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State of the Field Essay: Haiti's Revolution and the Early American Republic

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Essay by Wendy Wong-Schirmer, McNeil Center for Early American Studies

To say that relations between the United States and Haiti are often uneasy is an understatement. Even though Haitian independence became a reality in 1804, the United States did not formally recognize Haiti until 1862. Literary scholars and historians like Michael Dash and Mary Renda have noted the fraught nature of U.S.-Haitian relations that continued into the twentieth century and beyond. Others such as Philippe Girard have further argued that any ongoing instability has its historical origins in the political strife of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) and Haiti's own war for independence.¹ Building on Girard's observation, the seemingly distant past is important for the study of more contemporary U.S. foreign relations. Foreign relations between the then former French colony of St. Domingue and the early United States are a study in how foreign relations can occur without formal recognition. They also constitute an important site for examining the promises of revolution and the dynamics of modernity and progress.

Modernity typically rejects tradition, privileging the 'New World' and progress over the 'Old.' Following an exceptionalist approach, Americans have long pointed to their own revolution as a viable example of republican self-government for the rest of the world to follow. Moreover, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, heralding "the birthday of a new world" that would arise with American independence, declared that the United States would have the power to "begin the world over again."² In addition, a tendency to view the American Revolution as non-violent and "strangely bloodless"—as Holger Hoock recently observes in *Scars of Independence*—has contributed to this exceptionalist outlook.³ In contrast, Haiti and its

¹ See Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), and Philippe Girard, *Haiti: The Tumultuous History- From Pearl of the Caribbean to Broken Nation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010).

² Thomas Paine, "Appendix," *Common Sense* (1776) <http://www.bartleby.com/133/5.html>

³ On violence in the American Revolution, see Holger Hoock, *Scars of Independence: America's Violent Birth* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2017). For the underlying fear that violence might be an integral part of the initial and ongoing formation of the United States and thus part of the legacy of the Revolution, see Caroll Smith-

revolution became an exceptionally and wholly ‘other’ locale associated with blackness and violence. What Frederick Douglass, speaking at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago as former U.S. ambassador to Haiti, called “the only self-made Black Republic in the world,” which had obtained freedom similarly to the United States, was pushed from the center to the periphery, and rendered “unthinkable” in the Age of Revolutions.⁴ According to historian and anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot, the Haitian Revolution has been “silenced” in Western historiography on the Age of Revolutions. Its successful anti-slavery *revolution* (not slave *revolt*) was “disavowed” as a viable paradigm of modernity and a model of emancipation.⁵

Current scholarship has concentrated primarily on recovering what has been truncated and obscured while building on and moving beyond Trouillot’s seminal thesis: silence did not constitute erasure. It also did not entail near-complete diplomatic isolation.⁶ Rather, prior to the increased focus on the Haitian Revolution’s impact on the Atlantic World, narratives of Haitian-U.S. foreign relations previously marginalized the reality of “a relation of obscured *interdependence*,” where the United States and Haiti were historically, geographically, and textually entwined.⁷ Revising preexisting narratives of the nature of the fraught relationship between the two nations and revolutions is a matter of nuance. Rather than the two nations sharing, as they once did, a history of two new American nations moving along parallel trajectories, in the United States, at least, the two histories have often been depicted as antithetical.

Increased focus on ‘America *in* the world’ as opposed to ‘America *and* the world’ in the study of U.S. foreign relations history, coupled with a turn in Early American history toward Atlantic World history/studies, has necessarily situated the Early Republic within histories of the Age of Revolutions that span a more interconnected geographic region. Scholarship from the mid-to-late 2000s onward sought to peel back the layers of silence to restore the Haitian Revolution to the significant place that it occupied. Work such as such as David Geggus’s *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (2001) and *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (2002), Gordon Brown’s *Toussaint’s Clause* (2005), Laurent Dubois’s *Avengers of the New World* (2005), Sean Goudie’s *Creole America* (2006), Geggus and Norman Fiering’s *The World of the Haitian Revolution* (2009), and Wim Klooster’s *Revolutions in the Atlantic World* (2009)

Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). For the paring of slave violence with Jacobinism and the French Revolution, see Rachel Hope Cleeves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁴ Frederick Douglass, “Lecture on Haiti,” Dedication Ceremonies Delivered at the World’s Fair, 2 January 1893. <http://faculty.webster.edu/corbetre/haiti/history/1844-1915/douglass.htm>

⁵ Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

⁶ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995; second edition, 2015), Chapter 3; Drexler and Dillon, 15.

⁷ Michael Drexler and Elizabeth Mack Dillon, “Introduction” in Drexler and Dillon eds., *The Haitian Revolution and the Early Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 3, 6, 14. Emphasis is the author’s.

made St. Domingue and then Haiti more central and less marginal to the conceptual framework of the Atlantic World.⁸ The circulation of goods, ideas, and people, both free and slave, throughout Atlantic port cities meant that Haiti, rather than being an isolated place, “stood at the very center of the network of the developing capitalist world economy.”⁹ For the early United States, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael Drexler’s edited volume, *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States* (2016) has most recently and crucially emphasized that recovery from obscurity, as opposed to Haiti as a state of non-relation.

Given this ‘Atlantic turn’ and subsequent emphasis on the interdependent nature of Haiti-U.S. relations, Dillon and Drexler note further that “it should no longer be possible to write a history of the early republic of the United States without mentioning Haiti, or St. Domingue, the French colonial name of the colony known as ‘the pearl of the Antilles’ and the site of a world historical anticolonial, antislavery revolution that occurred between 1789 and 1804.”¹⁰ Moreover, this perspective restores agency to Haiti, emphasizing a post-colonial United States that was far from being the superpower it would later become, and which was in the process of being globalized. As far as revolutionary paradigms and examples of modernity and slave emancipation went, the American Revolution and the United States presented one viable possibility. France and Haiti presented others. In an Atlantic World, where slavery and slave insurrection were common realities, not only did the Haitian Revolution challenge the revolutionary self-image of the United States, but “both revolutionary Haiti and the revolutionary early U.S. republic were sites where [contradiction and tension between the revolutionary politics of republicanism and an economy fueled by slave labor] rose to the fore.”¹¹

Paine’s writing on American independence notwithstanding, the Haitian Revolution, an important world event in its own right, was “a revolution about the human.”¹² Unlike the American Revolution, it was not just about political liberty, but about “what freedom would look like.” The Haitian Revolution, according to Anthony Bogues, created “a new ground for thinking and practicing freedom.” Its

⁶ David Patrick Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), Gordon S. Brown, *Toussaint’s Clause: the Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), ⁸Sean Goudie, *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), Geggus and Norman Fiering ed., *The World of the Haitian Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

⁹ Drexler and Dillon, 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹² Anthony Bogues, “Epilogue: Two Archives and the Idea of Haiti,” in *Ibid.*, 324.

“unprecedented, multilayered historical practices” created “a breach in colonial modernity,” whose meanings have yet to be fully engaged, fully grasped.¹³

‘The Horrors of St. Domingo’: Haiti, Revolution, and Violence

As Douglass intimated to his audience at the Haitian pavilion at the Chicago World’s Fair, discussion of U.S.-Haitian relations in the Early Republic as the event itself was unfolding and in its aftermath raised the issue of revolutionary ideals being taken to their logical conclusion—the question of “what kind of liberty ensues from what kind of liberation.”¹⁴ Americans at the time expressed anxiety over the French Revolution’s violence, and subsequently about the revolutionary violence in St. Domingue. American newspapers often reported developments in both, the details of which entered into public discourse. White-planter refugees and their slaves from St. Domingue fled to U.S. port cities such as Philadelphia and Charleston. Slave emancipation and its perceived connection with Europe’s revolutionary upheavals “tested the revolutionary self-image of the United States” in an age of slave revolt and revolution.¹⁵ Fear that St. Domingue’s example would spread to the Southern states reverberated in the Early Republic, resulting in the ever-present specter of “Haitian gothic,” where discourse about Haitians’ post-colonial self-emancipation often emphasized violence and horror. The perceived danger that the French Revolution and Jacobinism posed was a common trope, as both Rachel Hope Cleeves and Ashli White have shown: this influx of refugees was a reminder of what Americans saw as Jacobinism’s potential to radicalize slaves in St. Domingue and in the United States. “French negroes,” after all, could corrupt American-born slaves.¹⁶

Scholars have come to more readily recognize the Haitian Revolution as an integral part of the Age of Revolutions in its own right, and not just an example of the French Revolution in the colonies. This foregrounds how Americans at the time grappled with whether the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions shared a future—violent—destiny. Former slave and first leader of independent Haiti Jean-Jacques Dessalines claimed after declaring independence 1 January 1804 that he had “avenged America,”

¹³ *Ibid*; See also David Brion Davis, *Revolutions: Reflections on American Equality and Foreign Liberations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Brandon R. Byrd, “An experiment in self-government: Haiti in the African-American political imagination, 1863-1915” (Ph.D. Diss., UNC Chapel Hill, 2014), Raphael Hoermann, “A Very Hell of Horrors: The Haitian Revolution and the Early Transatlantic Haitian Gothic,” *Slavery and Abolition* 37 (2016): 183-205.

¹⁴ Fischer, 9.

¹⁵ David Brion Davis, *Revolutions: Reflections on American Equality and Foreign Liberations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 54.

¹⁶ Leonora Sansay, *Secret History; or, The Horrors of St. Domingo and Laura*, ed. Michael Drexler, (Toronto: Broadview, 2007); Rachel Hope Cleeves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

meaning that the Haitian Revolution possessed a redemptive quality.¹⁷ Far from mere paranoia, hysteria, and paternalistic “backwardness,” legitimately raising questions about any revolution’s possibilities and limits are a reminder that what was at stake was the realization of freedom, equality, and republican self-government.

Concern about Haiti dovetailed with the possibility of sharing a dangerous future destiny with the French Revolution. This made Americans who were initially enthusiastic about their own revolution inspiring its “sister republic” more cautious about close connections with the event of the Terror. While the partisan politics of the period and subsequent popular histories have sometimes referred to President Thomas Jefferson’s reputation as an over-enthusiastic Francophile, Jefferson was often cautious, and considered safe distance between the United States and France to be necessary. Certainly by the time he became president, referring to the United States metaphorically as a ship still moored off shore from its French counterpart, Jefferson was confident that the republican experiment in America would remain safe, preserved by distance, even if France should “blow up.”¹⁸ Americans subsequently set their revolution apart, not only from the French Revolution’s Terror, but also from the Haitian Revolution and its slave insurrection.

While Americans openly promoted their own revolutionary paradigm over and against others as non-violent, Holger Hoock’s focus on violence as the primary analytical and narrative emphasis introduces some potential future leveling. Revolutions and the formation of new nations are rarely bloodless, despite any conscious or unconscious desire to believe in an “orderly” and even quaint American Revolution. Wars for independence often become civil wars.¹⁹ Viewing the American Revolution through the lens of violence assesses what it wrought on the ground and in the new nation’s psyche, drawing attention to how it dealt with exit wounds. The process of contending with what that trauma has wrought can, perhaps with good reason, provide part of a larger framework for state-formation and nation-building exercises. After justifying separation from the British Empire, dissociation arguably underlay the new nation’s political philosophy of independence, the way it viewed other revolutions and nations, and its future foreign-relations goals.²⁰ In wishing to preserve their republican experiment, Americans tried to make revolution safe for America.²¹

¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Dessalines, “Liberty or Death. Proclamation. Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Governor General, to the People of Hayti,” 19 June 1804.

¹⁸ Thomas Jefferson to John Breckinridge, 29 January 1800, James P. McLure and J. Jefferson Looney, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Digital Ed.*, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/TSJN-01-31-02-0292> [accessed 19 April 2017]

¹⁹ Klooster, 162.

²⁰ For a study of the Declaration of Independence’s political philosophy, see Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (Liveright: New York, 2014).

²¹ Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine’s America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

Balances of Power

David Geggus's work has consistently demonstrated that the realities of the international balance of power had a way of asserting themselves, any efforts to distance the United States from Haiti notwithstanding. St. Domingue remained economically and strategically important to the United States and the major European colonial powers, and was far from peripheral in U.S. and Haitian foreign relations. While Northern and Southern states feared slave rebellion in the Early Republic as a significant possible threat to national security, Arthur Scherr sounded a call for caution. He challenges the tendencies of many historians to exaggerate Jefferson's fears of a slave rebellion spreading to the South when it came to non-recognition of Haiti.²² Moreover, given Haiti's importance, non-recognition could limit relations with it only so much. Julia Gaffield recently argued that no consistent plan existed to quarantine, if not starve, the first black republic, as some have suggested. Rather, other powers reacted to Haiti with "multiple layers of recognition and non-recognition."²³ In that context, Haiti crucially and successfully maintained its independence, demonstrating before 1825 that conducting trade without formal recognition was possible. As Carolyn Fick and others have stressed, Americans and Europeans were therefore not the only diplomatic actors in the Atlantic World; Haitians themselves actively negotiated between these powers, seizing opportunities even as relations could prove uneven. And when the threat of American expansion loomed, as it subsequently would in the 1860s and 1870s, Haiti could nonetheless maneuver itself effectively in order to benefit from U.S. power.²⁴

Most scholars acknowledge that St. Domingue's economic and strategic importance ultimately meant that it was difficult to "quarantine" or isolate completely. While the Early Republic's borders were porous and differences between foreign and domestic were not as sharp as they would subsequently become, foreign and domestic affected each other, but the dynamics and extent to which this was the case tend to vary.

The Haitian Revolution's reverberations through the Early Republic's print public sphere demonstrate that power politics and transnational connectivity also point to a further conclusion: that marginalizing and silencing in political and intellectual discourse are not always deliberately calculated. Silencing the Haitian Revolution in the United States did not necessarily mean hushing things up. Or making things up. James Alexander Dun's treatment of how Americans contended with the Haitian Revolution that they read about in Philadelphia's newspapers demonstrates that these Americans invented the Haitian Revolution. Dun illustrates the complex dynamics of a long-standing, ongoing practice and balancing act where Americans used foreign affairs—including foreign revolutions—to talk mostly about themselves. The same event—perhaps especially a traumatic one like the Haitian Revolution— could mean different

²² Arthur Scherr, *Thomas Jefferson's Haitian Policy: Myths and Realities* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 87-88.

²³ Julia Gaffield, *Haitian Connections in the Atlantic World: Recognition after Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); N. Pierre, "Liberal Trade in the Post-Colonial Americas: Haitian Leaders and British Agents, 1806-1813" *Journal of Haitian Studies* 12.1 (Spring 2015): 68-99.

²⁴ Carolyn Fick, "Revolutionary St. Domingue and the Emerging Atlantic: Paradigms of Sovereignty," and Laurent Dubois, "Frederick Douglass, Anténor Firmin, and the Making of U.S.-Haitian Relations," in Drexler and Dillon, 23-41, 110.

things to different people who read it through the context of more immediate local events on the ground. Degrees of proximity and distance were important to mediating information flow, the transmission of ideas, and the assessment of meaning. Marlene Daut and Raphael Hoermann therefore stress the need to view the Haitian Revolution—and any reconfiguration or marginalization thereof, including non-recognition of Haiti—through the transatlantic aspects of the public sphere of print, but also through the eyes of those who lived it. Lest the story of U.S.-Haitian relations become one primarily about how the Haitian Revolution affected the United States, Daut and Hoermann remind us that Haitians also contended with fraught relations with Americans: what, after all, did formal recognition mean to them? Haiti matters—but so do Haitians.²⁵ Emphasizing the United States as the one being globalized as opposed to the one doing the globalizing has been an important historiographical development since the end of the Cold War. But Haiti's own post-colonial republic of letters indicates that the United States and the European powers did not easily control discourse about Haiti's revolution.

The Haitian Revolution, Slavery, and Abolition

The Haitian Revolution's challenge to slavery in the Atlantic World lay in its advance of a paradigm of black abolitionism—the revolutionary slave—which existing literature has often placed outside the conventional narrative of the period's political ideas—instead of situating it alongside that narrative.²⁶ The politics of slavery and abolition were both international and national (and transnational). Either slavery was compatible with republican self-government and democracy or it was not. Answers to that question in the Atlantic World varied, and so did understandings of what was or was not compatible with progress. Were degrees of separation between the United States, Haiti, and their respective revolutions driven by race, if not racism? Tim Matthewson answered in the affirmative: a proslavery foreign policy is necessarily a racist one, especially given porous borders between foreign and domestic.²⁷ Yet, scholars studying the politics of slavery in the United States, even while not denying the seriousness of race and racism, have urged caution based on the complexity of the subject. The interrelated questions of slavery and abolition seen on a transatlantic scale cannot be reduced to racism: for the United States, progress

²⁵ James Alexander Dun, *Dangerous Neighbors: Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). For more on the practice of Americans using foreign relations to talk about themselves and to take the pulse of their own revolution, see Timothy Mason Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenges to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009). Marlene Daut, *Tropics of Haiti: Race and the Literary History of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1789-1865* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015); Daut, "The 'Alpha and Omega' of Haitian Literature," in Drexler and Dillon, 313. Also see Jeremy D. Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Hoermann, "A Very Hell of Horrors," 200.

²⁶ Bogues in Drexler and Dillon, 315, 325. As a recent corrective to the lack of focus on black abolitionism, Manisha Sinha has written a history of abolition in the United States in a transnational context, which puts African American resistance to slavery at the center of the story. See Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

²⁷ Tim Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy: Haitian-American Relations during the Early Republic* (Westport: Praeger, 2003).

was predicated on minding a balance of power that was not simply international but simultaneously internal.

One of the ways modernity took shape in the Early American Republic was in an emerging nation state that was a compound republic—a republic that was itself made of republics—and a nation state that was itself a state system. Preserving the American Revolution meant contending with slavery and the political interests of slaveholders.²⁸ Slavery affected everything it touched to lesser or greater degrees, such that Americans did not discuss slavery all of the time, but it arose even when they thought they were debating other issues. Moreover, Patrick Rael demonstrates how contending with and seeking to manage and balance slavery's divisive potential regarding constitutional power meant a “long death” for slavery in the United States—whereas “nowhere else in the Atlantic world did slavery die as it did in Haiti.”²⁹ Still, race and slavery issues hardly put a halt to the willingness of the United States to deal with Haiti. Ronald Angelo Johnson's treatment of the Adams Administration shows that for a brief moment, both the United States and Haiti were “emerging republics striving to escape European domination and finding their own way.”³⁰ The United States still established diplomatic ties and treated with St. Domingue on par with the European nations, even while not going so far as to recognize Haitian independence and endorse emancipation at home.³¹

The Haitian Revolution gave rise to—or at least was one of the drivers of—a subsequent continental shift in the nation's reorientation and in the politics of slavery, which contributed further to the process of Haiti's marginalization and slavery's entrenchment. Drexler and Dillon claim that a decisive geographic reorientation occurred with the simultaneous expansion of the slave economy westward in wake of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and the shutting down of the slave trade between the Caribbean and the United States in 1808. What resulted was a form of buffering. Labor regimes intensified as they became integrated into industrial technologies and international capital markets. The reorientation of the nation away from an Atlantic economy where the Caribbean was central meant redrawing the geography of the United States on a continental scale. Slaveholders' defenses of slavery became more aggressive, describing it as a positive good. Christa Dierksheide's recent study of amelioration as an answer to the slavery issue is significant in this context. For slaveholders in the United States and the British West Indies, slavery was “a civilizing system entirely compatible with progress.”³² Far from backward and parochial, slaveholders in the Anglosphere saw themselves as cosmopolitan and enlightened. As the

²⁸ John Craig Hammond, and Matthew Mason eds., *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), xvi.

²⁹ Patrick Rael, *Eighty-Eight Years: The Long Death of Slavery in the United States, 1777-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

³⁰ Ronald Angelo Johnson, *Diplomacy in Black and White: John Adams, Toussiant Louverture, and their New World Alliance* (Athens, GA: University Press of Georgia, 2014), 19.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

³² On the amelioration of slavery toward eventual emancipation as an alternative form of modernity, see Christa Dierksheide, *Amelioration and Empire: Progress & Slavery in the Plantation Americas* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 22.

United States expanded westward, so would slavery, which could be ameliorated, thus undercutting abolitionism and providing an alternative model of modernity to the radical revolution and liberty of the French and Haitian Revolutions. Amelioration should be seen as a contributing factor to the change in outlook where Haiti and the United States went from having parallel historical tracks to the United States being at the center and Haiti on the periphery. Revolutionary Haiti, which began as the double of the United States, ended up its *doppelgänger*, reformulated as a “disaster” or relatedly as an entertaining, theatrical “diversion” in American stage dramas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³³ Revolutionary Haiti could be reformulated in this negative image because slaveholders could formulate enlightened progress along another track: pro-slavery ideology was a dominant worldview in the eighteenth century, and universal rights and freedoms were not necessarily the only guiding principles of the modern world.³⁴

Be it as *doppelgänger*, disaster, or diversion, Haiti’s revolution nonetheless reverberated throughout the American imagination, psyche, and the politics of slavery in the Early Republic, challenging the previous tendency of the United States to sell the eventuality of its own antislavery future to “a candid world” which left emancipation to some future date.³⁵ As attitudes toward slavery hardened, Matthew Clavin argues, antislavery and proslavery groups within the United States contended with the image of Toussaint Louverture, former slave and leader of the Haitian Revolution, as a figure of either hope or dread, and the prospect of “the promise and peril of a second Haitian Revolution.” In addition, he draws attention to the moral dimension when he observes further that slavery was a more holistic problem than one that belonged to either politics or society.³⁶ Rather, “the Haitian Revolution proved that whenever slavery existed it was not just black lives that were in jeopardy.”³⁷ Slavery and the Haitian Revolution’s example, after all, confronted Americans with the larger question of the extent to which the moral value of human beings was consistent with ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’ Slavery affected the whole person. Peter Onuf has recently re-articulated this ongoing question: “black lives have always mattered. How they mattered throughout the entire course of American history, from the first colonial settlements onward, tells us who we are as a people.”³⁸

Further Opportunities for Research

³³ Drexler and Dillon, *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States*, 317, 269.

³⁴ Dierksheide, 16.

³⁵ Thomas Jefferson, *Declaration of Independence*. <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/>.

³⁶ Matthew J. Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009),

³⁷ Clavin, 9.

³⁸ Peter S. Onuf, “Four hundred years of African-American history,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 16 July 2016. http://www.richmond.com/opinion/their-opinion/guest-columnists/article_86caea63-53b2-5ca1-bf72-1ab9d9262be0.html [accessed 21 April 2017].

Comparatively speaking, if “the revolutionary politics of republicanism and an economy fueled by slave labor was a *constitutive* one in the broader Atlantic world,” then there is ample room to explore the Haitian and U.S. constitutions, side by side, not just as literature, but as law and legal writing and their roles as instruments of state-building technology.³⁹ How did the Anglo-American Atlantic World legal culture compare to its French Atlantic counterpart? How did legal writing intersect with literature, culture, and politics, and with the print public sphere—and where do slavery and abolitionism fit within that matrix?

Concern for ‘not privileging the nation state’ as the primary category of analysis has rightly driven a good deal of the most recent scholarship in U.S. foreign relations and in Early American history. Nonetheless, the Age of Revolutions and recalling the emergence of the nation state as a process presents opportunities for scholars to have it both ways—to think outside of the nation-state box while still bringing the nation state back in. Even when it is necessary and fruitful to think “about literature, culture, and politics transnationally, as forms of expression that mirrored the hemispheric scope of the slave trade; to think what might have been lost when culture and emancipatory politics were finally forced into the mold of the nation state...,”⁴⁰ the other half of that equation is that nation-state formation did not occur in a vacuum, and was a significant historical process in the eighteenth century.

Nation states as one particular expression of modernity no longer tend to receive as prominent a treatment as they once did when they were taken almost for granted. Yet, what historians and literary scholars aim to recover about the Haitian Revolution still constitutes the context from which the warp, woof, and characters of particular nations—their interests, their values, and what they profess to stand for—emerge. The Age of Revolution and the French, Haitian, and American Revolutions still raise questions about what kind of people, what kind of nations, arise from different revolutions. Sibylle Fischer’s emphasis on a heterogeneous approach to modernity means understanding the Haitian and American Revolutions on their own terms. But such understanding also requires attention to models of modernity, also dominant in the Anglo-American context during the same period, that stress pragmatism, gradual abolition, and amelioration—however uncomfortable the results may make us when we are used to thinking of abolitionists as espousing a morality closest to our own. This approach allows us to avoid reducing modernity and revolution to the American, French, and Haitian models while also allowing critical examination of each of them.⁴¹

In viewing the larger transnational context of the Age of Revolutions, historians of U.S.-Haitian relations may find it useful to cultivate more awareness of the Law of Nations. Much of the work comprising the ‘Atlantic Turn,’ often stressing globalization and the reality of multiculturalism on the ground, tends to focus on connectivity. This focus allows historians, especially of foreign relations and the Atlantic World,

³⁹ See, for example, Robert J. Reinstein, “Slavery, Executive Power, and International Law: The Haitian Revolution and American Constitutionalism,” *American Journal of Legal History* 141 (2013). For work on Constitutionalism and slavery, see Christopher Tomlins, *Freedom Bound: Law, Labor, and Civic Identity in Colonizing English America, 1580-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 2.

⁴¹ Dierksheide, 22.

to move beyond the nation-state as a seemingly essential category of analysis. But connectivity often produces tension and pressure points, which form important catalysts for nation-state formation, as they did in the case of the United States itself. Centralization and constitutional issues within the British Empire over paying for the Seven Years' War provided the tension over British imperial power that led to the formation of the United States, which Americans themselves would also confront when they formed an imperial government of their own.⁴² Moreover, in an Atlantic World where the European balance of power was disintegrating, the United States and its 'more perfect union' claimed to embody the ideal enlightened balance of power, which enabled it to enter the modern world. Within the balance of power in the United States, we might examine linkages between the Southern states and the West Indies regarding the larger questions of modernity, progress, and sectional tension within the union. The same anxieties over progress between the United States and other nations such as Haiti occurred within the United States itself. Carefully balancing similarities and differences is important to assessing and evaluating the uneasy closeness between Haiti and the United States.

It is within this balance of power that we might further assess the Haitian Revolution, the politics of slavery, the moral worth of human beings, and life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.⁴³

Wendy Wong Schirmer, a historian of Early America and U.S. foreign relations, received her Ph.D. from Temple University. She is currently working on a book project that examines the relationship between print culture, neutrality in the Early Republic, and the politics of slavery.

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⁴² David Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), Chapter 1.

⁴³ On the problem of federal union, parts and wholes, and modernity, see Peter S. Onuf, and Nicholas Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolution, 1776-1814* (Madison: Madison House, 1993), David C. Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), Onuf and Onuf, *Nations, Markets, and War: Modern History and the American Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006); Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).