

## DESSALINES'S AMERICAN PROCLAMATIONS OF THE HAITIAN INDEPENDENCE

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The moving public spectacle of the inauguration of the first black president of the United States in January of 2009 prompted many Haitians and friends of Haiti to think back to the ascension of the first black leader in a New World nation, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, in January of 1804. The coming to power of Dessalines coincided with the celebration of the new nation's declaration of independence. Thomas Jefferson described the U.S. Declaration of Independence as "an instrument pregnant with [...] the fate of the world."<sup>1</sup> It was in Haiti, as David Armitage has noted, that the declaration of independence as a genre began its trajectory from a single nation's document to a "global history" of "imitations and analogues" (11). Haiti's own *Acte d'indépendance* is hardly fully described as an "imitation" or "analogue," however; it stands as one of the most remarkable monuments of Black Atlantic textual history. But do we fully understand the circumstances of the articulation and dissemination of the Haitian declaration of independence? This article revisits the history of the proclamation(s) of Haiti's independence to explore evidence of Dessalines's mediated but essential authorial role, which I will argue has been downplayed for two centuries, in part because of Dessalines's later iconic imperial role. And yet, Dessalines's production of the poetics of the independence not only reveals the remarkable innovations of the early construction of Haiti as a nation or, in Benedict Anderson's terms, "an imagined community," it also highlights the early period of independence as a time of intense and intentional media dialogue between Haiti and the United States as neighboring republics in hemispheric history.

From the time of the independence, some disclaimers about Dessalines's authorship have been made in the name of racism rather than scholarship. The French *Journal des débats et lois du pouvoir législatif: et des actes du gouvernement*, which was one of the newspapers in France arguably the most open to representations and self-representations of the postcolonial government in former Saint-Domingue, hastened nevertheless to state "the

obvious,” which is to say the editor’s firm belief that all of Dessalines’s proclamations were authored by renegade whites: “Il est également inutile de faire observer que la proclamation qu’on vient de lire n’est l’ouvrage ni de Dessalines, qui ne sait pas signer son nom,<sup>2</sup> ni d’aucun individu de sa couleur”<sup>3</sup> (“Nor is there any need to state the obvious, which is to say that the above proclamation is not the work of Dessalines, who is unable to sign his own name, nor of any other individual of his color”). Someday, the paper asserted, the blacks would be only too happy to acknowledge that their “atrocious counsel” should be attributed in fact to “apostate whites, who came from Europe to turn these ferocious animals against their own kind.” Far from being a statesman with an *oeuvre*, Dessalines in this account is a ferocious animal and, at the same time, a puppet.

In Haitian historiography, nationalist pride inadvertently has fueled a parallel lack of attention to Dessalines’s textual legacy, through unquestioning acceptance of distinguished nineteenth-century Haitian historian Thomas Madiou’s account of Boisrond-Tonnerre’s scripting of the Declaration of Independence. David Geggus summarizes the story that has been transmitted from history to history through the centuries:

Louis Boisrond-Tonnerre, who wrote the declaration of independence, was passionately anti-European but, Paris-educated, of mixed racial descent, and several generations removed from slavery, he had little personal connection to Africa. Dessalines entrusted him with writing the independence proclamation on December 31st after rejecting as too staid an earlier attempt by another French-educated mulatto, Charéron. Boisrond supposedly declared, “To draw up the act of independence we need the skin of a white man for parchment, his skull for an inkwell, his blood for ink, and a bayonet for a pen.” He sat up all night to work on the document.<sup>4</sup>

This independence scene is often embellished with details such as multiple bottles of rum drained by Boisrond through the night as the ink flowed.<sup>5</sup> The next morning, according to Madiou, the General-in-Chief Dessalines, “couvert d’habits dorés, tenant entre ses doigts enrichis de pierreries l’acte de l’indépendance que venaient de signer au palais du gouvernement nos plus illustres guerriers, monta sur l’autel de la patrie” (146) (“draped in gold cloth, holding between fingers weighted with precious stones the Declaration of Independence that our most illustrious warriors had just signed in the presidential palace, mounted the altar of the fatherland”), where he presided over Boisrond’s reading of his (Boisrond’s) text. And

then, before the evening of that New Year's Day, Dessalines had the text published throughout the new nation of Haiti, and it was celebrated everywhere with “des fêtes magnifiques” (152) (“lavish parties”). The nation, in this account, was signed, sealed, and delivered in the course of one night and day.

Anyone who has ever developed mission statements or manifestoes may find the turnaround described by Madiou for the Haitian Declaration of Independence a bit surprising. Unfortunately, there is no known original, signed manuscript of the *Acte d'Indépendance* to confirm or contradict the timing described by Madiou; one of the earliest known manuscripts<sup>6</sup> is the one at the Archives nationales in Paris, clearly marked “duplicata,” and it yields no definitive clues as to its production on a given date or place, or its drafting and refinement; another version, at the Jamaican National Library, is equally mysterious in its relation to the lost original. Madiou's detail of the publication of the text throughout the state of Haiti raises even more questions about the original and allegedly simultaneously printed documents. It is not at all clear, in the chaos of the transition from colony to independent nation, that there were functioning newspapers in Haiti in the early months of 1804. Although the *Gazette du Cap* replaced the earlier *Gazette de St. Domingue*, and the *Gazette politique et commerciale* also came into existence in 1804,<sup>7</sup> neither is confirmed to have existed in early 1804. The *Gazette politique et commerciale d'Hayti* was first published on November 6. Madiou himself discusses documented details of the publication of some of Dessalines's 1804 proclamations but only in November 1804 editions of the *Gazette du Cap* and the *Gazette politique et commerciale* (*Histoire d'Haïti* 173, 174, and 183). Even if by “publication” Madiou meant not publication in newspapers but the posting of documents in public places, the challenges of travel through the Haitian countryside would not have allowed for instantaneous dissemination of the document throughout the new nation on the day of its actual composition.

The major accounts of the independence era prior to Madiou's massive history did not mention Boisrond's role, and when they referred to a Declaration of Independence, they appeared to refer solely to the information contained within the document, not to any contemporary accounts or otherwise privileged information. Marcus Rainsford, who wrote one of the earliest histories, published in 1805, simply made the following summary:

[Dessalines] appointed the first day of the year for a solemn pledge of hatred to the French government, and an abjuration of all ideas of conquest and aggrandizement.

The terms of this declaration of union are dreadful, and they were acceded to by the people with the enthusiasm he desired, and proclaimed throughout Haiti.<sup>8</sup>

Rainsford cites, twice, the secretary who signed the November 1803 proclamation, B. Aimé, but does not mention Boisrond-Tonnerre. Dubroca, in the 1806 version of his defamatory biography of Dessalines, mentions, without dating it, the “Declaration of treachery”<sup>9</sup> by Dessalines, Christophe, and Clerveaux, which undoubtedly refers to the November 1803 proclamation by those three generals, and he also mentions a proclamation of Dessalines as Governor General for life dating from May of 1804 (68), but there is no mention of a Declaration of Independence, and no allusion to Boisrond-Tonnerre.

The Haitian historian Baron de Vastey, in the 1819 *Essai sur les causes de la révolution et des guerres civiles d'Hayti*, which was translated into English in 1823, cites a convocation of military leaders “on the 1st of January, 1804, nearly two months after the expulsion of French,” with the purpose of taking “into consideration such measures as would be most conducive to the happiness, the liberty and the independence, of the people.”<sup>10</sup> Pamphile de Lacroix in 1819 likewise briefly mentions one text (apparently the first part of the Acte d'indépendance), in which on January 1 the black military leaders swore their “obéissance aveugle aux lois émanées de l'autorité de leur nouveau gouverneur-général”<sup>11</sup> (“blind obedience to the laws issuing from the authority of their new governor-general”); he does not mention Boisrond-Tonnerre. Placide Justin and James Barskett also note the signing on January 1, 1804 of a formal Declaration of Independence, but they appear to have derived all their historical information from the published document itself, and they make no mention of Boisrond.<sup>12</sup> Boisrond-Tonnerre himself, in his memoirs of the Revolutionary era, makes no mention of the independence proclamation and a heroic role for himself. His memoirs feature in the original appendix only an odd selection of correspondence from Pauline Bonaparte (the wife of General Leclerc and sister of Napoleon) and her relatives.

If one cannot confirm the existence of an original January 1, 1804 Acte d'indépendance that was composed by Boisrond-Tonnerre, or even of early accounts of Boisrond's role, and if the somewhat implausible accounts of an instantaneous nation-wide celebration of an imperially-splendid Dessalines's ascension (Dessalines, after all, at that time had been consecrated in the role of general-in-chief, not emperor) all originate in the account by Madiou, what does this suggest about the history of the genesis of the Haitian Declaration of Independence that has come down

to us through the ages? (Prior to moving on to this question, I would like to note that Madiou is generally an excellent source of documented historical information and a keen detective of inconsistencies around the paper trail. Although I contradict his account of the specific day of January 1, 1804, I do rely elsewhere in my work on his observations concerning other moments of complex Dessalinian textual genesis, notably his analysis of the backdating of Dessalines's imperial nomination and acceptance.<sup>13</sup>)

I will argue in this essay that Dessalines, not Boisrond, was the crucial conceptual voice in the main sections of the 1804 text we now accept as the Haitian Declaration of Independence or "Acte d'indépendance," as he was in his other proclamations from late 1803 through the final months of 1804. But this 1804 Acte d'indépendance constituted several different texts that may have been composed and disseminated over the course of several weeks in the first two months of 1804, rather than in the twenty-four hours of New Year's Eve and New Year's Day of 1804; they may subsequently have been united and backdated to January 1, 1804, to create an internationally justified symbolic architecture of the inauguration of the Independence. Dessalines's earlier, November 1803 text with generals Christophe and Clerveaux proclaiming the independence of Haiti—which I will refer to as the "proclamation of independence," as distinct from the Acte d'indépendance—also was plausibly an authentic Dessalinian text, and constitutes a crucial part of the textual legacy of the Haitian Independence; it was widely disseminated in the U.S. in early January of 1804 and interpreted in the U.S. as a declaration of independence. This multi-part symbolic architecture produced by Dessalines was intended to create a Haitian political identity and agency that would resonate on the world stage.

### **DESSALINES AS POLITICAL "AUTHOR"**

The Acte d'indépendance that Madiou framed as authored by Boisrond<sup>14</sup> is strongly marked by what we can recognize from earlier and later documents as the characteristic rhetorical and poetic ferocity of Dessalines. From the November 29 proclamation by Dessalines, Christophe, and Clerveaux, with its metaphor of the bloody tatters of the veil of prejudice, to the ardent rejection in the Acte d'indépendance of the fingerprints of a cruel French culture all over the laws, customs, and cities of Hayti, to the famous evocation of the irritated genie/genius of Haiti rising from the seas in the April 28 "I Have Avenged America" proclamation, Dessalines's late 1803 and early 1804 texts share recurrent types of symbolism, tone, structures of address, and strategies for persuasion and self-justification. In place of Toussaint's defensive and

arguably Romantic<sup>15</sup> rhetorical identification, Dessalines's voice calls into question the politics of European cultural models and militates for free access to a New World public sphere.

If Dessalines is not the primary authorial voice directing an admittedly complex redactive process, one would expect that the proclamations by different named secretaries<sup>16</sup> would differ sharply from one secretary to another. If Boisrond were the true Haitian génie ("genius") behind the devouring onslaught of ideas and images in the "Acte d'indépendance," this stylistic mark would, logically, be absent in texts by two other secretaries named in multiple Dessalines texts: B. Aimé and Juste Chanlatte. But there is a fluid, sustained, and critical structure of metaphor in the major Dessalinian texts, regardless of secretarial signature. Dessalines generally was attentive to established political tropes, but rather than reiterating them, he recast them so that they were simultaneously appropriated and critiqued.

For example, in the April 28 "I Have Avenged America" proclamation,<sup>17</sup> Dessalines redeploys the classical "tree of liberty" metaphor to striking effect.<sup>18</sup> The Revolutionary French had made the "tree of liberty" a centerpiece of popular celebrations of the Revolution. In Saint-Domingue, the "tree of liberty" also had been celebrated by the French commissioners and by Toussaint.<sup>19</sup> When Toussaint was seized and deported by the French, he proclaimed, "In overthrowing me, they have uprooted in Saint-Domingue only the trunk of the tree of the liberty of the blacks; it will grow back because its roots are deep and numerous."<sup>20</sup> The tree of liberty in Toussaint's Gonaïves statement had been transformed into the tree of liberty *of the blacks*. But for Dessalines, liberty in the mouths of the French was a euphemism for the veiled existence of slavery and prejudice, and so the tree of liberty became "l'arbre antique de l'esclavage et des préjugés" ("the ancient tree of slavery and prejudice"). Likewise, the French, renowned throughout the Western world as champions of the rights of man, were for Dessalines "les implacables ennemis des droits de l'homme" ("the implacable enemies of the rights of man"). He claimed to have given the signal through which the justice of God had worked through the slaves to bring down "the axe" upon this blighted tree.

But it is the further development of this metaphor that is truly striking. Dessalines imagines that the "infernal politics of the Europeans" had surrounded the tree with a triple layer of bronze armor, making it virtually invulnerable. Once the Haitians have felled the armored tree of slavery and prejudice, they place its triple bronze protection against their hearts like a coat of arms or a magical amulet. The contact of the bronze against

their hearts makes them as cruel as their enemies (ruled perhaps by “*la loi d’airain*,” “iron law”), and their vengeance becomes like an overflowing torrent—precisely the “lavalas” metaphor used in the identity of Aristide’s political party—carrying away everything that opposes it:

J’ai levé mon bras, trop longtemps retenu, sur leurs têtes coupables. A ce signal, qu’un Dieu juste a provoqué, vos mains, saintement armées, ont porté la hache sur l’arbre antique de l’esclavage et des préjugés. En vain le temps, et surtout la politique infernale des Européens, l’avaient environné d’un triple airain; vous avez dépouillé son armure, vous l’avez placée sur votre cœur, pour devenir (comme vos ennemis naturels), cruels, impitoyables. Tel qu’un torrent débordé qui gronde, arrache, entraîne, votre fougue vengeresse a tout emporté dans son cours impétueux. (June 4, New York Commercial Advertiser)

(I raised my arm, too long restrained, over their guilty heads. At this signal, unleashed by a just God, your hands, sacredly armed, brought down the axe on the ancient tree of slavery and prejudice. In vain had time, and above all the infernal politics of Europeans, layered it with a triple armor of bronze; you stripped it of its armor, you placed it over your heart, to become [like your natural enemies], cruel and merciless. Like an overflowing torrent that roars, uproots, and pulls, your vengeful fire carries away everything in its impetuous course.)

Similarly, in the November 1803 proclamation of independence (as distinct from the 1804 Acte d’indépendance), signed by the secretary B. Aimé, Dessalines approaches the problem of slavery and liberty not in tragic and sentimental terms like those of Toussaint, but with vivid and shocking symbolism meant to continually reintroduce the trauma of slavery from the perspective of an exuberant promise or threat that it would never again be tolerated: “Nous jurons de ne les jamais céder à aucune puissance, quelle qu’elle soit sur la terre; le voile effroyable du préjugé est déchiré en pièces; et il l’est à jamais. Malheur à quiconque oseroit tenter d’en rajuster les sanglans lambeaux!”<sup>21</sup> (“We swear never to yield them to any power on earth. The appalling veil of prejudice is torn to pieces and will stay sundered forever. Woe to whoever would dare to piece back together its bloody rags!”). This long metaphor infuses a strange corporeality into the abstract idea of prejudice: either the veil of prejudice has concealed wounded bodies, becoming bloodied in the process, or has

its own fantastical body, so that when it is torn apart by those who have suffered under it, it bleeds. Whether its sanguinary appearance owes to its aggressive nature or to the vengeance through which it has been dismantled is not clear. In either case, prejudice, an abstract psychological construct, is inseparable for Dessalines from the visceral evidence of violence. To use this violence in a new rhetoric that would serve in the crafting of new laws is the clear goal of this former slave as political speaker.

In direct contrast to the stylistic similarity of the independence texts generated by Dessalines, we can note that separate writings authored by Boisrond and also by Chanlatte in their own names are stylistically quite distinct from Dessalines's proclamations. The important memoirs of Boisrond-Tonnerre are nevertheless in some ways prosaic and disorganized in their recounting of Haitian revolutionary history when compared with the impassioned documents generated by Dessalines. Even where Boisrond speaks in dramatic and unforgiving terms, we do not find the highly condensed and fluid symbolism that characterizes Dessalines's texts. Here is an example: "Le moment des crimes est arrivé; lecteur impartial, vous allez juger quels furent les bourreaux et quelles furent les victimes"<sup>22</sup> ("The moment of the crimes was upon us. Impartial reader, you will be the judge of who played the role of executioner and victim"). In the concluding passages of his memoirs, Boisrond comes closer to the pell-mell metaphorical rhetoric of the proclamations than anywhere else, but each succeeding image is separate, not organically connected: the abyss can be measured by the eye; Haitians hold liberty in their hearts; they hold the keys to that liberty in their hands.

Haïtiens, que le courage d'un héros a relevés de l'anathème du préjugé, en lisant ces mémoires, vous mesurez de l'oeil l'abîme d'où il [Dessalines] vous a retirés! Et vous, esclaves de tous les pays, vous apprendrez par ce grand homme, que l'homme porte naturellement dans son coeur la liberté, et qu'il en tient les clés dans ses mains. (*Mémoires* 119)

(Haitians, freed of the anathema of prejudice by a hero's courage, in reading these memoirs, your eye will measure the abyss from which he [Dessalines] rescued you! And you, slaves of all countries, you will learn from this great man, that every man carries liberty in his heart, and that he holds the key to it in his hands.)

Juste Chanlatte, in some of his later writings, notably the 1824 *Histoire de la Catastrophe de Saint-Domingue*, did occasionally demonstrate significant overlap with the rhetoric of Dessalines. However, this overlap sometimes



appears to show the influence of Dessalines's proclamations on him rather than vice versa. Consider the following passage, which is virtually a pastiche of the metaphor (discussed above) of the veil of prejudice from the first proclamation of independence, signed by the secretary B. Aimé: "Quelle plaie horrible de l'humanité que nous venons de découvrir! Ah! Puisque nous avons eu le courage de soulever ce voile, hâtons-nous d'en déchirer les lambeaux dégoûtants!<sup>23</sup> Et puissent-ils ne jamais reparaître sur la surface du globe!"<sup>24</sup> ("What a horrible wound we discover in humanity! Oh! Because we had the courage to lift this veil, let us hurry to shred the rest of its disgusting tatters! And let them never again appear on the surface of the globe!")

Dessalines's secretaries were not necessarily poised to challenge European logic in the same ways as this former slave whose body was reputedly covered with the scars of punishment. At this time in Haitian history, the role of secretary most often indicated that the individual in question had received an education in France. (We can see from the case of Toussaint's oblique secretarial role in the very early stages of the Haitian Revolution that this was not invariably true, however). Geggus notes that "Chanlatte was raised in Paris and spent the period 1798-1803 in the United States. Boisrond was educated in Paris and lived there approximately 1792-1800, when he was aged 16-24" (*Haitian Revolutionary Studies*). Unfortunately, I have yet to find identifying information concerning the mysterious "B. Aimé" (occasionally rendered simply as "Aime" without the accent mark, or even "Amie"). His name resembles an abbreviation of "bien-aimé" ("beloved), which may signal that it was a pseudonym, or it could possibly be a sign of a less privileged racial/cultural background, since former slaves did not necessarily have a conventional division of Western familial patronym and first name and were sometimes known by descriptive nicknames.

It is clear that Dessalines's secretaries were (with an exception in one decree, which I will discuss below) well schooled in the conventions of political discourse of the time, and especially in French (and American) revolutionary discourse. This is the mimetic identification with France on the part of the Haitian elite that led the historian Joan Dayan to comment of Haitian political texts in general:

What strikes a reader of the various French proclamations during and after the revolution is the astonishing homogeneity of what was said, no matter who speaks or for what purpose. Debates in the revolutionary assemblies in Paris, the words of Georges-Jacques Danton and Robespierre

especially, once printed in newspapers in Saint-Domingue, were recycled as formulas or favored shibboleths by those who took on the burden of politics and the prerogative of French in the new republic.<sup>25</sup>

Charles Moran likewise believed that he had found a concrete example of the mimetic influence of French Revolutionary rhetorical conventions in the following lines from the “I Have Avenged America” speech: “What do I care what judgment contemporary and future races will pronounce against me? I have done my duty.” These lines showed, he argued, “practically the identical language used by Danton on a somewhat similar occasion” (“Que m’importe le jugement de la posterité sur cette mesure que commande la politique pourvu que je sauve mon pays?” [*Black Triumvirate* 118].)

Dessalines’s proclamations are undeniably mediated texts, produced in conjunction with educated advisors and secretaries who had mastery of the technology of writing and were familiar with a stock of distinguished political tropes. But his lack of formal education can be viewed not just as the absence of a skill, but also as a degree of distance from the Foucauldian “disciplining” of the imagination by the normative claims and mimetic conditioning of any culture’s educational system. Dessalines’s texts are his own texts not through writing but through redactive processes, and yet they are marked by an internal integrity as a corpus. Although they borrow from the “lights” of western Revolutionary thought, Dessalines’s proclamations manifest an ongoing effort to replace Western cultural hermeneutics with those from his own environment and history as a slave, and probably a maroon, in Saint-Domingue.

Prior to exploring the distinctly African diasporan poetics of Dessalines’s proclamations, however, it is important to note that his secretaries, privileged or not, all would be considered “black” by American standards, making their work a part of the New World African diasporan literary corpus. In the United States, the “one drop” rule, which was meant to make it impossible for the descendants of slaves to benefit from white ancestry, had the paradoxical effect of uniting all non-whites with African heritage within the category of “blacks”—a category that ultimately would prove politically useful for resistance to white hegemony. This same principle of a single political and racial community defined in opposition to white hegemony, regardless of degrees of “lightening” and generational distance from slavery, was a striking innovation of Dessalines’s 1805 constitution. In article 14, “exceptions of color” within the Haitian “family” are subordinated to a primary identity as blacks:

“the Haytians shall henceforth be known only by the generic appellation of *blacks*.”<sup>26</sup> (This political resolution was also meant to reflect a pragmatic future evolution. Since no whites with the title of master or proprietor were allowed to set foot on Haitian territory, the constitution assumes that differences of color within any given family would soon “necessarily” cease.) In colonial Saint-Domingue’s racial morphologies, people of mixed race like Boisrond-Tonnerre or Chanlatte would have been called *gens de couleur* (“people of color”) and therefore non-black, but by the terms of Dessalines’s constitution, they were all black. One can easily surmise, however, that the relationship to slavery in Dessalines’s proclamations is his own, rather than theirs.

The unity and singularity of content and the similarly distinctive style of Dessalines’s early Independence proclamations, regardless of secretarial signature, makes a strong case for Dessalines as the primary authorial voice in his proclamations. The case for the authenticity of his November 1803 proclamation of independence with Henry Christophe and Jacques Clerveaux further underscores his role as the voice of the Haitian Independence.

### **DESSALINES’S 1803 PROCLAMATION OF INDEPENDENCE**

The November 29 proclamation was dismissed flatly by Madiou as apocryphal, a fake. He came to this conclusion in part because the text was labeled “Au Fort Dauphin” on a day when Madiou believed Dessalines was in the Cap and in part because he had never found a manuscript version: “Nous ne l’avons rencontré nulle part, dans le pays, ni manuscrite, ni imprimée” (*Histoire d’Haïti* 125, fn.1). The first objection strikes me as inconclusive—the document may have been created over the course of more than one day and finalized in the absence of these leaders from Fort Dauphin. Madiou’s second point gives one pause, since the absence of a contemporaneous manuscript copy of the text is somewhat anomalous—one might have expected to find a copy of this important document in the *Notes historiques*<sup>27</sup> (*Historical Notes*) of Moreau de St. Méry. But when one considers that it was written in the days immediately following the routing of the French at Vertières and the final overthrow of the French colonial apparatus, it seems plausible that a level of administrative chaos and transition may have prevented this text from being copied before it was sent to the United States. The secretary B. Aimé definitely was the signatory to other texts collected by Moreau de St. Méry, such as a copy—from the American media—of the “I Have Avenged America” proclamation,<sup>28</sup> so we know that he was a real associate of Dessalines, which greatly reduces the possibility that the text was simply invented

elsewhere. Above all, the particular circumstances of the dissemination of this text suggest that it was prepared and directly mailed to the United States by B. Aimé, rather than being distributed in Haiti.

The November 29 proclamation arrived in the U.S. right in the expected timeframe for a Caribbean journey, which is to say two and a half or more weeks, with a poignant note requesting its publication. This note was written by Aimé and addressed to a Philadelphia newspaper publisher, Samuel Relf, who may have been known to the Haitian government through the significant community of expatriates from Saint-Domingue in Philadelphia. That note preceded the proclamation in this first publication and in many subsequent reproductions of the material elsewhere: through this history, Aimé's note arguably constitutes part of this first proclamation of independence. Relf was the publisher of the *Philadelphia Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, the first evening newspaper in Philadelphia, but the proclamation first appeared in *Poulson's Daily Advertiser*, on January 5, 1804 (and also, without the note from Aimé, in the *Aurora General Advertiser of Philadelphia* on January 5) and then in the *Gazette* on the evening of January 6.

Monsieur Relf,

Vous êtes invité, au nom des hommes libres de St. Domingue, et au nom de l'impartialité qui doit caractériser tout bon républicain, d'insérer dans votre prochain numéro la proclamation incluse. Vous obligerez infiniment

Votre très humble

B. Aimé

Secrétaire

(Mr. Relf,

You are invited, in the name of the freemen of St. Domingo, and, above all, of the impartiality which ought to be the stamp of a good republican to insert in your next issue, the enclosed proclamation.

You will infinitely oblige your most humble and obedient servant,

B. Aimé)

This proclamation by Dessalines, Christophe, and Clerveaux began with a forthright proclamation of independence: "L'Indépendance de Saint-Domingue est proclamée." It was clearly received as a proclamation of independence; the *New York Daily Advertiser* of January 7, 1804 preceded

the document with the note, “The following proclamation of independence of the island of St. Domingo has been published by the three principal military chiefs.” *The Trenton Federalist* (New Jersey) of January 9, 1804 noted “The Island of St. Domingo has been declared independent by the Negro Chiefs [...]” Several newspapers, including the *Middlebury Mercury* (Vermont) on January 18, included under the headline of the document the line “In the name of the black people and men of color in St. Domingo.” It sped through the American journalistic public sphere like wildfire, appearing in the following venues:

5 January	<i>Poulson’s Daily Advertiser</i>	Philadelphia, PA
6 January	<i>Evening Post</i>	New York, NY
	<i>Gazette of the United States</i>	Philadelphia, PA
7 January	<i>American Citizen</i>	New York, NY
	<i>Daily Advertiser</i>	New York, NY
9 January	<i>Trenton Federalist</i>	Trenton, NJ
	<i>Centinel of Freedom</i>	Newark, NJ
10 January	<i>Connecticut Herald</i>	New Haven, CT
	<i>Federal Republican</i>	Elizabethtown, NJ
12 January	<i>National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser</i>	Washington D.C.
13 January	<i>Newburyport Herald</i>	Newburyport, MA
14 January	<i>Mirror of the Times, &amp; General Advertiser</i>	Wilmington, DL
	<i>New England Repertory</i>	Newburyport, MA
	<i>Newport Mercury</i>	Newport, RI
	<i>Providence Gazette</i>	Providence, RI
	<i>Virginia Argus</i>	Richmond, VA
16 January	<i>Reporter</i>	Brattleboro, VT
	<i>Salem Register</i>	Salem, MA
17 January	<i>Republican Spy</i>	Boston, MA
	<i>Farmers’ Cabinet</i>	Amherst, MA
	<i>Oracle Post</i>	Portsmouth, NH
18 January	<i>Charleston Courier</i>	Charleston, SC
	<i>Courier</i>	Norwich, CT
	<i>Middlebury Mercury</i>	Middlebury, VT

19 January	<i>United States Chronicle</i>	Providence, RI
	<i>Windham Herald</i>	Windham, CT
20 January	<i>Eastern Argus</i>	Portland, ME
21 January	<i>Sun</i>	Dover, NH
24 January	<i>Bee</i>	Hudson, NY
	<i>Columbian Minerva</i>	Dedham, MA
	<i>Spooners Vermont Journal</i>	Windsor, VT
25 January	<i>Hampshire Gazette</i>	Northampton, MA
30 January	<i>Sun</i>	Pittsfield, MA
3 February	<i>Farmer's Gazette</i>	Sparta, Georgia
7 February	<i>Green Mountain Patriot</i>	Peacham, VT
11 February	<i>Political Observatory</i>	Walpole, NH
22 February	<i>Tennessee Gazette and Mero-District Advertiser</i>	Nashville, TN

The authenticity of this proclamation of independence is bolstered not only by this first American dissemination, but also by the fact that Aimé sent another letter to Mr. Relf, prefacing a decree from Dessalines dated February 29, on April 1, 1804. That letter in the *Philadelphia Gazette*, which was reprinted in other papers such as the *Chronicle Express* of New York on May 7, 1804, again appealed to Mr. Relf's impartiality:

Mr. Relf,

The government confiding in your impartiality, hopes that you will please to publish the enclosed Arrete [sic]. Although motives of a political nature required that this Arrete should at first be kept a secret, in order to insure its execution. It is at present the desire of the government to give it all possible publicity. —As evil disposed persons (of whom unfortunately there are too many) will not fail to charge us with causing an indiscriminate destruction of the whites, whether good or bad, who have remained in the island, it is right that the world should be undeceived by exposing the true motives which induced the government to a measure which has never affected and never will affect any but the guilty.

I salute you respectfully,

B. Aimé

Gonaïves, April 1, 1804

The decree in question ordered the arrest of “any persons who are or shall be known to have taken an active part in the different massacres and assassinations ordered by LeClerc or Rochambeau.” The names of these persons would be sent to the general in chief and made public, in order

to inform the nations of the world, that although we grant an asylum and a protection to those who act candidly and friendly towards us, nothing shall ever turn our vengeance from those murderers, who have bathed themselves with pleasure in the blood of the innocent children of Hayti.

Dessalines’s manifest desire to defend himself to a national or international public (“nations of the world”) through carefully coordinated interactions with American newspapers was also clearly laid out in a decree with the date of January 14, 1804 that was published in numerous U.S. newspapers, in French and in English, in late March of 1804. This decree, offering to pay for the repatriation of black and mixed race refugees from the Haitian Revolution in the U.S., contained the eloquent instructions that “this decree shall be printed, published, and posted up; and a copy thereof shall be immediately forwarded to the Congress of the United States.” Or in French, “Veut et entend que le dit arrête soit imprimé, publié et affiché, et qu’un exemplaire en soit adressé directement au Congrès des Etats-Unis d’Amérique.” Printed, published, and posted up, with copies to the center of the American political process: this was apparently the larger ambition, haphazardly implemented, of the government of Dessalines for his proclamations.

The above-mentioned decree is particularly interesting for the empathy expressed for blacks languishing in a country of slavery: “gémissant dans l’étendue des Etats Unis d’Amérique, retenus par défaut de moyens” (“suffering in the United States of America, for want of the means of returning”). It is also a notable text in the journalistic sphere because unlike the other proclamations issued from Haiti, the French versions do not correspond to the standards of educated French. *The United States Gazette* in Philadelphia on March 29 published a version that differed in several minute points from the version published in the *Evening Post* in New York on March 30. The *Gazette* version contains this line: “Il sera alloué aus le capitaines Américains, une some de quarante gourdes pour chaque individus qu’ils transporteront en ce pays.” (The *Gazette* translated and corrected this sentence to read “There shall be allowed to the captains of American vessels, the sum of forty dollars for each individual they may restore to this country”). The *Evening Post* rendered the same line as “Il sera alloué aux dis capitaines Américains, une some de quarante gourdes

pour unique individus qu'ils transporteront en ce pays." The discrepancies between the *Gazette* and *Evening Post* versions of the text presumably can be attributed to editors' attempts to transcribe with authenticity a text that was difficult to read, either in terms of its handwriting or its intended meaning. No secretary signed this document from Dessalines. Did the document reflect Dessalines's specific wording, in a French unique to his own understanding of the language? Or was it produced by a secretary who, like Dessalines, was manipulating a language in which he was not formally or fully educated? In either case, the text is a vestige of a moment in which Haitian leaders were seizing the power of print culture literally before their relationship to Western literacy was fully developed—*avant la lettre*....

### THE EVENTUAL ACTE D'INDÉPENDANCE

It is against this complex textual backdrop that the mystery of the Acte d'indépendance presents itself. I hazard no speculation concerning the verifiability or dates of the *assemblies or events* contextualized in the Declaration. There may well have been festivals of independence across the new nation of Haiti on January 1, 1804. But the documents that accompanied the further solidification of a nationally consecrated government and philosophy of the Independence would appear to have emerged over the course of the month of January and even February rather than all at once.

Unlike the November 1803 proclamation of independence, this text clearly was dedicated to Dessalines's fellow countrymen. The Haitian Acte d'indépendance has three main sections: a first brief statement in which the generals of the "indigenous" army attest their agreement to the project of independence as formulated by General in Chief Dessalines and swear to renounce France permanently; a second very long speech by Dessalines to the people of Haiti in which he articulates the nature of the historical turning point for the newly emancipated colony and urges that everyone take the same oath sworn by the generals in the first section; and a third brief section in which the assembled generals proclaim Dessalines Governor General of Haiti for life.

The first and second parts of the Acte are coherently related, but the odd pairing of the first and third parts of the "Acte" provide an internal textual suggestion that the "Acte" was composed as separate documents on separate occasions and only subsequently collated into one larger document. It seems very curious to have Dessalines referred to in the text and after his signature in the first part as "général en chef," but as "gouverneur général" in the third part. If the assembled generals had gone



to the trouble in one meeting of approving the authority of Dessalines as General in Chief, would they then have moved on in the same meeting to nominating him as Governor General without revising the first document? It is also significant that the names of the military signatories are not the same in these first and last parts of the Acte. The first part is signed by six *généraux de division*: Christophe, Pétion, Clerveaux, Geffrard, Vernet, Gabart, and then by twelve *généraux de brigade*, five *adjudans-généraux*, two *chefs de brigade*, ten *officiers de l'armée*, and Boisrond-Tonnerre, for 36 signatures in all. By contrast, the third part of the “Acte” is signed by seventeen officers in total, without the groupings by rank. Why such different signatories, and different titles for Dessalines, in a single document?

Jamaica is a key site of clues—but not proofs—about the emergence of the Haitian Acte d'indépendance, clues which are borne out and amplified in the U.S. media. In early January of 1804, the British Agent Edward Corbet, who had negotiated with Toussaint Louverture earlier in the decade, was sent by Governor Nugent of Jamaica to reinstate negotiations with General in Chief Dessalines. Captain Perkins brought the ship the *Tartare*, with Corbet aboard, to Port-au-Prince on January 15. Madiou reprints part of Dessalines's January 19 response to Nugent (*Histoire d'Haïti* 154). The diary of Lady Nugent, wife of Governor Nugent, recounts that Corbet returned from Haiti on the evening of January 24.<sup>29</sup> Corbet's January 25 notes outline his presentation to Nugent of a Haitian Declaration of Independence document:

I now beg leave to lay before your Excellency their declaration of Independence. This piece, wherever it may have been composed, was not published until after my arrival at Port-au-Prince, for the Copy I now have the honor of presenting to you had not been an hour from the press.<sup>30</sup>

This statement that Corbet had witnessed a publication process that occurred on some date between January 15 and the departure of the *Tartare* for Jamaica after Dessalines's January 19 letter to Nugent is invaluable but opaque. Corbet did not retain any printed materials from this period. The box in which the notes are found contains materials that date from January to March of 1804 and also from later dates. In this collection there is a complete manuscript copy of the Haitian “Acte d'indépendance,” dated January 1, 1804 and including all three parts. However, since it is a manuscript rather than a typeset document, we know that it is not the version to which Corbet referred in his report. The printed copy to which Corbet refers could therefore have been only the first part of the Acte or the first and second parts but not the third, and

it definitely contradicts the notion that the text was published throughout Haiti on January 1. On the other hand, it confirms that the text, in some form, was published early in the second half of January.

The U.S. publication of the “Acte” suggests separate moments of the composition and publication of different parts of the document. The first U.S. publication of a translation of a part of the “Acte” that I have found dates from March 7, in the *Evening Post* of New York. It was prefaced by this comment: “Extract from a Proclamation issued by Dessalines, General in Chief of the indegenous [sic] army at Saint Domingo, on or about the 16th of January last—.” The editor of the *Evening Post* provided no further information, unfortunately, about the provenance of the text nor about the means of arriving at a mid-January date.

The March 7 document in the *Evening Post* amounts to paragraphs three to eight of the long prose statement by Dessalines that forms the middle part of the “Acte.” Here is the *Evening Post* text in its entirety:

The First Year of the Independence of the People of Hayti  
Citizens Countrymen,

I have assembled on this solemn day those brave military men, who, on the eve of collecting the last breath of liberty, have lavished their blood to save it—Those Generals who have guided your efforts against tyranny, have not yet done enough for your happiness. The French name still hangs your country with mourning—every thing traces back the remembrance of the cruelties of that butchering people:—Our laws, our manners, our towns, all still wear the French image—what do I say! There exists Frenchmen [sic] in our Island, and you think yourselves free and independent of that Republic, which, it is true, has combated [sic] against all nations, but which has never vanquished those who would be free.

Ah! What victims of credulity and indulgence during fourteen years—Vanquished, not by French arms, but by the deceitful eloquence of the Proclamations of their agents. When shall we get tired of breathing the same air with them? What have we in common with a people who commit such cruelties? Compared to our patient moderation, their colour to ours, the extent of the seas which separate us, our avenging clime—all tell us sufficiently that they are not our brothers—that they never will become so—and that if they find refuge amongst us, they will still be the plotters of

troubles and divisions.

Indegenous [sic] Citizens, Men, Women, Girls and Children—cast your eyes around every part of this Island—Seek you therein your wives, your husbands, your brothers, your sisters?—what do I say—seek you therein your children, your sucking babes? What is become of them?—the prey of French vultures! Instead of these endearing objects, the eye, dismayed, beholds their assassins, like tigers trickling yet with blood, whose presence reproaches your insensibility and guilty slowness in avenging them.

Remember that you have done nothing if you do not give nations a terrible but just example of that vengeance, which a people, proud of having recovered their liberty and jealous of maintaining it, ought to exercise.—Let us terrify all those who would dare ravish it from us—Let us begin with the French.

On the same date, March 7, another version began to circulate widely. *The Daily Advertiser* of New York contextualized it as a fragment of a longer document provided by a survivor from Les Cayes: “By a gentleman Who Lately escaped, with other unfortunate sufferers from Aux Cayes, we are favoured with the following.” This document was an entirely different translation, suggesting that it was in fact produced from a different copy of the text. It provides one half of a paragraph that is missing in the *Evening Post* version:

Why do you delay to appease their manes.<sup>31</sup> Do you think your remains may repose in peace with those of your fathers, before you chase away tyranny? Your ashes in your tombs, without having avenged them? No, their bones would repulse yours with scorn.

The editor of the *Daily Advertiser* closed the long text with the reflection, “[The above is evidently in a very imperfect and mutilated form; but to some of our readers, we believe, it will not be altogether uninteresting.]”

The status of the March 7 text as the first American publication is complicated by a reference to the Haitian text that appears in on March 10, identified as “News from Charleston” and dated February 23: “A Proclamation of Dessalines, the Brigand Commander of St. Domingo, issued about the first of January, has been received at Kingston—in which he has declared that Island Independent, under the aboriginal name of *D’Hayte*.” The timing of its arrival in Charleston, however, suggests that

the news probably relates to Corbet's report in late January.

On March 24, the New York *Commercial Advertiser* published two more texts, correlating to the first and third parts of the "Acte d'indépendance," with this note: "The following article contains the sentiments and proceedings of General Dessalines, and his officers, respecting their future operations in the island of Hayti." This same document was published in *Poulson's Daily Advertiser* on March 27 with a note attesting to receipt of "a complete copy of the discourse of General Dessalines, which preceded the Declaration of Independence of that Island." This document is the first version to include a date, January 1.

This late March publication of the hitherto unpublished first and third parts of the "Acte" suggests that the full text had not been sent to the U.S. until late February and that possibly even then they were not considered of a piece with the second part. Here are the two texts:

#### LIBERTY or DEATH

##### Army Indigenous.

This day, the first of January, 1804, the General in Chief of the Army convoked for the purpose of taking the necessary measures for establishing the happiness of the country, having made known to the Generals assembled his true sentiments, to assure for ever to the indigenous of Hayti a permanent government, the object of his lively solicitude, and which he has done in a discourse tending to convey to Foreign Powers his resolution to render the country independent, and to secure to it the enjoyment of a liberty consecrated to the blood of the people of this island; and after having collected the opinion of each, demanded that every one of the Generals present, should take the oath to renounce France for ever, to die rather than live under its domination, and to combat with the last breath for Independence. The generals animated with these sacred principles and having given their unanimous concurrence to the well devised project of independence, have all sworn to posterity, and to the whole universe, to renounce for ever the authority of France, and to die rather than live under its domination. Done at Gonaïves the first day of the independence of Hayti, 1st Jan. 1804. [Here followed the signatures of Dessalines, Clervaux, Christophe, Pétion, Geffrard, Vernet, Gabart, (Divisionary generals) P. Romain, J. Capois, and others.]

In the Name of the People of Hayti,

We, Generals and Chiefs of the armies of the Isle of Hayti, penetrated with the knowledge of the good services which we have experienced from the General in Chief John James Dessalines, the Protector of the Liberty which is enjoyed by the People, in the name of that Liberty, in the name of Independence, and in the name of the People, whom he has rendered happy; We proclaim him Governor General of Hayti for life, and we promise to pay implicit obedience to the laws issued under his authority, the only one which we shall ever acknowledge: We give him the right to proclaim War, to make peace, and to nominate his successor. Done at head quarters at Gonaïves, the 1st January 1804, first day of the independence of Hayti. Signed, etc. (as above)

Interestingly, the order of the signatures on the document is not exactly the same as that of the Archives nationales text, but clearly the editor simply meant to summarize the general import of the signatures.

To my knowledge, no complete version of the Acte d'indépendance ever appeared in the United States in 1804. Not only was the long middle part by Dessalines abridged, but the three separate parts of the "Acte" were not published together, as one entity related to a single ceremony. Although the two major forms of the story of the Acte d'indépendance were fairly widely published in the U.S., they were certainly less broadly disseminated, and in more fragmentary form, than the late November 1803 proclamation of independence.

Prior to the news of the massacre of many of the remaining whites in Haiti, some American newspapers openly expressed their support for Haiti's independence documents. An editorial in the *Aurora General Advertiser* (New York) of 28 March 1804 stated:

We have read part of the address of the black general Dessalines, on the declaration of the independence of St. Domingo. On this subject we presume there are few who entertain dissimilar sentiments: the right to proclaim independence was unquestionably inherent in the people of that island, and there is not a doubt but that the colonial system, pursued since the assumption of the supreme authority of France by Bonaparte, provoked the severance at an earlier period than it would otherwise have taken place. The United States are necessarily much interested in St. Domingo.

This early “sentiment” was bolstered by overt appreciation of the commercial possibilities for the U.S. as a potentially privileged trade partner with Saint-Domingue and likewise by hostility and rivalry toward the government of Bonaparte. An increasing flow of news about the massacre of the remaining whites on Saint-Domingue put an end to stated perceptions that “the right to proclaim independence was unquestionably inherent in the people of that island.”

And only a few months later, the dialogic relationship—simultaneously mimetic and contestatory—between the Haitian and American declarations of independence would be replaced by a new dialogism between Dessalines's vision of independence and the founding of the French Empire of Napoleon Bonaparte. The year 1804 would end as a European/New World “imperial year,” as noted in the *Gazette* (Portland, Maine) on December 3, 1804:

Eighteen Hundred Four, will in [the] future be distinguished as the *Imperial year*; having given birth to four new Emperors in the Old and New World; viz. *Napoleon I*, Emperor of France; *Francis I*, Emperor of Austria; *Jacques I*, Emperor of Hayti; and *Frederick I*, Emperor of Brandenburg [...]

The Haitian Empire, emerging within an “imperial year,” would largely cover the historical traces of Dessalines's early theorizations of national independence, not least through historians' tendency to recontextualize him not as the firebrand voice of a new national identity echoing purposefully throughout the Americas but as a proto-Napoleonic imperial figurehead, “draped in gold cloth, holding between fingers weighted with precious stones the Declaration of Independence” (Madiou 146).

The U.S., despite its avid consumption of the news of the Haitian independence, far beyond the borders of small abolitionist communities, failed to legally recognize Haiti's independence in 1804 or even after the belated French recognition of the postcolony in 1825, waiting instead to do so under Abraham Lincoln in 1862. The complex paper trail of the Haitian independence texts highlights the true infrastructural and international marginalization of a new republic founded by former slaves rather than by dissenting countrymen of the colonial metropole. But it also highlights a moment when, situated between a rock and a hard place, Haiti attempted to awaken empathic and egalitarian responses from white postcolonial hemispheric neighbors and had glimmers of success. This history of the Haitian independence in the U.S. media is highly pertinent to reading the revolutionary American election of Barack Obama.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Cited in David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) 3.
- <sup>2</sup> Dessalines in fact was able to sign his name; examples of his signature are photographed in *L'Homme d'airain* by Timoléon C. Brutus (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: Imp. N.A. Théodore 1947) and *Dessalines: L'Esclave devenu empereur*, by Gaétan Mentor (Pétionville, Haiti: Gaétan Mentor, 2003).
- <sup>3</sup> Editorial comment following the reprinting of a part of the Haitian Declaration of Independence, translated from a March 8 publication in New York *Journal des débats et lois du pouvoir législative: et des actes du gouvernement*, May 6, 1804.
- <sup>4</sup> David Patrick Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002) 208.
- <sup>5</sup> See Charles Moran, *Black Triumvirate: A Study of Louverture, Dessalines, Christophe—The Men Who Made Haiti* (New York: Exposition Press, 1957) 117.
- <sup>6</sup> Archives Nationales, Paris, France (CARAN), AF III 210.
- <sup>7</sup> See Justin Emmanuel Castera, *Bref coup d'oeil sur la presse haïtienne, 1764-1850* (Port-au-Prince, Haïti: Imprimerie Henri Deschamps, 1986).
- <sup>8</sup> Marcus Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti, Comprehending a View of the Principal Transactions in the Revolution of Saint Domingo* (London, Albion Press, 1805) 348.
- <sup>9</sup> Louis Dubroca, *Vida de J. J. Dessalines, gefe [sic] de los negros de Santo Domingo* (Mexico: Zúñiga y Ontiveras, 1806) 47.
- <sup>10</sup> Pompey-Valentin, Baron de Vastey, *An Essay on the Causes of the Revolution and the Civil Wars of Hayti, being a sequel to the political remarks upon certain French publications and journals concerning Hayti*, trans. W.H. M.B. (Exeter: Printed at the Western Luminary Office, For the Translator, For Private Circulation, 1823) 42-3. The reference for the French original is Baron de Vastey, *Essai sur les causes de la révolution et des guerres civiles d'Hayti, faisant suite aux réflexions politiques sur quelques ouvrages et journaux français, concernant Hayti* (Sans-Souci, Hayti: De l'Imprimerie royale, 1819) 42-3.
- <sup>11</sup> Pamphile de Lacroix, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la révolution de Saint-Domingue* (Paris: Pillet aîné, 1819) 254.
- <sup>12</sup> Placide Justin and James Barskett, *Histoire politique et statistique de l'île d'Hayti* (Paris: Brière, Libraire, 1826) 411.
- <sup>13</sup> I account for Madiou's departure from plausibility concerning the textual and ceremonial inauguration of the Haitian Independence in two ways. The first concerns his unconscious respect for the folkloric abridging and enhancement that arise around primordially important historical transitions to independence, as in the anecdotes of George Washington and the cherry tree, Betsy Ross and the American flag, and the midnight ride of Paul Revere, all of which

crystallize events or ideology in both memorable and altered or shorthand form. The second concerns his lack of detailed firsthand familiarity with the U.S. journalistic publication history of Dessalines's proclamations. It has not become obvious until the emergence of new digital historical newspaper archives such as "America's Historical Newspapers" (Readex) that the Haitians pursued widespread publication of Independence documents in the U.S. media, partly in relation to Dessalines's pan-American leanings, and partly in relation to the apparent temporary collapse of Saint-Domingue's earlier journalistic edifice. In relation to the lack of confirmed publication data in Haiti, U.S. newspapers fill in crucial gaps in following the genesis and dissemination of documents in the first months of the Independence.

- <sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that in his larger contextualization of the process, Madiou does not contextualize Dessalines as external to the process of the production of the document, nor does he cast Boisrond as the document's sole author. On the contrary, Madiou's larger account describes a collective act of composition in which Dessalines's editorial comments were authoritative. He states that Dessalines had set the date of January 1 for the proclamation and put all of his secretaries, including but not limited to Jean-Jacques Charéron, to work on its composition. After several days, the secretarial team was still laboring. On December 31, Dessalines read this draft, which was heavily influenced by the American Declaration of Independence, and conveyed his disagreement with numerous elements of its style and content. After Boisrond made the famous statement already cited above, Dessalines charged him with the task of representing his (Dessalines's) feelings to the public (3:144-5). It is plausible that he had instructed Boisrond as to the precise nature of those feelings. So even Madiou appears to back away from the idea of a pure authorial act by Boisrond-Tonnerre.
- <sup>15</sup> In "Toussaint Louverture, Spin Doctor? Launching the Haitian Revolution in the French Media" I argued that Toussaint Louverture "figures in the ranks of the French or francophone pre-Romantics, including Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Rousseau, who graft subjectivity and *citoyenneté* together." *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. Doris L. Garraway (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008) 59.
- <sup>16</sup> Who were the secretaries of Dessalines, besides the three whose names certify the authenticity of his most prominent proclamations, which is to say, Boisrond-Tonnerre, Chanlatte, and Aimé? Timoléon Brutus describes them as a diverse and competitive group: "Les secrétaires dont il s'inspirait avec confiance ne s'entendaient pas sur un même sujet. Le bouillonnant Boisrond-Tonnerre, quoique moins expérimenté que Juste Chanlatte à qui l'on prêtait beaucoup plus de bon sens et aussi une science plus froide, flattait si habilement le chef, que sa voix l'emportait presque toujours sur le raisonnement pondéré des autres. Bazalais, Charéron, Dupuy, Diaquoi, Carbonne, Roux parmi les conseillers privés de Dessalines, restaient des secrétaires modérés." *L'Homme d'Airain: Etude monographique sur Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Fondateur de la nation haïtienne* (Port-



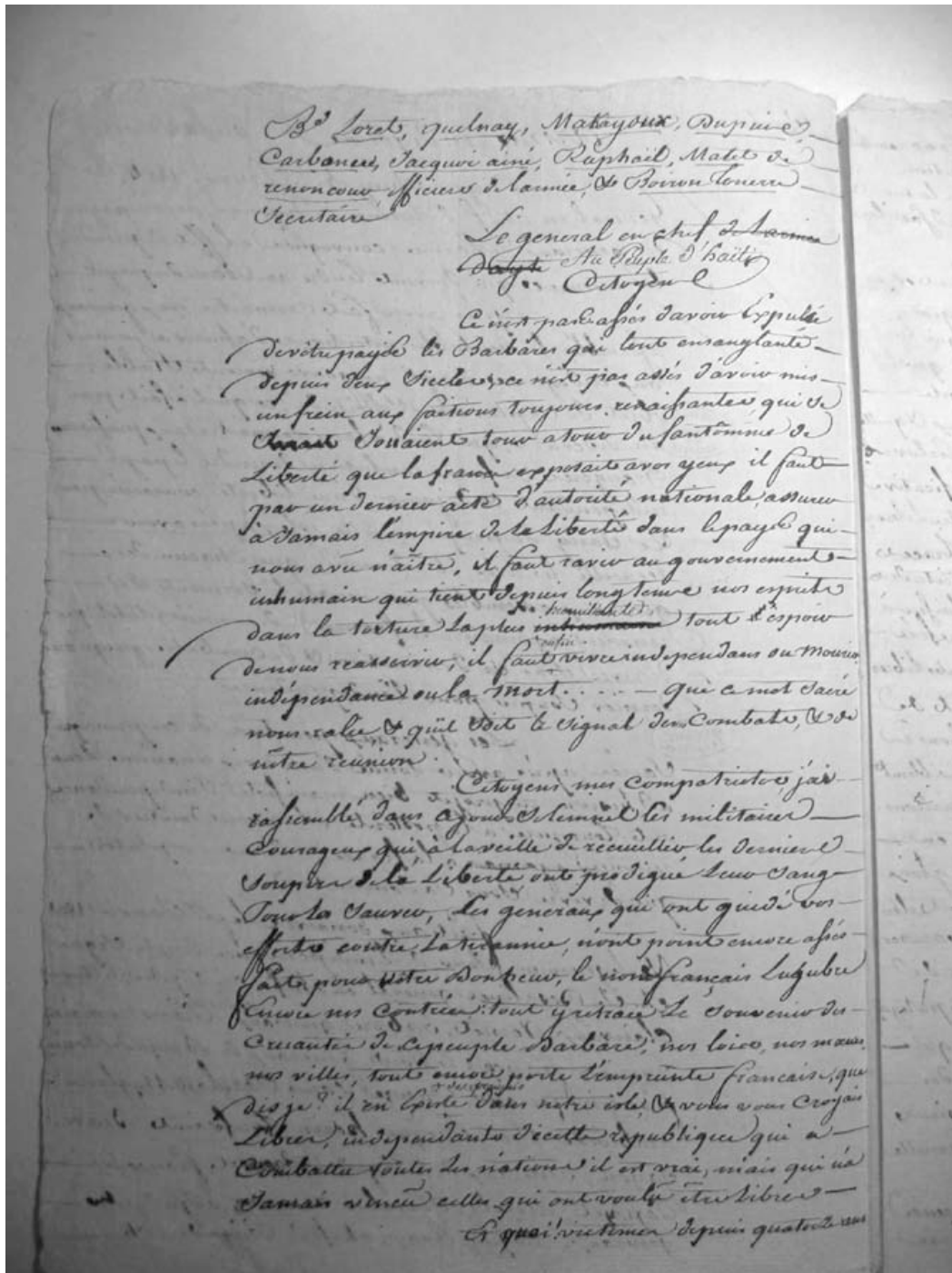
au-Prince, Haiti: Imprimerie N.A. Théodore, 1946) 1:353.

- <sup>17</sup> The earliest version of this text that I have located in the U.S. media dates from June 4, in the *New York Commercial Advertiser*. In France, the *Journal des Débats* published what it called “l’extrait d’une proclamation qui fut publiée par Dessalines, le 28 avril dernier,” on August 7, 1804. The *Journal* did not specify the source of the original French publication, and the extract given is derived from an American newspaper, documented only with the following reference: “*Nouvelles étrangères, Etats-Unis d’Amérique*, New Yorck [sic] 18 juin.” The French version is somewhat abbreviated in comparison with American versions. The full French version of the text is, like all the major Haitian proclamations from the Independence period, published in Linstant de Pradine, S., ed., *Recueil général des lois et des actes du Gouvernement d’Haïti, 1804-1808*. Paris: A. Durand, Pédone-Lauriel, 1886.
- <sup>18</sup> My discussion of Dessalines’s recasting of the tree of liberty metaphor draws on material previously published in the *International Journal of Francophone Studies*. That article in general develops the question of Dessalines’s authorial voice in ways that complement the research provided here. See “Before Malcolm X, Dessalines: A ‘French’ Tradition of Black Atlantic Radicalism,” *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, special issue on “Boundaries and Limits of the Postcolonial,” co-edited by Alec Hargreaves and Jean-Marc Mourra, 10:3 (2007): 329-342.
- <sup>19</sup> See Agent Roume, “Discours,” 16 Pluviôse An 7 (Port-Républicain: Gauchet et Co., 1798), 1.
- <sup>20</sup> Cited in Pamphile de Lacroix: “He addressed these memorable words to the division chief Savary, commander of the vessel: ‘In overthrowing me, they have only knocked over in Saint-Domingue the trunk of the tree of the liberty of the blacks; it will grow back by the roots, for they are deep and numerous.’” *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire de Saint-Domingue* (Paris: Pillet aîné, 1819) 2 :203.
- <sup>21</sup> Proclamation of November 29, 1803 signed by “Dessalines, Christophe, Clerveaux” and the secretary B. Aimé, published in the *Journal des débats* of February 21, 1804. This text had been published much earlier in the United States, in the *Republican Watch Tower* in New York on January 11, 1804. The French copy, with many other news stories about Saint-Domingue and Jamaica, was apparently translated from articles in English papers published in early February, although a couple of the news items have their source in New York.
- <sup>22</sup> Louis-Félix Boisrond Tonnerre, *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire d’Haïti* (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: Editions des Antilles A.A., 1991) 69.
- <sup>23</sup> “Dégoutans” (“dégoutant”) is one of many archaic spellings found in these texts from the early nineteenth century journalistic sphere. I have noted “sic” only by the most jarring of these spellings. Many of the translation choices made in nineteenth century newspapers may also seem awkward to contemporary readers.

- <sup>24</sup> AB.J. Bouvet de Cressé [and Juste Chanlatte], *Histoire de la Catastrophe de Saint-Domingue* (Paris: Librairie de Peytieux, 1824) 5.
- <sup>25</sup> Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 5.
- <sup>26</sup> “Constitution of Hayti,” July 15, 1805, *Commercial Advertiser*.
- <sup>27</sup> The voluminous *Notes historiques* (“*Historical Notes*”) of the colonist Moreau de Saint-Méry are housed in the *Archives d’Outre-mer* in Aix-en-Provence, France. Moreau was born in Martinique in 1750 and died in Paris in 1819, but he lived and worked in Saint-Domingue for long enough to write a richly detailed and authoritative ethnographic description of the French colony, the *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de Saint-Domingue*, published in 1796. The *Historical Notes* consist not only of information used in or left over from the *Description*, but of texts collected and never published. The Notes were sometimes written or transcribed by unidentified secretaries who were individually responsible for long sections of material.
- <sup>28</sup> See B. Aimé’s copy of a military proclamation by Dessalines, with the notation “Pour copie fidèle, signé Aime secrétaire. Prise dans la feuille de New York du 3 Mai et copié littéralement.” Archives d’Outre-mer (AOM), F3 141 545-6.
- <sup>29</sup> Lady Maria Nugent, *Lady Nugent’s Journal*, ed. Frank Cundall (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1907) 250.
- <sup>30</sup> I am very grateful to Julia Gaffield, a doctoral student in History at Duke University, for sharing this detail of her outstanding research in Kingston, which confirmed a part of the puzzle that had previously been featured in drafts of this chapter only in speculative form. This quote comes from “No. 1 Report from Edward Corbet esq, dated January 25, 1804,” Jamaican National Library, 784 N, MS 72 Box 3.
- <sup>31</sup> The translation choice of “manes” again reflects the operative nineteenth century sensibility.

Liberte  
 Arrivee indigene ou la mort  
 Aujourd'hui 8 Janvier 1804 Le  
 General en chef de l'armee indigene, accompagne  
 des generaux de l'armee, convoque a l'effet de prendre  
 les mesures qui doivent tendre au bonheur du pays  
 apres avoir fait connaitre aux generaux  
 assemblez ses véritables intentions d'apurer a jamais  
 l'ame indigene d'ayste un gouvernement stable,  
 objet de vœux de l'indigene, de ce qui a fait par  
 un discours, qui tend a faire connaitre aux puissances  
 Etrangeres sa ferme resolution de rendre le pays  
 independant d'aujourd'hui d'une liberte consacree par  
 le sang du peuple de cette isle, apres avoir  
 recueilli les avis, il a demande que chacun des  
 generaux assemblez prononcât le serment de  
 renoncer a jamais a la France, de mourir plutôt que  
 de vivre sous sa domination, & de combattre jusqu'au  
 dernier soupir pour l'indépendance.  
 Les generaux prenant de ces principes  
 sans avoir eu besoin d'une voix unanime leur  
 adhesion au projet bien manifeste d'indépendance,  
 ont tous juré a la posterite, de mourir plutôt  
 que de vivre sous sa domination.  
 Fait aux Bonaires le 8 Janvier 1804  
 Le premier sous de l'indépendance Bayle. Signe  
 J. J. Desalme general en chef, Christophe, Delthion  
 Clairon, Verne, Sabare, generaux, Pierre romain  
 Guerin, Francois la Bour, generaux de Brigade, Louis  
 Francon, Porand, Cange, Louis Baglais, Magloire  
 Ambroise, Jean Jacques beron, Louis saint, Diave  
 Rayon, Generaux de Brigade, Joseph, Francois  
 Papayot, Morely, Chevalier marie, adjudants  
 generaux, Maguy, Roup, chef de Brigade, Charreau

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de votre crédulité & de votre indulgence vaincue non  
 par les armes françaises, mais par la pitoyable éloquence  
 des proclamations de leurs agens, qu'après nous l'afrique  
 nous serz plus de nous à ce que nous ne sommes  
 commun avec ce peuple Bourreau? Sa cruauté  
 comparée à notre patiente modération, sa couleur  
 La nôtre, l'étendue de nos mers, qui nous séparent  
 Climat de vengeance nous séparent qui ne sont pas nos  
 frères, qui ne se vengent jamais & qui se  
 trouvent un atelle parmi nous, de seront encore  
 les machinations de nos troubles & de nos divisions  
 Citoyens Indigènes femme, fille,  
 Ne crainte portez vos regards sur toutes les parties  
 de cette île, cherchez y vos époux, vous, vos maris,  
 vos vos frères, vos vos sœurs, que des je? cherchez  
 y vos enfans; vos enfans à la mamelle qui sont de  
 Devenus? j'aimis de l'idée. . . . La proie de ces vautours  
 qu'ils de ces victimes entrecroisées, votre ~~œil~~  
 Conscience n'ajoutent que leur a assassin, qui les  
 Lèvres dégoutant encore de leur sang & sont l'aspect  
 présence vous reproche encore votre insensibilité & votre  
 Couvrable lenteur à les venger, qu'attendez vous pour  
 apaiser leurs mères, chargez que vous voulez que  
 vos vices reposent auprès de vos pères quand vous  
 avez chassé la tyrannie, descendez vous dans leurs  
 tombes sans les avoir vengés? non leurs femmes  
 repousseront les vôtres, de vous hommes précieux,  
 généraux ~~intrepides~~ intrepides, qui insensibles à  
 vos propres malheurs avez ~~la~~ la liberté  
 en lui prodiguant tout votre sang, sachiez que vous  
 n'avez rien fait si vous ne donnez aux nations un  
 Exemple terrible mais juste de la vengeance qui  
 doit exercer au peuple fier d'avoir recouvré la liberté  
 de talons de la maintenir. effrayons tous ceux qui  
 osent s'attenter de nous la rendre encore, commençons  
 par les français, qu'ils finissent en attendant  
 3<sup>e</sup>

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Côté, sinon de ce côté par le Souverain des Français  
 qu'ils y ont exercé, au moins par la résolution  
 terrible que nous allons prendre de servir à la mort  
 quiconque ni Français, ni Français, ni Français  
 le territoire de la liberté.

Nous avons été et nous sommes  
 libres, pour nous mêmes, imitons l'enfant qui  
 grandit; son propre poids brise la liasse qui lui  
 devient inutile de l'enfant dans le monde, quel  
 peuple a combattu pour nous? quel peuple  
 voudrait recueillir le fruit de nos travaux & quelle  
 déshonneur <sup>absurde</sup> <sup>de</sup> vaincre pour être esclaves  
 Réponds aux Français cette ignominieuse qualification  
 ils ont vaincu pour être esclaves ces esclaves  
 Marchons sur l'autel de la liberté  
 imitons les peuples qui portants leurs sollicitudes  
 surques sur l'avenir, et apprenant à l'histoire  
 la postérité l'exemple de la tactique ont préféré  
 d'être opprimés, que d'être du nombre des peuples libres  
 gardons nous que l'esprit de  
 proselitisme ne détruise notre ouvrage, laissons en  
 paix respirer nos voisins qu'ils soient Français  
 nous légis des lois qu'ils se sont faites & nous  
 pas toute feu révolutionnaire, nous législateur en  
 législateur des Antilles, faire consister notre gloire  
 à troubler le repos des îles qui nous avoisinent, elles  
 sont point comme celles qui nous habitent & nous  
 du sang de leurs habitants, ils sont point de  
 vengeance à exercer contre l'autorité qui les protège  
 heureux de n'avoir jamais connu les Français qui  
 nous ont détruits, elles ne peuvent que faire des  
 vœux pour notre prospérité, paix à nos voisins  
 mais anathème au nom Français, haine à toute  
 à la France, voilà notre Dieu  
 Indigence & l'aye, non heureux  
 Destinée

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Ou recevoit en Murmurant les loix qui le genre  
 qui veillo à ta destinée aux Lettres pour ton  
 Bonheur tu mériterais le sort des peuples ingrats  
 Mais loin de moi cette offense  
 idée, tu seras le soutien de la liberté qui t'ouvrira  
 L'ajout du chef qui te commande, prête donc  
 contre ses mains le serment de vivre libre & indépendant,  
 & de résister à toute ce qui  
 tendra à te remettre sous le joug. Sur ce serment, de  
 poursuivre à jamais, les ~~ennemis~~ <sup>des Français</sup> des ennemis de ton  
~~gouvernement~~ <sup>indépendant</sup>  
 1804, Le 1<sup>er</sup> Janvier pendant la figure d'J. Dessalines  
 Au Nom du peuple d'Hayti  
 Nous généraux en chef des Armées  
 de l'île d'Hayti, prendons de reconnaître des bienfaits  
 que nous avons éprouvés du général en chef J. D.  
 Dessalines le protecteur de la liberté dont jouit le  
 Peuple  
 Au nom de la liberté au nom  
 de l'indépendance, au nom du peuple qui nous a  
 rendus heureux, nous le proclamons <sup>Général</sup> gouverneur avec  
 de l'île d'Hayti, nous jurons d'obéir aveuglément aux  
 ordres émanés de son autorité, la seule qui nous  
 reconnait, nous lui donnons le droit de faire la  
 guerre, la paix, & de nommer son successeur.  
 Fait au quartier Général Le 1<sup>er</sup>  
 Janvier 1804. Signé par les D<sup>es</sup> Partes  
 Louis Capois  
 Dessalines

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