 1804, resulted in an independent Haiti, eventually spelling an end to all Caribbean slavery. The

\(^{16}\) Knight, 111.
repercussions of the Haitian Revolution would be felt for generations, and nowhere more
than in its slaveholding neighbor to the north, the United States.

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On the eve of the Saint Dominguan slave revolt, the French colony consumed
between 10 and 15 percent of all American exports, more than the rest of the West Indies
combined. The U.S. provided its plantations with everything from foodstuffs like beef,
pork and fish to lumber and slaves. In return, the colony provided the United States with
nearly all of the sugar and molasses it imported, which, distilled into rum, became an
important staple in Atlantic commerce. Despite restrictive British and French navigation
laws, some 500 American ships were actively trading with Saint Domingue which was
second only to Great Britain in the young nation’s foreign commerce.17 John Adams,
then U.S. minister to England, spoke not only for the leading statesmen of the fledgling
nation, but also for widespread public opinion when he stated that “the commerce of the
West India islands is part of the American system of commerce. They can neither do
without us, nor we without th

As lucrative and vital as the trade between the two nations was, however, the
connection between the United States and Saint Domingue went much deeper. The
political agenda of the colony’s free blacks was informed in so small part by the
American Revolution. A regiment of *affranchis* known as the Fontages Legion, had
traveled to Georgia where it participated in the siege of Savannah against the British
redcoats. Performing admirably in battle, particularly in the failed assault of October 9,

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1779, the regiment included in its ranks many future leaders of the Haitian Revolution, among them Jean Baptiste Chavannes, André Rigaud, Jean-Pierre Lambert, and Henry Christophe. They returned home with both military experience and the ideology of liberty espoused by American patriots, both of which would figure prominently in subsequent events.

Of equal importance was the news, brought to the slaves of Saint Domingue by African American sailors on American ships, that slaves in the Northern states had gained their freedom. These landmark changes in North America were compounded by the formation in 1788 of the *Amis de noirs*, a French antislavery society which petitioned the French crown for humane treatment of slaves and flooded the island with abolitionist propaganda. In one of the only first-hand accounts of the early days of the slave revolt, a disaffected young planter asked how the colony’s slaves, “so well treated,” could rebel and placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of French abolitionists who he conflated with Revolutionaries. “One must ask those composers of phrases who have inundated the country with their incendiary writings; those stupid innovators who brought turmoil to France and killed their King; those Whites of Europe who were found at the head of the insurgents.”19 This sentiment would later become an important part of master-class ideology in the American South as well. The powerful British antislavery movement gained steam around the same time when, in 1789, William Wilberforce demanded an end to England’s participation in the slave trade, an extremely disturbing development for Jamaican planters who insisted abolitionists were intentionally fomenting rebellion.

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19 Althéa de Puech Parham, ed., *My Odyssey: Experiences of a Young Refugee from Two Revolutions* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), 44.
Antislavery sentiment existed at the time of the Haitian Revolution, not only across the Atlantic, but in North America as well. What had been a white consensus on the question of slavery before 1750 began to show signs of dissent in the four decades before the revolt in Saint Domingue. Cracks appeared in white solidarity such that, before 1791, “there was a remarkable convergence of cultural and intellectual developments which at once undercut traditional rationalizations for slavery and offered new modes of sensibility for identifying with its victims.”

While nowhere near as developed as European abolitionism, American minds were not insulated from the factors – the emergence of secular social philosophy, British industrialization, and religious moralism – that provided much of the basis for rejecting traditional defenses of slavery.

Into this situation arrived the news of the bloody revolt in Saint Domingue. The island’s colonial assembly immediately requested assistance from its neighbors, acquiring aid from Martinique, and even Jamaica where British planters put aside nationalistic grudges and opted to stand in solidarity with their fellow slaveholders. The colonial assembly, however, looked most expectantly to the United States where its agents circumvented diplomatic protocol, much to the dismay of Paris’s foreign minister in Philadelphia.

Apparently well aware of the potential for empathy from a state where slaves constituted a majority of the population, Monsieur Polony, charged with securing foreign aid, sent an urgent and frightful message to South Carolina’s governor. “The French of St. Domingo find themselves in the most imminent danger,” read the proceedings –

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included with Polony’s request – of the General Assembly of Saint Domingue of 24th August, holed up in Cape Francois. “The slaves have risen, the houses are on fire. The whites who had the government of them are murdered. Those who have escaped the sword of the assassins are obliged to retreat into their towns and abandon their properties.” The communication reflected the desperation of the colony’s elites just two days into a conflagration that would ravage the island for thirteen years. It also sought to play on the fears of South Carolinians who already viewed with trepidation the potential consequences of a slave revolt at home. “The scourge which is now laying waste the most valuable French possessions in America,” stated the communiqué, “threatens all the neighboring Colonies if they do not invite to destroy the source of it.”

Unfortunately for Monsieur Polony and the whites of Saint Domingue, the South Carolina legislature was in recess until early December. In responding to Polony’s urgent appeal for assistance in combating the August revolt, however, Governor Charles Pinckney stated that South Carolina’s citizens “feel for your situation” and “have a particular interest in hoping that such support will be afforded by your friends as will enable you to effectively crush so daring & unprovoked a rebellion.” Your success, he continued, “will prove the general detestation in which such attempts are held and will always be opposed [;]…your future and the fate of the insurgents will have a happy effect in operating as an example to prevent similar commotions in other countries.” For reasons he would only relate to his own legislature, however, the Governor at first offered only the rhetoric of solidarity in place of concrete assistance.

22 “Extract from the register of the General Assembly of St. Domingo, August 24th 1791,” in messages received: Enclosures, Governor’s messages, transmitted to House 5th December 1791, transmitted to Senate 6th December 1791, South Carolina Archives, Columbia (microfilm).
23 Governor Charles Pinckney’s answer to the Colonial Assembly of St. Domingo, September 1791 in Messages received: Enclosures, South Carolina Archives, Columbia (microfilm).
Upon the South Carolina legislature’s return in early December, Governor Pinckney sent the House and Senate copies of his correspondence with the French colony’s agent, including the original request and his response. He also included a message to the assembly stating that “their communications are of an affecting nature being a country of similar possessions,” referring to his state’s reliance on its own slaves and plantations. He went on to say that “while we may sympathize with our friends and lament their sufferings, they very strongly prove the policy of having our Malitia [sic] always in a situation to act with promptness and effect as circumstances may require.”

The Governor also makes reference to “the difference of opinions which prevail…upon the regulation of the Militia,” suggesting that at least some representatives may have intended for the South Carolina militia to engage directly in the revolt in Saint Domingue. Pinckney instead admonished the assembly to provide monetary assistance to the beleaguered French planters and keep the troops at home.

Unsatisfied with the Governor’s response, Monsieur Polony attempted to appeal directly to the South Carolina General Assembly, a move that would not have been possible save for the newness of the U.S. federal government. As he put it, “notwithstanding the answer which his Excellency [the Governor] politely communicated to me,” he was left “but little expectation of succeeding in proportion to the hopes and necessities of my country.” Polony, committed to his relief mission, employed both flattery as well as an appeal for empathy, writing: “Friends and allies! of a free people; whose courage and whose humanity have been distinguished under all circumstances, and have called forth the admiration of the whole European world….You [who share] as well

24 Governor Charles Pinckney to the South Carolina House and Senate, 4th December 1791 in Messages received: Enclosures, South Carolina Archives, Columbia (microfilm).
a peculiar sympathy of circumstances….Who better than you can feel and appreciate 
misery which language is so little able to describe?”

Ultimately, the South Carolina legislature took the advice of its governor and kept 
its militia at home. Instead, they offered “to furnish such supplies of provisions or stores 
as Monsieur Polloney [sic] shall think fit to order for the French portion of the Island of 
Saint Domingo to the amount of a sum not exceeding three thousand pounds.” The 
supplies were a small contribution in the face of “an event to which the history of 
America affords no comparisons of history.” The Governor did not even bother to alert 
the legislature until they were back in session, two months after first hearing of the revolt. 
Perhaps Governor Pinckney and his legislature failed to realize the gravity of the 
situation, though this seems highly unlikely. Considering their self-acknowledged 
vulnerability at home, it is much more probable that, while desiring to do anything in 
their power to check the rebellion, they feared exerting themselves too greatly lest they 
find themselves in a similar predicament. In fact, Pinckney wrote to President George 
Washington long before alerting the South Carolina General Assembly, urging him to 
take action or risk the revolt becoming a “flame which will extend to the neighboring 
islands, and may eventually prove not a very pleasing or agreeable example to the 
Southern States.”

Saint Domingue’s colonial assembly did not, however, pin all of its hopes on 
South Carolina. In an effort to gain more from his mission to the Southern state,

25 M. Polony, petition to South Carolina legislature, December 1791, South Carolina Archives, Columbia (microfilm).
26 General Assembly Committee Report and Resolution regarding Governor’s Message and enclosed memorial from M. Poloney, 15th December 1791, South Carolina Archives, Columbia (microfilm).
27 M. Polony, petition to South Carolina legislature, December 1791, South Carolina Archives, Columbia (microfilm).
28 Pinckney to Washington, Charleston, 20th September 1791.
Monsieur Poloney mentions his colleague Monsieur Roustan who was dispatched to Philadelphia in an attempt to gain the support of the U.S. Congress and, while there, gained the attention of the Pennsylvania legislature. He admonishes his South Carolinian audience to emulate the Pennsylvanians who, “deeply affected by the scenes of distress presented…generously decreed to us all the assistance they had it in their power to bestow.” Though an exaggeration, the mission to Philadelphia did obtain a much more prompt response. The debate it engendered in the Pennsylvania statehouse, however, had little in common with the white solidarity characteristic of South Carolina’s reaction.

It is unclear how the Pennsylvania legislature became informed of the slave revolt on Saint Domingue or why they, without outside urging, took such direct interest in the matter. They had already drafted two resolutions regarding assistance to the French colony and formed a committee to investigate the truth of the reports of insurrection when they learned – following the investigations of the aforementioned committee – of the presence in Philadelphia of Roustan. One thing that is clear, however, is that his mission aroused the suspicions of the French minister Jean Baptiste de Ternant.

Ternant, alerted to the presence of Roustan by the Consular General who encountered the Dominguan diplomat in New York, was at once alarmed at his pretensions to “negotiating with the United States as Sovereign Nation to Sovereign Nation.”29 Although concerned that any weapons procured might eventually be turned against the Mother Country, Ternant nonetheless felt compelled to provide the assistance the colony needed lest it take a step toward independence by subverting diplomatic protocol and acquiring aid directly from the United States. Ternant noted with

29 Ternant to Montmorin, 28th September 1791, Frederick Jackson Turner, ed., in Correspondence of the French Foreign Ministers (henceforth denoted as CFM), 47.
consternation how Roustan could hardly have failed in this regard as, only a day after his arrival in Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives submitted two proposals for the island’s relief.

The political environment in Pennsylvania regarding matters of race and slavery bore little resemblance to that in South Carolina. Whereas such matters were treated with a certain casual racism as well as a near-universal fear of slave revolt in the former state, Pennsylvania’s state house seemed to handle them much more delicately. Just days after the insurrection on Saint Domingue and before news of it had reached Pennsylvania, its legislature was hearing the complaints of one of its members who possessed evidence that a free black was kidnapped in the state to be sold in a Virginia slave market. Urged on “by the Society for the gradual abolition of slavery, to make a demand that they [the kidnappers] should be delivered up, to answer the charges against them,” the representative contacted the governor of Virginia where he was rebuffed.30 The state’s subsequent willingness to engage in a limited legal altercation with its neighbor over the issue points toward the very different atmosphere in Pennsylvania versus that in South Carolina.

Thus, the outbreak of rebellion in Saint Domingue produced a complex response from the Pennsylvania legislature. On September, 21, Representative Richard Wells offered two resolutions in support of the colonists of Saint Domingue. It noted the “cruel and barbarous massacre of the white inhabitants,” and the feelings of “deep sympathy for the distressed and dreadful situation of the wretched inhabitants of Cape-Francois, then closely besieged by an enraged and brutal multitude of Negroes and Mulattoes.” Wells’ proposal, seconded by Francis Gurney, went far beyond words of solidarity, however,

and offered to immediately provide resources to “succour the unhappy inhabitants of Cape Francois,” threatened as they were “by a murdering and desperate host of Negroes and Mulattoes.” The resolution further called for the establishment of a committee to draft a bill to enable the governor to charter two ships for the purpose of transporting supplies to the Saint Dominguan planters, as well as to take on board as many refugees as possible.\textsuperscript{31}

The committee, which consisted of Richard Wells, Elias Boys, Daniel Clymer, Albert Gallatin, and Cadwallader Evans, reported back the following day. Having discovered the presence of Monsieur Roustan, they were informed that the mulattoes of Saint Domingue had not taken part in the violent revolt – “on the contrary, great numbers of those people have tendered their services to defend the city, and have been armed for that purpose.” A motion was thus made by Richard Wells to strike out the words, “and Mulattoes,” which passed. The records of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives next mention that Samuel MacClay offered another amendment, this time suggesting that the words, “by a murdering and desperate host of Negroes,” be eliminated from the resolution.\textsuperscript{32} It seems, however surprisingly, that this only came after a brisk debate concerning the possible legitimacy of the slaves’ cause. A representative identified only as a Quaker, rose during the deliberations to state “that it would be inconsistent on the part of a free State to take measures against a people who used the only means they had of throwing off the yoke of terrible slavery; that if the Negro insurrection were treated as

\textsuperscript{31} Pennsylvania House of Reps., \textit{Journal} (Philadelphia, 1791), 528.

\textsuperscript{32} Pennsylvania House of Reps., \textit{Journal} (Philadelphia, 1791), 530.
a rebellion, what name could then be given to that of the Americans, through which they
won their independence?”

He was not the only member offended by the wording of the resolution. Albert
Gallatin, a member of the committee charged with preparing the bill to provide the
vessels for Saint Domingue’s relief and the future Jeffersonian Republican leader,
expressed similar sentiments in his personal correspondence. Though he regretted the
violence of the rebellion, it was clear to Gallatin that the brutality of the blacks was the
direct consequence of so many years of slavery. “For the whites to expect mercy from the
mulattoes and negroes is absurd,” he wrote, “and whilst we pity the misfortunes of the
present generation of whites of that island, in which, many innocent victims have been
involved, can we help acknowledge that calamity to be the just punishment for the crimes
of so many generations of slave-traders and slave-holders?”

To what extent Gallatin or others participated in the debate is unclear, however,
there were enough abolitionist voices to change the wording of the resolution to exclude
the words, “by a murdering and desperate host of Negroes.” Samuel MacClay’s
compromise passed, 36 to 24, on a roll-call vote. Among its supporters were Gallatin and
Richard Wells, who was originally so militant in the language of his own resolutions. His
usual supporter, Francis Gurney, however, took the other side, along with Boys and
Evans, other members of the committee.

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33 Quoted in Ternant to Montmorin, Philadelphia, 30th September 1791, Turner, ed., CFM, 53. Tim
Matthewson, in the footnotes of A Proslavery Foreign Policy, 34, notes that “Quaker” was often used to
denote an antislavery advocate, regardless of religious persuasion.
34 Gallatin to Jean Badollet, Philadelphia, 1st February 1794, Henry Adams, ed., The Writings of Albert
In the end, the resolution was not acted upon as it came to the attention of the Pennsylvania legislature that measures had been taken by the office of the French foreign ministry to provide for the needs of the inhabitants of Saint Domingue. Minister Ternant, greatly perturbed by what he viewed as the arrogance of Roustan, who had publicly taken the title of “Deputy of the Colony of St. Domingue to the United States,” went directly to the U.S. government for aid and sent Roustan packing for Paris. Moreover, Pennsylvania’s assistance was ultimately unnecessary in light of the federal government’s receptiveness to Ternant’s requests.

The French foreign minister first contacted the Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, and the Secretary of War, Henry Knox. Both reacted positively: Hamilton offered up $40,000 of the money owed France for its assistance in the Revolutionary War and Knox quickly sold Ternant a thousand muskets from the arsenal at West Point. President Washington was soon consulted but there appears never to have been much question as to which side to take in the struggle. The planter hegemony had to be maintained. Only Washington, though, mentioned race in his rationale for supporting the colonists. “Lamentable…to see such a spirit of revolt among the blacks,” he remarked. The others saw the maintenance of commerce and the ability to prove to France the new nation’s willingness to repay the debt owed its recent ally as sufficient reasons to intervene.

Few observers thought the slave revolt on Saint Domingue would turn out any different than nearly all others before it. No one realized that in the years to come, the rebellion would become a full-scale revolution, upending the society and economy of the

36 Ternant to Montmorin, 28th September 1791, Turner, ed., CFM, 50.
island and resulting in the first black republic. George Washington, though not alone in his deep concern as to the plight of the planters, was certainly in the minority when he expressed to Ternant an uncertainty as to the final outcome. “Whatever the final issue of this affair may be it is difficult at this distance…to foretell, but certain it is, the commencement has been both daring and alarming. Let us, however, hope for the best.”

Not even Washington had any idea how complex the situation in Saint Domingue was about to make international relations, particularly those between the United States and its European rivals.

Still, the opening acts of this drama allow a rare glimpse into the formation of a foreign policy so intrinsically attached to domestic anxieties and sentiments. The fledgling federal government of the United States, still gaining its bearings after the tumultuous days of its resistance to British rule, was at first circumvented by a Saint Dominguan colonial assembly desperate for salvation and willing to appeal directly to state legislatures. As a result, relatively localized attitudes on slavery and race were visible as state policy makers in South Carolina and Pennsylvania briefly became actors in foreign affairs. The reaction of the South Carolinians largely reflected their racism and fear of a revolt at home. This anxiety would continue to motivate their actions in regard to Haitian-American relations until the Civil War put an end to the cruel institution they were defending, though this fear, as will later be demonstrated, did not always translate directly into anti-Haitian policies. While such sentiment similarly dominated the federal government’s deliberations concerning the island nation for years, the issue would

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continue to be a battle ground upon which both supporters and detractors of slavery would take a stand.

Despite the lack of a coherent antislavery agenda in North America in 1791, this process took an important step the moment Americans learned of the revolt on Saint Domingue. Americans in public life, such as those in the Pennsylvania and South Carolina legislatures, were forced to make their positions known on a matter of race. Anti-slavery sympathizers in the Pennsylvania legislature, some of whom had acted against slavery in their own state, were in large part similarly guided on this foreign policy issue. Even so, their interaction with their slaveholding “sister states” was too often “calculated to avoid all invidious and unprofitable altercation.”39 This state of affairs was not to last, however, and as tension between North and South increased in subsequent decades, so too did pressure to reform relations with Haiti cause the issue to become increasingly contentious.

Most importantly, however, the actions of the Pennsylvania and South Carolina legislatures in the days immediately following the slave revolt on Saint Domingue indicate the way American policymakers’ attitudes on matters of race extended into the arena of foreign policy. As a result, the divisions within American society come into sharper relief, presaging the terminal crisis of American slavery. The actions of South Carolina’s general assembly, which did not even begin to question the legitimacy of the planter regime in Saint Domingue, contrast sharply with Albert Gallatin’s suggestion that the island’s planters got what was coming to them for perpetuating an evil institution. The Pennsylvania legislature’s debate on whether or not to call the insurgents “a

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39 Pennsylvania House of Reps., Journal (Philadelphia, 1791), 445. The quote is in regard to the complaint concerning the kidnapping of the free black by Virginians mentioned on page 14.
murdering and desperate host of Negroes,” had no bearing on the action to be taken as the body’s membership had agreed to provide the colony’s white population with assistance. At least thirty-six of the Pennsylvania House’s members, however, apparently did not want their name identified with a resolution defaming the black rebels. While this act may not register high on the continuum of abolitionist sentiment, it is not without significance. By taking action on a matter of foreign policy, members of the legislatures of Pennsylvania and South Carolina, as well as members of the federal government, expressed their attitudes on slavery at home. It would not be the last time this occurred.
CHAPTER 2

As news of the slave revolt on St. Domingue spread in the United States and public opinion began to take shape, a number of factors, both geopolitical and domestic in nature, influenced the ensuing debate over how to respond to this unprecedented event. Growing hostility between the United States and France, the needs of the young nation’s economy and its merchant class, as well as the complexity of views on matters of race so aptly personified by Thomas Jefferson all played a role in the formation of a foreign policy toward Haiti. None, however, turned out to be as instrumental as the ambition and paranoia of the southern planter class which, abandoning the post-Revolutionary apologies for slavery, embarked on a program of expansionism both territorial and ideological in nature. Indeed, one historian has labeled Jefferson’s impact on Haitian-American relations “the triumph of the southern conservative reaction” to the Haitian Revolution.40

While southern slave-owners did exert disproportionate influence over U.S. foreign policy, their reaction to the Haitian Revolution, more than simple repugnance toward black independence and naked fear of slave revolt at home, was also indicative of the social and political climate in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Though the idea of a multi-racial society remained anathema to all but a handful of radicals at this time, a degree of ambiguity as to the future of American slavery resulted in an exchange of views on Haiti that differed from the expectant conservative reaction that would later become the over-riding factor in determining U.S. foreign policy regarding Haiti. The uncharacteristic and surprising embrace of the Revolution’s most charismatic leader,

Toussaint Louverture, on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line, played an important role in this episode in America’s agonizing journey out of slavery and indicated that there was more to the Southern calculus than a simplistic racism or even a desire to preserve their human property.

In the years immediately following the American Revolution, the conflict between proponents and detractors of slavery began to take shape in the United States as well as across the Atlantic. While this complex clash took many forms and a simple dichotomy between pro- and anti-slavery forces obscures the divisions and alliances that formed across and within sectional, political and class-based lines, as well as the varying meanings of the related terminology, this study leaves much of this subtle differentiation to others. Instead, it is more important here to focus on the increasingly sectional conflict arising in the United States between regions in which slavery remained an integral part of the local economy and those in which it was gradually phased out in the wake of the Revolution. As one historian aptly notes, “The Revolution had entailed upon the institution of slavery a gigantic question mark and upon Americans the necessity of facing up to the prospect of what it would be like actually to have Negroes free.” The answer, formed in the minds of Americans, to this implicit question was influenced by a wide range of factors, not least among them perceptions of events in the Caribbean.

Just as Enlightenment principles provided so much of the basis for the political revolutions of the time, so too did they contribute to the development of complex and interrelated phenomena in Western culture, particularly British Protestantism, that provided the intellectual framework necessary to question the legitimacy of slavery.

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Among them were the emergence of a secular social philosophy and the popularization of an ethic of benevolence, two developments which raised questions about slavery’s morality in Western societies. Similarly, changing perceptions of the cultural difference of blacks, an image made more positive by primitivists seeking to prove man’s inherent virtue and creativity by constructing the “noble savage,” played an important role in beginning the process of deconstructing some of the most negative stereotypes relating to blacks. Of course, these transformations alone do not account for the appearance of organized efforts to limit or end slavery as the secular Enlightenment also contained ideas and perceptions which tended to encourage the defense of slavery. Precise causality, however, is less important to this study as is the fact that conditions existed which made slavery a vulnerable institution; which made it easier to perceive its inherent contradictions; and relaxed the sense of inevitability which had heretofore been associated with it.

At the same time material circumstances and trends seemed to bear out the hopes of abolitionists. While the period preceding the American Revolution was a veritable golden age for Caribbean sugar cultivators and, to a lesser extent, those producing other crops on the backs of imported slaves, the war exposed the vulnerabilities of this key part of the Atlantic trade system. By curtailing the flow of provisions from North America, the conflict resulted in higher production costs and inflation. Further, hostilities threatened many colonies with destruction at the hands of foreign armies and if that were not enough, a series of hurricanes devastated Jamaica and the Leeward Islands. Long the core of the trans-Atlantic slave system, any weakening of the Caribbean sugar plantations

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and the class which was dependent on their success for wealth was perceived by abolitionists as an indication of slavery’s overall decline. This period also witnessed the rise of abolitionist organizations when, in 1787, the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was founded in Britain followed closely by the Société des Amis des Noirs in France. The first American abolitionist organization, the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, was established in 1775. It was soon followed by The Society of Friends, the Pennsylvania Antislavery Society, and the New York Manumission Society.

While many attempted to insulate blacks from the swirl of ideas influencing the beginnings of abolitionism, such efforts were in vain. Unwilling to wait for a gradual emancipation which might never come, many sought more forcefully than ever to secure their own freedom. Such sentiment fueled the insurrection in Haiti as well as subsequent plots in North America. The concomitant violence – or threat of violence – in turn resulted in the Southern conservative reaction against the liberalizing trends of the revolutionary age. This response found its culmination in the embargo and non-recognition of Haiti secured in 1806 by the United States Congress over the objections, muted though they may have been, of northern merchants and antislavery sympathizers.

A detailed analysis of the years immediately preceding the embargo, however, reveal the complex and countervailing forces at work as well as a certain willingness on the part of the Southern slaveholding establishment to compromise one the core underpinnings of Southern slave society – that is, the myth of black inferiority – by embracing Toussaint Louverture. This circumstance existed for only a few years, however, diminishing in the wake of Louverture’s arrest by the French, the ensuing

43 Davis, 51-53.
violence in Haiti, and its perceived spread to the American South. This violence, along with the arrival of thousands of French refugees and the efforts of some Southern political philosophers, armed planters with the ideological weaponry needed to resist efforts toward emancipation. Their success in papering over the inherent contradictions of slavery would, however, only temporarily insulate the institution.

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Official federal aid to the beleaguered colony ended abruptly in 1793 when the planter regime collapsed and black rebels seized control of most of St. Domingue. The end of white hegemony in the former French colony did not, however, bring an end to the profits of American merchants. Instead of trading with the French, U.S. businessmen simply made their contracts with the British, who occupied various parts of the island between 1793 and 1798, and with the black rebels and their mulatto allies. Hence, American exports to the island grew from $3,200,000 in 1790 to $8,400,000 by 1796.44

As relations with the French deteriorated following the signing of the Jay Treaty with England in 1794, most Federalists viewed St. Dominguian independence as both an opportunity for commercial profits and as a means of hindering French power in the Western hemisphere.45 The focal point of Federalist confidence in the ability to achieve political and economic gain from the Haitian Revolution was the latest and most charismatic leader of the continuing revolt, Toussaint Louverture.

Succeeding Léger Félicité Sonthonax, the white radical commissioner from France, Toussaint Louverture immediately set about implementing his vision for the

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44 Logan, 60; Montague, 47.
45 President John Adams disagreed with this assessment at first but was eventually convinced of its merits. See Adams to Timothy Pickering, Apr. 17, 1799, in Charles F. Adams, ed., “The Works of John Adams” (10 vols., Boston 1850-1856), 8, 634.
future of Saint Domingue. An extraordinarily complex personality, described variously as
an autocrat, aristocrat, tireless worker, mystic, and humanitarian, Toussaint often imitated
Napoleon Bonaparte in dress and demeanor. One of the earliest American consuls to the
island, Tobias Lear observed the adoration of Toussaint “by all the inhabitants of all
colours; whether this proceeds from fear or love I cannot tell; but all speak of him as a
just man.”\(^{46}\) It was perhaps this perception that allowed Toussaint so much success in
forcing the black revolutionaries to return to work on the abandoned plantations spread
throughout the country. As a result, he garnered praise and support from both his own
people as well as many in the United States.\(^{47}\)

Hoping to formalize U.S.-Haitian trade, Toussaint sent Joseph Bunel as his
representative to Philadelphia in mid-1798. Many important federalists were highly
receptive to Bunel’s offer of an alliance which would allow the United States exclusive
rights in the traffic of supplies necessary for carrying out St. Domingue’s ongoing
struggle against France.\(^{48}\) Foremost among such federalist supporters was Timothy
Pickering, secretary of state from 1795 to 1800, who firmly believed Toussaint
Louverture to be “a prudent and judicious man possessing the general confidence of the
people of all colors.”\(^{49}\) An early advocate of Haitian independence, he further wrote that
“nothing is more clear than, if left to themselves, that the blacks of St. Domingo will be
incomparably less dangerous than if they remain the subjects of France…France with an
army of those black troops might conquer all the British Isles [in the Caribbean] and put

\(^{46}\) Lear to Madison, July 20, 1801, Consular Dispatches, Cap-Haitien, vol. 3.
\(^{47}\) The majority of my assessment of Touissant Louverture is informed by Thomas O. Ott, The Haitian
\(^{48}\) Charleston City Gazette, June 3, 1799.
\(^{49}\) Pickering to William Smith, Feb. 13, 1799, Pickering Papers, reel 10 (Massachusetts Historical Society).
in jeopardy our Southern States.” According to Pickering, southern Federalists in Congress agreed about the danger posed by France. “The Southern Members were convinced, and therefore cordially concurred in the policy of the Independence of St. D., if T[oussain]t and his followers will it. Mr. [Jacob] Read [of South Carolina] was the only exception to this opinion, and his opinions are sometimes unaccountable.”

The issue split Americans along party lines as Federalists, both North and South alike, viewed Haitian independence favorably while Jeffersonian Republicans opposed it. For Federalists, the fear of French power in the Caribbean and their desire to expand U.S. trade in the region motivated their support for Toussaint Louverture and the rebellion he led. At the same time Republicans faced a dilemma: their pro-French and anti-black attitudes were in conflict with the commercial and security interests of the United States, especially with the outbreak of the Quasi-War with France in 1798. As a result, Thomas Jefferson did little to hinder American merchants supplying the rebels until after the fate of St. Domingue had been decided.

For Napoleon, controlling St. Domingue was crucial to gaining any real benefit from Louisiana and ultimately, consolidating French possessions in the West Indies. At the same time, Americans gazed covetously upon Louisiana and the potential for economic expansion it offered through the application and expansion of slave-based agricultural practices. Thus, Jefferson and other Republicans found themselves in the

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50 Pickering to Smith, May 5, 1799, Pickering Papers, reel 11.
awkward position of relying on a charismatic former slave in revolt against France to secure U.S. interests in both the Mississippi Valley and the Caribbean.

The fact that Toussaint, by keeping the French government busy in St. Domingue, had freed Louisiana for American expansion to the southwest, was not lost on the editors of Southern newspapers. Rather than indulge in racism or misdirection, they embraced the black rebel with all possible sincerity and as much propriety as he was accorded in Northern newspapers. In spite of his color, one newspaper acknowledged that Toussaint “must be a man of no inconsiderable talent, since he has both conceived and executed so great a project as that of rescuing his unhappy country from the miseries with which it was afflicted by the tyranny of France.”

After General Leclerc of the French expeditionary force treacherously took Toussaint Louverture into custody in June 1802, Southern editors continued to extol his virtues. In an essay strongly supporting the deposed general one editor wrote that “in every point of view Toussaint is an interesting character. To those who consider him an advocate of an oppressed people, his discomfiture will be a source of regret….Even as the leader of a revolt, his conduct as far as has been correctly developed, evidences powers of mind, which in higher stations would exhort admiration.” In an attempt to ameliorate American anger over Toussaint’s fate and as a result of the surprising amount of support he enjoyed in the United States, French authorities published an official explanation of the black general’s arrest in U.S. papers accusing him of complicity in the massacre of whites and of plotting independence from France. It would seem, however, that anti-French sentiment weighed more heavily in the South than did anti-black

53 Columbia Mirror and Alexandria Gazette (Va.), May 25, 1799.
54 Advertiser and Commercial Intelligencer, Alexandria, (Va.), June 28, 1802.
attitudes as Southern whites seemed uncommonly willing to grant Toussaint Louverture the benefit of the doubt. Wrote another Southern newspaper editor in response to the French explanation, “Toussaint, before the arrival of the French army could not by the most rancorous of his enemies, be accused with having spilt the blood of the innocent; he could not be reproached with requisitions and robberies, such as have marked the progress of General Leclerc. We have been told that he was a monster, and that he has committed the most wanton cruelties, but where are the proofs of this?”

If his demise the next year in a French prison were not enough to bolster anti-French sentiment, several papers editorialized about the indignities perpetrated upon Toussaint’s family. In a front-page article, The Richmond Enquirer castigated the French for their treatment of Madame Toussaint, the general’s wife. Though not actually pregnant at the time, the article suggests that she lost a child due to torture and reported that she “has no less than 44 wounds in different parts of her body. Pieces of flesh have been torn from her breast, as with hot irons, together with nails of her toes!” The editor sarcastically held Madame Toussaint up as “a living witness to the humanity and honor of the tender Emperor of the French.”

It was certainly in the interests of Americans, both pro- and anti-slavery, to abandon their racial stereotypes by embracing Toussaint Louverture. Federalists, hoping to both discredit France and reinvigorate trade with St. Domingue, rallied around Toussaint and decried his treatment at the hands of the French. For Southerners, their ambitious plans to expand into the Mississippi valley were dependent upon a weakened France. Further, they celebrated Toussaint’s largely conservative administration of the

55 Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser (Williamsburg), July 3, 1802.
56 Richmond Enquirer, January 15, 1805; the story was also reprinted in the Louisiana Gazette (New Orleans), March 5, 1805.
former French colony as he reinstated forced labor in an effort to harness white resources and stabilize the economy. He was perceived to have treated fairly with white plantation owners as he guaranteed the safety and property of his former owner. Finally, as one author has put it, Toussaint Louverture’s success “was a victory of the New World over the Old,” something all Americans could celebrate.57

The death of the black general did not put an end to the literature on Toussaint Louverture, nor did Americans cease discussing and debating the meaning of his life throughout the antebellum period. Americans’ ongoing fascination with this charismatic figure cannot be explained simply by Southern interest in economic expansion or anti-French sentiment. It must be viewed in the context of the sense of vulnerability and decline associated with slave-based economies at the time. As such, the embrace of Toussaint by Americans – northern antislavery advocates and free black abolitionists as well as Southern apologists – takes on a new symbolism. To embrace Toussaint, while on the one hand an expression of counter-revolutionary sentiment, also meant accepting a degree of black sovereignty and self-determination. This concession, even as it only applied to a foreign country, was remarkable in that it implicitly undermined some of the core underpinnings of white supremacy, namely the belief in the inferiority and incapability of blacks. To be sure, Toussaint meant many things to many people, yet the fact that he could be so universally embraced by Americans across party, regional and racial lines suggests a complex calculus on the part of U.S. policymakers, irreducible to simple racism, anti-French sentiment, or commercial interests.

Yet just as developments in Haiti seemed to auger hope for those who yearned for a way out of the predicament of American slavery, so too did events in the beleaguered

57 Hunt, 87.
former colony carry the seeds of a new ideological solidarity on the part of American proslavery advocates. This reconfiguration of American attitudes toward the institution of slavery achieved a foreign-political manifestation in the 1806 embargo of trade with the then-independent Haiti and the nonrecognition of the newly-formed country. A dramatic shift took place, from a pro-Haitian foreign policy during the Quasi War of 1799 and the public embrace, even among Southern observers, of the stabilizing influence of Toussaint Louverture, to a full trade embargo and the rapidly spreading public fear of slave revolt at home. In many ways, to examine the U.S. response to the ongoing rebellion in Santo Domingo “is to watch the drastic erosion of the ideology of the American Revolution.” If so, the ideology which replaced it owes much of its substance to events in Haiti and their intersection with domestic racial politics.

Among the earliest accounts of events on Saint Domingue were those of refugees fleeing the violence ravaging their homes and plantations. Though these expatriates traveled to the United States continually during the thirteen year-long Haitian Revolution, the largest group arrived following the burning of Le Cap Haitien in 1793. Biographical data on the Saint Dominguian exiles is sketchy at best, primarily because it is difficult to differentiate them from the significant numbers of émigrés who traveled to the U.S. in order to escape the French Revolution. What little biographical data that exists lists only miscellaneous bits of information about the social and economic positions of some the wealthier refugees.

The convoy from the Cap fire brought thousands of stricken colonists, though the exact total of the emigration can only be inferred from some of the figures which have

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58 Jordan, 375.
59 B. Maurel, Cahiers de Doléances de la Colonie de St. Domingue, 359.
survived. The exiles published a political defense which claimed to represent the opinions of ten thousand refugees, and later claimed to speak for ten thousand French families, thought the latter is certainly an exaggeration. About two thousand Saint Dominguans were receiving federal aid in the winter of 1794 as many planters were ruined by the rebellion. Though a precise number is difficult to pinpoint, enough came to publish newspapers and pamphlets, support charitable organizations and social clubs, to figure in American social and cultural life, to partake in political agitation and to worry American officials into passing the Alien and Sedition Acts. As such, it seems reasonable to consider ten thousand a conservative estimate.

Economically speaking, the refugees fell into three basic categories. The first consisted of those arriving completely destitute and in need of assistance. Another included those who, though arriving with limited means, nevertheless struggled along on their own by capitalizing on their own skills or trades. The third group, smaller and more socially prominent, was made up of individuals who had some resources and were thus able to sustain a relatively higher standard of living. However, these divisions were not always determined by preexisting social status – many wealthy planters were among the destitute after their property was destroyed in the rebellion. Fortunately for the former colonists, aid was forthcoming in the U.S. as relief funds were raised privately and by legislatures in many eastern cities now home to the exiles.

60 Affaires de Colonies, X, no. 12.
61 Constitution et règlements ou by-laws de la Société Française de Bienfaisance de Philadelphie precedes d’une esquisse historique sur son origine et sa marche (Philadelphia, 1892), 87-90. This and other pamphlets from the French Benevolent Society of Philadelphia are cited for figures on the size of the immigration in Frances Sergeant Childs, French Refugee Life in the United States, 1790-1800. (Chicago: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1940), 65.
62 Childs, 84.
Sometimes divided socially as well as between royalists and revolutionaries, the Saint Dominguan refugees nevertheless shared in the horror of their experiences during the slave revolt sweeping their former country. Typical of these accounts was that of an anonymous young planter just returned to St. Domingue from France who, almost immediately after his arrival, was swept up in the bloody events. “Many women,” he writes, “young, beautiful, and virtuous, perished beneath the infamous caresses of the brigands, amongst the cadavers of their fathers and husbands. Bodies, still palpitating, were dragged through the roads with atrocious acclamations. Young children transfixed upon the points of bayonets were the bleeding flags which followed the troop of cannibals.” Though a stylized account, the author is quick to assure his reader that “these pictures were not exaggerated, and I more than once saw the sorrowful spectacle.”

Whether embellished or not, these tales were retold in the United States by thousands of refugees and reprinted in American papers. The previous account reappeared in at least two U.S. newspapers in articles describing how the black rebels used as their standard “the body of a white infant impaled upon a stake.” Whether or not the facts were portrayed accurately, the mix of revenge and racial hatred fueling the mindless combat was not lost on American observers. The eyewitness descriptions of the consequences of slave revolt – or in the conception of some, the consequences of slavery – struck a chord with many Americans already fearful of such a conflagration. As such, Saint Dominguan refugees and their woeful tales later served as one critical component in both reorienting U.S. policy and in reconsolidating pro-slavery ideology.

64 Philadelphia Gazette of the United States, November 12, 1791; Maryland Gazette (Annapolis), January 3, 1793.
The fear of a slave revolt at home during the Haitian Revolution was palpable. Tales of events in St. Domingue only fueled the suspicions of Southern whites and provided a lurid example of what might befall their own slave society lest they lower their guard. A Virginian who filed a deposition in connection with local plots in 1793 reported overhearing a group of blacks conspiring. “The one who seemed to be the chief speaker said, you see how the blacks has killed the whites in the French Island and took it a while ago.” Though refugees brought only a handful of slaves with them to the United States, at times these individuals were themselves implicated in plots. A newspaper article from South Carolina indicated as much: “They write from Charleston (S.C.) that the NEGROES have become very insolent, in so much that the citizens are alarmed, and the militia keep a constant guard. It is said that the St. Domingo negroes have sown these seeds of slave revolt, and that a magazine has been attempted to be broken open.”

Those who looked forward sought a way to mitigate the crisis they foresaw. Following the toppling of slavery in Saint Domingue, Thomas Jefferson, then Secretary of State, devoted a great deal of thought to the subject. “I become daily more and more convinced,” he wrote to James Monroe in July 1794, “that all the West India islands will remain in the hands of people of colour, and a total expulsion of the whites sooner or later take place. It is high time we should foresee the bloody scenes which our children certainly, and possibly ourselves (south of the Potomac,) have to wade through, and try to avert them” by adopting gradual emancipation measures.

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Even Jefferson, however, could not escape contending with rumors of insurrection connected to that on St. Domingue as he warned Governor John Drayton of South Carolina in a letter of December, 1793. “A French gentleman, one of the refugees from St. Domingo, informs me that two Frenchmen, from St. Domingo also, of the names Castaing and La Chaise, are about setting out from this place for Charleston, with a design to excite an insurrection among the negroes.” He goes on to indicate his source’s lack of concrete evidence, yet, “…were anything to happen, I should deem myself inexcusable not to have made the communication.”

The decade following the largest exodus of refugees from St. Domingue in 1793 was a period of more intense and widespread slave discontent than had ever existed before. The reasons for this phenomenon are partly explained by the vulnerability of slavery described earlier in this chapter including the revolutionary philosophy prevalent at home and abroad as well as the economic depression that gripped the South for most of this period. The uprisings in the West Indies, particularly on St. Domingue, played no small part in fueling the discontent as well as the sense among many American slaves that the time for outright resistance had come. Paranoia and rumors of slave revolt – as well as a few very real plots – kept a fearful hold on the South. Perhaps the most important year in this period was 1800 when the great conspiracy named after Gabriel, a slave belonging to Thomas H. Prosser, was barely averted. The plot ended in failure mainly because of a warning provided by two slave informants as well as poor weather on the night of the intended insurrection. Nevertheless, the attempt, along with others such as the Easter Plot of 1802, confirmed the fears of many Southern whites.

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Meanwhile, events on St. Domingue proceeded inexorably toward a disastrous end for the French expeditionary force charged with pacifying the colony. The actions of the force and its leader, General Leclerc, seemed only to further infuriate the island’s black inhabitants leaving them more determined than ever to resist their former colonial overlords. The General’s betrayal of Toussaint Louverture, rather than calming the blacks as he had expected, had caused them to become “enraged at the unfair manner in which Toussaint was sent off to France.”\textsuperscript{70} Along with the order to reinstate slavery handed down from Napoleon Bonaparte, such actions led increasing numbers of blacks to determine that their interests lay with the rebels. Just as importantly, yellow fever ravaged the French forces, enormously reducing their effectiveness in disarming the blacks who were continually re-supplied by American smugglers. Increasingly desperate, Leclerc turned to acts of unspeakable brutality. “Numbers of the Negroes were daily executed,” observed Captain Mather, an American shipmaster, “and the scenes of cold blooded massacres which took place were never surpassed in that ill-fated colony.”\textsuperscript{71}

Black resistance, however, seemed only to increase in proportion to Leclerc’s growing ruthlessness.

Sensing the opportunity to seize leadership of the rebellion, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, an ambitious commander among the blacks still ostensibly loyal to France, began plotting his defection. Under the guise of assisting the French, Dessalines began systematically targeting rebel leaders who might threaten his position. In October 1802, he made his move, mutinying to the rebels and immediately striking the French. He continued to dispose of those guerilla leaders who defied him and at the Arcahaye

\textsuperscript{70} Boston Gazette, Sept. 20, 1802.
\textsuperscript{71} Boston Gazette, August 5, 1802.
Conference of late November Dessalines was formally recognized as the leader of the black resistance. For the first time since Toussaint Louverture’s arrest, the Haitian Revolution was in the hands of one man.

At the same time that Dessalines was consolidating his political power, General Leclerc was felled by the same yellow fever that had decimated his troops. He was succeeded by General Rochambeau who, though an able military commander, indulged in acts of genocide perhaps even more appalling than those of his predecessor. The new commander instituted a policy of extermination, reportedly drowning blacks in the harbor at Le Cap and even using a ship at Port-au-Prince as a gas chamber in order to more efficiently pursue his goal. He soon received 10,000 reinforcements from France resulting in another year of combat. By late 1803, however, almost all of the expeditionary force, along with many of the white population, had evacuated. With only revenge on his mind, Dessalines had the remaining whites massacred and on January 1, 1804, the rebels formally declared independence, forming the black republic of Haiti.

This last spasm of violence, taken alongside the death of Toussaint Louverture and growing fears of a major slave uprising at home soon led to a dramatic reversal of official U.S. policy in the form of the embargo and nonrecognition of Haiti. This consequence was itself the product of an ideological reconsolidation brought about in no small part by events in St. Domingue. Immediate emancipation on the order of the Haitian Revolution was horrifying to U.S. policy makers. They could not countenance the self-emancipation of slaves or black domination of whites. Yet the embrace of the Revolution’s most charismatic figure, Toussaint Louverture, across party and geographic

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72 Ott, 176-177.
73 Boyer to Minister of Marine, Nov. 1802, in Le Moniteur, Jan. 11, 1803; Boston Gazette, Dec. 30, 1802.
lines, amongst supporters and detractors of slavery, even after his death, may do more to indicate the state of American slavery than has previously been attributed this phenomenon.

To be sure, the belief that a St. Domingue politically independent of France but economically dependent on the United States would be less dangerous to the latter’s own territory and slaveholdings was critical in bringing Americans to the support of Toussaint.⁷⁴ Such issues were close to the surface for many Southern whites. Historians have largely chosen to accept this explanation, however, without examining the very fundamental way in which it undermined slavery.⁷⁵ Perhaps the most pervasive and systemic method of control employed by American slavery was the fostering of the belief in the innate inferiority of blacks. Theologians assured all – including the slaves themselves – that blacks were cursed by God just as so-called ethnologists and historians offered manufactured evidence of their natural inferiority.⁷⁶ To sacrifice this method of control by acknowledging the independence of a nation of blacks and treating as an equal its black dictator, engendered a contradiction that is difficult to explain away by invoking the short-term material interests of Southern whites.

Was the vulnerability of the institution of slavery perceived to be so acute that such measures were deemed necessary by Southerners? Did some southern apologists see in Toussaint’s own imposition of strict social controls and forced labor, in lieu of outright slavery, some sort of third way between indefinite bondage for American slaves and the

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⁷⁴ See correspondence between Rufus King, United States Minister to England and Timothy Pickering, Secretary of State, during 1799, in King, ed., “Life and Correspondence of Rufus King,” 2, 499-501, 504-505, 557.
⁷⁵ See Matthewson, A Proslavery Foreign Policy; Jordan, White Over Black; Kerber, Federalists in Dissent; Hunt, Haiti’s Influence on Antebellum America; Aptheker; American Negro Slave Revolts.
cataclysm of race war? Or was the slaveholder’s capacity to compartmentalize the matter of a black head of state apart from the conditions of their own slaves sufficient to maintain this contradiction? Unfortunately, the record of correspondence between the major political actors, newspaper reports, and indications of public opinion are insufficient to definitively answer these questions.

At the very least, however, it must be concluded that events in Haiti were critical in driving two diametrically opposed trends in the period of American history leading up to the Civil War. The first, and certainly strongest at least in the years immediately following the Haitian Revolution, was reactionary in nature and would soon lead to a new ideological solidarity in support of slavery and the dismantling of the revolutionary philosophy upon which America gained its independence. The second, though much less thoroughly constructed, served to undermine the institution of slavery. At times this occurred intentionally, as anti-slavery advocates intermittently wielded Haiti to their advantage; at other times it was unintentional, as Southerners weakened perhaps the most fundamental method of control over slaves by entertaining black independence. These two trends and their inextricable and oft-noted connection to Haiti formed the core of the debate that ended in the American Civil War.
CHAPTER 3

The declaration of an independent Haiti and the bloody reprisals that coincided with it set the stage for the establishment of a definitively hostile foreign policy toward the new nation. The embargo act of 1806, passed over the objections of Federalists from both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line, set the tone of U.S. interaction with Haiti for the next half-century. Further, contemporary perceptions of events in the former colony were filtered through ideas about the future of American slavery and contributed assiduously to the sectional divisions among Americans. Most apparently, Haitian independence served as a critical factor in the ideological re-arming of the Southern planter class and the articulation of the positive-good argument for slavery. Though ostensibly clothed in a debate over commercial interests and relations with France, important though these factors were, it was the introduction of slave-holder anxieties that secured the embargo. The fallout of the Haitian revolution was inextricably linked to the development of the domestic debate on slavery and particularly to the nineteenth-century expansion of the peculiar institution.

The establishment of a policy of non-recognition with respect to Haiti also proved, in the years that followed, a point of departure between the United States and the great powers of Europe. An examination of the nature of this divergence reveals a facet of US slavery rarely scrutinized. The extent to which ongoing support for slavery at home affected relations abroad further serves to demonstrate the character of the domestic debate and its enduring connection to the specter of Haiti. The United States held back recognition of Haiti, even when it was materially advantageous, longer than any other major power, a move directly tied to the sensitivity of the race question at home.
The defeat of the Leclerc expedition and the subsequent declaration of Haitian independence in January 1804, though originally supported by many Americans on both sides of the issue of slavery, proved a turning point in relations with the former French colony. While Haitians sought to establish friendly ties with their neighbors, their efforts were complicated by the bloody and expansionist nature of the new regime. General Jean-Jacque Dessalines quickly carried out his plan to massacre the remaining whites on the island. Starting at Jéremiés in the South, he traveled from town to town heading up the savagery himself. Openly contemptuous of his place in history, he exulted: “What do I care for the opinion of my contemporaries or of future generations?”

Perhaps even worse from the perspective of other slave societies, Dessalines attempted to conquer Santo Domingo (modern-day Dominican Republic). The Haitian constitution of 1805 pledged non-interference in the affairs of other countries but its authors also assumed that they would never be secure until the entire island was under Haitian control. If that were not enough to stir the anxieties of southern Americans, Haiti also came to be seen as a refuge for blacks and a beacon of freedom in the Caribbean. The new nation’s government offered citizenship to any blacks who arrived on its shores.

The pragmatic foreign policy of the Adams administration, which had concluded that a weak, independent Saint Domingue was preferable to a colony dominated by the pernicious French, was due for a reorientation under President Jefferson. While the latter

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78 It is to be noted that U.S. contemporaries often refer to Haiti or the whole island as Santo Domingo, using it interchangeably with St. Domingue or Haiti. This endured even in the scholarship on Haiti through the 1940’s.
endorsed – in principle – variations on Adams’s realpolitik, Jefferson had to consider a wider range of domestic factors, not least of which was the southern conservative reaction which had gestated since the advent of the revolt in 1791. Following the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the enthusiasm for the expansion of slavery into these new territories reached a fever pitch. However, this ambition had already been set into motion by the collapse of Saint Domingue’s export economy following the outbreak of revolution and was facilitated by the invention of the cotton gin in 1793. The South Carolina legislature overcame its dread of slave revolt in 1803 and reestablished its participation in the international slave trade. Over 40,000 manacled Africans arrived in the next five years direct from the Guinea Coast, though it still barred slaves from the Caribbean who were believed to be infected with the contagion of rebellion. With their fresh slaves, southerners opened new cotton lands in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The divisive congressional debates that coincided with this expansion revealed two opposing philosophies about not just what to do with the lands acquired from France, but about the broader question of future role of slavery in the United States. These two philosophies also came to frame the ensuing debate on the Haitian embargo.

Jefferson also had to contend with an ideological reconsolidation of pro-slavery thought – itself deeply informed by interpretations of events in Haiti – that superseded his earlier calls for gradual emancipation as a method of preventing a similar revolt in the United States. One of this movement’s most eloquent proponents was South Carolina Senator John Taylor. His series of seminal essays, first appearing in 1803, urged his readers to conclude from the St. Dominguian experience that slavery would and must be a
permanent part of American life. “Negro slavery,” he writes, “is a misfortune to agriculture, incapable of removal, and only within the reach of palliation.” In their efforts to reckon with this misfortune, state legislatures had resorted to “the policy of introducing by law into society, a race, or nation of people between the masters and slaves, having rights extremely different from either, called free negroes and mulattoes….It was this very policy, which first doomed the whites, and then the mulattoes themselves, to the fate suffered by both in St. Domingo; and which contributes greatly to an apprehension so often exhibited.”

Thus, the argument for gradual emancipation was reinterpreted as a critical part of the existing problem.

Taylor again references Haiti while confronting other arguments presented by Jefferson in his Notes on Virginia, including the idea that God favors the cause of the slaves. “I shall pass over the enlistment of the Deity in the question with an humble hope, that his justice and mercy do not require the whites and blacks to be placed in a relative situation, as that one colour must extinguish the other;” he writes, “and as inclining to think the enrollment of his name on the side of the slaves, somewhat like an inattention to his own attributes, apparently siding with masters throughout the ages and amongst nations hitherto, the liberating St. Domingo masters excepted.” He goes on to claim that “Slavery was carried farther among the Greeks and the Romans than among ourselves, and yet these two nations produced more great and good patriots and citizens, than, probably, all the rest of the world.”

Here, Haiti is employed as an anomaly; something

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81 Taylor, 122. The idea that slaveholding may have had the positive influence on a republican society is an important part of the end to post-American Revolution apologies for slavery and is considered in more depth in Edmund S. Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1975).
to be feared and prevented at all costs, but an exception to the rule that God favors masters rather than proof of the opposite.

Though the idea of a multiracial America had always been anathema to all but a tiny handful of radical anti-slavery advocates, Taylor further employed St. Dominguan imagery in arguing that slavery could only end in a cataclysmic race war and the extinction of one or the other race. “But what will not enthusiasm attempt?” he asks. “It attempted to make freemen of the people of France; the experiment pronounced that they were incapable of liberty. It attempted to compound a free nation of black and white people in St. Domingo. The experiment pronounced that one colour must perish.” He goes on to admonish those in the North who would abide an alleviation of the servile condition of southern slaves. “For what virtuous purpose are the Southern runaway negroes countenanced in the Northern states?” he begs. “Do these states wish the southern to try the St. Domingo experiment? If not, why do they keep alive the St. Domingo spirit?” Taylor here implies a myth that was propagated by French plantation owners at the time of the rebellion as well: that abolitionists were directly responsible for the bloodbath of Saint Domingue, an idea that became an entrenched part of master class ideology in the United States.83

Thus Taylor served as an influential purveyor of Southern conservative thought. If the American Revolution ushered in a period remarkable for its diversity of views amongst southern slaveholders, the independence of Haiti coupled with the forceful oratory of conservatives like John Taylor put an end to Southern apologies. This newly

82 Taylor, 178-79.
83 David Brion Davis, The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 35. See also, Althéa Puech Parham, My Odyssey, for the French Creole version of this concept.
reconsolidated ideology was clear in its willingness to confront: “The fact is, negro slavery is an evil which the United States must look in the face.” However, it was just as explicit in its connection to Haiti. The traditional mechanisms of control like “Rewards and punishments, the sanctions of the best government, and the origin of love and fear, are rendered useless,” Taylor argues, “by the example of St. Domingo.” Taylor, though perhaps the most outspoken American to attempt to define the lessons of St. Domingue, was far from the only one to conceive of Haiti and its relation to American slavery in such terms.

Legislative shifts coincided with the ideological repositioning articulated by Taylor and his colleagues. The southern conservative reaction was manifested in laws like those passed in Virginia (1801, 1802, 1804, 1805, 1806), North Carolina (1802), South Carolina (1800, 1805), Georgia (1802, 1804), Maryland (1805), and the Mississippi Territory (1805). This new body of legislation sought largely to re-impose what were seen to be weakened methods of control. They were primarily aimed at slaves and free-coloreds, requiring, for example, recently manumitted slaves in Virginia to leave the state within the following year. It also encouraged new forms of surveillance and control on free blacks whom southerners perceived to be dangerous incendiaries owing to their perceived role in the St. Dominguan revolt.

A shift in national policy and the inscribing of the southern conservative mark on US foreign policy was the next step in consolidating this ideological shift. Jefferson opposed relations with the Dessalines regime and even ignored a letter from the dictator

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84 Taylor, 180.
received just before Haiti’s declaration of independence. Still, the president could not disregard the close commercial ties between American merchants and the new Haitian leadership. In the absence of French authorities to sanction their trade, US merchants had opted to supply Haitian rebels, as well as their various opposite numbers, with all manner of supplies including weapons of war. These ties were increasingly under attack as the remnants of the Leclerc expedition, now scattered throughout the Caribbean, began issuing letters of marque to privateers authorizing them to seize contraband of war. In response, American merchants began arming for self-defense.

The protests of US merchants, whose valuable ships and cargo were regularly being seized, soon reached President Jefferson. Despite the danger of this illicit trade, the value of American exports to the West Indies reached $7.4 million in 1805, more than double that of the previous year. As French chargé, Pichon complained that American merchants conducted a “private and piratical war against a Power with which the United States are at peace” and threatened warlike actions if the Jefferson administration failed to embargo trade with Haiti. Jefferson first proposed a variation on John Adams’s pragmatic policy toward Saint Domingue. He hoped to neutralize the island through an international agreement mutually enforced by a consortium of powers. Specifically, he sought to ward off the danger posed by Haitian commerce and navigation to the southern states just as his proposal acknowledged that nothing could be done to repair the immense

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86 Dessalines’s letter is described in Pichon to Talleyrand, 3 Nov. 1803, *Archives de Affaires étrangères, Correspondence Politique, états Unis* [hereinafter cited as *AE, CP, EU*] 56: 95-97.
87 John H. Coatsworth, “American Trade with European Colonies in the Caribbean, 1790-1812,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 24 (1967), Table A-1, 262. U.S. government statistics on American trade with Haiti were not separated from the French West Indies until 1817-1818. Most sources suggest that Haiti likely represented the bulk of this trade.
damage done to white hegemony in the Caribbean and, by extension, in every slave society.

If the great powers had been at peace his proposal might have gotten off the ground but with Britain and France pursuing their own agendas, they showed no interest in the president’s proposal. In official communications the administration continued to defend US trade with Haiti against Pichon’s criticisms. Secretary of State James Madison, however, sent instructions to the U.S. minister in Paris to explore a compromise on the issue. The new plan was to produce an agreement whereby the U.S. government would prohibit the arms trade in exchange for a guarantee of the protection of noncontraband commerce. But U.S. gun runners would no longer be tolerated. “With respect to articles of War,” Madison remarked, “it is probably the interest of all nations that they should be kept out of hands likely to make so bad use of them.”

Though both the Adams and Jefferson administrations had stood against any embargo of U.S. trade with the Haitian rebels, it was clear by 1804 that Jefferson was prepared to abandon this stand.

The Spring massacres that followed the declaration of Haitian independence marked the beginning of the end of concerted U.S. opposition to an embargo. While Toussaint Louverture had been widely praised in American circles for his restraint and stabilizing influence, both north and south of the Mason-Dixon Line, his successor Dessalines met with no such embrace. Many historians of early U.S. diplomacy were unconvinced that the particularly bloody conclusion of the Haitian Revolution and the increased fear of its spread constituted the “real reason” for the dramatic shift in the

administration’s position.\textsuperscript{90} This, however, ignores the correspondence between Pichon and French Foreign Minister Charles Talleyrand in which he indicated that Madison himself had raised the issue of Haitian trade in the context of the Spring massacres and confided that it was this event that had convinced the administration to ask Congress for an embargo.\textsuperscript{91}

Jefferson was anxious to resolve the Haitian trade problem. He had no desire to become embroiled with the great powers over this issue and, as a southerner, even less desire to continue permitting contact with ex-slaves. The question was a pressing one because it was conceivable that Federalists might recommend recognition at the upcoming session of Congress; it was feared they might suggest a policy congruent with the \textit{de facto} recognition policy that had largely endured since 1793 and could even provide for incendiary Haitian diplomats traveling under diplomatic passport in the southern states. Still, his opening address to Congress in November 1804 presented only the French case for suppressing trade and did not allude at all to the racial anxieties that served as his overriding motive for seeking an embargo. American merchants were arming vessels “to force a commerce into certain ports and countries in defiance of the laws of those countries,” he said. The United States could not permit its citizens “to wage a private war,” and he recommended Congress take remedial action.\textsuperscript{92} Intent on avoiding a clash over slavery as had recently occurred over Louisiana, he did not publicly request

\textsuperscript{90} Logan, \textit{Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti}, 169.
\textsuperscript{92} Jefferson to Congress, Nov. 8, 1804, \textit{Annals of Congress}, 8\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 2\textsuperscript{nd} sess., 11.
that northern merchants sacrifice their commercial interests on behalf of the peculiar security concerns of southern slaveholders.

Two weeks later, Boston Republican William Eustis introduced a bill in the House to regulate the clearance of armed vessels. The next month the president’s son-in-law, John W. Eppes, moved to prohibit vessels from arming altogether unless they were bound for the piratical Mediterranean or the Orient. “We are informed,” he told Congress, “that armed vessels sailing to the West Indies are sold, with their arms and ammunition, to a class of people it is in the interest of the United States to depress and keep down.” The motion was defeated and the House passed an amended version of the original bill despite opposition from a coalition of commercial Federalists and Republicans. The Senate significantly weakened the bill and then passed it with the Federalists again in opposition.

Most Federalist newspapers continued to oppose any restrictions on trade, a position determined largely by commercial interests. Those in the North were particularly vociferous in upholding Haiti’s independence and the right of Americans to trade with it. Boston’s *Columbian Centinel* even compared the Haitians’ experience to that of Americans saying, “Their case is not dissimilar to that of the people of the United States in 1780-1800.” Few of their southern counterparts went so far but most Federalist organs continued to resist any restrictions on trade. Cracks in the Federalist position began to appear at this time, however, as the sectional nature of the debate became more clearly established. The editor of the Norfolk *Gazette and Publick Ledger*, for example,

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94 Boston *Columbian Centinel*, Nov. 17, 1805.
thought there were “many reasons of policy, and perhaps of justice” for not
countenancing “the trade with the ports of St. Domingo in the possession of the blacks.”

Interestingly, Albert Gallatin, who once appeared to stand against an unfair
response to the outbreak of rebellion in Haiti and, like the Centinel, compared their
struggle to the American Revolution while in the Pennsylvania legislature, had amended
his views as Jefferson’s Treasury Secretary. While some Republicans like Senator
Samuel L. Mitchell of New York interpreted the curbing of U.S. commerce with Haiti as
bowing to illegitimate French demands, Gallatin responded in a fifteen-page analysis. He
insisted that U.S. trade with the revolted blacks was illicit and contrary to the laws of
nations because “San Domingo is a french colony…in a state of rebellion against the
Mother Country.” American merchants broke the laws of nations, he claimed, by arming
against duly authorized French privateers. Seemingly realizing his position contravened
precedent he shifted his tack; he concluded that it was “the magnitude of the evil” that
“calls for a remedy.”

The new law did not seriously interfere with commerce in either contraband or
innocent goods. The measure had been bandied about by both houses of Congress and
had “excited no little speculation and a more than ordinary share of ridicule in every part
of the country.” Even before the bill got out of the House it had been so severely
weakened that a Republican conceded that “the opponents of the bill had nearly gained
their object.” From the administration’s point of view, the bill was advantageous in that
it eliminated the potential embarrassment of defending Federalist gun runners. However,

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95 Norfolk Gazette and Publick Ledger, Nov. 26, 1804.
96 Gallatin to Samuel L. Mitchell, Treasury Department, 3 Jan. 1805, Gallatin Papers Microfilm.
97 Philadelphia United States' Gazette, Feb. 11, 1806.
98 Frederick-Towne Herald, Dec. 29, 1804.
it did little to assuage southerners’ fear of the Haitian menace, nor did it come close to meeting the objections of the French. Louis Ferrand, the commander of the French forces stationed at Spanish St. Domingo, repeatedly complained of American merchants’ continued willingness to brazenly flaunt the trade ban. In 1805, a fleet of merchant ships returned to New York harbor and prominent Federalists, among them former minister to England and vice presidential candidate Rufus King, publicly celebrated their successful gun-running expedition. Among the toasts offered at the celebratory banquet was the one offered by King who exclaimed, “[To] the Government of Hayti; founded on the only legitimate basis of all authority…the people’s choice! May it be as durable as its principles are pure.”

King’s endorsement of Haiti, though clothed in an exclamation of democratic sentiment, was more likely an outburst of joy at having turned a profit and an assertion of his right to trade with the island. Still, it indicates the growing divide between the priorities of the merchant class and the security concerns of slaveholders. Nevertheless, the brazen displayed only fueled French indignation.

Knowing his hand in the Caribbean was weak, Napoleon Bonaparte expanded his diplomatic offensive by offering to negotiate a handover of the Floridas if Jefferson would acquiesce on Haiti and grease the wheels with 60 million francs. The president opted to remain in the background this time and allowed center stage to be occupied by the pacifist Republican Senator George Logan. The Logan bill, the provisions of which included a full embargo on trade, passed the House and Senate with little opposition. The only remarkable difference between the Logan bill debate and that surrounding the Eustis bill was Logan’s willingness to play on southern fears of slave revolt. “Is it sound

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99 The toast is included in an editorial column of the New York Evening Post, June 13, 1805.
policy,” he asked Congress, “to cherish the black population of St. Domingo whilst we have a similar population in our Southern States?” He similarly encouraged racial hatred on the part of Northerners who had staunchly opposed the earlier ban.101 According to Federalist William Plumer, “several of the Senators from the Southern States declared that almost the only reason that reconciled them to the bill was the fatal influence that the independence of the Haytians would have on their own slaves.”102 With the French minister seated in the Senate gallery, the bill was hurried through both houses of Congress.

Jefferson signed the new measure into law on February 28, 1806. The embargo was renewed in 1807 and expired on April, 25 1808. Trade with Haiti continued to be officially restricted under the embargo and non-intercourse act and, as such, it was not until 1810 that trade with the black republic was again legal. Some goods still reached the island during this period but the trade never again reached its earlier proportions. The bill did not live up to the expectations of most of its proponents. It did not, as Napoleon had hoped, result in the French reacquisition of Haiti, nor did it, as Jefferson had hoped, result in the U.S. gaining control of the Floridas. Still, the adoption of the embargo of 1806 was an important benchmark in Haitian-American relations in that it established a hostile foreign policy that largely endured until the Civil War.103

It also was important in shifting the frame of what was ostensibly a foreign policy debate in a way that foreshadowed the sectional conflict over American slavery. Southern members of Congress focused on what, to them, was the central issue: the threat Haiti

103 Matthewson, “Nonrecognition”; Proslavery Foreign Policy.
posed to white hegemony and the status of their own servile populations. The Haitian revolution was an ideological threat, an example of slaves who had displaced their masters and they were completely unwilling to welcome Haiti into the family of nations as anything resembling an equal. The true nature of the debate was revealed as John Eppes engaged in personal attacks against the Logan bill’s opponents and adverting to the “immediate and horrible destruction of the fairest portion of America.”\textsuperscript{104} The most notable opposition addresses were presented by Representative Harrison Gray Otis and Senator Samuel White of Delaware, the latter of which was praised by John Quincy Adams as “one of the most powerful and beautiful speeches I have ever heard made in Congress.”\textsuperscript{105}

The divide was not between southerners interested in perpetuating slavery and racially benevolent northerners, but rather between the aforementioned southern conservatives and their northern opponents who were increasingly unwilling to sacrifice commercial interests for the security of an institution for which they already felt a general distaste. This divide, not just political but cultural and economic in nature, was to gestate in the following decades. The Haitian Revolution and the complex foreign policy debate that ensued in the U.S. played an integral role in beginning to frame the sides of the debate on the future of American slavery, a confrontation that would have the most dramatic of consequences on the development of the nation.

\textsuperscript{104} Speech of John W. Eppes, 24 Feb. 1806, \textit{Annals of Congress}, 9\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 1\textsuperscript{st} sess., 499.
\textsuperscript{105} Adams, ed., \textit{Memoirs of John Quincy Adams}, 1: 414, entry of 20 Feb. 1806. For the speeches of Otis and White, see \textit{Annals of Congress}, 5\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 3\textsuperscript{rd} sess., House, 2742-45 (for the earliest iteration of his argument); and 9\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 1\textsuperscript{st} sess., Senate, 20 Feb. 1806, respectively.
In the 1830s, France and England offered formal recognition to Haiti. In the United States, the growth of cotton capitalism and slavery increasingly made the recognition of a free Black republic a political impossibility. The divergent paths taken by the United States and the great powers of Europe further serve to indicate the extent to which the impending question of race had entangled itself with U.S. foreign policy.

Even as early as the declaration of Haitian independence in 1804, British policy in the Caribbean was being guided by abolitionist James Stephen. It was his efforts that allowed Prime Minister William Pitt to issue his order in council of 1805 barring enemy colonies from re-supply with slave labor. His strategy sought to identify abolition with the national interest by preventing the production of colonial wealth that would fuel the French war effort. In 1807, Parliament abolished the slave trade to England’s own colonies, a humanitarian measure that reflected the acceptance of the abolitionist position within the English governing elite. The resultant new conception of the British empire as focused on commerce, markets, and raw materials, rather than on land and slaves, differed enormously from the United States which, though it had also banned the slave trade in 1808, was actively expanding its slave society at this time.106

Capitalizing on the collapse of French power in the region, Stephen expanded his strategy in directions that transformed Anglo-American relations. He expanded the definition of contraband to include tropical staples produced by slaves and transported to Europe on American vessels. The application of this decision increased tensions between the U.S. and Britain and would, in part, lead to the War of 1812. With American officials

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thus distracted, little contact between the United States and Haiti took place during the
decade following the embargo.

In 1817, Septimus Tyler, an American agent, was appointed to attempt the
collection of $132,000, a sum U.S. merchants believed Haiti owed them due to a number
of ship seizures that had occurred in the previous several years. Tyler failed because his
letter did not acknowledge Haiti’s current ruler, Henri Christophe, as the recognized
sovereign. In 1820 a group of American merchants again requested government action in
order to collect the claims, but John Quincy Adams, now Secretary of State, informed
Congress on March 27, 1820 that “A formal recognition of the kingdom of Hayti not
being deemed expedient, no further measures have been found practicable on the part of
the Executive in the case….” 107 Although Adams did not specify the reasons that
recognition was not expedient, the concurrent debates over the admission of Missouri and
the bitterness of many Americans on the subject of slavery thus revealed may have had a
great deal to do with his response.

Meanwhile, the continued struggle of the Spanish-American colonies for
independence raised questions for U.S. policy-makers similar to those connected with
Haiti. The circumstances were essentially the same, except for the question of race. In
1817 and 1818, the United States began recognizing the independence of many of these
former colonies and formed a commission charged with strengthening commercial ties
with them. Those who spoke on the matter, however, skillfully avoided any mention of
Haiti. Even Henry Clay, in his notable speech of March 22, 1818, could refer to the
traditional policy of the U.S. to recognize de facto governments without any reference to
the one Latin American nation whose independence had been established through

107 American State Papers, Foreign Relations, 4: 634 (hereafter cited as ASP, FR)
revolutionary struggle long before the others had even begun their efforts. Even more remarkable was the speech of Senator Holmes of Maine in which he pleaded, “This nation [the U.S.] now stands alone, the only established Republic on earth, like a solitary rock in the ocean….Will it not then be a source of consolation, that we can hail one Republic as a sister, take her by the hand and encourage her in her advance to freedom?” 108 Obviously, Haiti could not be allowed to console the United States in her republican loneliness, yet these speeches reveal an enduring facet of relations with Haiti. Just as southern slaveholders who heaped such lofty praise on Toussaint Louverture in the 1790s demonstrated their immense capacity to compartmentalize such praise separately from efforts to strengthen the concept of black inferiority at home, so too did Senators Holmes and Clay so easily detach black Haiti from a discussion of the pursuit of liberal ideals in Latin-American states.

Trade with Haiti again began to take an important place in American commerce, not least because, owing to the mercantilist policies of most European powers at the time, it offered one of the few opportunities to establish unrestricted trade. Most of this interaction involved northern merchants as southerners continued to fear contagion amongst their slaves. Dread of slave revolt continued with the 1822 insurrection of Denmark Vesey in Charleston, South Carolina, who was said to have come originally from Saint Domingue, to have received aid there, and to have planned to travel there after the plot’s conclusion. 109 As a result, South Carolina passed a law forbidding free black sailors from coming to its ports under penalty of being captured and sold into slavery.

Pressure for recognition continued in the commercial sector. Northern merchants like Caleb Cushing and John Dodge published eloquent defenses of Haitian recognition and expressed the hope that the importance of mutual trade would soon override the prejudices that stood in its way. When their appeals had no effect, Haitian president Boyer sent a direct request for recognition to John Quincy Adams. “The Haitian people,” he wrote, “do not think that the American people, who in another epoch found themselves in the same situation and felt the same need, can refuse them the justice that is due them.” He then reverted to a much more vulnerable argument, asserting that while “there is no similarity of color between the sons of America and those of Hayti, there is between them the similarity of feeling and will.” As might be expected, the president directed that the letter not be answered.

While Congress ignored the question of Haitian recognition, the U.S. press devoted considerable coverage to it. Notably, an article in the New London Advocate pointed out the inconsistency of recognizing many former Spanish colonies while still refusing Haiti. The writer concluded that if it was the color of the Haitians’ skin that prevented American recognition, “this should never be given as a reason by men who profess to believe in the principles of that immortal instrument, the Declaration of Independence.” The most important article appeared in Niles’ Register in which the author asked whether the United States was ready to send and receive ministers from Haiti. “Could the prejudices of some, and the perhaps, just fears of others be quieted?” The answer was categorical: “We think not. The time has not yet come for a surrender of our feelings about color, nor is it fitting at any time, that the public safety should be

110 Logan, 196.
111 Cape Haitien, Consular Dispatches, Vol. 5.
112 New London Advocate by Paulson’s American Daily Advertiser, Jan. 29, 1823.
The debate was becoming increasingly sectional as Pennsylvania, the most southern state from which advocacy for recognition emanated, also marked the southern boundary of abolitionism. The deep South continued to voice its determined opposition.

The Monroe administration was no more inclined to acknowledge Haiti’s independence. In the crucial year of 1823 when the Monroe Doctrine was formulated, the president felt compelled to restate the official policy. Senator Holmes had recently advanced a resolution seeking information about the status of relations with Haiti and a fresh request for recognition had just arrived from President Boyer. In a special address to Congress on February 25, 1823, he again categorically refused to afford recognition to Haiti. For John Quincy Adams’s part, his role in formulating the refusal is unknown but on the subject of the Holmes proposal he speculated that it was a “trap” set to endanger his chances of securing the Democratic nomination for president in 1824. Adams had clearly tempered his views on Haiti significantly since his Senate opposition to the embargo of 1806, or at least came to view more clearly the political inexpediency of taking a firm stand on Haitian recognition.

In 1825, despite the continued existence of slavery in the French colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe, Haiti’s former colonial overlord became the first to grant it formal recognition. Many Frenchmen believed that a restoration of trade with the island nation would redress an unfavorable balance of trade. The most significant factor in the decision, however, seems to be the fact that so few blacks ever lived in France. The notice of recognition was delivered by a fleet of fourteen warships which took such a

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113 Niles’ Register, XXV, Sept. 27, 1823.
menacing position in the harbor of Port-au-Prince that President Boyer did not dare refuse the onerous terms on which his government was afforded recognition. Foremost among these conditions was the demand that Haiti pay an indemnity of 150 million francs within five years. The special concessions accorded France, as well as recognition itself, seem to have immediately raised suspicions among American observers.  

U.S. policy-makers continued in their strategy of avoiding any mention of Haiti. The debate over the naming of delegates to the upcoming Congress of Panama at which all North and South American states were to be represented confirmed this. The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, upon learning that recognition of Haiti was to be on the agenda for the meeting declared on January 16, 1826 that the “Untied States should never permit themselves to enter into any discussion with any foreign State whatever, as to the relations they should be obliged to establish with any People not parties to the discussions.” In other words, the Committee opposed the presence of Haiti at the Congress and the formulation by any other nations of the policy that the United States should adopt with regard to Haiti. Beyond these allusions to the black republic, Haiti was not mentioned in the Committee’s proceedings.

The House members who participated in the debate over the naming of delegates were even less subtle. Representative Forsyth of Georgia intended to leave no doubt that “Southern feeling, prejudice, if gentlemen prefer the term, should prevent our Executive from naming this topic in any assembly of nations.” The Senate outdid the House in vituperation as Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri explained that the United States

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could receive “no mulatto Consuls or black Ambassadors” from Haiti because “the peace of eleven States in this Union will not permit black Consuls and Ambassadors to establish themselves in our cities, and to parade through the country, and give their fellow blacks in the United States, proof in hand of the honors which await them, for a successful revolt on their part.” Senator Hayne of South Carolina stated simply, “Our policy, with regard to Hayti, is plain. We can never acknowledge her independence. Other States will do as they please – but let us take the high ground, that these questions belong to a class, which the peace and safety of a large portion of our Union forbids us even to discuss.” To “take the high ground” for Hayne meant, of course, not discussing anything that might threaten the maintenance of a Union founded on slavery and racial prejudice.

Britain was to follow France in reestablishing relations with Haiti when, in 1826, it installed a consul-general on the island. In 1838, formal recognition was accorded. British recognition of a free black republic was not the threat it was in the United States since it had emancipated all of its slaves in 1833. Still, the United States refused to budge an inch on the question. In 1832 Boyer attempted to induce President Andrew Jackson to change the title of the commercial agents operating in Haiti to that of consul, thereby securing a kind of implied recognition. In exchange, Boyer was willing to remove the additional ten percent duty imposed on American imports. According to William Miles, the American commercial agent at Les Cayes at the time, the naval commander who

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118 *Debates*, 330-32.
119 *Debates*, 166.
120 The major works on U.S.-Haitian relations disagree here. Treudley, *The United States and Santo Domingo*, 83; and Tansill, “The United States and Santo Domingo,” 122 cite 1826 as the date of British recognition whereas Logan, “Diplomatic Relations,” 231 claims it was 1838.
carried the provisional agreement “soon returned with its quietus from Washington. The sore spot was color.”

In 1838, France recognized the unconditional independence of Haiti and reduced the indemnity to 60 million francs. The same year marked the beginning of bitter new debates in Congress over recognition of Haiti. When petitions for the abolition of slavery were silenced by the so-called “gag rule,” abolitionists presented more than two hundred petitions for Haitian recognition in an effort to keep the slavery question before the public. Hugh Swinton Legaré of South Carolina condemned the petitions as “a plausible pretext and convenient opening to a continued discussion of that fatal question,” abolition. While these petitions suffered the same fate that befell those for the abolition of slavery, the tactic indicates the extent to which the two issues were intertwined in American politics.

By the 1840’s nearly all the nations of Europe, including Spain and Portugal which still had slave holdings in their American colonies, had followed France and Britain by extending diplomatic recognition to Haiti. Oddly, the countries which were most materially damaged by the Haitian Revolution, namely France, owing to its mercantile commercial interests on the island, were the first to grant it recognition. The United States, which was only symbolically damaged by the revolt as an antislavery symbol of black power, was the only nation to hold out as long as it did. Those who formulated foreign policy in the European countries were often intimately connected with Haiti in some way. For example, many French elites held St. Dominguan plantations on

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121 William M. Marcy Papers, XLII, 42,014-42,015, Miles to Marcy, September 14, 1853.
the eve of the Revolution and similarly, many British policymakers were military men who had served in the Caribbean and seen for themselves the horrors of the slave revolt and the regional conflicts it sparked.

In the United States, however, policy was largely formulated by men who only conceived of Haiti in symbolic terms; that is, as a symbol of the dire consequences of allowing such a rebellion to take place. Further, planters feared that if Haiti became a symbolic object in the minds of their own slaves, it would help those slaves interpret their own condition in such a way as to introduce new possibilities of a way out. The few Americans with an intimate connection to Haiti, most of whom were merchants, advocated tirelessly for recognition but were repeatedly silenced by the opposition. Framing Haiti in terms of its symbolic importance to Americans, especially as the actual event of the Revolution faded into memory, can go a long way to explaining the divergence of the United States in relation to the imperial powers of Europe on the question of diplomatic recognition of Haiti.124

Though Haiti had its American advocates spread amongst the merchant class, and eventually among anti-slavery advocates – some of whom found utility in employing the question of recognition to propose an end to American slavery – the forces opposed to this recognition were by far the more powerful in the period covered above. From the post-independence embargo debate until the mid-nineteenth century those who sought to reduce the impact of the Haitian Revolution on the state of American slavery were largely able to control the foreign policy regarding Haiti. An issue which had, at one time, been

more one of commercial interests and party affiliations became increasingly sectional as
the country hurtled toward a bloody confrontation on slavery. Even though few
Americans were directly connected to Haiti, the symbolic function Haiti came to serve in
U.S. politics can hardly be underestimated. Above all, the black republic had become
inextricably woven into the politics of race in America. This process was so complete
that the foreign-political and the domestic could no longer be clearly distinguished from
one another.
CHAPTER 4

The years immediately preceding U.S. diplomatic recognition of Haiti coincided with an intensification of the domestic debate on the future of American slavery that led in large part to the outbreak of the Civil War. Though petitions for recognition continued to be advanced by abolitionists in Congress in an effort to keep the issue of slavery in the public eye, Haiti functioned as more than just a tool of the anti-slavery movement. Recognition was a key part of the abolitionist agenda and recognition was the first fruit produced by the Southern secession as the lack of pro-slavery votes in Congress directly resulted in the establishment of diplomatic relations. Whereas the conservative reaction of the South had dominated U.S. foreign policy regarding Haiti from 1806, the recognition afforded Haiti in 1862 represented an important part of the reversal of pro-slavery advocates’ fortunes that occurred during the Civil War.

While the specter of Haiti continued to fuel both sides of the domestic debate on slavery right up until recognition, a third factor has yet to be fully explored. The Haitian Revolution, as well as the very existence of the black republic it gave birth to, played a crucial role in shaping and giving meaning to the Black nationalism that gained strength in the 1850s. In an unlikely convergence, this force combined with the efforts of a wide range of figures on both sides of the slavery debate resulting in a number of colonization schemes aimed at emigrating freed blacks to Haiti and other locales in Africa and the Americas. Persons ranging from President Abraham Lincoln to the militant black nationalist preacher, James Theodore Holly, advocated, funded, and recruited emigrants for colonization in Haiti. At every turn, racial politics mixed with material interests; the fears of slaveholders who foresaw the end of an institution mixed with the hopes of
American blacks, and the disastrous end to the Haitian colonization experiment served as
a fitting conclusion to the often tragic story of the United States’ early relationship with
the world’s first black republic.

Almost immediately after the outbreak of revolution in St. Domingue, events on
the island became significant forces in the shaping of black thought and action in the
United States. The French refugees from the crisis, a number of whom brought their
slaves with them, were one source of firsthand accounts of the revolt. Although such
reports were not given directly to American blacks, the subject was discussed in public
and private gathering places where blacks were present as servants and in other
capacities. Literate blacks read of events in St. Domingue in newspapers and passed on
information by word of mouth. Slaves and free blacks in the U.S. were quite cognizant of
the major events and circumstances surrounding the Haitian Revolution, resulting in a
measurable increase in belligerency and acts of insurgence against American slave
society.\textsuperscript{125} Though southern paranoia may be reflected in likely exaggerations of the
direct influence of St. Domingue on slave plots, it did serve as an inspiration for the
participants in the Denmark Vesey conspiracy, the Nat Turner rebellion and most other
major slave plots of the nineteenth century.

If Haiti had a symbolic and psychological significance for southern blacks, the
same was no less true of their free brethren in the north. Many free black spokesmen in
the North articulated a view of the Haitian Revolution comparable to the way whites saw

\textsuperscript{125} Monroe Fordham, “Nineteenth-Century Black Thought in the United States: Some Influences of the
Santo Domingo Revolution,” \textit{Journal of Black Studies}, Vol. 6, (1975), 118. See also, John T. McCartney,
University Press, 1992); K. Smith, “Becoming Native: The Concept of Place in Early African-American
(2004); Wilson J. Moses, \textit{Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History}. (Cambridge:
the American Revolution: that is, as a struggle for freedom against tyranny and injustice.
Among those who saw the revolt as a model for more militant action in the U.S. was
Henry Highland Garnet. In his famous “Address to the Slaves of the United States,”
given before the National Colored Convention in Buffalo in 1843, he called for American
slaves to follow the example of the Haitians and rebel against their masters. 126 Similarly,
Thomas Hamilton predicted that the black population would eventually outnumber the
whites, making it impossible “to put off that event which was brought about by
bloodshed in Hayti.” 127 In addition to orators like Garnet, the black press served as
another vehicle through which thoughts on the connection between Haiti and the
condition of American slaves was explored. The opening editorial in the first black edited
newspaper in the U.S. held that “the establishment of the Republic of Hayti after years of
sanguinary warfare; [and] its subsequent progress in all the arts of civilization,” were
indicators of the extent to which black inferiority was a myth. 128

In the 1850s, the black theologian James Theodore Holly, seized on the events in
St. Domingue, then over fifty years in the past, calling the revolution “one of the noblest,
grandest, and most justifiable outbursts against tyrannical oppression.” He further
contended that it was a struggle in which a race of “almost dehumanized men…rose from
their slumber of ages, and redressed their own unparalleled wrongs…in the name of God
and humanity.” In their “struggle for liberty, the Lord of Hosts directed their arms to be
instruments of his judgment on their oppressors.” Holly concluded that the black
revolution in St. Domingue was more “wonderous and momentous” than the American

126 The speech is excerpted in Herbert Aptheker, A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United
States from the Colonial Period to the Civil War. (Citadel, New York: 1951).
127 Quoted in Aptheker, Documentary, 414-415.
Revolution. As one of the strongest advocates of black emigration, Holly urged black Americans with skills to migrate to Haiti and contribute toward establishing there a “strong, powerful, enlightened and progressive Negro nationality, equal to the demands of the nineteenth century.”

The growing popularity of emigration movements in the 1850’s was due to the advocacy of a wide range of influential Americans, many of whom viewed the colonization of blacks abroad as a chimera, though for disparate reasons. Black men like Holly believed that the primary reason slavery and the slave trade still existed was due primarily to the fact that there was as yet “no powerful and enlightened Negro nationality anywhere existing to espouse the cause and avenge the wrongs of their race.” In his view, the emigration of free blacks from America could help forge a strong black nation in the Caribbean capable of shaping international politics. Though African-Americans’ interest in emigration and the ideas of Holly waxed and waned, it would reach its peak in 1860 and 1862 when “Haitian fever” swept many black communities.

However, the idea of solving America’s race problem by means of colonizing blacks abroad had preoccupied the minds of most U.S. leaders, both within and outside of government, since the turn of the nineteenth century. The colonizationist effort was institutionalized in 1816 with the founding of the American Colonization Society. Most American presidents supported its efforts and its membership included Speaker of the House Henry Clay, Chief Justice John Marshall, Rufus King and Patrick Henry, among others. Some of its members believed blacks deserved a life free of the oppression they

found in America, while others sought to strengthen the existing racial hierarchy by deporting free blacks, thereby avoiding what John Taylor called a “nation of people between the masters and slaves, having rights extremely different from either, called free negroes and mulattoes.” Regard less of their motives, all agreed that black and white could not live side by side.

Of all the colonization schemes pursued by the Society, the establishment of Liberia in West Africa was one of the few to result in any appreciable success. The colony of Liberia was founded within five years of the chartering of the American Colonization Society, and in 1847 it proclaimed itself a republic. Britain extended diplomatic recognition immediately but the United States was to hold back until the Civil War, a fact that underscores the less-than-benevolent intentions of the colonizationists. As for the colonization of Haiti, the Society did not seize on it immediately. The first effort to migrate blacks to the island was led by James T. Holly who transported two thousand colonists to Haiti in 1859. Though the effort was a failure and only about two hundred of the original colonists could be accounted for a few years later, a more concerted effort, backed by massive government funding, was soon to follow.133

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Meanwhile, the same circumstances that conspired to tear the country apart in the Civil War also resulted in an environment that finally allowed for the diplomatic recognition of Haiti, reversing the policy of nonrecognition that had set the tone of U.S.-Haitian relations since 1806. Just as the possibility for reconciliation between the Union and the Southern secessionists rapidly deteriorated, President Santana issued a

133 Fordham, 120-24.
proclamation reasserting Spanish dominion over the Dominican Republic. Secretary of State William H. Seward took a firm stand against Spanish annexation and in his

_Thoughts for the Consideration of the President_ of April 1, 1861, he suggested that the administration demand a categorical explanation from Spain.134 Alarmed by Spain’s ambitions, Haitian President Geffrard appealed on May 22 directly to President Abraham Lincoln for recognition.135 There is no evidence that Lincoln or Seward replied to this appeal.

On May 25, James Redpath, one of the commercial agents of Haiti in the United States, asserted to Seward that the Spanish reoccupation of the eastern half of the island might result in war between Spain and Haiti and the possible seizure of Môle St. Nicolas, of strategic importance to the U.S. navy.136 A month later, George Usher, the former American commercial agent in Haiti now acting in that capacity for Haiti in the U.S., suggested to Seward that any reestablishment of Spanish rule on Hispaniola would threaten Haitian independence and be “an infringement of what is called the Monroe Doctrine.”137 Oddly, the Secretary of State who would eventually give new force to the Monroe Doctrine as it applied to Mexico apparently saw no infringement of it in Spain’s threat to Haiti. In his reply, Seward thanked Usher for an update on the conditions on the island and confined himself to a non-committal reaction. “I beg to assure you,” he responded, “that this Government regards with much interest and sincere sympathy the

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135 National Archives, Haiti, Notes from, Vol. 1 (hereafter cited as “Haiti, notes to” or “Haiti, notes from”).
patriotic people of that Republic, who have, under an enlightened administration proved themselves deserving the freedom they have acquired, and in the undisturbed enjoyment of which we earnestly hope they will long be permitted to remain.”138 Any material efforts to ensure such a situation were not forthcoming.

When on July 10, 1861, a Spanish fleet compelled President Geffrard to acknowledge Spanish rule in the Dominican Republic and agree to pay an indemnity of two hundred thousand dollars, the United States remained silent. Nevertheless communications urging recognition continued unabated from the commercial sector. On September 4, Seth Webb, the newly-appointed American commercial agent at Port-au-Prince, wrote Seward that the refusal of the United States to send a diplomatic representative to Haiti was “altogether disastrous to the interests of our commerce, & almost destroys the political influence of our government & its commercial agents.” He went on to assert that “a prompt & cordial recognition of Haytian nationality by the existing government of the United States…would diffuse among this whole people a satisfaction which can hardly be understood in America & if followed up on our part by even the ordinary civilities of official intercourse, would enable us to hold this island in the hollow of our hand.”139

In spite of these warnings and urgings, as well as the Spanish expedition to the island, Lincoln waited until the opening of the regular session of Congress to recommend diplomatic recognition. In his message of December 3, 1861, he told the legislators, “if any good reason exists why we should persevere longer in withholding our recognition of the independence and sovereignty of Hayti and Liberia, I am unable to discern it.

Unwilling, however, to inaugurate a novel policy in regard to them without the approbation of Congress, I submit for your consideration the expediency of an appropriation for maintaining a chargé d’affaires near each of these new States. It does not admit of doubt that important commercial advantages might be secured by favorable treaties with them.” Lincoln went on to note his hope that it would exercise “a salutary influence on the opinion of foreign nations,” and would “fulfill the dictates of propriety and justice.”

Despite the administration’s lack of haste in extending recognition to these two black countries, as well as having mistakenly labeled them “new States,” the move represented a major turning point in U.S. interaction with Haiti. The commercial motive for recognition requires no explanation. Such considerations were an ever-present aspect of U.S.-Haitian relations as far back as the Caribbean island’s time as a French colony. Recognition’s impact on foreign affairs is understandable as well, and ties to the most likely reason for Lincoln and Seward’s reluctance to propose it sooner. The European powers, in particular Great Britain, were beginning to show sympathy for the Confederacy, in part because the Lincoln administration had not yet made clear the connection between slavery and the Union cause. While the President believed the moment for emancipation had not yet arrived, he likely hoped the recognition of Haiti and Liberia would cultivate some support for the Union in the progressive circles of Great Britain and France. Though in referring a matter to Congress which he could have decided himself Lincoln may appear to have exercised undue timidity, it is more likely he was deeply aware of the effect recognition would have in the all-important

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141 Logan, 298-99.
border states which still held slaves but had, as yet, not seceded from the Union. Lincoln, who withheld the preliminary draft of the Emancipation Proclamation until September, 1862, was not inclined to move too far ahead of public opinion, especially in any action that might affront the border states. As Seward wrote to Charles Francis Adams, American minister to Britain, “Every demonstration against slavery puts our assured position in Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, and Virginia at hazard.” The recognition of Haiti and Liberia was, of course, considered by pro-slavery advocates as an assault against that institution as evidenced by the ensuing Congressional debate.

With the Civil War in full swing, the Senate’s discussion of the President’s proposal reflected the sectional differences that had come to frame any matter involving Haiti. Senator Garret Davis, a Democrat from Kentucky employed language reminiscent of Hayne and Benton in 1826, declaring Washington society’s unease with the idea of a black foreign minister. Similarly, Senator Saulisbury, a Democrat from Delaware, objected to the presence of a black minister in the Senate gallery reserved for diplomats. The Republican Senator from Massachusetts, Charles Sumner, managed to overcome this opposition. His speech of April, 23, 1862, made no plea based on serving justice to blacks either in Haiti or the United States, but instead emphasized commerce, the deterrent effect recognition would have on any Spanish or other European intrigues on the island, and the fact that the U.S. was the only major power not to have already recognized Haiti’s sovereignty.

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143 Congressional Globe, 37th Congress, 2nd sess., 1806-1807, 1815.
144 Congressional Globe, 37th Congress, 2nd sess., 1773-1776, 1814-1815.
While it is difficult to determine the relevant weight of these arguments – including the decidedly muted one concerning racial justice – in the minds of the thirty-two senators who voted for the measure, it is clear, however, that the seven who voted against it stood on the same “lofty principles” of Hayne and Benton in 1826. The House debate followed roughly the same parameters as the one in the Senate and a party-line vote resulted in thirty-seven votes against the assent of eighty-six Republicans and abolitionists.\textsuperscript{145} President Lincoln signed the bill for the appointment of commissioners to Haiti and Liberia on June 5, 1862 and six weeks later Benjamin Whidden became the first diplomatic representative from the United States to Haiti. Recognition would have been impossible before secession resulted in the exodus of most Democratic members of Congress and a letter from Seward to one of his principle advisors, Thurlow Weed, confirms that recognition was a key part of the abolitionist agenda. Writing just two days after Sumner effectively silenced the Senate opposition, Seward exulted that “Hayti and Liberia are recognized,” listing it alongside the suppression of the African slave trade and the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, all accomplishments he attributes to the fact that Democratic opposition was then “only small enough to annoy and excite.”\textsuperscript{146}

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Another item, however, remained an important aspect of Lincoln’s agenda. As explained above, Lincoln, like many other U.S. statesmen, was thoroughly convinced that blacks and whites would never be able to co-exist peacefully in America. The war-time confiscation of plantations along with the Confederate’s human property made the

\textsuperscript{145} For the register of the votes in the Senate and House, see respectively\textit{Congressional Globe}, 37\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} sess., 1816, and 2527-2536.
\textsuperscript{146} “Seward Papers,” Seward to Weed, April 25, 1862.
question of what to do with the newly freed slaves all the more pertinent. In April 1862, as a result of his persuasive efforts, the U.S. House of Representatives created the select Committee on Emancipation and Colonization for the express purpose of thoroughly examining all aspects of colonization in order to determine its feasibility.

In the spring and summer of 1862, Congress provided Lincoln exactly what he sought: legislation linking emancipation, confiscation, and colonization. The same series of acts that freed the slaves in Washington, D.C. and those held by rebellious slave owners, also resulted in the appropriation of $100,000 to design and implement colonization programs.\(^{147}\) Then in July, an act of Congress – the most far-reaching of the entire series – not only increased the funds to $600,000 but designated Abraham Lincoln the sole trustee of all colonization efforts.\(^{148}\) Though colonization had been favored by American presidents reaching back to Thomas Jefferson, none had ever been provided the resources and authority to enact such schemes as had Lincoln in 1862. Unfortunately, he was to grossly mismanage the resources resulting in a disastrous end to his colonization efforts and yet another tragic chapter in U.S.-Haitian relations.

Lincoln first looked to Central America for an acceptable place to colonize freed blacks. Ambrose W. Thompson owner of the Chiriqui Improvement Company in Panama, convinced Lincoln to authorize the signing of a contract between the United States and his company, which among other provisions set aside land for the establishment of a black colony. Lincoln’s enthusiasm for the colonization scheme clouded his judgment as he disregarded an ongoing border dispute over the contracted land, as well as the advice of the Secretary of the Navy concerning the shady character of


\(^{148}\) *U.S. Statutes*, 378, 582, 592.
Thompson. Lincoln, however, was more concerned with hurrying blacks out of the country as fast as possible rather than with the capability of the site to successfully support a colony. The colonists were supposed to have supported themselves by mining local coal deposits, but when a box supposed to contain coal from the Chiriqui site turned out to be full of nothing but dirt, the President nevertheless persisted in his efforts. It was not until Seward, concerned for the goodwill of Latin America, advised Lincoln to abort the project that he reluctantly abandoned the plan.149

With Central America no longer an option Lincoln instructed Seward to feel out the European powers on the subject of signing treaties to allow black emigration to their American colonies. When he received a lukewarm response, Lincoln turned to Haiti. Having first rejected it as a colonization destination because of its Roman Catholicism and the possibility of Spanish annexation, he now concluded it was the best choice. His decision would turn out to be among the greatest blunders of his presidency and the last colonization effort attempted by the United States.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Lincoln’s tireless campaign to induce blacks to leave America and settle on foreign shores included an invitation to a group of free blacks to visit with him in the Oval Office. Occurring a month after he won the victories in Congress providing him with the resources he needed to pursue colonization, the historic meeting represented the first time a U.S. president discussed a matter of public interest with black people. The summit quickly devolved into a lecture from the President on the incompatibility of whites and blacks and the virtues of colonization. “And why,” he asked, “should the people of your race be colonized and where?...We

have between us a broader difference than exists between almost any other two races. Whether it is right or wrong I need not discuss, but this physical difference is a great disadvantage to us both, I think. Your race suffers greatly, many of them, by living among us, while ours suffer from your presence.”\textsuperscript{150} The men were far from convinced by Lincoln’s short-sighted monologue and retired to their communities promising only to consider his appeal.\textsuperscript{151} The anti-slavery press reacted with fury and Frederick Douglass reflected the overwhelmingly hostile attitude of northern Negroes and abolitionists when he bitterly noted that “In this address Mr. Lincoln assumes the languages and arguments of the itinerant Colonization lecturer, showing all his inconsistencies, his pride of race and blood, his contempt for negroes and his canting hypocrisy.”\textsuperscript{152}

Despite this cool reception from free blacks and abolitionists, plans for colonization in Haiti went forward. On December 31, 1862, the Department of the Interior entered into a contract with Bernard Kock, who had persuaded President Geffrard to lease him the L’Ile à Vache, an island off Haiti’s southern coast. Kock was to receive fifty dollars per emigrant, up to fifty-thousand voluntary colonists. Since Kock did not have sufficient capital for his undertaking, he induced a group of New York capitalists, headed by P.S. Forbes and Charles K. Tuckerman, to finance the project. They invested $70,000 for the purchase of a ship but by the time it was ready to sail, Lincoln had cancelled the contract. Rumors of Kock’s untrustworthiness, as well as the admonitions


\textsuperscript{152} Liberator, August 22, 1862; Douglass’ Monthly, September, 1862.
of Seward who had never shared Lincoln’s enthusiasm for colonization, finally prevailed over the President’s ambitions.153

Forbes and Tuckerman, in an effort to prevent the loss of their investment, convinced the government to resign the contract with them instead. In a show of their ineptitude, they promptly rehired Kock as administrator of the colony and in April, 1863, a ship carrying about four-hundred fifty colonists departed for L’Île à Vache. The expedition seemed doomed to failure from the start as a carrier of small pox was somehow allowed on board resulting in twenty deaths. No real preparations had been made for the colonists’ arrival and Forbes and Tuckerman had failed to secure an agreement with Haitian officials on the transfer of the original lease. Kock, who had been referring to himself as “governor” of the island, was soon forced by the angry settlers to seek protection from Haitian authorities after he reportedly duped the settlers out of all the U.S. currency they brought on the voyage.

Forbes and Tuckerman replaced Kock with A.A. Ripka, who for a few months tried to develop the colony, but he soon determined the situation to be hopeless and gave up. For the next three and a half months the freedmen were alone on the island. Acting on information received from American consular and diplomatic officials in Haiti, Lincoln then dispatched D.C. Donnohue to investigate conditions on the island. After a time, Donnohue gained control of the project causing him to suffer delusions of grandeur, calling himself the absolute monarch of the island.154 By January 1864, conditions on L’Île à Vache were declared a disaster and the project was terminated. Lincoln sent an

153 Lockett, 437-438; Logan, 308-309.
army transport to return the remaining colonists to the United States and Congress not only repealed the act that gave Lincoln $600,000 for colonization and appointed him sole trustee, it also passed an act that forbade the U.S. government from any further involvement in colonization schemes.\(^\text{155}\)

The unmitigated calamity that was the L’Ile à Vache colonization effort serves as a fitting conclusion to the story of the United States’ early interaction with the black republic. Haiti, long a symbol of the dangers of holding a population of humans in bondage, was neither a concrete threat to U.S. slavery nor the chimera American colonizationists believed it to be. Nevertheless, the function of Haiti in American society and politics went through new evolutions as the Civil War approached. While slaveholders in the Antebellum South may have been able to compartmentalize the Haitian revolt in an effort to maintain the apparatus of control, abolitionists and free blacks increasingly seized on events in the former French colony to undermine assertions of black inferiority. At every turn, U.S. interaction with Haiti, ostensibly a foreign policy matter, was largely determined by and refracted through the racial politics of the time.

Haiti was a logical choice for black emigration from the perspective of colonizationists, whether white or black, only for different reasons. For black nationalists, Haiti represented the hopes of a race and manifested the deconstruction of the myth of black inferiority. For whites like Abraham Lincoln, their short-sighted racism led them to believe Haiti offered an economically and geographically feasible place of disposal for millions of unwanted blacks. The brief convergence of interest in migration among some free blacks and the enthusiasm for such an effort within the Lincoln administration resulted in an experiment which, though ending in disaster, also marked a landmark in the

\(^{155}\) \textit{U.S. Statutes}, 352.
United States’ struggle with racial reconciliation. With colonization no longer an option, Americans knew they had one less path toward establishing a society free of slavery. Any possible solution to America’s deepest and most intractable conundrum would now necessarily involve a multi-racial society.
CONCLUSION

It is no coincidence that the first epoch of American history, from the Revolution that gave birth to a nation, to the Civil War that nearly split it in two, roughly coincided with the period between the slave insurrection in Saint Domingue and its eventual diplomatic recognition. Just as the Haitian Revolution was connected to other revolutions of the period, including that in America, so too was its subsequent history intertwined with developments in U.S. society. It is not enough, however, to conclude that racism and the defense of slavery resulted in a reactionary policy toward the black republic. Events in Haiti were crucial in shaping the domestic debate on the future of slavery and were critical to the development of the sectional conflict in the United States that led to the Civil War.

From the outset, the bloody Haitian Revolution framed the issues at hand and represented for slaveholders what was at stake. The symbolic importance of Haiti – that is, Haiti as an example of the consequences of widespread slave revolt upon white hegemony – was powerful enough to allow anxious slaveholders to essentially dominate the formulation of U.S. foreign policy toward Haiti for three quarters of a century. The fear of those for whom Haiti served only a psychological function overcame the commercial interests of many who had direct contact with the former colony.

To be clear, many factors contributed to the complex debate over U.S.-Haitian relations. In the beginning, partisan politics and disputes with the great powers of Europe were important in drawing the battle lines. Later, sectionalism came to be an important factor and commercial interests were always in play. However, the race question was never far from the surface, even when the actors involved did not expressly say so. The
American Revolution and other related developments in Western society hung a question mark over the institution of slavery. The contradictions of a nation founded on “liberty for all” that was, at the same time, deepening its economic commitment to slavery were not lost on all contemporary observers. At the same time, however, the concept of a multiracial society was unfathomable to nearly all Americans, giving rise to efforts to colonize free blacks outside of the country.

It was in this context that the Haitian Revolution occurred. The responses of two groups, the Pennsylvania and South Carolina legislatures, reacting before the fledgling federal government and even before news of the event spread widely, foreshadowed the debate to come. In South Carolina, where personal commitments to slavery ran deep, the legislators considered sending their militia to assist but held back only because of the fear of a similar revolt at home. In Pennsylvania a more complex exchange ensued. While most of those involved were quick to denounce a slave revolt that resulted in the deaths of whites, some members took the opportunity to express their anti-slavery convictions, thus transposing their opinion on a domestic institution to the arena of foreign policy.

This exchange also was the first instance in which a U.S. policymaker compared the Haitian Revolution to that of the thirteen colonies against British rule. This would take place time and again over the course of the debate over relations with Haiti and was a way for opponents of a hostile policy to shift the discussion away from the sensitive race question. Measuring the sincerity of such arguments, like gauging the authenticity of any expression of sympathy toward the Haitians or, for that matter, toward American blacks, remains difficult. Nevertheless, the developing disagreement over how to react to the Haitian slave revolt reveals a great deal about domestic views of slavery.
Perhaps the most intriguing period in the history of U.S.-Haitian relations remains the few years between the initial revolt and the embargo passed by Congress in 1806. It was during this time that pro-slavery advocates were still in the process of consolidating an ideological defense of slavery, a process in which Haiti figured prominently. Also, ambivalence about the future of slavery was at its height as many slaveholders considered proposals for gradual emancipation. In this context, the wholehearted embrace of Toussaint Louverture on the part of Americans on both sides of the slavery debate takes on greater significance than is traditionally attributed it. To be sure, race was not the only consideration on the minds of Southerners for whom party loyalty, Francophobia, and the hope of expanding slavery into the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase all factored into their calculus. Still, the circumstances beg the question: what would have happened had Toussaint remained in power and Dessalines not massacred the remaining whites in Haiti?

In the view of the author, events in Haiti – though not the only factor – were a major consideration for Americans charting the course of slavery. At every turn, Haiti was seen as a model for the consequences of sudden emancipation and the resultant multi-racial society. When conditions in Haiti were stable, as in the period of Toussaint’s rule and later that of Presidents Boyer and Geffrard, they provided a certain degree of cover for Americans who were publicly opposed to slavery at home. Still, the fact remained that a conciliatory policy toward the black republic was simply not pragmatic until the Civil War. This is evidenced by the shifting positions of actors like Albert Gallatin and John Quincy Adams. Both stood against a hostile policy toward Haiti at first
– at least partially on the grounds of racial justice – and both changed their tune when they found themselves in the executive branch.

Haiti served an inspirational function for American blacks as well, as it implicitly undermined the myth of black inferiority which served as a key part of the machinery of social control in the Antebellum United States. Just as Southern whites were employing the image of Haiti in order to strengthen master-class ideology, blacks interpreted it through the lens of their own condition. Thus, Haiti’s influence on nineteenth-century black thought and the rise of black nationalism should not be underestimated. Many slaves were thus inspired to revolt, while some free blacks became enamored with emigration to the world’s first nation founded upon a slave revolt. Ironically, the disastrous end to American colonization efforts at L’Ile à Vache, though designed to avert the imposition of a multi-racial society, resulted in just the opposite. The termination of colonization left U.S. policymakers no other option but to consider the idea of living side by side with African-Americans.

Though American involvement with Haiti has taken numerous tragic turns in the years since, the diplomatic recognition afforded the country, made possible by the Civil War, represented a turning point in relations. Though the official policy of the previous five decades was reversed, however, it is difficult to conclude anything but the fact that racism was the overriding sentiment in U.S.-Haitian relations. Still, in every case, events in Haiti took on deep symbolic significance in U.S. politics and were interpreted through the lens of one’s own conception of the race question. The various answers provided to that question – at times merely a reflection of simplistic racial hatred, but in most cases the product of complex considerations – reveal the multifarious nature of the relationship
between Haiti and the early United States. The trajectory of this racialized foreign policy is only apparent when one can view the entire arc of the nonrecognition policy by studying the period between the Haitian Revolution and its eventual diplomatic recognition.
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